

This is the stuff to excite the fans!

LUTON TOWN 2, MILLWALL 1

TWO first-class games within a week have done much to restore my belief, which I must admit has flagged at times, that football has not lost any of its pulling power as the number one entertainment.

After the thriller at Hillsborough, it seemed too much to hope that the Town would be involved in another of similar calibre when they met Millwall on Saturday.

However, it happened, propitiously, before the Town's biggest crowd of the season, 15,113, most of whom, the considerable Millwall contingent excluded, were given a glowing start to the New Year.

Unquestionably, this was the Town's best home display so far. They showed how the fluid quality of their play has developed in recent weeks and this, combined with determined purpose and pure skill, cut one of London's promotion hopefuls firmly down to size.

Not that this was an easy victory, because Millwall, even if they looked less like First Division candidates than did the Town, did not give up easily, even under the blow of becoming two goals down in the first half.

Chances missed

This lead might have been extended, except for the brilliance of King and the fact that the Town are not yet making the best use of enough of their chances.

King, in fact, emerged as one of the game's heroes, because his mobility was reduced considerably when he was tackled by Halom in the latter part of the first half, and thereafter he played on with a heavy limp.

With Kitchener also hurt during his bruising battle with Halom, it was a brave move by manager Benny Fenton to send on Alder for the fit Dunphy four minutes after half-time.

However, by that time, facing a deficit of two goals, the situation called for drastic action and, for a time, it looked as if the gamble might come off.

That Town advantage had been earned in a first half that was completely theirs, during which they played fast, incisive football, making liberal use of the space on the wings.

There, the thrust of Anderson and Hindson provided the Millwall defence with a lot of problems, to many of which they failed to find a solution.

Allied to this, was a spirit of adventure at the

back, which led to Ryan and Slough both making effective sorties that might have brought goals, and there was always the threat posed by Nicholl when he came up for corners.

A hint of this was given when he was only inches too high from a corner, but then, in the 19th minute, when Hindson swung the ball over accurately, NICHOLL was on the spot to out-

jump everybody and land the ball in the top corner of the net.

That really set the Town alight and was followed by a thrilling run by Ryan, who covered over half the length of the field and finished with a drive that King could only push out in the direction of Givens. Unluckily, the ball fell at an awkward angle for him, so that he could not turn it in.

Nearly all the positive scoring attempts came from the Town, with Court forcing King to another fine save and Slough missing by inches.

Richly deserved

Then, however, came the reward they so richly deserved, with a goal as spectacular as has been seen on the ground this season.

Givens was sent away down the left and battled to the dead-line before slinging across a great centre which ANDERSON, racing in at top speed, met with his head to send the ball crashing into the back of the net.

It was the sort of goal against which no defence in the world could have an answer, and it installed the Town in a strong, though not impregnable position, as it turned out.

No doubt, during the interval, there were reminders in the Town dressing room about how the Lions came back apparently from the "dead" at Sunderland recently to snatch a point with two late goals, and there were warnings that a strong barrage would have to be expected.

So it turned out with All-

der producing a more positive contribution as a striker than had Dunphy in mid-field.

Lions snap back

Some confusion in defence led to a corner being conceded to Millwall in the 52nd minute, and from this, the ball was prodded on by Smethurst to POSSEE, who made no mistake.

At that point, the game

ducing this into a near shambles, but Mr Bassett contented himself with taking only one name, that of Kitchener, for a tackle on Halom that was so late that it almost qualified for the tag of "stop press."

Apart from the flow of material from Anderson and Hindson on the wings, which had the effect of stretching the visitors' defence, and served to underline that there is still a place in the modern game for raiding wingers, the other feature of the Town attack was the fire and determination of Halom.

Effective Halom

From the point of view of goal output, his contribution since joining the Town has been disappointing but, as I have pointed out previously, his value cannot simply be measured by the number of times his name appears in the scorers' lists.

There can be no doubt that on this occasion he caused much disarray among the visitors' rearguard, gave Kitchener his toughest task of the season and, in the process, collected a number of knocks, from which he came back courageously.

Much to admire was there, too, about Givens, whose hard work and effort is enabling him to make the fullest use of the extra space his new role gives him.

Court in form

Since Court returned to the team the Town have been unbeaten in seven matches, which may not be wholly coincidence, because the ex-Arsenal man is now showing the form that induced the Town to part with their record fee for him.

With Keen enjoying a revival in form, too, the Town are much more powerful in the middle of the field these days.

Dominating the defensive structure again was Nicholl, with his complete command in the air, well supported by Moore, who had some rather erratic moments, none of which led to anything serious.

From Ryan came the type of display which made him such a success last season. He seemed to have altogether more confidence,

which was reflected in the amount of overlapping he did, and this also applied to Slough.

Read was under nothing like the pressure that confronted King, and apart from one nerve-racking failure to cut out a centre in the first half, he was faultless.

By ERIC PUGH

LINE-UP

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

MILLWALL: King; Brown, Cripps; Dorney, Kitchener, Burnett; Bridges, Bolland, Possee, Smethurst, Dunphy (Alder).

Referee: F. Bassett, Swindon.

equaliser, to be lifted up again when it was seen that the goal had been disallowed for offside.

As it happened, that was really the end of the danger, because the Town defence regained their grip, and their opponents were allowed no clear-cut chances after that.

Full-blooded

This was a game which was full-blooded in character, producing some tackling of a bruising nature, but play was allowed to flow by a referee who was not only tolerant, but possessed of good sense.

Other officials I can think of, but will not name, could have had the effect of re-