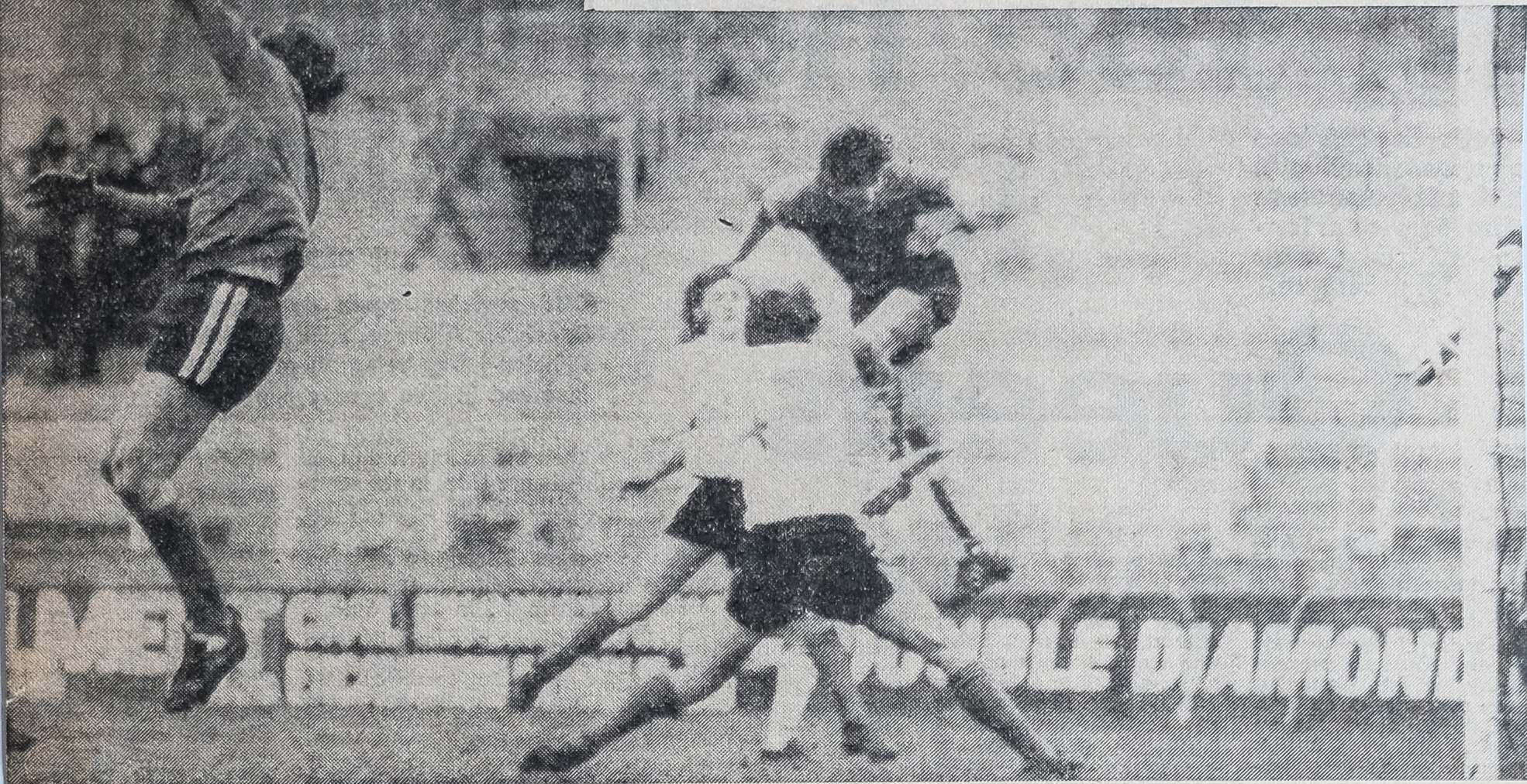


Goal!

With the Town two goals down at Fulham, Peter Anderson (dark shirt) puts them back in the game with this finely headed effort in the 59th minute.



THEY JUST GAVE IT AWAY!

FULHAM 3, LUTON TOWN 1

ONE thing the Town are learning the hard way is that they cannot afford to give—should it be “gift”?—any team a two-goal lead and expect to get away with it.

Virtually that was what happened at Craven Cottage on Saturday when, despite a tremendous, all-out effort in the second half, they had to concede the defeat, though the final scoreline gives an entirely erroneous picture of what actually occurred.

In many ways, this was a carbon copy of the Cup-tie at West Ham, except that Fulham were never dominating and, as happened at Upton Park, there were those afterwards who argued with some justification that the Town were unlucky.

However, the diet that bad luck provides in the way of points is liable to be meagre and, in football, while fortune does play a part, the honours generally go to the team that make the best use of the opportunities that come their way.

So, it is necessary to go deeper than that. Basically, the matter of conceding unnecessary goals is sufficiently rare to cause comment because, by and large,

goal to make the most of them.

In midfield, the Town looked smart and efficient, but there were times when the situation was simply crying out for a block-busting type of striker.

