

AFTER ALL THE ALIBIS STILL NO JOY

CHARLTON ATHLETIC 2, LUTON TOWN 0

FIRST, the alibis for the Town's defeat on what was strictly an undistinguished occasion, watched by a crowd of 7,941 spread sparsely around the vast terraces of The Valley, something which did not exactly provide the background for a thriller.

Nor was it a game designed to arouse the passions, but there was vehemence off field afterwards from Town manager Alec Stock and his assistant, Jimmy Andrews.

Normally, this pair accept the ups and downs with a certain amount of equanimity, but, on this occasion, they could not forbear to be highly critical of the referee in allowing both goals against the Town.

From my own observation I would say that they had a decided case, and both goals, which came either side of the interval, sparked off controversy.

Objections

First came in the 40th minute, when the Town had two grounds for complaint about the goal obtained by ROGERS. It came direct from a corner which, in my opinion should not have been awarded, because it seemed perfectly plain that the ball went out, without deflection, when Hunt completely mistimed an attempt to hook in a centre.



LINE-UP

CHARLTON ATHLETIC: Dunn; Jones, Warman; Went, Shipperley, Davies; Peacock (Plumb), Treacy, Hunt, Rogers, Flanagan.

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

Referee: E. Jolly, Manchester.



However, the official view went the other way and Rogers's in-swinging found a billet just inside the far post with Barber left groping.

At the same time, it was clear, even from the stand, that he had been impeded and there were immediate appeals from the Town, which were firmly turned down.

In fact, some of the players told me afterwards that they had complained before the corner was taken that Treacy, on the goal-line, was holding Barber down when corners were being taken.

They were unanimous that Barber had not been allowed to get off his feet to reach the ball.

That was bad enough, because the concession of even a single goal always seems to be a mortal blow to the Town these days, but worse

SPORT

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By ERIC PUGH

was to come 16 minutes after half-time.

Court went in to tackle Peacock for a 50-50 ball, and the Charlton player executed a perfect dive, which first sent him soaring into the air and then down to the ground as if he had been pole-axed.

Unrewarded

Again, the Town's appeals against the award went unrewarded and WENT, after some gamesmanship of twice placing the ball on the penalty spot, blasted the ball past the luckless Barber.

Until the first goal, the Town were more or less on an even keel, without playing with anything resembling complete assurance. Yet, they made a bright enough start, during which Givens was pulled down just outside the penalty area. Keen shot wide from the free kick and Court was too high at the end of a productive movement by Wainwright and Keen.

Midway through the half, there were spells of persistent pressure by the Town, and I noted at the time: "No sign of an improvement in finishing against a Charlton defence that is tending to pack their area."

Few chances

Indeed, clear-cut chances were few, but one did fall to Givens when Court nodded the ball on to him, but his reaction was wild in the extreme and the ball went soaring too high.

Busby also saw a header go not all that much too high and, if the Town were looking better in approach than were Charlton, they just could not find the openings that were so badly needed. Then came the first goal which certainly had a lowering effect on the Town's morale.

During the first half, Shipperley had been booked for a foul on Anderson, and he pulled him down again soon after the interval. From the free kick, Anderson got behind the defensive wall without being able to get in a shot.

That was just about the story of this match so far as

the Town were concerned, because they just could not find the gaps and it seemed that too many players were being caught with their backs to the goal and were not able to swing around quickly enough.

Halom on

On the hour, Halom was sent on for Busby, which caused some mild surprise at the time, because Busby, who had tended to be a little too ambitious at times, had begun to look as if he might blossom forth as a saviour.

That this should happen to him, he could regard as unlucky and certainly Halom contributed little in the half an hour he was on view to suggest that improvement had been effected by the switch.

In fact, Halom was just in time to see Went's goal, and also another hair-raising experience just before that happened, when another Rogers' corner swung in and bounced off the inside of the far post with, so far as I could see, Barber unimpeded on this occasion.

Complicated

There was never much hope for the Town after the second goal and their build-up from midfield continued to be too laboured and more complicated than the methods adopted mostly by their opponents.

Indeed, their best chance was delayed until almost the last minute, and fell to

Givens who, with all the goal to aim at, drove the ball straight at Dunn.

There was little about the Town's display to uplift the spirits of their loyal supporters or to suggest that such experiments as have been made have been completely successful.

Barber, in my opinion, was most unlucky because, before the unfortunate experience of the first goal, he was looking very good indeed.

This was particularly marked in the courageous way in which he left his goal, combined with safe handling of the ball, though there were times, when I wondered whether he was not tending to overdo the spirit of adventure.

If the facts are true, and I have no reason to doubt them, he was blameless over the vital first goal and, on the whole, he had cause to be satisfied with his return to the side.

Strain

Probably because of the strain thrown upon them by the shortcomings up front, the defence did not wear the solid look it can. One could not fault Ryan or Slough, but I think that Nicholl was rather below his dominant best.

Maybe it was a figment of the imagination, but he did not command as he can, and this could possibly be traced to the fact that Moore had a struggling sort of game.

One thing that did stand out like a sore thumb was

the need for more pace and a hard tackler in the destroyer mould in midfield. The inclusion of Wainwright in this vital department has added poise, because he is so good in possession, but has not brought extra speed or toughness in the tackle.

Tireless

These days, Keen tends to be one-paced, though he worked tirelessly, and that left Court as the most successful of the three.

Forward, the problems remain unchanged, with Givens the most lively of the four strikers we saw, but again showing erratic form in front of goal, while Anderson was effectively shut out for most of the game.

Just how to hit on a formation capable of getting a couple of goals with any freedom continues to be the biggest headache and problem for those responsible for team affairs. Certainly, there is a great need for more aggression up front.