



● THE NUMBERS GAME: Orient's defence in depth outnumbered the Town's attack during Monday's game.

Blanket defence bores the fans and outwits attack'

THE PATIENT supporters who stayed to the bitter end of Monday's dismal score-less draw with Orient at Kenilworth Road deserve as much praise as most of the players on view. 76/77

The game was so bad that afterwards even George Petchey, Orient's manager, apologised for his side's part in it. But he at least could smile with pleasure at winning a priceless point in his team's fight against relegation.

For the Town it was a vital point lost on a day when a team with First Division aspirations found it impossible to work out a method of beating a packed Second Division defence.

Orient came for a point, battled for 90 minutes with eight men back in their own penalty area, and went home wondering how Luton had come so close to the promotion race.

The Town's defence was never under any sort of pressure. Goalkeeper Milija Aleksic had one header to save in the first half and nothing worse than back-passes in the second.

But waves of Town attacks beat themselves to a standstill against Orient's deep defensive formation, with no-one having the wit to work a way through.

The defence, with Graham Jones standing in for the injured Paul Price, was able to amble through the game.

But the midfield and attack were pathetic. Alan West seems to have lost his zest for soccer, and was nothing like the player who helped carry the Town to the First Division last time.

Unlucky to be replaced

Brian Chambers was only rarely at the right place at the right time, and woefully inaccurate with his use of the ball.

I made Lil Fuccillo the most impressive of the middle three, and shared the obvious displeasure of supporters when he was called off to make way for Ron Futcher after 63 minutes.

The Manager's explanation was that he could have pulled any one of the middle three out of the game to make way for an additional striker. The chop fell on Fuccillo in the hope that it would create more space on the Town's left flank and give Steve Buckley a chance to become more involved.

Geddis was outnumbered

But with John Aston devoid of ideas and supplying no sort of service, and Jim Husband contributing little, David Geddis was hopelessly outnumbered.

ORIENT DETAILS

LUTON TOWN 0, ORIENT 0

Brian Swain's Verdict: ★

TOWN: Aleksic; Jones, Buckley, Faulkner, Paul Futcher; Chambers, West, Fuccillo (Ron Futcher, 63 mins); Husband, Geddis, Aston.

ORIENT: Jackson; Fisher, Roffey, Gray, Roeder; Payne, Glover, Possee, Grealish (Chiedozie, 45 mins); Bennett, Whittle.

REFEREE: Alan Robinson, Waterlooville: made fewer mistakes than most of the Town players.

ATTENDANCE: 11,066—makes you wonder if the area really wants First Division football as much as the club does.

ENTERTAINMENT: Terrible—hardly good enough for the Second Division, let alone the First.

BOOKINGS: Bennett of Orient for a foul on Fuccillo; Payne of Orient for wasting time; Paul Futcher for hands; David Geddis for dissent.

By the time Ron Futcher joined him Orient knew that they could hold on for as long as they liked. It reached the stage where Orient were content to bang the ball upfield to Town players, confident that the next attack would be no more effective than the last.

Geddis ran his heart out, and the frustration welled to the surface two minutes from time when he was booked for expressing dissent.

Earlier, Orient's Payne had been cautioned for wasting time, and I had every sympathy with the owner of the voice which shouted: "Hurry up, we want to go home."

Orient found that they had no need to hurry. The Town did all the huffing and puffing and the Londoners packed their penalty area and waited for the final whistle.

Orient forced to defend

Orient's manager claimed afterwards that he had not intended to play such a defensive game. "We knew it would be a hard match," he said. "It started off hard, and got harder all the way through."

"We fell back on defence because we had to — Luton put a lot of pressure

on us. I'm highly delighted with the point.

"It might not have been very entertaining, but we came here to do a job of work. In our position every point is precious.

It was a "miracle"

"We're short of players and we've got a long injury list. People who say we didn't do anything to entertain have to remember that this game is all about results.

"We got a point and that's a miracle for us — we knew Luton would be the better team. I'm sorry that we had to play the way we did, but when teams are fighting for promotion, or against relegation, you have to expect entertainment to take second place to the need to get results."

Said Harry Haslam: "I can't begrudge Orient their point. But I'm sick at the way things have gone. We needed the points, but we couldn't work out how to draw them out of defence.

"Several players know that they didn't do what we wanted. We've had a talk about it, and they feel as sick as I do and as sick as the supporters must feel.

"It wasn't much of a crowd, but we wanted to do better for those who do stick with us."