

Point from Orient sounds better than it looked

A GRIM and unimaginative scoreless draw at Orient on Monday night ended the Town's Christmas and New Year programme with a record far more attractive than the match—six points from four games.

And the point that had to be prised away from Brisbane Road in 90 minutes of hard graft went some way towards excusing the appalling lack of entertainment served up. Both forward lines flopped, but Orient's agony was slightly worse than the Town's because they even saw a penalty chance wasted.

There seems to be something about Orient that brings out the worst in Town teams. Matches between the two sides rarely sparkle, and Monday's was as bad as most that have gone before.

One fact sums up the match's failure as a spectacle: Orient goalkeeper John Jackson had to make one serious save in the whole 90 minutes. Milija Aleksic had to make two, neither very strenuous.

The goal attempts were few and far between, with the Town missing a good close-range chance in the second half and Orient's midfielder Bill Roffey trying his luck with three long-range attempts.

The missed penalty gave us some indication of what was to come. In the only serious attack of the early stages Peter Bennett had whipped a 20-yard shot wide of a post, and Orient had shown signs that they were prepared to move forward in strength and put the Town under pressure.

In the 11th minute Peter Kitchen was invited to chase a hopeful through ball down the left side of the Town's penalty area. Steve Buckley and David Carr were in pursuit, and from the stand it looked as though Kitchen's pace was taking him goal-side of them.

As the three players jostled for position and possession, Bennett fell down and referee Reeves, who was within 20 yards of the incident, ruled that he had been pushed.

Kitchen Orient's leading scorer, took the kick himself — and produced one of the worst penalty attempts ever seen, even at Brisbane Road. He side-footed the ball hopelessly high, and well wide as well.

Ironically, it was at the same end that Buckley produced a similar penalty miss in the corresponding Christmas match a year ago. Orient won that encounter 1-0, and on balance they felt on Monday that they deserved a similar result this time.

Perhaps they did, but the Town's defence settled down to battle through to a point, and our consolation was that if you play badly and pick up away points success can yet be achieved.

The Town's first and last attack of the first half was started and finished by Ricky Hill. He won a tackle in midfield, slipped a short pass to Phil Boersma, ran 10 yards to collect the return and blasted in an accurate low drive.

It would have been worth a goal, but Jackson made a smart diving save to turn the shot round a post, and for the remaining half hour of the first half the Town offered nothing in attack.

The biggest threats came from Buckley, who forced his way down the left wing several times, but nothing came of his efforts.

Ron Futchter tried hard, but was given little service and even less support. Brian Stein was closely marked and often harshly tackled by Fisher, and Boersma had one of those games when almost everything he tried failed.

Stein tried switching wings, but as both sides made errors in midfield the game died quietly, and hundreds of fans sloped off long before the end to find something more interesting to do.

It was a case of Orient's dreary stereotyped midfield and attack giving itself up to a Town defence that worked hard to save a point in the knowledge that the forwards had little hope of grabbing the other one.

The Town's brightest moment came in the 77th minute when Buckley belted a long high free kick across the face of the goal. Futchter rose well to head the ball back into the six-yard box, but the hapless

REPORTS BY



BRIAN SWAIN

Stein, under pressure from defenders and with only a split second to make his move, scooped the chance over the bar.

Orient's answer came from John Chiedozie, who had the cheek to actually run faster than Buckley a couple of times.

Breaking fast from the middle, he almost got in with a chance in the 81st minute, but as he burst past Buckley Aleksic saw the danger and raced out of his area to make a saving tackle and clearance.

The problem for the Town was that the midfield never got going. Alan West was the only one to make any impression on the game, and it was fortunate for the Town that his efforts cancelled out those of Orient's Tony Grealish, who had threatened to take control in the early stages.

That threat, like just about everything else in the game, turned out to be another case of flattering to deceive, and the final whistle was a happy release for supporters of both teams who were brave enough to stay to the bitter end.

ORIENT DETAILS

ORIENT 0, LUTON TOWN 0

Match verdict: ★★

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

ORIENT: Jackson; Fisher, Hoadley, Roeder, Gray; Roffey, Grealish, Bennett; Chiedozie, Mayo, Kitchen. Sub: Clarke, not used.

REFEREE: Denis Reeves, Middlesex: The Town thought he was harsh when he gave a penalty against them. But he had a better game than many of the 22 players on view.

ATTENDANCE: 9,270, and they all deserved better value for money than they got.

ENTERTAINMENT: Hardly any, with both defences too good for some inept attacking play.

77/78