

Town so keen they muff it

LUTON TOWN 2, CARDIFF CITY 2

EASY would it be to make banal references to Santa Claus and the spirit of goodwill, but the Town's failure to make the best use of their scoring opportunities is nothing new, nor is their tendency to concede unnecessary goals at home.

Both these failings could be held responsible for the loss of a point to a poorly organised team with lack of finish probably accounting for 70 per cent of the trouble.

Last week, I recall writing that now that the Town are creating the openings by their new fluid approach, it should be only a matter of time before fulfilment in goal-scoring is reached.

Unfortunately, that did not occur on Saturday, otherwise Cardiff would have found themselves on the receiving end of the mother and father of a thrashing.

As it was, they were let off the hook by what manager Alec Stock described afterwards as wild finishing, adding, "We threw it away. No team can miss chances like we did and expect to win."

Too eager

In a way, it is difficult to assess exactly what goes wrong when it comes to getting the ball into the back of the net, but as I see it, over-eagerness could be the root of the trouble.

This produces a tendency to bang at the ball forcibly, and mostly inaccurately, when a placed shot would be of far greater advantage. More poise and steadiness in front of goal, as well as better placement of the ball, would appear to be the most crying need.

To all intents and purposes, this game could have been won in the first 20 minutes because, once the Town had got over the initial shock of Phillips nearly catching Read by surprise in the first minute, they exposed the considerable limitations of Cardiff's back four.

Chances galore

Chances galore began coming. Hindson shot high over, Keen forced Irwin to pluck the ball from under the bar, Halom headed inches wide and Anderson, left clear by a fine pass from Givens, saw his shot deflected outside.

So it went on, with Irwin in action again from Hindson, and then, after 24 minutes, came the goal which was hoped would have a settling and confidence boosting effect on the attack.

ANDERSON began the move and finished it. First he dispossessed Gibson, slipped the ball to Halom and was in position for the return pass, from which he closed in from the right, to find the far corner of the goal.

It really was an object

LINE-UP

LUTON TOWN: Read; John Ryan, Slough; Keen, Nicholl, Moore; Anderson, Court, Halom, Givens, Hindson. Substitute: Jim Ryan.

CARDIFF CITY: Irwin; Carver, Bell; Phillips, Morgan, Derrett; Villars (Woodruff), Clark, Couch, Warboys, Gibson.

Referee: K. H. Burns, Stourbridge. Attendance: 10,606.

lesson in how to make the most of an opening but, unfortunately, it did not change the general pattern, because Halom should have added to the lead when sent through by Anderson. Instead, he delayed his effort a split second too long, and the ball was deflected by Irwin.

Cardiff reply

Then, with 34 minutes gone, Cardiff earned the first of only two corners they had in the match, compared with 14 for the Town, which is the measure of how they were outplayed.

There would have been no need for Nicholl to concede the corner under pressure, but for a bad mistake by John Ryan midway in his own half.

With plenty of time, he gave the ball away to Clark, who made his way through with some persistence. The corner was only half cleared to **PHILLIPS**, waiting on the edge of the penalty area, and his shot went through a crowd of players to level the scores after 34 minutes.

Immediate reaction by the Town brought efforts off the target by Anderson and Keen and, almost on the stroke of half time, Givens crashed the ball against the bar.

With the experienced Woodruff sitting on the trainers' bench, it was always on the cards that Cardiff would make a substitution, and, for some reason, this

was delayed for four minutes of the second half before he came on for young Villars.

Frustration

While the result was some tightening up in midfield, it did not prevent the Town still doing nearly all the attacking, but with nothing coming from it there were increasing signs of frustration.

Naturally enough, Cardiff packed their penalty area even more tightly than before, which merely increased the Town's problems, and they tried to improve matters by pushing up Givens to help Halom and using Anderson on the right wing.

Time was beginning to run out for the Town when they went ahead again from the penalty spot, which had begun to look the most feasible way left for them to score.

Even though manager Jimmy Scoular thought the award harsh, there was no doubt in my mind that Derrett was rightly penalised when he pulled down Givens from behind.

No mistake

GIVENS was entrusted with the kick, made no mistake and provoked the thought that he might earlier have tried the art of placing with some profit.

At that stage, it seemed any odds on a Town victory, earned the hard way, it is true. Certainly, few anticipated that Cardiff would again regain equality.

Yet, that is exactly what they did, four minutes later, when Warboys made some ground on the left before floating over a centre to which, surprisingly, **CLARK** beat Nicholl in the air, and Read appeared slow to react to his header.

Though the Town hit back in desperation, there was no reprieve for them, despite a flurry of corners in the closing minutes.

Had the goals come as they should, then there

FIRST GOAL

PETER ANDERSON lets fly to open the Town's account after 24 minutes.



would have been little criticism of the team performance, because they could scarcely have established a greater ascendancy in midfield and up to the point of getting the ball into the back of the net.

Five off target

At various times, at least five players could be said to have missed reasonable chances, and one thing the Town are suffering from at the moment is Halom's inability to match in goal output, the thoroughly valuable work he does in approach.

With reservations about their finishing, both Anderson and Hindson did well, and Givens appears to relish the new freedom in midfield that has been given him.

Court and Keen found these circumstances those in which they could flourish, and I can seldom recall them driving forward so successfully as they did on this occasion.

Really, the resiliency of the

back four was rarely put to the test, but Nicholl again stood out, as did Moore, despite some unintentional clearances, the final destination of which must have surprised even him.

John Ryan is still some way below being the player he was last season, but Slough was coolly assured, and at times looked as if he might teach the men in front of him a shooting lesson.

Certainly, Read had no cause for complaint on the score of being over-worked, but I feel that he has to bear responsibility for the second goal, as does Ryan for the first.