

HASLAM MAD AT WASTED POINTS



ALEC STOCK

LUTON TOWN entertained their biggest crowd of the season in a Boxing Day spectacular against Fulham, but ended up by chucking away three-quarters of their Christmas points.

The holiday brought just one point from four for the Town. But they can still be regarded as promotion candidates thanks to the other results at the top of Division Two in the last two League programmes.

In spite of the quality of the football

By ROGER DUCKWORTH
Luton Town 1 Fulham 1

and the quantity of the crowd, Town manager Harry Haslam was not his usual smiling self. "We had it won," he growled afterwards. "Then the back four threw it away.

"I don't mean that stupidly, but they started to drop back. They went all defensive instead of pushing forward. With an attacking side like Fulham you have to push them back. You have to counter attack.

"We'll be talking it over tomorrow. We're going to have one of our dressing room inquests. We'll get it right yet."

But Fulham manager Alec Stock, formerly at Luton, was a happy man. "I

think we entertained 'em," he said. "We saw two good sides out there. We are beginning to play a bit again. We never stopped fighting and I think we deserved the point."

It was a grand game of football, hugely enjoyed by the large and appreciative crowd. Luton did 70 per cent of the attacking, and they should have won by a couple of goals.

Both goalkeepers saw plenty of action. Horn made brilliant early saves to former Luton men Alan Slough and Viv Busby, and Slough sighed afterwards: "I still haven't beaten the so and so. I played against him for Luton at Portsmouth and he made some great saves. Graham certainly takes some beating."

In a way it was a tale of two keepers.

Fulham's Peter Mellor also saw plenty of action. He had trouble holding the greasy ball cleanly in the first half, but he made flying deflections to Butlin, West and Husband.

West was again Luton's shining light, but he had oceans of support in midfield from the big-hearted Anderson and the brave and tricky Jim Ryan, who looks more enthusiastic than ever about going in where it hurts.

And Fulham had former England skipper Alan Mullery, who is still an outstanding midfielder player.

Slough gave a strong performance, and Busby, good-naturedly referred to as something off the top of the Christmas tree by a section of the Luton crowd, played with bags of skill and spirit against his strong-tackling former colleague.

Rare tussle

I would not be as harsh about Luton's defence as their manager. Thomson again stood out like a beacon in control and distribution while Shanks and Garner were fast and resolute.

Butlin was well marked by big John Lacy who used his 6ft 3in frame to blot the Luton leader out in the air. He said afterwards: "Barry is a hell of a player to play against. He's strong and brave. We had a good old tussle." Lacy was booked for a foul tackle on Butlin.

Aston again supplied plenty of centres — and the goal. It came after just seven minutes. His low shot from the left wing was deflected past Mellor by full-back Fraser. But the Fulham keeper was generous in his praise for the Luton man: "John deserved the goal for the way he got in the shot on the turn," he said.

In spite of the deflection, Luton are crediting Aston with the goal.

Husband is still searching for his old form, but looking better all the time. He has bags of heart and his luck might have changed had that second half volley not brought such an incredible save out of Mellor.

And Slough and John Conway were unlucky at the other end when Shanks and Thomson cleared off the line twice in a few seconds.

After Anderson had missed with a header chance, Fulham equalised. The goal was a triumph for Busby who dribbled in from the left and crossed for John Conway to clip the ball into the goal.

With eight minutes left Luton appealed for hands in the box against Mullery. It was turned down. "Quite right too," said the Fulham skipper afterwards. "It hit me under the armpit."

LUTON: Horn; Shanks, Thomson, Anderson, Faulkner, Garner, Jim Ryan, Husband, Butlin, West, Aston. Sub: John Ryan.

FULHAM: Mellor; Cutbush, Fraser, Mullery, Lacy, Dunne, John Conway, Jim Conway, Busby, Slough, Barrett. Sub: Lloyd.

ATTENDANCE: 15,259

GOALS: Aston (Luton, 7min), John Conway (Fulham, 78min).