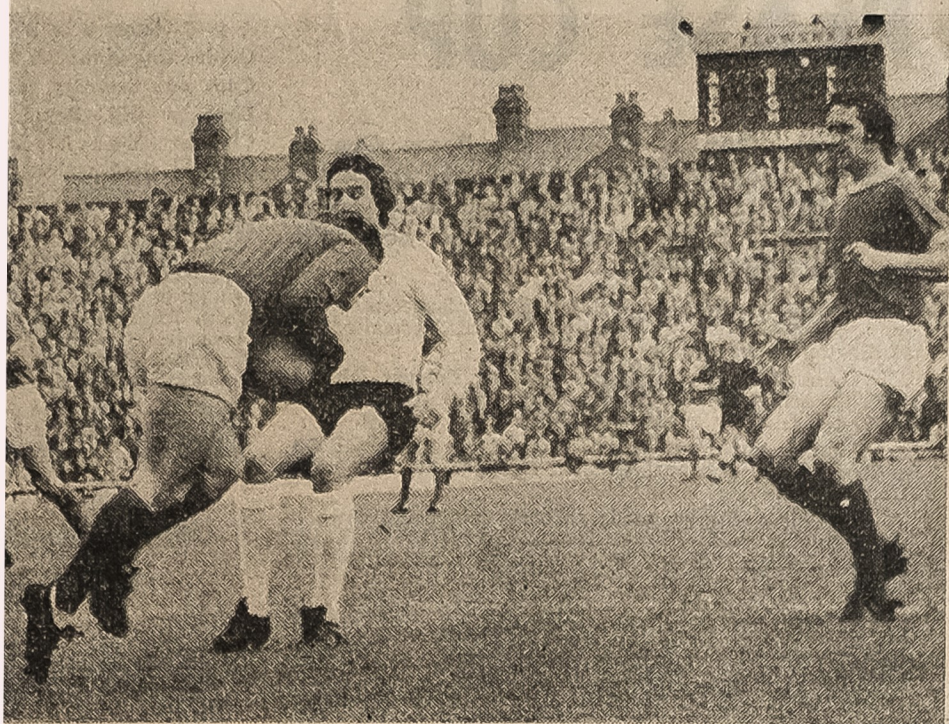


Town's goal-flow dries up totally



Above, Swindon goalkeeper Peter Downsborough gathers the ball safely as Town's Vic Halom challenges. Below, Downsborough has more time to clear on this occasion, but has a wary eye on Peter Anderson, who is coming through fast.



LUTON TOWN 0, SWINDON TOWN 0

WHILE it is true that there can be excitement and thrills in a goalless draw, this game did not come into that category. It was a disappointment that the Town did not maintain the goal-flow evident in their last two home matches, after which it was hopefully contended that the famine was over.

When, afterwards, I ventured the opinion that it had been a pretty deary affair, manager

By ERIC PUGH

Alec Stock did not agree, saying, "The lack of finish made it look worse than it was."

Of course, there is something in that line of argument, but, to add to the absence of real punch was the additional handicap,

under which each team laboured, of apparent inability to build up fluent attacks from midfield.

As a result, the number of clear-cut openings created was strictly minimal and, on the odd occasions when one did occur, there was not the accuracy in front of goal to exact full toll.

One of the reasons for the scarcity of scoring chances was the fact that far too many passes went other than where they were intended, and this, combined with a certain resolution shown by Swindon in defence, cut down the amount of goalmouth excitement.

Best chance

Best opportunity the Town had all afternoon came the way of Anderson in the 15th minute, when he raced through a gap in the middle of the defence.

Unfortunately, possibly through wanting to make absolutely certain, he delayed his shot a fraction too long, and Thomas came running across to bring him down.

My own reaction was that it was rather more than a marginal case for a penalty, and I am perfectly certain that many referees would have pointed to the spot.

Yet, the Town's coach, Jimmy Andrews, thought the verdict was correct, but the clear fact was that it should have counted as the goal that could have injected some life into this match.

Although manager Fred Ford told me afterwards: "We did not come specifically looking for a draw," there can be no possible doubt that Swindon's approach was largely defensive, and the Town had nearly all the first half play.

Rogers boob

In fact, nearly 25 minutes had gone before they launched their first worthwhile attack, and then Rogers, of all people, missed a chance which nine times out of ten he would have gobbled up.

Horsfield just got a flick of his head to the ball as Nicholl challenged, and



Rogers, streaming through the middle as Barber came out desperately, lifted the ball over.

Town centre-forward Vic Halom in a bid for a high ball with Swindon's Burrows.

Anderson remained the one Town forward who looked like breaking the stalemate, and he was unlucky with a low shot that went inches wide after he had out-witted Thomas.

By and large, though, Downsborough was not ex-

LINE-UP

LUTON TOWN: Barber, John Ryan, Shanks, Slough, Nicholl, Moore, Wainwright, Keen, Halom (Busby), Givens, Anderson.

SWINDON TOWN: Downsborough, Thomas, Trollope, Butler, Burrows (Jones), Mackay, Bunkell, Harland, Horsfield, Noble, Rogers.

Referee: R. Perkin. Stafford. Attendance: 13,423.

tended, and his most serious task was contained in tipping over brilliantly a free kick by Keen.

In the course of the 45 minutes, the count of corners for the Town must have reached double figures, but there was never much sign of anything definite coming from them.

When the second half began, it was seen that Burrows was missing from the line-up, suffering from the effects of damaged ligaments to an ankle, which came about when he fouled Anderson in the early minutes.

Filling his place represented no problem, because Harland was switched to centre-half, and Mackay, who had rather laboured

through a mid-field stint before the interval, slotted in as the other member of the back four.

Strangely, the changes which had Jones as front-runner, brought improvement by Swindon, who had their only other scoring chance of the match five minutes after the re-start, when Rogers slipped the ball inside to Noble.

No carping

Taken by surprise, Barber was badly out of position, but Noble, as had Anderson earlier, waited too long, so that Shanks came to the rescue by smothering the shot.

"Hands," said Noble. "No," said the referee and, afterwards, manager Ford said: "I am not prepared to carp at the decision."

There were signs that both teams were trying to open up the game, but the defences, having taken a stranglehold, were in no mood to relax it.

An indication of the way things were going came 14 minutes from the end, when Halom was replaced by Busby, a decision that met with a mixed reception.

However, Halom had not accomplished a great deal, even in the way of absorbing the weight, nor was his heading of the ball very effective.

Support lacking

Of course, he could point with some justification that the support from behind was not what it might have been, and Slough and Givens, although enthusiastic and hard-working, could not fairly be described as creative, despite the fact that they had control in mid-field for long periods.

Wainwright, too, had another quiet match, which left Anderson as the man on whom the Town's hopes for goals rested, and he had just those two isolated chances.

This was the third consecutive match in which the Town defence had kept a blank sheet, so there could be no cause for complaint there, and I made Nicholl, Moore and Shanks outstanding members of it.

Useful job

Keen did a very useful job and, in the main, Ryan played his part against Rogers, whose brilliance was evident only on isolated occasions.

For Barber, there was not a great deal to do, but his handling of the ball was good, and he could be faulted only when Shanks came to his rescue after Noble had been left with a clear chance.