

All the pressure lands scant glory

LUTON TOWN 1, PRESTON NORTH END 1

TWO low-scoring draws against largely defensive opposition, combined with a lack of drive and aggression in the Town attack, do not exactly add up to five-star entertainment so far at Kenilworth Road.

Another precious point eluded the Town on this occasion after they had largely dominated the game against Preston who, in the slightly exaggerated view of manager Alec Stock "Had one shot at goal and scored."

Figures cannot always be taken as final proof, but it is some indication of the Town's territorial advantage that they gained nine corners against four by the visitors, and that there were periods when the Preston defence came under very heavy fire indeed.

This was particularly marked during the early stages, when the Town quite sparkled and their rather flagging confidence could have been given the best

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boost in the world had a header by debutant Robin Wainwright, not gone inches the wrong side of the post.

Wainwright was one of two youngsters being given a "blooding," the other being Don Shanks, who played such a notable part for England's youth team when they won the Little World Cup in Czechoslovakia during May. Afterwards, Stock told me: "I was very pleased with the way the two boys went. They will do for me."

Inevitably, of course, some of the more critical fans were inclined to compare Wainwright with MacDonald which, of course, was completely unfair.

For one thing, they have differing styles, and Wainwright's conversion to a striker has been of comparatively recent origin. Previously, he was regarded as a midfield man with more than a little pretension to skill and ability to hold the ball.

To expect him suddenly to become an out and out thruster in the MacDonald mould is beyond the bounds of reasonableness, but, given time, and the encouragement of the more restive fans, he could well fill the gap.

Meanwhile, the question must be whether the Town can afford to wait, and the whole matter is aggravated by the fact that Busby, from whom so much was expected this time, has failed signally to attain his best form.

Boxed in

Naturally, this is something for which no-one could have budgeted. Having played so long in the shadow of MacDonald, as the sort of second string as it were, thoughts were along the lines that Busby would blossom forth in his own right.

Maybe, he is missing MacDonald more than most, but the fact is that he is failing to find openings with the facility he showed last season, is tending to become boxed in by holding on to the ball, and has also developed the bad habit of doubling back.

Culmination was that he was called off 20 minutes from the end in favour of Jim Ryan in an effort to achieve some variation and improvement.

Another who is tending to

LINE-UP

LUTON TOWN: Read; John Ryan, Shanks; Keen, Nicholl, Moore; Busby (Jim Ryan), Slough, Givens, Wainwright, Anderson.

PRESTON NORTH END: Kelly; McMahon, McNab; Bird, Hawkins, Lyall; Heppellette, Ham, McIlmoyle, Spark, Clark (Wilson).

Referee: F. Bassett, Swindon. **Attendance:** 11,772.

hang on to the ball unduly instead of using it to advantage is Anderson. He became bogged down after a bright enough start, but, he at least, did get the vital goal in the end.

It came with just eight minutes left, when a movement begun by Slough ended with Keen pushing the ball through and ANDERSON was left with a reasonably easy chance.

Shortly before that happened, there was one of the game's few controversial incidents when Preston, for a split second, seemed to have extended their lead to 2-0. It occurred when Read was penalised for handling outside the penalty area and the ball was pushed quickly to Spark.

Without a moment's hesitation, Spark sent it soaring into the roof of the net, only to see the referee pointing for the kick to be retaken because he had not blown his whistle.

Naturally, the Preston manager, Alan Ball, was aggrieved, and he told me: "Before the start, the referee told us that he wanted free-kicks taken quickly, and

then he disallowed the goal because he had not blown his whistle."

Preston's goal had come in the 27th minute when Lyall lobbed the ball into the penalty area, and HEPPLETTE, with the Town defence looking rather flat-footed, was scarcely challenged as he headed the ball past Read.

The Town made a spirited response and half-chances which fell to Keen and Busby were not accepted.

