

A good point hint of the real Town

OXFORD UNITED 1, LUTON TOWN 1

71/72

TO suggest after one good result — and the draw gained at Oxford on Wednesday was just that — that the Town's problems are over, would not only be idle, but erroneous.

However, there were encouraging signs that some of the difficulties are being overcome, partly by patience and application, and partly by trial and error.

For me, one of the best things to emerge was the measurable improvement Slough made on his Saturday's showing.

Maybe it will need another game or two in the midfield role for Slough to become the really dominant force the Town need, but he was much more ambitious in attack than against Preston.

With Givens tenacious and hard working, it looks as if this pair between them can provide the midfield power that has been lacking, especially with the help of Keen, who was never other than busy and in the thick of the fray.

There remains the considerable task of finding the drive and punch further for-



LINE-UP

OXFORD UTD: Kearns; Lucas, Shuker; Roberts, Clarke (C), Evanson; Sloan, Atkinson (G), Clarke (D), Cassidy (Skeen), Atkinson (R).

LUTON TOWN: Read; Ryan, Shanks; Keen, Nicholl, Moore; Busby, Slough, Wainwright, Givens, Anderson. Substitute: Court.

Referee: J Taylor (Wolverhampton).

Attendance: 10,490.



ward and of the three front runners, Wainwright was much the most impressive.

Without anything much in the nature of what could be described as adequate support, he showed commendable determination and skilful footwork at times, particularly when he found the space of the left wing.

More than that, he was decidedly unlucky to have what would have been a winning goal disallowed early in the second half.

A collision between Givens and Roberts, which spreadeagled both near the centre line, left Wainwright with a clear run and he calmly rounded Kearns to place the ball into the net.

Unfortunately, the referee had already stopped play, to award the Town a useless free kick.

Offside trap

This was only one of the decisions to puzzle the crowd, the home section of which was frustrated in the first half, especially by the facility with which the Town defence moved up in unison to catch Oxford offside.

Unfortunately, the progress achieved by Wainwright was not matched by Busby and Anderson, both of whom tended to stay out on the wings more than usual, possibly following instructions.

Once again Busby found himself boxed in, mostly because he neglected to do the simple thing and release

By ERIC PUGH

the ball more quickly. He was thus frequently caught in possession as was Anderson who took a long time to make any sort of impression on the game.

When, inside the first quarter of an hour, each team scored, there were expectations of a thriller, but they were not really fulfilled.

Speed, dash and enthusiasm there was in plenty. In fact, there were times when the play was just crying out for someone to slow it down and bring some semblance of construction and order.

In retrospect, neither goalkeeper could complain of overwork and Read's gravest anxiety came from back passes that threatened not to travel far enough.

In a highly promising start, the Town took the lead after nine minutes when GIVENS coolly and confidently accepted a close range chance after Wainwright had flicked on a corner by Busby.

Any ideas of grandiose things the Town might have been cherishing at that stage were dampened when Oxford equalised four minutes later through CLARKE (D).

A crossfield pass by Ron Atkinson to Lucas began it and both Cassidy and John Ryan missed the centre. It went on to Clarke whose shot got in just under the bar.

Some indecision was apparent among the Town defence during the first half when they found difficulty in picking up the lively, elusive Cassidy whose industry made gaps for his forward colleagues.

Therefore, it must have been with something akin to relief that they saw that because of a leg injury Cassidy had not reappeared for the second half, his replacement being Skeen.

In his absence, the Oxford

Robin Wainwright flicks on Busby's corner-kick for Givens to put Town ahead against Oxford after only nine minutes.



attack became more stereotyped and the Town defence particularly Nicholl and Moore, settled down into their successful vein of last season.

Though adequate, John Ryan has scarcely touched peak form yet, but this could be due to the fact that something of a curb has been placed on his natural attacking tendencies.

Doubtless, this will be removed when the Town have a couple of wins under their belts.

Bright future

One thing certain is that while the Town have youngsters of the calibre of Shanks to introduce to the League team, the future can be regarded as bright.

This sturdy 19-year-old scarcely put a foot wrong, even in the first half, when various uncertainties were plaguing the defence as a whole.

Oxford were handicapped in the last quarter of an hour by having Lucas reduced to a limping passenger on the wing, but there was no question that the Town deserved their point.

And with the game in injury time, it nearly became two points because Slough was only inches too high following a free kick.