

WAKE-UP TOWN, IT'S GOALS YOU NEED

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THAT SCORELINE is as misleading as an election promise. Two down at half-time, Luton pulled a goal back in a gallant second-half revival, and Fulham scored their third goal in the third minute of injury time that should never have been played. Two apiece would have been more fair.

By ROGER DUCKWORTH

The referee was Roger Kirkpatrick, that balding extrovert who runs like a panto principal boy and talks so loudly to the players you can hear him at the back of the stand.

He's the man the crowds love and the players don't. "He makes us look fools," one Luton player told me after the match.

Even so, Mr Kirkpatrick was mobbed by autograph hunters as he left the ground while many players left unchallenged.

Slow starter

He handled the game well, but where the heck did he get those extra three minutes from? There were no stoppages for injury, and neither trainer left his hutch. He once warned Fulham skipper Lloyd for wasting time over a throw-in and pointed meaningfully at his watch. But that didn't take three minutes.

Even so, Luton have only themselves to blame. They should have beaten a Fulham side who look just about right for their league position. But in the first half the Town conceded two soft goals and gave a heavy-legged performance which was the beginning of the end of their unbeaten league sequence.

In midfield Keen gave the ball away too often as his passing went to pieces for a

spell and the Luton attack looked as if it couldn't get its second wind.

People keep telling me that Halom isn't really a centre-forward and that he never has been. He's really an inside-forward they say. That's why he doesn't score goals. Codswallop! He's a big lad, wears the number nine shirt and plays up front. I would like to see him have a few more pots at goal rather than trying to set things up all the time.

And Hindson must start at 3pm with the rest. He was Luton's best forward in the second half and when he got going the Town looked in control. But he seems a slow starter, and had he done in the first half what he did in the second, it could have been a different tale.

Givens gave another whole-hearted performance but he might have scored when breaking after a good Halom pass early on. He might also have had a penalty in the second half when he was pushed in the back. His appeal was ignored.

Messy cross

Little went right for Anderson who ran into trouble too often, but he scored a good goal, a header to a Hindson corner, to put Luton in the game.

Court grafted in midfield and again Nicholl and Moore had outstanding matches. Backs Ryan and Slough came through with credit, though Ryan sometimes found it hard to keep his feet on the wet surface against the wiles of Barrett, Fulham's best player.

The Londoners went ahead

after half an hour when someone forgot to mark Johnston on the near post and he nodded in a Lloyd corner.

Eight minutes later Johnston got the top of his head to a messy cross from Barrett which had been deflected once by Cross. But they all count.

Read could hardly be blamed for any of the goals and I think he was being hard on himself when he said in the bar afterwards: "You are the 12th person to say 'cheers' to me today. The other 11 were the Fulham players."

His positioning and handling were generally good. Luton's biggest problem was a lack of punch up front

Still, losing at Fulham is not the end of the world. Luton have a respectable league position which they should be able to maintain. Queens Park Rangers come to Kenilworth Road next Saturday and the Town could upset their promotion aspirations. In the meantime coach Jimmy Andrews should get all the strikers, forwards, inside-men, wingers, call them what you like, and give them some tuition in the creation and acceptance of chances.

Luton don't want too many managers to be able to say what Fulham's Bill Dodgin said on Saturday night: "You can call me a very grateful manager to have a team that can play badly and still win."

Luton's second-half fight-back so nearly came off. Halom, Hindson and Keen might all have scored. But they didn't. It was really no more than an impertinent gesture when Barrett kidded the Town defence after 93 minutes to score the third goal in that mystery bonus period.