

OH, FOR A HOT SHOT IN THE LINE

LUTON TOWN 1, QUEEN'S PARK RANGERS 1

71/72

JUSTICE was just about served by this scoreline after a match that was full of effort, incident and drama and one in which I fancy the Town could have achieved the victory they so badly needed had they possessed more drive and power in front of goal.

However, this is no new problem, but one which I have had to emphasise only too frequently recently. Goals not only bring points, but make all the difference between a team being merely useful and one which can categorically be described as "good."

That tag, undoubtedly, would be applied to the Town if only they could discover someone to find the net with some regularity, or if some of those in possession, would show more willingness to chance their arms.

To underline the point, the plain fact is that they secured a draw against workmanlike Rangers, only by virtue of an equaliser from a defender, and that is a situation that has obtained only too often.

As an illustration, Halom, the man signed as a marksman whom it was hoped would fill the gap left by Macdonald, did not, as I recall, have one direct shot at goal.

For all his willing and often clever work in mid-

LINE-UP

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

QUEEN'S PARK RANGERS: Parkes; Clement, Hazell; Venables, Hunt, Mancini; Saul, Francis, Leach, Marsh, Ferguson. Substitute: Busby.

Referee: K. A. Wynn, Wolverhampton.

field, the scarcity of goals from him has been a tremendous handicap.

More than that, the general goal shortage leads inevitably to members of the back four having to become adventurous in order to try to remedy matters and, although I would not say it happened on this occasion, there have been times when this has tended to leave the situation at the back not so tight as it should be.

In fact, in defence and midfield, the Town were every bit as good as the Rangers, if not somewhat better.

Perhaps Rangers had some extra pull so far as striking power, mainly through the machinations of Marsh who, of course, is one of the best ball players in the business, but who had something of a mixed game, combining outstanding brilliance with a certain amount of frustration.

Splendid

As expected, Moore did a splendid job of marking the England forward, and the success he achieved in this difficult task was made even more notable by the fact that he was carrying an ankle injury for nearly the whole of the game.

In fact, only nine minutes had gone when he went into a tackle with Mancini, whose boot he received on his ankle. So swollen was it that coach Jimmy Andrews told me afterwards: "If we had taken his boot off, we would not have got it on again."

However, Moore is the sort of character who shrugs off that sort of misfortune, and his subsequent play did not suggest that he was in the sort of discomfort that obviously must have been the case.

By the time the mishap occurred, the Town were already in arrears, again being the victims of an early goal. It was an unfortunate affair in which Keen mis-headed a clearance to FRANCIS, who left Slough floundering and Read helpless with a rising drive from the edge of the penalty area.

As play developed, there was some very tough tackling indeed, and the name of Court was taken for the first time this season for what was a very late tackle on Marsh.

That was after 19 minutes and three minutes later the Town were level through a spectacular goal by JOHN RYAN, whose brief should not really include the need to figure in the list of scorers, though he did on one occasion last season.

This time he picked up a loose ball and, before the Rangers' defence were aware of the danger, he had controlled it, made ground and, from upwards of 25 yards, slammed the ball over the head of Parkes, who had advanced some way out of his goal.

This had a settling effect on the Town, and Anderson, with a little more steadiness might have given them the lead, but he was wide of the near post following a defensive mistake.

Worthy

Keen was not far off the target with a worthy effort, but against that, Marsh was just wide of the far post after a clever individual burst, and then Ryan came to the rescue after Read had pushed out a shot from Leach.

After the whistle had gone for half-time and the players were trooping off the field, Marsh was involved in an unusual incident in that he was booked by the referee, who afterwards would not divulge his reason.

