

WITHOUT A GOAL

Defiant goalkeeper halts Town's revival

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A ONE-MAN RESISTANCE movement, name of Jim Platt sent the Town to their sixth home defeat of the season on Monday when Middlesbrough pinched the points in a game that was typical of too many we have seen at Kenilworth Road this year.

Yet although it was an unwelcome defeat, there were signs that the Town might be able to do better next season, because the score was not a true reflection of the run of play.

It was, however, a reflection of the Town's biggest failing—the inability to turn good approach work into the goals it deserves.

And it is a sad reflection of the Town's striking power, or lack of it, that the absence of Barry Butlin seems to be the vital factor—time and time again.

And you cannot help thinking that there is something wrong with a team that misses one man so badly.

On Monday each side started with a disadvantage. The Town were without John Aston, while Middlesbrough's combative mid-field man, Nobby Stiles, was out with a hamstring injury.

MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN 0
MIDDLESBROUGH 1

Half-time: 0-1

TOWN: Barber; Shanks, Thomson, Anderson, Faulkner, Goodeve, Jim Ryan, John Ryan, Busby (Fern, second half), Hindson, French.

MIDDLESBROUGH: Platt; Creamer, Spraggon, Craggs, Boam, Maddren, Gates, Mills, Hickton, Armstrong, Foggion. Sub: Taylor, not needed.

THE GOAL: Maddren for Middlesbrough (seven minutes).

ATTENDANCE: 6,177, lowest of the season.

REFEREE: T. D. Spencer, Wootton Bassett, Wilts. He didn't.

ENTERTAINMENT: Warranted better than the lowest crowd of the season.

Struggle

But as the first half went against the Town, the absence of Stiles was not important. Middlesbrough had the wind and driving rain at their backs, and they had much the better of things.

Conditions were atrocious, with the centre of the pitch and the Oak Road end a skating rink of mud.

Middlesbrough wisely decided to attack Oak Road first, and it paid quick dividends.

The Town defenders were sliding about all over the place when Maddren fastened on to a long throw-in and scored easily in the 7th minute.

For the rest of the first half the Town looked as though they might take a

ashing from Middlesbrough as well as from the weather.

Alan Foggion got through with a chance, but mis-kicked at the vital moment; David Mills missed from 18 yards; and Don Shanks and Ken Goodeve worked like Trojans to patch up the Town defences.

Up front, there were only two reasonable efforts from the Town. Gordon Hindson took a short free-kick from Peter Anderson and hammered in a shot which Jim Platt did well to save, and Viv Busby put a header from Jim Ryan's cross inches wide of the post.

But Busby, for all his finesse, got no change out of Stuart Boam, and it was a revelation when he was replaced for the second half by Rod Fern.

It was like the introduction of a rumbustious clog-dancer for a ballet maestro—and that was a day for clogging the ball rather than stroking it.

With the weather in their favour, and Fern in-

jecting life into their attack for the first time in the game, the Town suddenly found their form.

They streamed forward on the Middlesbrough goal, with Graham French and Peter Anderson stamping their authority on the game.

Fern nearly scored with his first touch of the ball, and for a time Platt, in the Middlesbrough goal, lived dangerously as his defence crumbled before him.

But Platt put up superb display after some early hesitancy, and in the end his performance divided the two teams.

Purple patch

The Town hit a purple patch, but could not turn it into goals against an inspired, and occasionally lucky, goalkeeper.

So Middlesbrough stole the points, and probably thought it was not too much to pay for them when John Craggs was booked for a late tackle on Hindson.

ACTION MAN ROD PUTS LIFE INTO TOWN

ROD FERN, the man who cannot command a regular place in the Town side despite the £50,000 paid for him less than a year ago, was the one man who looked likely to score against Middlesbrough.

Fern, pictured in action above, sat on the sub's bench for the first half, but brought some much-needed life to the Town attack when he took over Viv Busby's role.

In almost his first kick, he harried the Middlesbrough defence into a mistake, and they needed luck to keep him out.

But from then on, goalkeeper Jim Platt was the man who took the eye. As the Town piled on the

pressure, he and his defenders had to slog through the mud to hang on to the points that gave them revenge for their 1-0 defeat by the Town at Middlesbrough.

Town defenders had time to join in the attacks, and the picture below shows John Faulkner climbing to meet a centre. But Platt climbed higher, and thwarted the Luton player with a two-fisted punch.



JUNIOR HATTERS WIN CUP

THE HARDY fans who stayed on after the Town's match on Monday were rewarded by some entertaining soccer between two teams of schoolboys.

The Junior Hatters, the Town's "nursery" club, beat Star Juniors 2-0 to win the Bedfordshire Under-16 Youth Cup.

In appalling conditions, the boys played remarkably well. The young Hatters sewed up the game in the

first half with goals from Martin Chalmers and Martin Neil.

Star Juniors, based on Luton's Runfold Estate, came more into the game after the interval, but ran out of steam as the mud sapped the energy of both sides.