

CHANCES FLUFFED—AND THEN COMES A KILLER

6,000 watch as point slips away ^{7/78}

NEW TOWN MANAGER David Pleat managed to put a brave face on things after seeing his side robbed of a victory they had just about deserved by a Bristol equaliser 15 seconds from time.

"We worked hard, we kept trying, and we played some entertaining stuff in our build-up," he said.

He would have added that too much of that entertainment was swamped by a tidal wave of mistakes in front of goal, and the Town's smallest gate for years went home frustrated at a performance that promised much more than it achieved.

Bristol Rovers showed no great adventure and were lucky to be in the game at all for most of it. They lost the midfield battle, where Lil Fuccillo took charge, and were forced to stage a long defence struggle for survival.

They could have been buried under an avalanche of goals, but they survived for 86 minutes, thanks to some good saves, some atrocious Town finishing and a large helping of luck.

Three times Town efforts rattled the woodwork, and Ron Futcher produced a succession of agonising failures before partly redeeming himself when he headed the Town into the lead with only four minutes to go.

The goal, his 11th of the season, seemed certain to give the new manager a victory to help wipe out the memory of his first game, the FA Cup defeat at Millwall.

Instead, it goaded Bristol into pushing forward with an air of desperation they had never shown before, and the Town's defensive marking was all at sea when defender Steve Harding headed the point-saver as the referee's watch was ticking through the last quarter of the last minute.

The Rovers, without an away league win all season, were content to ride their luck as the Town wasted

Report by Brian Swain Pictures: Steve Templeman

an impressive amount of domination.

Only once in the first half was Milija Aleksic's goal under serious threat, when Staniforth beat Paul Futcher for speed in an early break, but was then beaten by the goalkeeper's spreading save.

That was in the second minute, and from then on Bristol goalkeeper Martin Thomas was the busiest man on the pitch.

Phil Boersma created panic stations down Bristol's right flank, and from one of his centres Brian Stein produced a header which Thomas flipped acrobatically over the bar.

Stein had a sparkling first 30 minutes, and was unlucky with a neat turn and shot, which left Thomas beaten but clipped the outside of a post.

The woodwork saved the Rovers again shortly afterwards. Alan West, whose return raised the Town's vision and creation in midfield, lobbed accurately from outside the box. Thomas, at full stretch, managed to push the ball on to the bar, and after Stein's shot from the rebound was blocked Ron Futcher sent the ball straight back to the grateful Thomas.

The goalkeeper went full-length to turn aside a shot by Fuccillo, and when he was beaten by an inswinging corner Bobby Gould headed off the line.

The Town defence was given such an easy ride that full-backs Paul Price and David Carr were both able to wander upfield to add their weight to Town attacks, and Bristol's newest discovery, 19-year-

old Paul Randall, was rarely given the chance to shine.

He showed off his pace just once, with a run that took him past Paul Futcher and then around Aleksic, but by the time he prepared to shoot for the empty goal Futcher had got back to make a successful tackle.

Some of the tackling was dubious, and so was the refereeing of Peter Reeves of Leicester.

He booked part-time physio Roy Johnson for going on to the field to treat Fuccillo without getting permission first. The sponge-man mistook a signal for a free-kick.

Mr Reeves let some bad tackles go, but then cautioned John Faulkner—his fifth booking of the season—for an alleged foul on Pulis, which was never a serious offence.

Graham Jones joined in the Town's almost continuous attacks, but was off target with his best two shots, and Ron Futcher let another good chance slip when he hit a post from close range after a low cross by Price.

For the last 16 minutes Ricky Hill replaced Jones, but he too was unable to get his shots on target, and with ten minutes to go the long-suffering crowd was beginning to head for warmer places after Ron Futcher fluffed another opportunity.

He was a yard too slow,

● Bristol Rovers goalkeeper Thomas

made a second too late, to reach the rebound after Thomas beat out a shot by Stein, but made amends for some of his earlier slackness by putting the Town ahead in the 86th minute.

Boersma started the move in midfield, having moved across to the right. His pass found Stein outside the

penalty area. The ball kicked to Futcher seemed to have won a corner.

The wait for goals. PART OF THE H



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CLUB LICENCE GRANTED

HOUGHTON Regis Community Association been given a chance "flourish" under a r club registration certificate.

The association, based Thornbury School, granted a club licence Dunstable Magistrates Tuesday.

The association, chaired by Cllr Philip Jones, now provide bars for functions during normal licensing hours.

"The club registration is a necessity, and the success of the community centre will not flourish without it," said Cllr Jones. "Everyone has been working very hard with the aim of getting registration."

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 1, BRISTOL ROVERS 1
Half-time: 0-0

TOWN: Aleksic; Price, Carr, Faulkner, Paul Futcher; West, Jones (Hill 74 mins), Fuccillo; Stein, Ron Futcher, Boersma.

BRISTOL ROVERS: Thomas; Aitken, Bater, Harding, Taylor; Prince, Williams, Pulis; Gould, Staniforth, Randall. Sub: Hendrie, not used.

THE GOALS: Ron Futcher for the Town 86 minutes, header from Brian Stein's overhead kick across the goalmouth; Steve Harding, 15 seconds from time, header after Town failed to clear a corner.

ATTENDANCE: 5,913—lowest for years. Might have been a boycott, but more likely caused by the bitter cold weather.

REFEREE: Peter Reeves, Leicester. Inconsistent and not up to the sort of standard league football needs.

ENTERTAINMENT: The Town were good to watch everywhere except when it mattered most, in front of Bristol's goal.