As someone sitting near me remarked: “There is nothing wrong with Luton that a Malcolm Macdonald could not put right.” And that, near sacrilegious as it

Read, I am told, shouted, and could have made the simplest catch, but Slough had already committed himself to his course of action.

That proved fatal in that Lloyd’s corner from the right came across unerringly and, somehow or another, with the Town’s marking too slack, JOHNSTON was left unattended, and he headed the ball through.

My notes at that point said: “The Town had had a lot of the play without working out many scoring openings or showing real promise of thrust. The final pass is tending to go wrong.”

Certainly, as things had gone, to be one goal down was far from the end of the

As they had at West Ham, the Town now took complete control, and they struck gold in 59th minute when ANDERSON got up surprisingly high from a Hindson corner to head a splendid goal.

Pressure

That was the signal for all-out pressure, with Keen, Court and Givens all pressing forward from midfield, and it became a question of how long Fulham’s suspect and over-worked defence could hold out.

With some difficulty they did so, though they were distinctly lucky when Keen was inches too high from a free-kick, Court missed narrowly and Anderson, with another spectacular leap, just topped the bar with a well-timed header.

Such full committal to attack in the search for an equaliser naturally left some gaps at the back, and it was a Fulham breakaway that brought the third goal with the last kick of the match from BARRETT after a longish, diagonal run.

That, in fact, came in the third minute of injury time, which was strange in that neither trainer was on the field at any stage and, even though there was some time-wasting by Fulham near the end, three minutes is an awful long time.

As I see it, the Town’s main problem remains how to increase their scoring output, and indecision seems to exist whether Givens or Anderson should be the second main striker.

Strictly on figures, Anderson seems to qualify, because

his goal was his tenth of the season and he does seem happier up front than in the half and half midfield role.

The trouble is that, at the moment, the odd goal here and there is not enough, and I did think in the first half that there should have been more wing raiding, both by Anderson and, more particularly, by Hindson.

That the former Newcastle player has high ability no-one doubts, but he seems to be such a slow starter that, as on this occasion, his first half contribution was minimal.

Yet, when he really got into it later and began taking on his full-back, one could always see danger.

Court again

Court again had a good match, and so did Keen, if one overlooks the inaccuracy of much of his passing, and it was not in midfield that the Town were beaten.

Maybe Nicholl was a little tardy to begin with, but his domination increased along with that of Moore as the game progressed.

Both Ryan and Slough had their problems at times, which would have gone unnoticed in the general pattern, but for the concession of those first half goals, with neither of which Read appeared to have much chance, and he was probably unsighted when the third came.

ERIC PUGH on Town’s defeat at Fulham

may be in some quarters, just about sums it all up.

Let me hasten to say that Halom did well against his former colleagues, working tirelessly, and laying the ball off well.

However, for all the admiration there must be for his efforts, the plain fact is that he is not getting the goals that must have been hoped for when he was bought.

Even so, he does make chances and I thought Givens should have given the Town the lead in the sixth minute when he ran on to a neatly-headed flick by the centre-forward, but his shot from close in and rather angled, was clawed down by Webster.

Just short

For most of the first half, Givens was used as second striker and, again, he might have scored when, stretching forward, he failed to get a touch to a header by Anderson after a free kick by Keen.

Though, when they were on the move, the Fulham attack looked enterprising enough, it came as a shock when they went ahead after 31 minutes.

A corner was conceded unnecessarily, in that Read was standing immediately behind Slough when the left-back headed behind for what he thought was safety.

world, but the situation took on a more jaundiced look seven minutes later, when Fulham gained what can best be described as a streaky goal.

Trouble

Barrett, always liable to cause a certain amount of trouble, made a break on the left and a centre which somehow eluded everyone as it came across goal. For all that, the ball found a billet in the far corner of the net because someone got the slightest touch to it at the last moment.

Officially, the goal was credited to JOHNSTON, but there were some who said that it went in through a deflection by Nicholl. Whatever the truth, the effect was the same, in that it presented the Town with a long, uphill battle.

Creditably, they were prepared to face it, because they came out for the second half full of fight and good intentions. As he had been for the later stages before the interval, Anderson was pushed up from midfield and, in the first minute he made a centre that Keen could not quite reach.

Then, Keen might have levelled matters when he was left with a clear headed chance from around six yards, but the ball went straight at Webster, who made hard work of saving and nearly fell over the line in the process.

LINE-UP

FULHAM: Webster; Moreline, Callaghan; Dunne, Matthewson, Richardson; Johnston, Cross, Earle, Lloyd, Barrett. Substitute: Stephenson.

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

Referee: R. B. Kirkpatrick, Leicester. Attendance: 11,328.

by far the most reliable and consistent part of the team this season has been the back four.

Certainly, more points have been saved by them than have been lost, and some indication of their strength is given by the fact that this was only the second time this season that they have had as many as three against them.

What did strike me forcibly on Saturday was the thought that pushing the ball about in lively style in midfield is not enough, unless it is allied to the creation of clear-cut scoring chances and the accuracy in front of