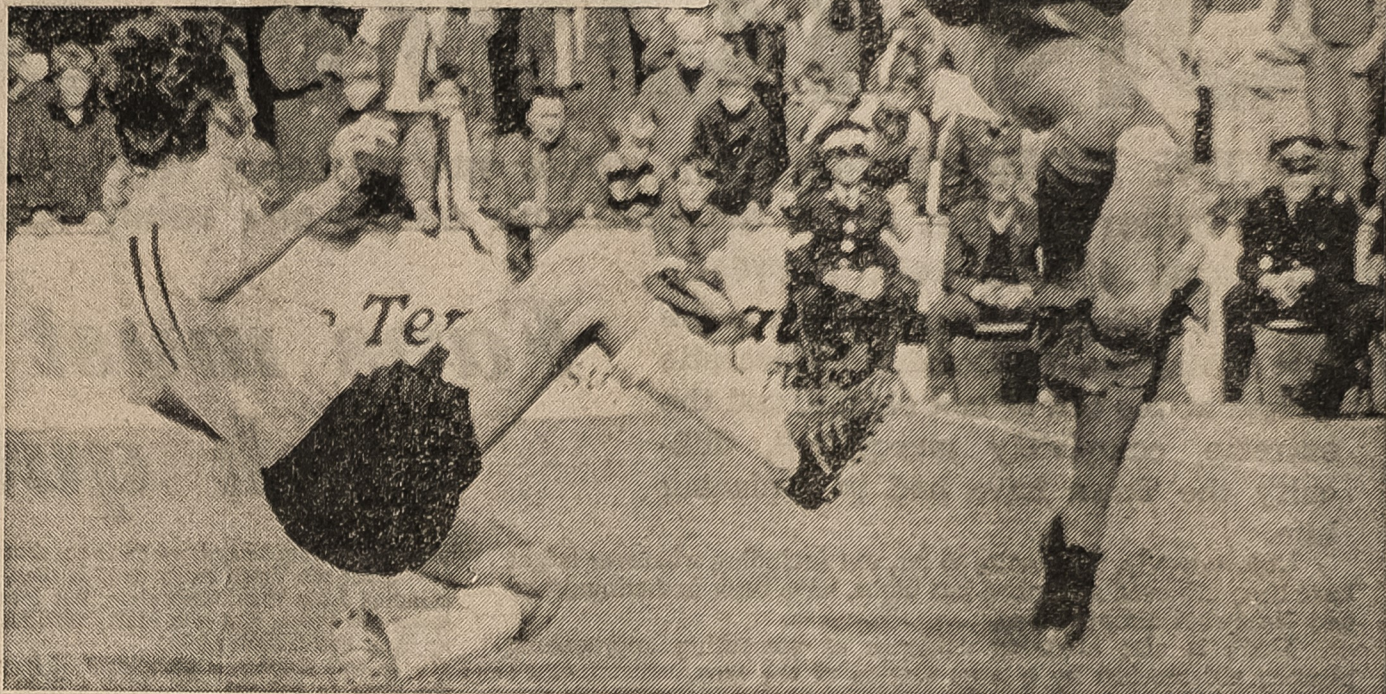
Then, with two minutes left to half-time, came the game's only booking, McMahon being the unlucky one after a foul on Wainwright.

Showing a great deal of determination, the Town streamed to the attack at the start of the second half, but found few gaps in the Preston defence who, at the same time, were lucky on several occasions.

Hanging on

One of these came when Givens let go a full-blooded drive which must have found the back of the net but for the fact that Hawkins got in the way and three consecutive corners served to emphasise the Town's superiority at that time.

With an hour gone, Preston had to use their substitute, Wilson, when Clark went off with damaged ribs,



but the change made little difference, and Preston proceeded to rely more and more on defence in order to preserve their narrow lead.

Apart from striking problems, Stock had not been happy with the midfield build-up and to tackle that he pushed up Slough and used Givens more in a midfield role. This, I thought, brought improvement, but both players may need a little while in which to adjust completely.

For instance, Slough has become used to the comparative anonymity of a member of the back four, and he was not the dominant figure in midfield that I hoped for.

There were times when Givens looked very good, coming from behind, and I feel that this is an arrange-

ment that could well succeed, especially as Shanks looks as if he can make the step into League football quite happily in Slough's old place.

Keen tried hard to force things on, but was handicapped at times by difficulty in producing an accelerating burst.

Although Moore is not yet in his decisive form of last season, there is not a great deal amiss with the back four, in which Nicholl obtained a vital mastery over McIlmoyle in the air.

John Ryan was sound without trying anything like so often as last season, the dangerous overlap which was then some measure of compensation for the Town's lack of wingers.

ABOVE: Peter Anderson, the man who notched Luton's equaliser, narrowly fails to deflect the ball into the net on this occasion and it lands safely in the arms of goalkeeper Alan Kelly. BELOW: Robin Wainwright, one of Town's young stars, who was given his chance on Saturday, is pictured in action up front.



Givens is there

Don Givens follows up and is right on the spot should Preston goalkeeper Alan Kelly fumble the ball, but Kelly made no mistake and the ball is cleared.

