

A late equaliser from Ronnie Futchersaved the Town's blushes and earned them a point, and later Haslam was in defiant mood when critics questioned whether it was a failure as another home point was lost.

"I can understand the feelings of the supporters," he said. "They want success. They want to see us scoring goals. They don't want that any more than I do. But the draw gave us three points out of the last four, so we're coming along, and I still think we will win more than we will lose."

On the field, the brightest spot was the performance of Brian Stein when he was sent on for the last 15 minutes to replace Jim Husband.

Stein, a non-league player at Edgware Town until a couple of months ago, showed a refreshing exuberance, and a willingness to take players on and show a little ambition.

It was in direct contrast to most of what had gone before. In the first half both sides played a 4-4-2 formation, with Phil Boersma operating in a forward midfield role behind Ron Futchers and Jim Husband.

It was not a huge success, and Mansfield countered with the same system, which the Town used to such good effect the previous week at Southampton.

They built their game on a tight defence, looking for quick breaks to catch the Town unguarded, and the policy worked only too well.

The Town pressed forward hopefully but the shooting was pathetic, and few clear-cut chances arose at close quarters. The best early effort was a sizzling free kick by Steve Buckley which whipped a few inches wide of the post. Mansfield looked more dangerous when they countered, with Dave Syrett toe-poking a chance wide and Dave Goodwin being thwarted by a spreading save by Milija Aleksic.

But the goalkeeper was sold by the defence when Mansfield broke away to score in the 28th minute. Husband, who had shot wide from a reasonable position a minute earlier, carelessly lost possession to wreck another Town attack, and Mansfield took full advantage.

Paul Price, who had all but abandoned his defensive duties, had pushed up too far on the right, and from Husband's error Pat Sharkey knocked a pass of 30 or 40 yards into the space behind Price.

Syrett raced clear, and with too much space already given up for John Faulkner and Graham Jones to cover, coolly shot Mansfield into the lead as Aleksic tried to narrow the angle.

I felt sorry for Faulkner particularly, because he and Buckley were the two best defenders on view.

The reverse stung the Town into renewed attacking frenzy. But it was all too frantic. Futchers deserved better when he had a shot cleared off the line by Sharkey after a good cross by Boersma, but Ricky Hill put the rebound wide from a good position.

He almost made amends with a sweet 20-yard run and shot, but Rod Arnold beat out the attempt. The goalkeeper nearly dropped his side in the act a couple of minutes after the interval when he gave away an indirect free kick for carrying the ball, and got booked for dissent.

Alan West, who had a patchy game, touched the free kick short to Buckley, and the complete Mansfield team, lined up on the goal-line between the posts, was relieved to see Buckley's piledriver crash into the post, and out of touch for a throw-in.

Lil Fuccillo's slogging determination kept the Town going in midfield, and Futchers worked away without enough support to upset Mansfield's defensive composure.

Boersma was asked to

REPORT BY BRIAN SWAIN — PICTURES BY RON PURVES

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 1, MANSFIELD 1

Half-time: 0-1

TOWN: Aleksic; Price, Buckley, Faulkner, Jones; West, Hill, Fuccillo, Boersma; Husband (Stein, 76 mins), Ron Futchers.

MANSFIELD: Arnold; Bird, B. Foster, Wood, C. Foster; Sharkey, Miller, Goodwin (Saxby, 54 mins), Miller; Syrett, Aston.

THE GOALS: Dave Syrett for Mansfield, 28 minutes, with the Town's right flank uncovered as Syrett chased a long clearance out of defence; Ron Futchers for the Town, 85 minutes, after Lil Fuccillo had headed John Faulkner's long cross back into the goal area.

ATTENDANCE: 6,401, lowest of the season—but even this game was better than going Christmas shopping with the wife.

REFEREE: Brian Daniels Brentwood; firm and on the ball, and stood no nonsense, although John Faulkner was lucky to escape a booking for handball.

BOOKINGS: Mansfield hat-trick—Pat Sharkey and Rod Arnold for dissent, Dave Goodwin for a foul on Lil Fuccillo.

ENTERTAINMENT: Very poor for Town supporters with Mansfield's deep defence stifling the attack and frustrating the fans until Brian Stein injected more life into the front line in the last 14 minutes.

ODDSPOT: Both sides played in Luton Town kit — Mansfield borrowed the Town's white away strip because Mr Daniels ruled that their amber and light blue clashed with the Town's colours, and Mansfield hadn't brought a change strip with them.

operate as a traditional left winger in the second-half, but when he did get good crosses in they came to nothing.

The Oak Road End was baying for Boersma to be taken off when they saw Stein limbering up on the touch-line, but instead the chop fell on Husband.

The choice could have been either, but at least there was a renewed zest in the Town's approach after Stein got cracking.

He was prepared to run at anyone, and Mansfield were shaken out of their cool confidence by his speed and ball control.

It injected a new element into the Town's attacks, pointing up the pedestrian predictability that had gone before, and indirectly it paved the way for the late equaliser.

Faulkner did the first spade-work with his unflagging determination carrying him up the left wing as the game moved into the last five minutes.

His cross went over the heads of the defence to beyond the far post. Fuccillo headed the ball back into the centre, and Futchers earned his reward for a lot of hard work by nodding in the equaliser.