

STILL NO CURE FOR THE TO

OBVIOUSLY the point Luton gleaned from this lukewarm local derby was little consolation to either their fans or their management, who are baffled alike at the team's inability to score goals from the easiest of chances.

Luton should have won about 6-4, but in the end they handed Watford their first point since mid-December and the visiting fans something to smirk about.

A colleague said I was barmy when I told him I quite enjoyed the match. I did. It was one of those games when something was always likely to happen. At times both sets of forwards were almost ingenious in the manner in which they contrived not to score.

It's not that they were not trying but that they were trying too hard. Goals have become as scarce as mice at a cat's home at Luton, and whenever one looks on the man concerned goes to such lengths to make sure of it that something always goes wrong.

As Town director Mr Reggie Burr said afterwards: "One day all those chances we are making are going to go in, and we are going to give someone the biggest thumping of all time."

This inability to score has become an obsession with the players. Coach Jimmy Andrews summed it up well when he commented: "The scarier things are, the harder they are to get."

That is certainly how Luton's forwards see it. Four of Luton's six chances fell to

Luton Town 0 Watford 0

By ROGER DUCKWORTH

MATCH DETAILS

Luton Town: Barber, John Ryan, Shanks, Keen, Nicholl, Slough, Jimmy Ryan, Court, Halom, Givens (Anderson, 64 min), Hindson.

Watford: Walker, Butler, Wilkings, Lugg, Franks, Eddy, Mc

Gettigan, Wigg, Morrissey, Lindsay, Welbourne, Sub: Rowan.

Referee: Mr Jack Taylor (Wolverhampton).

Attendance: 10,816.

the unfortunate Givens, for whom nothing would go right.

In the first half he was put clear with a superb flicked header from Halom. But Walker ran out of his goal fast and blocked the Luton man's shot.

In the second half he shot over an empty net from six yards, and it must have been almost a relief, albeit an embarrassing one, when he was pulled off in the 64th minute to give Anderson a try.

Givens is a skilful and talented player. Like the rest of the Luton team, he will be even better when the goals start going in and he can start playing some relaxed football.

After some tenacious play Anderson broke through and looked set to score when he accidentally trod on the ball and Watford were able to recover. Anderson made an admirable recovery to win back possession but his shot was blocked by Butler on the line.

John Ryan, Luton's best defender, had already hit a post, only to watch his mates miff the chance to score from the rebound, and Jimmy Ryan, Luton's best forward, brought a flying save out of in-form Walker.

The Watford goalkeeper, deputising for the injured Andy Rankin, also made a

super-save to a flying header from Halom.

It looked as if Luton's frustration was ended in the last minute when Anderson headed into the net, following an almighty scramble in which the ball had been nudged against the crossbar. But the Luton man's jubilation celebrations were cut short when World Cup referee Jack Taylor disallowed the effort.

He explained afterwards that he had seen a Luton player using his elbow on an opponent. He had certainly blown before the ball crossed the line and was right on the spot.

Mr Taylor, in fact, was the most accomplished performer on the field, and if there were more referees of his ability football would be a better game.

Natural winger

What of Luton's comeback man? Jimmy Ryan brought a class to the Luton attack that has really been missed during his absence through injury and illness, and he must be a cert for next week.

Hindson found it harder to settle back into the side from which he had been missing for three weeks, but Luton must persevere with two wingers. Hindson is the only natural they have in that department.

Left-back Don Shanks took time to settle but gave an eager performance. His inclusion gave Slough the chance to move inside next to Nicholl and he had a good game.

Nicholl was given a difficult time by Wigg, who must have infuriated the Luton centre-half by balking him when they both went up for high balls. Mr Taylor was aware of what was going on and kept a close eye on the situation, playing advantage to good purpose.

The speed of John Ryan and his understanding with his namesake was Luton's brightest point. Some people have been saying they would like to see John Ryan at centre-forward. It might not be such a daft idea. He has the right build and a liking to shoot whenever he gets the chance. Remember, Malcolm Macdonald came as a full-back.

Court was hardworking and constructive in midfield, but Keen did not have his best game. He seemed to find the tricky, gusting wind an awkward enemy, but even so some of his distribution was good.

Up front Halom did a lot of good things, and two of Givens's best chances came from his quickness to spot an opening. Keen was also involved in these moves.

Barber had a fine afternoon in goal. He has a good pair of hands, and in the early stages he made a quite brilliant recovery at the feet of Morrissey after dropping a hard shot from Lugg, which fooled him after being twisted by the wind.

Disappointed

Even so Morrissey should have scored. He and the rest of the Watford forwards seemed to have as much trouble as Luton when they got near goal. Luton, in fact, were outgunned for spells in the first half, which Watford took 8-1 on corners.

Afterwards Watford manager George Kirby said he still had not written off his club's chances of escaping relegation, even though they are so far adrift at the bottom. "We don't give up," he told me. "We just keep on playing and picking up points like this one."

Luton manager Alec Stock was clearly a disappointed man after failing to beat his nearest neighbours. "It's the story of our lives — missed chances," he told me. "Did anyone count how many we missed? I lost track."

"But if you don't take chances you don't get any rhythm, and good players begin to look indifferent ones."

"What we needed was a bit of composure round the box."

Next Saturday Luton go to Swindon, where they will have to fight every inch of the way. With only eight goals in ten matches this year, the Town will have to work something out in training this week if they are to improve that average against the solid Wiltshire defence.

It would be a lovely thought if we could look forward to that "thumping" that Mr Burr was talking about.

Luton's goal that never was



LUTON Town really thought they had won their local derby with Watford at Kenilworth Road on Saturday, when Peter Anderson netted just before the end. But the joy was short-lived, because referee Jack Taylor whistled for a pushing offence before the Luton player had found the net.



In the top picture Chris Nicholl jumps well above Watford skipper Keith Eddy to head a cross into the goal-mouth, and on the right Watford keeper Mike Walker and full-back David Butler are well beaten as the ball goes into the net from Anderson (out of the picture).

Below, Nicholl clasps his head in his hands in disbelief that the goal has been disallowed, and David Court lets Mr Taylor know just how he feels, while Vic Halom prepares to move in for his protest. Meanwhile Don Shanks has his arms in the air, still sure that the goal stands.

Pictures by KEITH DOBNEY

