

Town's fire-power again goes phut

LUTON TOWN 1, SUNDERLAND 2

71/72

ONCE AGAIN it is my disappointing task to detail another failure by the Town in suffering their second consecutive home defeat, purely because of their lack of scoring power.

And, I fear, that points will continue to escape until some sort of striking force is established with ability to make the most of the chances that are created.

On the credit side, they put up a quite sparkling display in a first half that had the Sunderland defence frequently rocking at its foundations. Indeed, coach Jimmy Andrews averred afterwards that this was the best football he had seen from the Town since he joined the club.

But, he added: "The goals just would not come, despite a tremendous amount of effort. It just makes you feel as if you are bashing your head against a wall."

I agree

Willingly, I second his opinion of the quality of the football produced, but my immediate feeling is that I would be happier at a little less class being shown and more goals being produced.

In the normal way of things, one should follow the other, but this is not happening to the Town, whose biggest single output in the last seven matches has been one, which is certainly too low a "norm" by any standard.

I am persuaded that they are having no luck whatsoever, in that they are getting none of the lucky breaks in front of goal.

On Saturday, they were frustrated at least three times in the first half by spectacular saves from Forster, a long-serving reserve who, beforehand, was

LINE-UP

LUTON TOWN: Read; John Ryan, Slough; Keen, Nicholl, Moore; Wainwright, Court, Halom (Anderson), Givens, Busby.

SUNDERLAND: Forster; Malone, Coleman; Harvey, Pitt, Porterfield; McGiven, Kerr, Watson, Lathan, Tueart. Substitute: Chambers.

Referee: T. H. C. Reynolds, Swansea. Attendance: 10,994.

thought to be the Achilles heel of the visiting defence.

Certainly, things turned out very differently, because Forster played an heroic role under the unrelenting pressure the Town exerted for most of the first half.

It might have been expected that manager Alec Stock would have been

By ERIC PUGH

critical, but he told me afterwards: "I think today was unkind to us. I told the players afterwards, loud and clear, that I saw no reason for shouting at them or bawling them out."

Brown agrees

Corroboration for the views expressed by Town officials came from the Sunderland chief Alan Brown, who said: "I thought it was a fine game of football, and that Luton looked a good side."

While a certain amount of allowance can be made for an unkind run of the ball at close quarters, it is true, nevertheless, that what the Town are sadly lacking at the moment is a strong direct middle member of the

striking force, imbued with the sole idea of taking the shortest route to goal.

While, as ever, I am willing to concede the value of the work Halom does in approach and his capacity for absorbing the weight, I can see no evidence that he is more goal-hungry than he was, or that there is any marked increase in his scoring attempts.

Tonic

This was underlined after 69 minutes, when he was called off in favour of Anderson, who straightway plunged into the fray and generally brought the promise of increased danger.

What would have happened had Sunderland not been given the tonic of a goal in the seventh minute by PITT, one can only speculate. For one thing, they were playing their fifth game in 11 days and manager Brown admitted that his players were so tired that they were like a lot of zombies.

Pressure

Possibly had it been the Town who had scored early, Sunderland would have folded up under their fatigue, but that goal from Pitt with a header that I thought Read should have saved, gave them a new impetus.

Most of the rest of the first half was a story of heavy Town pressure, relieved by quick breaks into attack by Sunderland. Busby stabbed wide a centre by Givens, Keen headed inches off the target and then, in the 22nd minute, the referee ignored what seemed to be a clear case for a penalty when Malone pulled down Givens.

In quick succession, Forster saved from Court, the ball eventually bouncing off the inside of a post, and then he stretched to push over one-handed a worthy attempt by Busby.

Tighter

Towards half time, Sunderland stepped up their raids and a marginal offside decision deprived Tueart of a headed goal after Read had become marooned.

As might have been expected, Sunderland concentrated in the second half on

THEIR VERDICTS:

ALEC STOCK: *The day was unkind to us.*

JIMMY ANDREWS: *The best football I have seen from the Town.*

ALAN BROWN: *Luton looked a good side.*

ERIC PUGH: *The Town lack a strong striker who takes the shortest way to goal.*

tightening up at the back and in midfield, with the result that the Town did not find the number of gaps of which they had failed to make the fullest use in the first half.

Before Anderson really had time to make his full impact, Sunderland broke away to obtain their second goal in the 74th minute through their most dangerous raider, TUEART.

He picked up a pass from Kerr out on the right, turned in, rounded Read as the goalkeeper came out in desperation, and banged the ball in from an acute angle.

Shortly afterwards, Tueart nearly settled it completely when his shot hit the top of the bar and bounced over.

Rally

It was at this point that the Town began a great rally to try to save something. Busby should have put them back in the hunt, and Anderson might have done so, had he not been brusquely pulled down from behind by Harvey, a couple of yards outside the penalty area.

Forster made a great diving save from a free kick by Keen, and then followed an amazing escape, with the ball bobbing about in front of goal and, finally, Pitt clearing off the line from Anderson.

Somewhat unluckily, Harvey was booked for a foul on Givens, and then, with a bare four minutes left, the Town at last broke the ice through NICHOLL, whose close-range shot was judged to have crossed the line.

That Nicholl and other defenders are having to go up in search of goals is not helping their effectiveness as a unit, and is underlining the threat carried by snap breakaways in which Sunderland specialised.

Of course, if the goals were coming with any frequency from those whose job it is to provide them, this would not be necessary.

However, making due

allowance for this, the defence can be said to have done well, Nicholl again being a dominating factor, but receiving good support from Ryan, Moore and Slough.

Some doubt must be cast about Read's culpability so far as the first goal is concerned, but other than that he made some splendid saves.

Intent on making the most of his opportunity to establish himself in the side, Wainwright had a sparkling first half, during which he looked a very good player on the ball, and although he did not quite achieve the same standard after the interval, he certainly did nothing to damage his future prospects.

Both Court and Keen were continually driving forward, with the former the more effective, because his passing was more accurate.

In flashes, Busby looked more than useful, and a goal or two would do wonders for his confidence.

Certainly, there is hope of goals from him sooner or later, and these could also come from Givens if he could overcome a tendency to be erratic at close quarters. Generally he was lively and a more dangerous raider than he was the previous week.