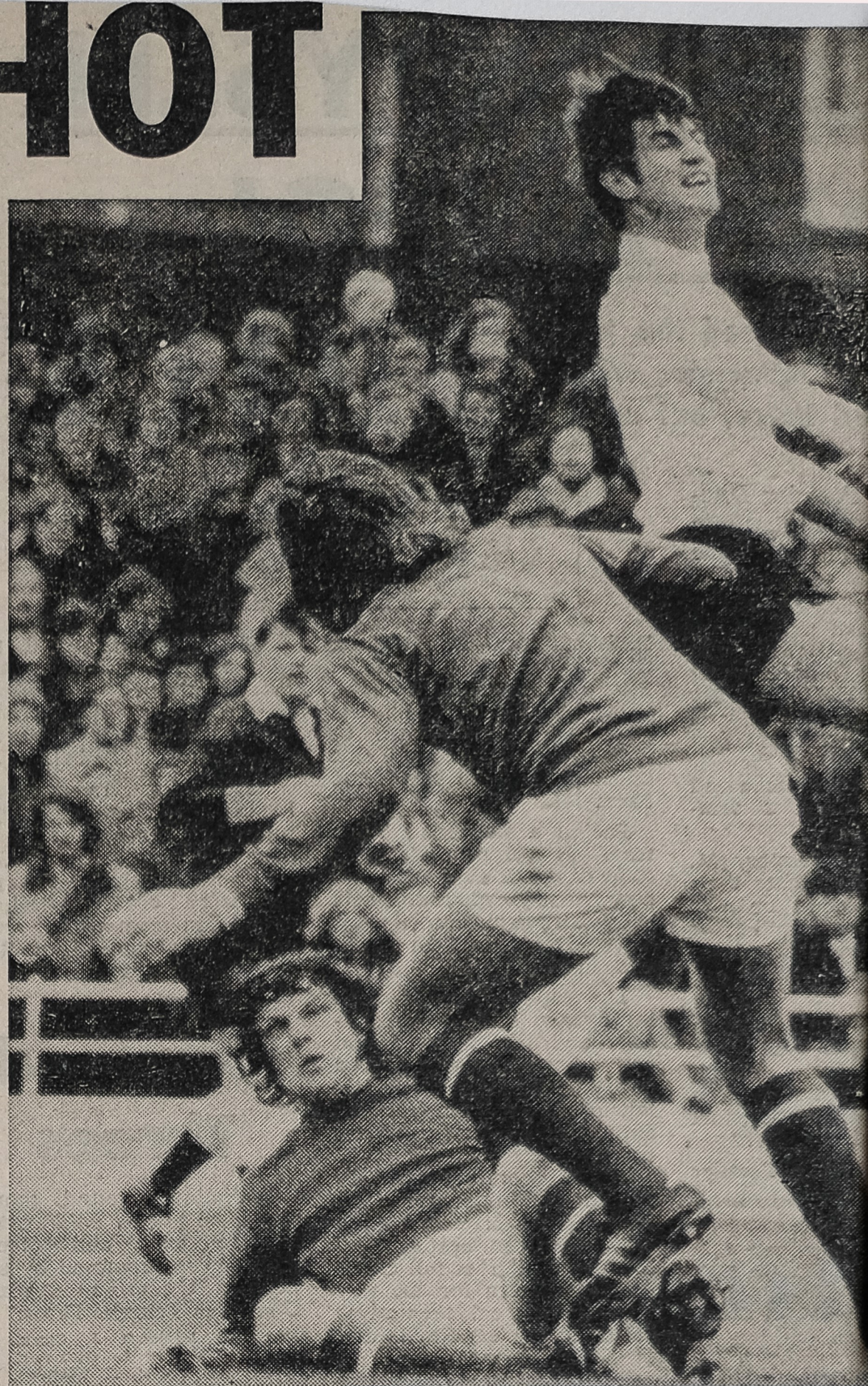
However, Marsh said that he said to the official: "Can I ask you a question?" and, thinking he had not heard, repeated it. It was at this point that Mr Wynn produced his book.

As it happened, that was the last time he had to use it, even though there was plenty of "needle" in this match, especially during the first half which was contested at a rare pace.

Not that the second half quite lived up to that quality, but there were sufficient near things to keep the Town's biggest League crowd of the season, 17,280, on their toes.

Read could have been responsible for disaster when he handled the ball inches outside the penalty area and Marsh squeezed the free kick through only inches wide.

With Hindson again showing a high degree of skill, particularly after the interval, when he was a constant danger, the Town had their moments and Parkes was forced to save from him and



Chris Nicholl shows why he is the envy of so many other clubs as he laughingly confounds three Queen's Park Rangers players at Kenilworth Road on Saturday.

also from a splendid header by Nicholl from a corner by Hindson.

As they had done in the first half, Rangers made a strong finish, and later on, during a defensive mix-up, Mancini missed a chance of snatching a winner, which would have been bad luck on the Town, who always put up a hard, spirited fight.

Sound

As I noted earlier, there were no complaints about the soundness of the back four, with Nicholl again in powerful mood and, despite some tentative moments, John Ryan and Slough were more than adequate, as was Read, apart from a couple of mistakes for which he did not have to pay.

Court continues in most consistent form in midfield, as for that matter does Keen, who must have been pleased with his display against his former club.

There was no doubt that Hindson was the best forward, because Anderson was largely over-shadowed, found few openings, and showed a distinct tendency to turn into trouble.

Once again, Givens, who was constantly in the picture was tried both as striker and in midfield and there were also variations for Anderson.

There was a stage when I felt that Jimmy Ryan might be introduced with some hope of improvement, but I fancy that it was considered unwise to pitch a "cold" player into a match in which play was never very far from boiling point.

Cup dates

THE semi-finals of the Bedfordshire Intermediate Cup will be played on February 26, when Biggleswade United meet Vauxhall Motors Reserves at Cranfield United Ground and Heath United play Brache Sparta on Haynes FC ground.

Venues for the semi-finals of the Bedfordshire Junior Cup on February 19 are: Eaton Bray United Res v Borough Arms at Totternhoe; Clifton v Ewe and Lamb at Arlesey Town.

Junior Charity Cup semi-finals on February 12 are: Chaul End Ath v Tempsford at Flitwick; Leighton OB 'A' v Rotheram OB at Waterlow's.

County Sunday Cup semi-finals on February 20 are: Ewe and Lamb v Taverners at Electrolux; GCSC v Queensmen at Aspley Wanderers' ground.

Sunday Junior Cup semi-finals on February 20: Heron Sports v Leighton Orient at AC-Delco; Blue Star v Green Man at Skefko.

Sunday Lower Junior Cup: The Glendales v LMG United at Wells Star ground; Luton St Mary's v Clifton Res at Silsoe.