

PENALTY IS THE DECIDER

Ref's clanger robbed us claims angry manager

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A PENALTY GOAL, much disputed by the Town, was enough to give Plymouth victory in a shambles of a match in Devon in which neither team looked like scoring.

After the game, we once more had an inquest that was concerned mostly with a referee's performance, with the Town convinced that Derek Nippard had boobed with his penalty decision.

Even Plymouth's supporters thought it was a harsh decision, so Town boss Harry Haslam had some sympathy for his complaint that the penalty was the biggest robbery since the Euston mail train affair in 1963.

I agree with the general complaint that Plymouth's Brian Hall had taken a dive, and may have conned Mr Nippard. But it would be short-sighted to blame everything on to that one mistake.

Plymouth had previously taken only three points from four home games, and they looked a pretty nondescript bunch. They were short on ideas, and scared of opening up the game in case they got caught.

They were the sort of outfit that any team with pretensions of skill should walk over. But the Town were reduced to Plymouth's general level of incompetence, with neither side showing much invention in attack.

To complete an unhappy afternoon, Dixie Deans, the one man who looked capable of producing something out of the ordinary, had to leave the game 37 minutes early with an injury which turned out to be a broken nose.

He collided with the Plymouth goalkeeper in an attempt to reach a centre, and the Town's chances of snatching a point vanished as he walked up the tunnel.

The course of the game might have been different if the Town had scored early on. Ramsbottom made a good save after Deans had been put through by Ron Fletcher, and Harrison cleared off Jim Husband's toes after Steve Buckley and Ron Fletcher opened up the Argyle defence.

Plymouth settled for a negative style, trying to close the game down, but they also had a couple of half-chances, with Barber saving well from Mariner and Hall.

The second half is worthy of mention only because it brought the vital goal, three minutes after the break.

Collins shoved a low pass

No penalty says West

TOWN skipper Alan West was adamant that Plymouth's match-winning penalty should never have been given. "I definitely didn't push Brian Hall," he said.

"The two of us were going for the ball. Hall was going towards goal and I was coming across to try to tackle. He was in front of me, with his back to me, and I pulled away to avoid making contact.

"I pulled my arms backwards to keep completely clear, then Hall fell over and I fell over him. I couldn't believe it when the ref pointed to the penalty spot."

forward into the inside-right position, and Brian Hall chased after it, with Alan West in pursuit. Hall tumbled forward as West was spreading his arms upwards to try to avoid making contact, and both went down.

It looked like a dive by Hall from my seat, but Mr Nippard was much nearer, and blew up for the penalty very quickly. Johnson obliged from the spot, and the Town never recovered.

Barber and Deans were the pick of the bunch, but none of the Town's players could have been very happy with their performance.

There was no rhythm, very little pattern, and a disappointing absence of the short-passing game that has destroyed far better teams than Plymouth.

REPORT FROM
PLYMOUTH BY
BRIAN SWAIN

Match Details

PLYMOUTH ARGYLE 1, LUTON TN 0
Half-time: 0-0

TOWN: Barber; Price, Buckley, Faulkner, Paul Fletcher; Ryan, West, Fuccillo; Husband, Deans (Hill, 58 minutes), Ron Fletcher.

ARGYLE: Ramsbottom; Randell, Horswill, Sutton, Green; Dolve, Harrison, Collins; Hall, Johnson, Mariner. Sub: Hamilton, not used.

THE GOAL: Johnson, penalty, after Alan West chased back to try to tackle Hall and both fell down. Ref said penalty. Luton said diabolical.

REFEREE: Derek Nippard, Bournemouth: Nine years on the league list, but the Town are convinced he robbed them of a point.

ATTENDANCE: 12,187, Plymouth's worst of the season.

ENTERTAINMENT: Neither side produced much, with Plymouth scared to open up and the Town way below their normal form.



● THE Town's major threat disappeared after 51 minutes when Dixie Deans had to leave the field with an injury which turned out to be a badly broken nose. It paved the way for Ricky Hill's return to the league scene. Above: Hill forces Plymouth goalkeeper Ramsbottom to punch clear, with Ron Fletcher in close attendance. Below: a break in the first half which almost put the Town ahead—Ramsbottom saves from Dixie Deans.

DEANS BREAKS HIS NOSE

