

Town slip then fight back for a draw

LUTON TOWN 2, PORTSMOUTH 2

THE Town staged a great fight back after the disaster of being two goals down in the first 21 minutes at Kenilworth Road on Wednesday night, but should never have allowed the mediocre Portsmouth side to get into such a strong position.

It is a mystery why the Town defence, which plays so soundly away from home, should go through such patches of uncertainty in front of their home fans, but it happened again in this match.

It was a spell of uncertainty among the back four in the opening minutes that led to Portsmouth taking the lead in the third minute.

It came from a good move, swiftly built up between Reynolds and Piper, with the latter supplying the pass from which former Town forward **BRIAN LEWIS** scored. Thomson made a desperate effort to prevent Lewis's shot from going in, but succeeded only in helping it over the line.

Albert McCann, the other

former Luton Town player in the Pompey side, was next to look dangerous and brought Barber to a fine save by the far post.

It took Luton time to get going, but when they did they came close to getting on terms through the opportunism of Jimmy Ryan, who was unlucky with a snap close-range header that went just over the bar.

Further misfortune befell the Town when the defence once again was caught spreadeagled, Reynolds making a telling cross which was turned into the net by **PRICE**.

In trouble

Against a team struggling in the lower reaches of the table, the Town were now in serious trouble, but they fought hard to retrieve the situation and were heartened when **VIC HALOM** scored his eighth goal of the season from a cross by Jimmy Ryan in the 30th minute.

Halom is thoroughly enjoying coming through from behind, in contrast with last season's role, in which he was very often a lone figure up front waiting for long hopeful kicks from defence to reach him.

Fern was working well in the middle of the field and provided Busby with a snap chance to put the Town

in front with a nice flick inside, but, true to the terrible luck that has dogged him all season, the ball flew over the bar.

Faulkner had difficulty in coping with the speed of Price, the Portsmouth leader, and Barber saved the situa-



LINE-UP

LUTON TOWN: Barber; John Ryan, Thomson, Anderson, Faulkner, Slough; Jimmy Ryan, Fern, Busby, Halom, Aston. Substitute: Hindson.

PORTSMOUTH: Horn; Smith, Collins; Wilson, Stephenson, Munks; Piper, Reynolds, Price, McCann, Lewis (Hiron). Referee: T Tinkler (Boston). Attendance: 9,813.



tion when Price again raced clear, by pulling off a fine save at point-blank range.

BUSBY'S luck changed at last in the 44th minute, when he scored the Town's equaliser, and from the acclaim he received from his teammates, it was obvious that they shared his relief.

It was a bravely taken goal, for Busby, picking up a cross by Fern, powered his way strongly through the middle, warding off a challenge by Munks, and gave no chance to Horn, the goalkeeper who is on a year's loan to Portsmouth from Arsenal.

Having cut out this deficit, Luton moved a lot more confidently in the second

half, when it was mainly Portsmouth who were on the receiving end, but some missed chances once more cost the Town full reward.

Early in the half, Busby broke clean through and with only Horn to beat, he sent the ball sailing over the bar. Halom was the next to break clear, and Horn made a rather fortunate save, slithering down to block the shot with his feet.

In this hectic spell of Town pressure another opening was created by Busby, who made a shot-cum-centre across the face of the Portsmouth goal, but Aston was beaten by the pace in his attempt to run on to it and turn it to advantage.

The Portsmouth goalkeeper again had luck on his side when Faulkner came up to head a free-kick by Aston, for he struggled to grasp the ball as it was about to cross the line.

In the closing minutes, Portsmouth shook off the Town pressure. Lewis was substituted by Hiron 15 minutes from time, but by that time the Town defence were in no mood to concede further favours.

Playing good football and filling a high place in the league table, it is sad that the Town are not yet attracting the support they deserve.

After their win at Sunderland, it seemed reasonable to expect Wednesday's gate would be above average. Instead it slumped to 9,813.

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