

Garner fills the bill

LUTON TOWN 1, BURNLEY 0

71/72

WHILE one game cannot be regarded as conclusive, the inference to be gained, as the Town recorded their first victory since January 8, was that the gap left by the departure of Chris Nicholl can be filled from among present resources in more than adequate fashion.

On all sides, there was praise for Alan Garner, a young player with a minimum of League experience, collected with Millwall, and it is a tribute to him to be able to say that the efficiency of the back four was barely affected.

In particular, his success was pleasing to assistant manager Jimmy Andrews who, from his knowledge of the player when he was coaching at The Den, recommended him to the Town when he was released by Millwall at the end of last season.

Andrews told me: "I was delighted with him. I thought he played splendidly", and manager Alec Stock added his confirmation that what, I suppose, could be regarded as a calculated risk, had come off.

Naturally enough, Garner made a tentative sort of start, but he settled down,



By ERIC PUGH



despite the fact that he had no easy task in facing the £60,000 Paul Fletcher, who is an awkward sort of customer with whom to compete in the air.

So Andrews was entitled to add to his after the match comments: "I thought our back four were excellent. Now we can do with some of our defensive composure in front of the opposing goal."

Gloom relieved

As have so many other tussles at Kenilworth Road this season, this was one that should have produced more goals.

Burnley's chief, Jimmy Adamson, who once had the chance to become England's supremo, averred that, although Burnley can play much better than they did, they should have had their share of the goals that just did not arrive.

This lack of goal output is something that has been with the Town for some time, but there was some relief amidst the darkness in that Busby ended a long scoring blank for the Town, and was unlucky to be deprived of another goal.

The one that counted and which proved to be decisive, came in the 36th minute, the product of a free kick for a foul by Bellamy on Givens.

I suppose it came under the heading of a "professional foul", but Bellamy pulled down Givens when he had left himself with a clear run for goal, having earlier beaten Waldron.

Busby's goal

At all events, the name of the Burnley player went into the book, and Keen's free kick was pushed out to the left, where Anderson collected it. From almost the bye-line, he pulled it back and **BUSBY** came rushing through to accept an easy chance.

Earlier, Anderson and Busby had missed acceptable chances, but the crowning disappointment for the latter came with 14 minutes left.

A long clearance out of defence sent him striding through. Dobson half intercepted, which seems to remove the possibility of an offside decision, and Busby went on to plant the ball past Stevenson in unmistakable fashion.

Only then was it realised that there was some doubt about the goal, because the referee went over to the linesman, changed his decision, and from the position where the free kick was given, Busby must have been a shade offside as he began his run.

However, that was debatable and, afterwards Stock said: "It looked a good

goal to me, and to have it disallowed was disappointing, because it would have done a great deal for Busby's confidence."

On a more general theme, he said: "It was absolutely essential that we should win today. After all, young players can only improve on victories."

In the first 20 minutes, Burnley looked a highly useful combination, but their finishing was never good enough to beat Barber, who is certainly justifying the faith placed in him.

Very much in his favour is the fact that his reflexes are very quick and keen and, more than that, he is brave under pressure.

Just once he was caught when trying to deal with a high cross, but this did not explain the necessity for first Slough, then Keen, heading behind when Barber had the ball covered.

Star goes off

To a marked extent, Burnley were affected by the fact that Thomas, their England under-23 midfield man, was forced to retire at half-time with an ankle injury and, although his deputy, Collins, did well, the extra class which Thomas had shown only in glimpses, was missed.

While there were one or two close calls as Burnley sought to save a point, the Town were able to ride out the danger quite comfortably and, although another goal, as a clincher, would have been welcome, they always seemed capable of hanging on to their narrow lead.

One thing this match revealed was the complete re-emergence into last season's form of John Ryan, who is playing with great confidence. He made some thrilling runs, and again caused the thought that he might be the one to produce the extra pace needed in midfield.

From Shanks, the type of player who yields even the slightest thing in the most grudging manner, there was another eminently safe display, and Slough has taken happily to his comparatively new position as sweeper.

Midfield strength

With Court doing well in the middle and Keen's spoiling tactics highly useful, there was strength in midfield, allowing even for the fact that Givens, given the role to join the attack from behind, tended to be erratic.

However, I thought him unlucky to be booked five minutes from half-time for a foul on Thomas. Already, he is facing up to the necessity of answering for three cautions in 12 months.

Terrier-like in his tactics, and unrelenting in his pressure on Waldron who, unlike Garner, was stampeded into mistakes, Anderson was a constant source of trouble to Burnley's defence.

Naturally, one would have liked to have seen goals coming from him, but he was an all-out trier, and there were encouraging signs that Busby is regaining the form that first interested Newcastle.

For some reason, Jimmy Ryan had one of those days on which nothing seemed to go right for him, with the result that he was pretty effectively bogged down when he discovered that even his footwork could not take him past Wilson.

Certainly, this was nothing like the normal form expected from a player of his class and ability.

LINE-UP

LUTON TOWN: Barber; John Ryan, Shanks; Keen, Garner, Slough; Jimmy Ryan, Court, Anderson, Busby, Givens. Substitute: Moore.

BURNLEY: Stevenson; Docherty, Wilson; Bellamy, Waldron, Dobson, Thomas (Collins), Casper, Fletcher, Probert, James.

Referee: C. Thomas, Treorchy.

Attendance: 8,490.