

SUCCESS ON TOUR AND ANOTHER HOME JINX

MIDDLESBROUGH 0, LUTON TOWN 1

AS the Town reach the turn of the year, they must surely be well on the way to creating a new record of away victories, because this valuable win at Ayresome Park on Saturday was their seventh of the season.

Another interesting feature pointed out to me by goalkeeper Keith Barber is that while the Town have been leaking goals at home, in all seven victories away from home they have not conceded a single goal.

For the Town, the capture of these two points was a great start to the holiday, although the match never reached the heights as entertainment.

However, victory was well deserved, and any real football played in this match came from the Town. They looked more capable and had more purpose and ideas than a Middlesbrough side which was surprisingly poor for their League standing.

Middlesbrough had been involved in three 0-0 draws prior to Saturday, and their lack of goals was reflected in the size of the gate, with last-minute Christmas shopping obviously taking preference with many of their regular fans.

Those who turned up, 10,122, looked lost and forlorn on this spacious ground, and even many of these started to wend their way home early, bitterly disappointed.

The cynics were openly predicting before the start, that the outcome would again be 0-0, and by half-time it looked as if they were going to be right, because, although the Town did more than their share of attacking, they could not break down

Triumph well earned

the Middlesbrough rear-guard.

Middlesbrough mounted the first dangerous attack, and had a scoring chance in the seventh minute, when Armstrong picked up a slack pass by Butlin, but shot wide, and a minute later, Hickton followed suit to give the Town early knowledge of the weaknesses in the home finishing.

But soon it was the Town taking up the running, and Jimmy Ryan created an opening for Butlin. He went up to challenge goalkeeper Platt, who dropped the ball, but a free-kick was awarded against Butlin for fouling the goalkeeper.

A mix-up in the Luton defence presented Middlesbrough with another opportunity to open their account,

and Armstrong was left with an open goal to shoot at, but placed the ball just wide of a post.

Butlin was living up to his reputation as a speedy striker, and caught the Middlesbrough defence on the hop with a fine run through, only to be brought down on the edge of the penalty area by Taylor when a goal looked to be on the cards. Anderson took the free kick, and hit it well, but it rebounded off the legs of the defensive wall.

Luton's best shot of the first half came from John Aston, in the 34th minute, and he was a little unfortunate to see it sail just wide of the near post.

Luton were playing confidently, particularly in defence, where Don Shanks was having an outstanding game, but danger was being created by the familiar figure of Nobby Stiles, who was quick to latch on to a through pass by Craggs just before half-time. He fired in a good shot that had the beating of Barber, but it went wide of the upright.

It was in the 52nd minute that the Town broke the



ERIC NORRIS

describes it

all for you

23-12-72

deadlock, and gained what proved to be the decisive goal. It was scored by BUTLIN, his third in three appearances since joining the Town for £50,000 from Derby County.

The spadework was done by Peter Anderson, who showed clever footwork in beating an opponent down the left, and with Platt committed to trying to cut him out, he flicked the ball square across the face of the goal to the unmarked Butlin, who made no mistake in banging it into the empty net.

This goal proved a great boost to the Town, who started to press forward more confidently than ever as Boro' began to wilt, and Vic Halom came close to scoring with a long-range drive that was just too high.

Barber was not over employed against the poor Middlesbrough finishing but he excelled himself in preserving the Town's lead in

the 58th minute when he made a great diving save to keep out a shot by Mills.

Apart from a header by McMordie that hit the far post, the goalkeeper was never really in danger of being beaten again after this.

So, the Town took the points, and the players were

open wing play, and John Aston in particular had another fine game, although at times he tended to over-elaborate before getting the ball across.

John Moore, making his return to the side for the first time this season, showed all his old reliability as a stopper, and gave a whole-hearted performance in the place of the suspended John Ryan, and Rod Fern, the other player to come into the side—replacing Graham French, who was considered not to be fully fit after his hard testing of the previous week—played a full part in the team performance.

It was a happy and confident Town party that journeyed back from Middlesbrough on Saturday night, intent on exacting revenge on Sheffield Wednesday on the Tuesday for the 4-0 battering they received at Hillsborough early in the season.

