

TRAINING GROUND HOMEWORK BEATS SAINTS

A WEEK AGO, after the Town had been clobbered by bottom club Burnley, I wrote about the "glorious uncertainties" of football. And glorious was the word as a fighting display made nonsense of previous failings and enabled the Town to inflict Southampton's first home defeat since last January.

Southampton were beaten twice—once on the training grounds, where the Town worked out the right tactics, and once on the pitch where players put their homework into effect with gritty determination.

It was teamwork of the highest order on and off the field, and the result was, if anything, flattering to Southampton.

In the past, the Town have gone to away games with a cheerful policy of playing open attacking football, risking defeat through a willingness to look for goals.

It produced plenty of entertainment, a few good wins and a lot of defeats. But things are changing now, and Southampton's supporters felt the frustrations posed when a visiting team puts results first and entertainment second.

For Luton fans who went to The Dell, the entertainment was first class. In boxing parlance, the Town allowed Southampton to score all the points they

Report
By BRIAN SWAIN
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liked, then delivered a stunning knock-out blow.

And it was done after a bad start to the weekend. Jim McNichol, Paul Futch's deputy, injured an ankle in training, and 18-year-old Graham Jones was drafted into the side at the last minute.

He rose to the occasion magnificently, and the Town's success was built on the best back four performance they have produced for a long time.

John Faulkner, Steve Buckley, Paul Price and Jones threw up a wall of frustration in face of some concerted Southampton attacks, and when the line was occasionally breached Milija Aleksic did everything that was asked of him.

The Town used four men in midfield, including Phil Boersma whose job was to get up quickly to support attacks on the break.

Jim Husband and Ron Futch did the front running, and although Husband was not impressive the system worked a treat.

Lil Fuccillo, Alan West and Ricky Hill all popped up in strong attacking positions, and West and Boersma must still both be wondering why they failed to collect goals when the Saints' defence was torn apart by the speed of Town counter-attacks.

The first half was not terribly good for either side, with the Town taking some time to sort themselves out, and Southampton baffled by the Town's willingness to allow attacks to build up from midfield.

The home side's midfield men pushed forward hopefully, but ran out of ideas



● THE moments when Phil Boersma got it

when they found their path blocked by a sea of orange-shirted opponents.

The Town backed off to just in front of their penalty area, and Southampton's players almost gave themselves up when they found there was no colleague and no space unmarked.

In contrast, although big Chris Nicholl is still as good as ever in the air, he was found wanting when the Town attacked on the break and kept the ball on the ground, and better shooting by Futch and Husband could have put the Town ahead by half-time.

At that stage the game was in the balance, with both sides seeing the possibilities of a breakthrough.

But the second half was the Town's by a long way. Boersma astounded everyone, himself included, by an amazing miss. A Southampton corner was cleared by Faulkner. He followed his header out, blocked a Southampton shot, followed that, and then blocked another.

The ball broke to Boersma, and he smoothly accelerated with the ball from the halfway line. He was in the clear, with defenders stranded behind him. He dribbled round

goalkeeper Peter Wells, and then shot for the unguarded goal . . . and was a yard wide.

He almost made amends by beating his man and shooting against the post after good work by Fuccillo and Husband, and then put Alan West through for a chance that should have been taken, only to see the skipper shoot wide of the far post.

It looked as though the Town were throwing away all their hard work and disciplined defence, but once more they came back and snatched a well-deserved winner in the 72nd minute.

