



THIS IS THE RIGHT STUFF!

SUNDERLAND 2, LUTON TOWN 2

FOR 45 minutes at Roker Park on Saturday it looked as if all the blood, sweat and tears which, figuratively speaking, had been extracted during a week of iron-hard preparation, had gone for nought, and that all the Town could look forward to was the limitation of the margin of defeat.

Whatever words of wisdom were expressed during the interval, and they must have been as many as time would allow, produced a remarkable transformation. From looking a beaten team, the Town suddenly began to come forward when, previously, retreat had been their main purpose.

By ERIC PUGH



Firstly, Mike Keen beats the defence with a flying header and next the ball is lofted into the goal area, where Peter Anderson rises high to head towards goal.

Sunderland's defence was exposed then for what it really is — a somewhat ponderous, slow-turning formation and, suddenly, victory to the Town seemed considerably more than a pipe-dream.

In the end, I made them somewhat unlucky not to register their first away win of the season. It is perfectly true that they were unlucky with at least two scoring attempts in the closing stages.

Figures are not always reliable, but they do provide a guide to how play flowed, and they proved the measure whereby the situation changed.

In the first half, Sunderland gained seven corners, against one by the Town, but, in the second half, the count was 6-3 in the Town's favour.

Similarly in the first half, there were eight fouls, all for minor offences, against the Town and only one by the home team. After half-time, the pendulum swung the other way, Sunderland being penalised seven times and the Town five.

I mention this, because the free kicks for fouls on this occasion could really be related to the amount of pressure exerted.

Goal and penalty miss

With the Town being forced back into defensive positions from the start, it was not altogether surprising when WATSON gave Sunderland the lead after 18 minutes when, from a centre by Tueart, he half-hit his shot, a fact that was sufficient to deceive Read.

When it was all over, Sunderland probably pointed to the happening after half-an-hour as the major reason for them failing to win, because they missed a penalty.

It was awarded for hands by Nicholl who stopped, on the line, a shot by Tueart after Read had gone full-length to push out a cross drive from Watson.

There could have been no more clear-cut case for a penalty and, under the new refereeing regime, Nicholl was booked—something that he probably considered worthwhile when Hughes, from the spot, hit the outside of a post and the ball went for a goal-kick.

More than anything, the determination and fighting spirit of their defence, often stretched to the fullest extent, kept the Town in with anything of a chance. In the first half, they were scarcely able to launch a major assault on their own account.

Town find the clue

When finally they managed one, Hindson, sent through by Anderson, might have equalised, had his reaction been more decisive.

That seemed to give the Town a little encouragement, because, in the minutes before the interval, when they forced their first corner, there were the first signs that all might not be well with the home defence if any measure of pressure could be mounted against it.

Amidst the half-time homily from Messrs Stock and Andrews came the instruction to Hindson to try to "take on" Malone, in whom had been detected signs of vulnerability, and this proved to be a trump card.

Noticeable, too, when the second half began, was that Anderson played more in the middle, rather than on the right wing, where he had spent much of the first half.

Basically, though, I feel that the Town somehow or another emerged from the cloud that had been enveloping them since the Carlisle affair, and began to play with confidence and thrust that had not been evident before.

Maybe, they were aided in their fight back by the fact that Porterfield, a strong, able midfield man, went off after 56

minutes injured in a tackle with Halom, to be replaced by the 16-year-old prospect, Hamilton.

Probably completely unrelated to this incident was the equaliser a minute later when NICHOLL, from close in, rammed into the net, a corner from Hindson that had produced all sorts of problems for the home defence.

Soon afterwards came the second booking, that of Tueart for an ill-advised kick at Read, which laid out the goalkeeper for a short time. That Tueart's name should be noted was predictable, but not that Halom should be similarly penalised for what looked like no more than a token challenge on Montgomery.

Hereabouts, Hindson really began to show what a capable, assured player he is when in possession, and he gave Malone a distinctly uncomfortable time.

Crosses from the left wing began to appear with a regularity we have not seen since the palmy days of Graham French, and it was from one of these, hit low, that ANDERSON cleverly stabbed the ball past Montgomery to put the Town ahead with a quarter of an hour to go.

Spectacular goal

Unfortunately, the Town had little time in which to savour their improved situation before Sunderland drew level in spectacular fashion.

It followed a defensive mix-up in which Keen and Shanks appeared most involved, and the ball went out to McGIVEN. From upwards of 25 yards, he made a fine drive which, with what I am assured was the benefit of a deflection off someone's shoulder, left Read helpless.

Maybe expectations were that the Town would then be content to hold on to one point. Not so! They kept pressing forward and could well have regained the lead, because Givens, who had a brilliant second half, caused Montgomery to go full-length and also clipped the outside of a post.

Then, after the goalkeeper had saved with difficulty a downward header from Halom, Givens nearly won it. With seconds left, he raced through, and Malone somehow got into the line of flight of a shot that was undoubtedly booked for the net.

Meritorious result

Of the merit of the result from the Town's viewpoint, there can be no doubt and if they can maintain their second-half form their present uncertainties will quickly disappear.

Such changes as were made, worked well, because Read looked very confident, and Slough, with more time at his disposal in the back four, was a polished, cool defender.

Nor did Shanks worry about his change of role to midfield, and he carried out, most effectively, the job he was allotted—to shut out Kerr.

Even though he experienced some difficulty in the air against the £100,000 Watson, Nicholl was never other than resourceful and hard fighting, a description that can also be applied to Moore.

Ryan made an impressive start, but seemed to develop doubts about his play after the interval, and Keen, working hard, overcame to some extent his lack of pace, and was quite a driving force in the last quarter of an hour.

If Hindson can be kept supplied plentifully with the ball, he will be a match-winner, and one could not but admire the tenacity and courage of Anderson against what must be as tall a defence as there is in the Second Division.

His application was scarcely matched in the first half by Halom who, however, was much more effective afterwards with his harassing tactics, though we still look vainly for the end product of goals from him.

HOW THEY LINED UP

SUNDERLAND: Montgomery; Malone, Coleman; Harvey, Pitt, Porterfield (Hamilton); McGIVEN, Kerr, Watson, Hughes, Tueart.

LUTON TOWN: Read; Ryan, Slough; Shanley, Nicholl, Moore; Anderson, Keen, Halom, Givens, Hindson, Substitute: Busby.

REFEREE: F. M. Nicholson, Manchester.
Attendance: 17,971.