

*This was not the Town's day*

# How did they miss getting a hatful?

LUTON TOWN 0, WATFORD 0

"SQUANDERMANIA" seems an apt description of the disease from which the Town are suffering at the moment, and this was heavily underlined at Kenilworth Road, on Saturday, in a local derby that, beforehand, engendered less interest and partisan feeling than any other I can remember.

Not only that, but the attendance of 10,816, the lowest I can recall at clashes between these rivals, was a clear indication of the way the fans are thinking.

It is a fact, of course, that with Watford, doomed already to relegation, despite the somewhat optimistic noises their manager, George Kirby, was making after-

## LINE-UP

**LUTON TOWN:** Barber; John Ryan, Shanks; Keen, Nicholl, Slough; Jimmy Ryan, Court, Halom, Givens (Anderson), Hindson.

**WATFORD:** Walker; Butler, Williams; Lugg, Franks, Eddy; McGettigan, Wigg, Morrissey, Lindsay, Welbourne. Substitute: Rowan.

Referee: J. K. Taylor, Wolverhampton.

wards, they did not bring anything like the substantial following to which they are accustomed on this occasion.

Current disinterest of the Watford fans stems, of course, from their appalling

record this season, nor is there any difficulty in tracing the reason for the Town supporters staying away in substantial numbers.

## Goals wanted

Supporters want to see goals, and they want their team to win. It is as simple as that and, at the moment, the Town are not producing the goods in either form.

This is a problem that has worried most managers in the game, at some time or another, and Alec Stock is only too acutely aware of the situation.

"Missed chances are the story of our life, and this is a game of taking them — that's what it is all about.

"What it amounts to now

vitriol, and the volume of a foghorn.

For the life of me, I cannot see how this sort of thing can be other than harmful when a team is struggling, but I suppose that the barrackers feel that, having paid their money, they have a certain freedom of action.

Not until the first half an hour had gone did the Town really swing into action, and then Givens and Halom, the chief culprits in the matter of missed opportunities, failed to connect with an inviting centre from Hindson.

## By ERIC PUGH

is that the players are trying so hard that it has become a state of mind. We need some composure around the penalty box to give us some confidence," he told me afterwards.

Some of the openings that were missed were so easy that it was quite amazing that the Town did not have plenty of goals in hand at the end, but they seemed fated not to get the ball into the net.

Manager Kirby expressed himself as satisfied with the point, but opined that his team could have won, though he did not expect to do so.

In advancing that theory, he could have been thinking only of the first 25 minutes when, with a strong wind behind them, Watford, using three front-runners down the middle caused some trouble.

The Town, too, had reverted to a more fluid system, in which a 4-4-2 formation could quickly become 4-2-4 with the aid of hard running from the wingers.

For all that, not many real chances were created, though Barber showed his mettle with a great save from Morrissey, and was also able to deal with the follow-up by Lindsay.

## Harmful

Things were not going right for the Town, as sections of the crowd, more critical than usual, let them know in audible fashion. None did more so than someone in the stand whose voice seemed to have the texture of broken glass and

As I have noted on previous occasions, centres — and there were more of them on this occasion, mainly due to the re-emergence of Jimmy Ryan — all too often go to waste with no-one seemingly able to apply the touch that would turn some of them into goals.

With Watford's defence now at action stations, openings continued to crop up, with Givens, for whom this was a nightmare occasion, lifting over a centre by John Ryan.

## Clear chance

Then, he should have scored when sent through by a flick from Halom but, with a clear run, he did not make the extra few yards that would have made a goal a near certainty, and Walker was able to take the pace off the shot, which Butler cleared hurriedly.

There was a centre from Jimmy Ryan which, between them, Halom and Givens failed to force in, and then came perhaps the easiest chance of the lot.

Just two minutes before the interval, John Ryan came racing through to see his drive smack against a post. Back came the rebound to Givens, who made a hash of trying to turn it in, as did Halom from a more difficult position.

So, on the strength of the last quarter of an hour, plus the fact that it was their turn for the wind to be behind them, the Town were firm favourites as the second half began.

It had become more patent that Watford's chief aim was to retain a point, and their stubborn defence put up a stout resistance.

However, it needed a great diving save from Walker to keep out Jimmy Ryan's drive, and then the end of Givens' participation in the proceedings came just after the hour, when he drove over from less than 10 yards, to his obvious exasperation.

Immediately he was called off in favour of Anderson, who soon had a chance to end the stalemate, only for the accident-prone state of the Town's strikers to persist.

## Second bite

Inexplicably, he trod on the ball as it dropped invitingly in front of goal, and although there was time for a second bite at it, Williams was in position to kick his shot off the line.

Over-anxiety, which had been obvious all through the piece, became desperation in the closing minutes, when it can be conceded that the Town were unlucky on two occasions.

On the first, from a corner by Hindson, the ball hit the bar and, before the raid had ended, Anderson headed past Walker, only for the goal to be disallowed on the grounds that there had been some pushing and shoving.

So ended another largely disappointing performance, though goals should have come in sufficient numbers to have restored full confidence for the rest of the season.

Givens, we had seen, had

a most unfortunate day, purely because of his inaccuracy in front of goal, and Halom, too, gave little indication that he can find the finishing power to end the goal famine, though much of his general work was useful.

With his splendid centres, of which better use should have been made, and his willingness to take on the opposing full-back, Jimmy Ryan's future now seems set fair after the vicissitudes he has experienced this season.

Not so effective was the other restored winger, Hindson, who was not consistent, although he contributed some good things.

There could be little complaint about the back four, in which I thought John Ryan stood out. His forays down the wing were reminiscent of his best form of last season.

Once Slough had settled down into his new role, he looked good, while Shanks, who places safety before most other considerations, showed that he is more than ready for a regular place.

There is no doubt that Nicholl has carried a tremendous responsibility and strain this season, but he still kept the defence welded together without perhaps being so outstanding as he can.

Barber looked thoroughly capable and confident, and Court and Keen secured sufficient command in midfield for a crop of chances to be created, though the latter's passing at times was less than accurate, even allowing for the tricks of the wind.