

SPORT

Town match verdict ★★

TOWN FLOP AS FANS SUFFER

THE TOWN'S directors and manager Harry Haslam went into a huddle for an emergency board meeting after Saturday's shambles of a match at Kenilworth Road.

And well they might. For even the most biased Luton supporter could take little pleasure from watching two poor teams, and seeing the Town surrender yet another home point.

Mistakes

Less than 9,000 fans — second-lowest of the season — turned out to see lowly Orient force a draw, and come uncomfortably close to winning.

The Luton fans tried to lift the Town, but in the end they were full of frustration, and reduced to jeers and footstamping as one mistake followed another.

And that crowd, by its size and its reactions to Saturday's dull and dreary match, must give the Town officials and directors food for thought.

The blunt truth is that 6,000 people who watched the Town on Boxing Day stayed away on Saturday—and as things turned out, their judgment was right.

Hence Saturday evening's board meeting, which is at least proof that the Club is taking a hard look at its problems.

On Saturday's showing, the problem of the Town's poor performances at home is huge. The team never got into gear, even when Orient handed them a gift goal to put them ahead.

It came after 21 minutes, with Orient players standing around complaining when Bobby Thomson sneaked down the left wing to take a throw-in which Orient thought should have been theirs.

Perhaps it should, but the referee let Thomson get on with it, and he threw the ball straight to John Aston, who was unmarked near the edge of the penalty area.

From just inside the corner of the box he shot low and straight—at the Orient goalkeeper. Ray Goddard had the shot covered, but it rolled through his legs into the net and the Town were in front while Orient were still arguing about the throw-in.

But we were back to stalemate within three minutes, because the Town were caught out as Gerry Queen and Terry Brisley worked the ball through the middle of the field until Brisley was given a clear sight of goal from



The moment of cheer: Barry Butlin salutes John Aston's goal. Vic Halom was ready to pounce, but Orient goalkeeper Goddard had already made his biggest mistake of the day to let the ball go through his legs.

Poor fare for the fans, says BRIAN SWAIN



the edge of the penalty area. He took the chance beautifully, with a shot into the top of the net that caught Keith Barber slightly off his line.

And that, as it turned out, was the end of the Town's victory hopes, and in the second half it was Orient who looked more likely winners.

The Town's back four had

to stick at it for long periods; and I thought they came through reasonably well despite the energetic bustling of Queen, Brisley, Ian Bowyer and Derrick Downing.

Every fan sees every game differently, and listening to the chatter as the fans left the ground at the end, it seems that no one department of the Town team satisfied everybody, with the possible exception of Barber.

Certainly, things went wrong continually in midfield

and up front. Perhaps the Town were unlucky when Jimmy Ryan unleashed a tremendous drive which hit the top of the bar, but Orient had matched that bad luck earlier when Peter Allen "scored" after picking up a punched clearance by Barber.

It was disallowed because Brisley, who had forced Barber into that hurried save, was offside when the shot went in.

Those two incidents apart, the second half was terrible, and even the Oak Road end found little to sing about.

You could understand the frustration of fans. They were jeering and shouting "Rubbish" long before the end, and the substitution of Alan Slough was highly popular until it was seen that Peter Anderson was the man being brought off.

Slough was lucky—he only had to suffer for the last 10 minutes of the match, when many of the fans had already left for home.

MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN 1, ORIENT 1

Half-time: 1—1

TOWN: Barber, Shanks, Thomson, John Ryan, Garner, Moore, Jimmy Ryan, Anderson (Slough, 80 min), Butlin, Halom, Aston.

ORIENT: Goddard, Arber, Wall, Hoadley, Harris, Allen, Heppollette, Downing, Brisley, Queen, Bowyer. Sub: Dyson, not needed.

GOALS: Aston for Luton, 21 minutes. Brisley for Orient, 24 minutes.

REFEREE: A. E. Morrissey, Bramhall, Cheshire; worked hard.

ATTENDANCE: 8,344, lowest since September 2.

ENTERTAINMENT: Very little.

TOWN'S LEAGUE PLACING TODAY: seventh, drop of one place, nine points behind leaders Burnley.



The one that got away: Vic Halom is grounded after bursting through the Orient defence after a centre from Don Shanks was knocked back by Peter Anderson.