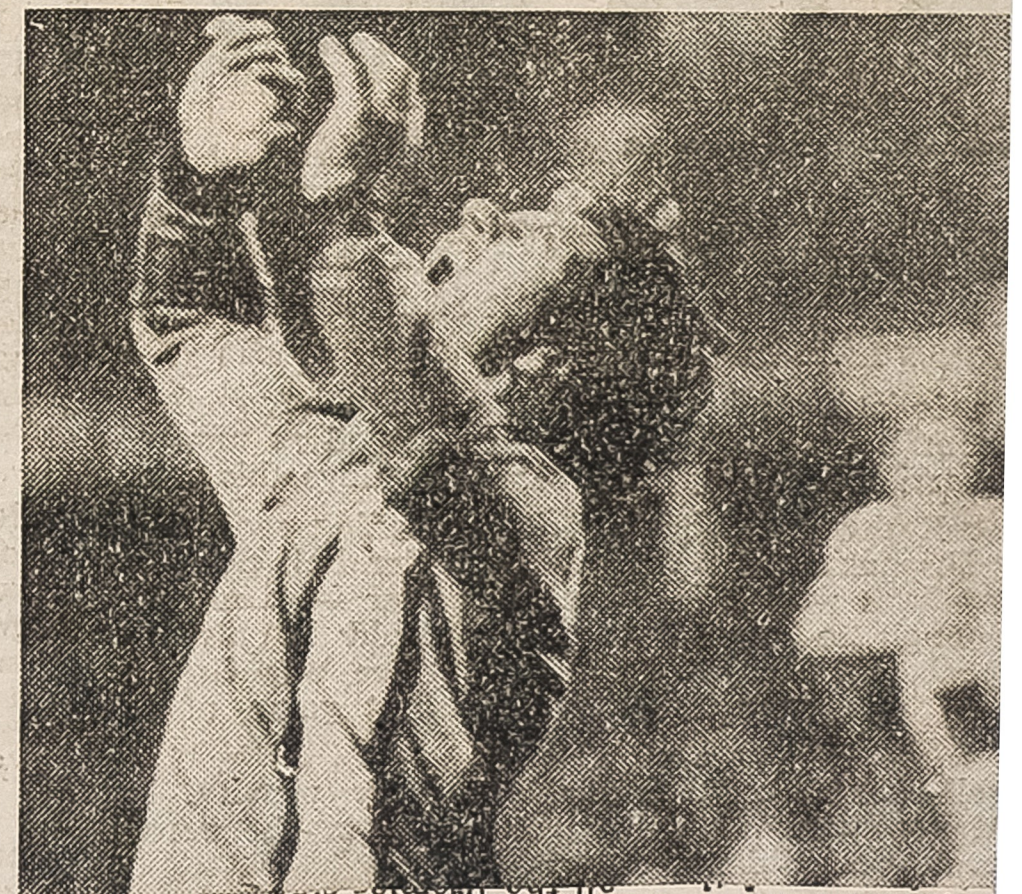
Southampton, never scared of conceding free kicks, gave one away about 25 yards from goal to stop Fuccillo going through. Justice was done when West rolled the free kick short and Fuccillo blasted a drive goalwards.

Some Town players think

all right, then made "the worst miss of my career" at the Dell on Saturday:

ABOVE: Southampton's defence is nowhere as Boersma dances the ball round goalkeeper Peter Wells, to leave himself with an empty net to aim at.

BELOW: "Oh no, how could I?"



Match Details

SOUTHAMPTON 0, LUTON TOWN 1

Half-time: 0-0

77/78

TOWN: Aleksic; Price, Buckley, Faulkner, Jones; West, Hill, Fuccillo, Boersma; Husband, Ron Futch. Sub: Carr, not used.

SOUTHAMPTON: Wells; Waldron, Andruszewski, Nicholl, Pickering; Williams, Ball, Holmes; Boyer, MacDougall, Neville (Hebberd, 76 minutes).

THE GOAL: Ron Futch, delicate header deflecting Lil Fuccillo's 25-yarder into the top corner after 72 minutes.

ATTENDANCE: 19,907, third highest of the day in the Second Division.

REFEREE: John Gow, Swansea: Both sides were happy with his performance, and there would be no grumbles if every whistler performed every week like he did.

ENTERTAINMENT: Fascinating contest of tactics with the Town's 4-4-2 system frustrating Southampton at one end, and breaking out into speedy counter-attacks at the other and a nail-biting last ten minutes as Southampton pushed everyone forward.

SOUTH BEDS

A GOAL KICK should be in prospect in the third round of the South Beds Sunday League's Solar Trophy on January 15 when Toppers United entertain

Both sets of forwards went goal-crazy on Sunday in winning their way into the third round with Toppers winning 14-0 against Cardale and Tophill beating Yates All Stars 13-2.

There were no major upsets in the competition with

corner. were missed at end by McMellon Jenkins. Ampth awarded a free-kick in the 7th minute. Ampt- obstruction and equalised after the tipped to him by ss, Gill.