

NOT often does one get a unanimous opinion about anything in football, but there was general agreement after the first view at Colchester of the offside experiment, that it had produced nothing like the impact expected. 5/8/71

Judged purely from the point of view of goals, this was obviously true, and my main impression was that an opportunity had been neglected to make maximum use of the open space offered.

From officialdom which included the Football League secretary, Alan Hardaker, there was what can best be described as cautious support for the change.

Hardaker felt that the experiment had been worthwhile, and that the ball was in play more often than in a normal game.

Certainly, there were noticeably fewer stoppages, and there was not a single

one for offside, but what was generally expected to happen — strong marksmen lurking in the extra space allowed — just did not happen.

Difficulties

Anything that can increase the continuity of play must obviously be given consideration, and I have the feeling that this particular experiment will not be pitched overboard without a further thorough examination.

Nor, at the moment, on the evidence of last Saturday, can I see it being incorporated in a law change in the not-too-distant future.

Obviously, in making their preparations for the Watney event, clubs faced difficulties in that they knew that the law would operate for only a limited period, and that they would be required to go back to the old way immediately the vastly more important League football began.

Tentative

Because of this, I am convinced that there was a somewhat tentative approach, which was confirmed for me by watching the Halifax - Manchester United clash on television.

If those responsible for tactics knew that the new offside rule were to operate permanently, then the approach would be different.

However, behind all the preparation was the thought



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that this was purely a temporary thing and Town manager Alec Stock admitted last week that the players had found difficulty in switching from one system to the other.

No answer

After the Colchester game, Stock was not too enthusiastic about it, commenting that he did not think it was the answer to brighter football.

Reaction of his assistant, Jimmy Andrews, was that the end of the season was the time for such an experiment because it tended to interrupt the usual preparation.

Defeat was certainly costly for the Town from the financial angle, but it could prove to be fortunate, in that they will have time to get the whole thing out of their system before they begin the quest for League points against Norwich City on Saturday week.

At times, at Colchester, I found myself wondering just what havoc a winger of the class of Graham French could have wrought, with the space near the corner

flag simply crying out to be exploited.

And it was noticeable that the Town's defence was in most trouble during the second half when Brian Lewis had the ball in the area between the corner flag and the penalty area.

One thing that did strike me was that the alteration promised a bonus for the long punt and hard following up, which Colchester tried to exploit more than the Town, who relied mostly on their normal build-up.

Perhaps the comment of a Colchester supporter sitting near me was most apt in this respect — "They play good football, but don't seem to get anywhere."

To be fair, this was during the second half, when the Town had been deprived of their most effective spearhead, Don Givens, which also meant less support for Viv Busby.

For a completely independent view I went to Mike Pearce, the administrative director of Royal Crossing Schaerbeek, the Belgian club who meet the Town in a friendly match at Kenilworth Road next Tuesday (7.30).

He was the Town's guest on Saturday, and he said, "I do not think the new offside rule proved anything. Everyone was expecting it to produce more goals, but I do not think it will."

Brutality

"What I think it would bring, if it were adopted for any length of time, is more brutality at the back."

"In my personal view, it is not a good thing. It would go against constructive football, and more teams would turn to big kicks upfield."

So, there it is. The Town have taken part in what may prove to be a significant experiment, though I doubt it. Now, they can forget it.