



Winning goal: Pictured from behind the net, Alan Slough, in dark shirt, slams home the only goal in the Town's win at Preston on Saturday.

TOWN'S TAILORED TACTICS PAID OFF

PRESTON NORTH END 0, LUTON TOWN 1
ALTHOUGH the Town's display had little of the sparkle and flair shown against Millwall a week earlier, there was still much character and skill about the way they gained their second away win of the season at Deepdale on Saturday.

For the most part, they simply followed the direction in which the signs were pointing, and gained the points through their great soundness and ability in defence.

In fact, the pattern for the whole game was really set in the 12th minute, when the Town were awarded a free kick some three or four yards outside the penalty area.

Keen pushed the ball to **SLOUGH**, whose raking drive found a space through the defensive wall and left Kelly helpless.

That gave the Town a distinct psychological advantage, and produced desperation in the shape of over-hasty, anxious play by Preston who, with the Town strong in midfield and at the back, were singularly lacking in finishing power, or even the promise of it.

Overdose

What chance the match had of becoming a memorable spectacle was largely doused by a chronic overdose of whistle from a referee, strongly aided and abetted by two linesmen determined not to miss the slightest, minor thing.

In some matches, it is my practice to make a note of all the stoppages, but I decided on this occasion that, in all probability, it would not be a meaningful exercise.

Afterwards, I was sorry I had not kept the record but, on the other hand, there were so many hold-ups that keeping count could not have been other than distracting.

Halom booked

Just about every time anything in the nature of a constructive movement began, there was a stoppage for one minor reason or another. So far as I could see, there was little in the play demanding such rigid control.

Certainly, viciousness, along with constructive football, was absent and the only booking, that of Halom

in the 77th minute was for the mildest of offences. Chasing a long ball, he merely seemed to collide with the back of Bird.

This was the centre-forward's second caution of the season and one against which the Town will surely give thought of appeal. As

By ERIC PUGH

Halom said afterwards, "Previously, I was hacked across the shins and nothing happened, not even a free kick."

For the lack of entertainment value, I would exonerate the Town, because they played it as they had to, and Preston made it easy for them by their inability to vary their tactics.

Time and time again, they tried to find McIlmoyle with high passes pumped into the penalty area, which were meat and drink to Nicholl and his henchman, Moore, who completely dominated the middle.

Snuffed out

In fact, McIlmoyle was held so completely that it was a surprise when he was left on the field and another striker, Tarbuck, was hauled

mix-up in which Read went down to smother Clark's attempt and, most people thought that the goalkeeper was the one who had offended. However, coach Jimmy Andrews told me afterwards that the players

Saved

Whatever the cause, the effect was in the Town's favour because Tarbuck, failed to get sufficient power behind his shot, so that Read was able to dive to his left and push the ball out.

Clark came racing in, but Read came to the rescue again, as he did a minute later when he pulled off the save of the match, flinging himself to his right to keep out a header from Tarbuck.

For Read, who seems to enjoy himself greatly when playing on northern grounds, this was a great day and, throughout, he never made even the semblance of an error.

Immaculate

Ever ready to leave his line to catch Preston's high lobs, his handling of the greasy ball was immaculate, and the knowledge that there is such confidence behind them does wonders for the men in front.

Except that John Ryan had a distinctly sticky first half, which he overcame

later to be altogether more solid, there was an encouraging look of safety about the back four.

Nicholl, of course, was the king-pin with a display that earmarks him as the best centre-half in the Second Division, and Moore was ever at his side. Slough, too, had a splendid match, and when a way was found through this line, Read was ever ready and waiting.

In midfield, where Keen and Court are playing so strongly and consistently, the Town have acquired a strength that is underlined by their recent highly successful run, and they received auxiliary help from Hindson and either Anderson or Givens.

Hard running

For once in a way, Givens began as second striker, but for both him and Halom, a continual worker and trier, it was a pretty unproductive job, because it called for much hard running after long balls hit out of defence.

Later, Givens was brought back to midfield, where he was always terrier-like in his efforts, and the Town's task was undoubtedly eased by the fact that Preston lacked someone to hold the ball and slow things down a bit.

After the goal, I cannot recall Kelly being brought into action in the first half, but early in the second half Anderson forced him to

make a great save from a deliberately placed header.

Then, in the closing minutes, when the Preston enthusiasm had begun to run out, Hindson made a searing cross-drive that was only inches off the target, and Halom hit the side-netting from an acute angle.

Justified

This was one of those matches in which the end wholly justified the means, and in which the Town tailored their tactics to the needs of a situation of which they always had command, so that defeat seemed out of the question.

PRESTON NORTH END: Kelly; McMahon, McNab; Bird, Hawkins, Lamb; Heppollette, Clark, McIlmoyle, Lyall, Tarbuck (Wilson).

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

Referee: J. D. Williams, Wrexham. Attendance, 12,844.

off 20 minutes from the end to make way for Wilson.

Preston's threat had come mainly from Tarbuck and Clark, but perhaps the former blotted his copybook irretrievably when he missed a vital penalty kick.

It was awarded during a