

TOWN'S TRIUMPH IS ONE FOR THE ARCHIVES

LUTON TOWN 3, PORTSMOUTH 2

A FEW matches in every club's history stand out like sparkling, precious gems. One against Newcastle years ago, when the Town came back from being 3-0 down, to win, is one that is still frequently brought out of the archives of memory.

Now, there is a good case for an addition to the collection, after the tremendous revival they made against Portsmouth on Saturday.

No more dismal scene of desolation could be imagined than the one at half-time when the thinly-spaced crowd was humming, not with anticipation, but with apprehension about what the Town's final fate would be.

Looking dejected, completely bereft of confidence and, apparently, of constructive ideas which they could carry out with any degree of accuracy, the Town had slumped to a 2-0 deficit.

In the words of manager Alec Stock later: "It could easily have been 4-0," and one could go even further than that and say that it should have been.

Stock: A win like this does more good than all the 'chat'

Obviously, only too aware that their recent home performances had caused them to lose some credibility among their supporters, the Town were desperately anxious to make a good start, but the reverse happened.

In the second minute, Keen headed a corner straight at the oncoming REYNOLDS, and the ball bounced off him with some force and beat Read, scrambling on his goal-line.

Reynolds, I am convinced, did not provide much propulsion of his own volition but the goal, fortunate as it was, probably set the pattern for the remainder of the half and a pretty depressing one it was from the Town viewpoint.

Chance lost

Piper could have increased the lead almost immediately and the one really clear-cut opening that came the Town's way was when Hindson crossed the ball and between them, Keen and Anderson missed it completely.

Nervous, jittery — you name it, the Town had it — and Portsmouth were made to look like First Division material with their grip in midfield, where ex-Town man McCann was a domi-

Sport

By ERIC PUGH

nant figure, and their exploitation of the flanks by Piper and Jennings.

As the interval neared with none of the expected disasters having happened, there was the feeling that better things could be in store, but this was dashed six minutes from half-time.

Then, a careless back-heeled clearance by Givens gave possession to McCann, who swayed past Court and Nicholl before slipping the ball to REYNOLDS, who blasted it into the net.

Just once, almost on the stroke of half-time, the Town showed some aggres-

Kenilworth Road are recalled, then the one secured by HINDSON after 58 minutes, his first for the club, will come high in the ratings.

Swooping on a pass in midfield, he let fly from 35 yards, possibly more, and the ball flew like a bullet into the net with even the fact that Standen got a hand to it failing to reduce its velocity.

Gallant Givens

Meanwhile, Givens had made one attempt to come back, only to leave again, and was off the field when both these goals came.

Gallantly, he came back to limp on the right wing, just in time to see Hindson again demonstrate his shooting power with an effort that brought Standen to his knees.

Understandably, some of the impetus went out of the Town's play, but the defence had so much improved that Portsmouth were never allowed to regain their first-half sparkle, and then came the thrilling climax.

Possibly, Portsmouth had tended to ignore the fact that Givens might still be able to make an effective contribution, and they should have been warned when, painfully, he lifted the ball not so far over after Anderson had centred.

The winner

At all events, Givens paved the way for the winner when he closed in from the wing, momentarily forgetting his handicap, and there were sighs of anguish from the fans when his shot crashed against the foot of the far post.

Not that they need have worried because ANDERSON collected the rebound and resisted the temptation to take a quick shot. Instead, he made ground to his right, giving himself a better angle, and scored with a low drive that Munks could only help into the net.

There was no comeback by Portsmouth and no-one wanted to prevent hundreds of supporters running on to the pitch to congratulate the gallant Town.

To reconcile the two vastly differing moods of the



Town seems to me to be just about impossible.

In the first half scarcely a single member of the team did himself justice, and wherever one looked, one could discern some imperfection.

No control

With Keen and Givens being given the run-around and Court valiantly striving to fill the gaps, the Town never achieved any measure of midfield control.

Of course, this increased the pressure on the back four, in which even Nicholl and Moore were caught in two minds at times and Ryan and Slough had their hands full against two purposeful wingers.

There was indecision right through the team, with even Read occasionally not seeming to know whether to commit himself to a situation or not.

LINE-UP

LUTON TOWN: Read; Ryan, Slough; Keen, Nicholl, Moore; Anderson, Court, Busby (Halom), Givens, Hindson.

PORTSMOUTH: Standen; Smith, Ley; Hand, Youliden, Munks; Piper, Reynolds, Trebilcock, McCann, Jennings. Substitute: Hiron.

Referee: C. Nicholls, Plymouth. Attendance: 9,910.

Forward, with Busby failing to find room and allowing himself to be boxed in and Anderson tending to be caught in possession, only Hindson really looked as if he might cause the Portsmouth defence any concern.

But the second half produced an entirely different story, every player contributing 100 per cent effort and no-one should underestimate the improvement that Halom brought.

Strong, intelligent running meant that he presented far greater problems than had Busby. He needed a good deal more attention as a result, and in particular the pressure was taken off Anderson and Hindson, who were both most dangerous. Coming forward, Keen

Town's Anderson and Portsmouth goalkeeper Standen tussle for the ball as it comes over from a corner kick. Chris Nicholl is on the left.

was much more effective, and Court helped in no small measure to press on the Town attacks, which eventually turned the tide completely in their favour.

In turn the back four found the going easier and, let the final accolade come from the manager: "I am very pleased for the players. A win like this does more good than all the 'chat.' It was a very professional second-half performance."

And I can think of no more fitting note to end a description of an epic recovery.