

TOWN WIN FIRST AWAY POINT AT OXFORD

By ROGER DUCKWORTH

Oxford United 1 Luton Town 1

LUTON TOWN are becoming a fair old bet on the treble chance coupon. Last night they collected their third draw from four matches, at the Manor ground, and today this must be regarded as a point stored than one chucked away.

But despite having one more valuable point in the bank, this was a match in which Luton's attacking force again underlined its inability to work together as a lethal unit.

Of the front three only Robin Wainwright came through with real credit and you had to feel sorry for him — for he did not have one good ball to chase all night. Instead he was left to forage alone, or to do his best in struggles for 50-50 balls from his mates.

And at the other end the lively Oxford front runners were usually one jump ahead of Luton's close-marking and fast-tackling.

Difficult

To me the biggest disappointment of the night was the performance of World Cup referee Jack Taylor, a Wolverhampton butcher. One of a series of bad decisions could have deprived Luton of a second point.

A speedy run by Givens saw him part with the ball just before being ploughed down by the fast-moving Roberts in a head-on collision. In spite of the difficult situation Givens managed to give the ball to Wainwright who ran clear and netted.

Admittedly the whistle had already blown but if there was a case for an advantage decision, this was it. Luton took little benefit from the free kick back on the halfway line.

After some early uncertainty in Luton's defence, Givens gave the Town an encouraging eighth-minute lead. Busby swung over a waist-high corner, Wainwright flicked on, and Givens, well placed in front of goal, controlled the ball well and thrashed it past Kearns.

Teased

Unfortunately Luton were not able to hang on. Cassidy teased and tormented until he laid on an opportunity for centre-forward Derek Clarke to fire a fierce shot in off the underside of the bar. There was the suspicion of a miskick somewhere in the heart of the Luton defence during Oxford's successful raid.

Givens and Slough had some bright ideas in Luton's midfield but on the whole Oxford had more fire and pace. Fortunately for Luton some of this faded when Cassidy stayed on his stool for the second half after receiving a knock.

His absence gave the Luton defence time to collect their wits and settle back into the secure unit we know them to be. Nicholl, who had been worried by the speedy groundwork of Cassidy, took the match by the scruff of the neck and took over in the air.

And John Moore, who did quite well in the second half, also established his class after the interval as Luton contented themselves with keeping Oxford out.

John Ryan was caught once or twice early on but his covering and overlapping later in the game saw him through.

Luton's outstanding defender was newcomer Don Shanks, who gave another crisp performance at left-back.

Slowed

Mike Keen, who was slowed by an ankle injury, said afterwards: "I think I'll be all right. All we want now is a win under our belts."



Luton goalkeeper Tony Read is left sitting dejectedly in the net after Derek Clarke (right) had cracked in Oxford's equaliser at the Manor ground last night. Luton players, from the left, are Anderson, Shanks, Moore, Read, Givens and Slough.

The picture below shows Luton in a happier light, with Don Givens smashing Luton ahead from an eighth-minute corner.



But Luton's big headache is still how to acquire cohesion in attack. They won't win games until they sort this out. One-man sorties into enemy territory are only rarely going to be successful.

Apart from that, Luton lost the ball too easily last night. And you can't score when the others have got it.

Neither goalkeeper had a great deal to do, though Read was put in some trouble with back passes. But he generally had a capable match.

As Alec Stock said afterwards: "It's always difficult to win anything at Oxford."

MATCH DETAILS

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

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

REFEREE: Mr Jack Taylor (Wolverhampton).

ATTENDANCE: 10,490.

GOALS: Givens (Luton, 8 mins), D. Clarke (Oxford, 12 mins).