LINE-UP

MIDDLESBROUGH: Pratt; Craggs, Jones; Stiles, Madden, Taylor; Gates (Smith), Hickton, Mills, Armstrong, McMordie.

LUTON TOWN: Barber; Shanks, Thomson; Anderson, Garner, Moore; Jimmy Ryan, Fern, Butlin, Halom, Aston. Substitute: Slough. Referee: R. Mathewson, Manchester. Attendance: 10,122.

given the confidence booster they so badly needed for their next test on Boxing Day.

They had again demonstrated the value of their

Christmas sat too heavily

LUTON TOWN 0, SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY 0

DESPITE the absence of public transport in Luton on Boxing Day, Luton's largest crowd of the season by a big margin, 15,799, turned up to see what should have been a real thriller against Sheffield Wednesday.

But they were doomed to disappointment, because the game was a real lack-lustre affair, grinding on monotonously with few goalmouth thrills to celebrate.

It is sad to reflect that the biggest buzz of interest among the crowd was caused not by the players on the field, but by a handful of young hooligans who ran on to the pitch. There was a brief stoppage while they were quickly and efficiently rounded up by the police and shepherded away.

Both teams had had hard games on Saturday, when the Town were winning at Middlesbrough and Wednesday were drawing with promotion rivals Aston Villa.

Hangover

Whether we were seeing the hangover is anybody's guess, but the fact remains that the Town again did the lion's share of the attacking but lacked the teeth to snap up the Kenilworth Road victory that has eluded them since September.

Certainly this tame gambol was not what the fans had come to see, though the Wednesday went home well pleased with their share of the spoils.

In fact, although they made fewer attacks, they had their chances to complete the double over the Town. Prendergast, their best forward, could have sewn it up had he shown a little more steadiness at the critical time.

The Town won two corners in the first 10 minutes, and before the second of these could be cleared they came close to a flying start when Jimmy

Ryan got in a cross which just eluded the onrushing John Aston as it flashed across goal.

Wednesday fought back, and Eustace had a shot blocked by Barber. The Town broke quickly from defence, and Halom went close with a good effort.

Little excitement

But exciting incidents were few and far between. The Town continued to dictate most of the play in mid-

THE LINE-UP

LUTON TOWN: Barber; Shanks, Thomson; Anderson, Garner, Moore; Jimmy Ryan, Fern, Butlin, Halom, Aston. Substitute: Slough.

SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY: Grummitt; Rodrigues, Clements; Thompson, Holsgrove, Craig; Sunley, Eustace, Joicey, Prendergast, Royle. Substitute: Sinclair. Referee: N. P. Paget, Coventry. Attendance: 15,799.

field, and Grummitt, who was in superb form, was the buster of the two goalkeepers.

He did well to save a header by Halom, and also cut out another attempt by Aston.

At the other end, Wednesday's best effort of the first half came from a header by Sunley that Barber did exceptionally well to get down to and block.

One of the most noticeable and pleasing features about Barber's recent form has been the speed of his reaction, which has saved the Town a number of times.

With nine minutes to go to the

interval Fern tried to inject some much-needed urgency into the Luton attack working his way cleverly through the packed Wednesday defence to finish with a fine drive that Grummitt saved superbly.

Sunley was running strongly and trying to prod his Sheffield attack into action, and he gave Prendergast a chance, only to see him shoot hurriedly and wide.

Wednesday looked dangerous as the interval approached, and Prendergast was amiss when he headed over the top from a cross by Crain.

More good work by Fern had Wednesday in trouble again, but after some inter-passing with Aston, Fern's shot was deflected for a corner, which Wednesday had difficulty in getting away.

When they did, Sunley raced clear, and the Town defence was in a dangerous situation. However, the Wednesday man took too long to get in his shot, and some cool play by Garner got the Town out of trouble.

Best chance

Possibly the Town's best chance to beat the home jinx and gain their revenge came towards the close of the game when Grummitt made one of his few errors when he failed to hold a corner by Aston. The ball ran loose to Anderson, but in his haste he mis-kicked and it rolled wide of the post.

The goalkeeper was in trouble only once more, and that was when a long drive by Halom caught him unaware and rolled out of his hands.

These incidents apart, it was no a match to remember.



Peter Grummitt saves as Town's John Aston races in.