



■ Jim Ryan gets a lot of power into this header but without reward

NO EXCUSES

By ROGER DUCKWORTH

Luton Town 0, Carlisle United 1

Town have nothing to offer the fans

THREE comments made to me after the match buzzed through my mind as I drove away from down-in-the-dumps Luton on Saturday night. One bloke in the crowd shouted at me: "What bloody excuse are you going to make for them this week?"

My mate, the hospital broadcaster, said: "At least you have the advantage of seeing them away from home — and don't have to watch this all the time."

And a colleague commented: "I suppose the men can take it, but the boys haven't seen their team win since the summer."

All these add up to Frustration with a

capital F. And I don't know the answer any more than anyone else.

I would point out to our friend that I don't make excuses for anyone. I try to search out reasons. But whatever I say about this dismal show is going to upset someone. So here goes. . . .

The crowd, small in numbers, but big in heart, tried to drive the disjointed Luton team forward. But they rarely looked like scoring.

Breakdown

There was a breakdown in the engine room — the midfield department, and as a result Luton could not hang on to the ball. And they found extreme difficulty in winning it.

On the other hand, Carlisle swarmed like drones on a summer afternoon, and they thoroughly deserved their victory. They came to Luton without an away win all season.

They climbed into the team bus with satisfied smiles on their faces at the end.

It's dangerous to name names on an occasion like this, but I thought Thomson had as good a game as anyone. But even many of his clearances went straight to the wrong side.

Luton played without any visible method. They fell into their old failing of slapping high balls into the middle. They were all gobbled up by a grateful Winstanley.

Mistakes at the back gave Barber palpitations, and he was not without blame himself. Some of his clearing was atrocious and why on earth did he throw that ball at the back of Faulkner when he wasn't looking?

Struggle

Garner had a fair game, and Aston and Fern tried to do their thing up front. But everything seemed to break down in its early stages.

Luton's splendid new lights were switched on at half time, but they failed to add any glitter to a Luton side that seemed devoid of bright ideas.

Luton last won at home against Brighton on September 16. And that was a struggle. Yet they look a different side away from home.

It's getting to a stage where I think home fans are beginning to think I make up the "fairy tales" of Luton's away form. I don't. But I don't pretend to understand it.

MATCH DETAILS

Luton Town: Barber, John Ryan, Thomson, Anderson, Faulkner, Garner, Jimmy Ryan, Slough, Fern, Halom (Goodeve, 72 mins), Aston.

Carlisle United: Ross, Derrett, Gorman, O'Neill, Winstanley, Tiler, Train, Martin, Owen, Balderstone, Laidlaw. Sub: Delgado.

Referee — Mr H. Davey (Nottingham).

Attendance — 10,091.

Goal — Owen (Carlisle, 28 mins).

Ken Goodeve went on for the last 18 minutes at the expense of Halom, who looked so relieved to get away that he ran straight to the dressing room.

Goodeve went straight to the right-back spot, and while he didn't have enough time to stamp his authority on the match, he looked good enough to warrant another go. I would like to see him get a full 90 minutes in.

Dropped

And Gordon Hindson, who was dropped last week, must be licking his lips.

On Saturday Luton go to Fulham to take on Alec Stock's new team. And I suppose they will win and make me eat my words. I hope they do. . . . but I'd love to know why they find it so much easier to win on other people's grounds. The theory has been put forward that they mark tighter and run harder. Why can't they do that at home?

You can count the shots Luton had at goal on one hand. Aston had one stopped, and Fern went just wide in the first half.

In the second half, Slough had one well saved and Jimmy Ryan had a header caught. That's not exactly what you'd call thrill-a-minute promotion stuff.

Former Manchester City centre-forward Bobby Owen scored the goal in the 28th minute after a long free kick was nodded over the Luton defence to find him waiting to the left of the goal.



■ Vic Halom gets down low to make a brave effort