

SOCCER VIOLENCE IS NO ANSWER TO LACK OF SKILL

THERE SHOULD have been some very hard thinking going on at Kenilworth Road this week—in the dressing rooms, the manager's office and in the boardroom. And if the right answers aren't forthcoming, Luton Town will be short of support next season.

The score-line as the Town lost 1-0 at Craven Cottage to a mediocre Fulham side does not begin to tell the story of just how appalling the occasion was.

Having followed and supported Luton Town for 30 years, up the giddy heights of the First Division twice, and then back to the depths of the Fourth, I can accept defeat more or less gracefully.

But I cannot accept the way in which the defeat came at Fulham. The Town's football was wretched in the extreme, but even worse, they showed a niggly bad-tempered approach which substituted physical violence for football skill.

And football skill was markedly absent from the Town ranks as Fulham pinched a goal through a defensive error and then held on to take the points without ever showing much sign of running riot.

Both sides were so poor that neither goalkeeper was much extended, but Fulham were worth their win.

At the end both sets of supporters were disgruntled with the rubbish set before them. Town boss David Pleat was warning that if some of his players didn't pull their fingers out they would be turfed out of the team. presumably the directors are going to find replacements.

Fulham's supporters were moaning about how bad their side was, to take only one goal off the worst visiting team many of them could remember.

The Town's only serious spell of contention was in the early stages of the game. Alan West, playing further upfield than he used to, posed problems for Fulham's defence, and referee Alf Grey made a vital decision which flattened the Town's chances.

West surged down the left flank and slung over a diagonal pass into the penalty area. Fulham goalkeeper Gerry Peyton fumbled the ball and was relieved to see it go past him and out of play for a corner.

But Mr Grey insisted that it was a goal kick, and Peyton's long clearance brought the only goal of the game. He booted the ball down the Town's left flank. David Carr shouted to Lil Fuccillo to leave it, and the midfield man did.

REPORT AND COMMENT BY TOWN FAN AND LUTON NEWS SPORTS EDITOR, BRIAN SWAIN

But Carr was put under pressure as he went to head clear, missed the ball completely, and let Brian Greenaway loose down Fulham's right wing.

Before the gap could be covered Greenaway crossed high to the far side of the penalty area and Tony Mahoney sent a looping header over Milija Aleksic and into the net.

Mahoney later missed two acceptable chances, and John Lacy hit the bar with a header.

Aleksic tipped over a rising drive by Greenaway, but the Town were getting lost in midfield and disappearing from view in attack.

It gives me no pleasure to report that Carr, a clubman to his boot-soles, was picked out by Fulham as the weak link in the Town's defence, and mercilessly exposed.

It's easy to criticise the lad for not being good enough. But someone else surely also needs to be concerned about the fact that the Town sold the only left-back they had, then tried to muddle through without lining up a replacement.

The hapless Carr was pushed into a job for which he is not equipped, and that's definitely not his fault. By taking on the job he has almost certainly damaged his own career prospects.

My feeling is that it is

about time to give Graham Jones the problem left-back job, although at Craven Cottage he had little more to offer in a bruising second half than physical aggression.

He and Carr both got stuck in with crude tackles for which they should have been booked. Referee Grey eventually decided that he ought to take action, and Paul Price, one of the few Town successes was the unlucky man.

His first real foul of the game, on Strong, earned him an official caution, while fouls by other players had been allowed to go unbooked.

Ron Futch, frustrated by the poor service he was receiving, was lucky to escape a sending-off with a back-heel kick at a Fulham defender.

Ricky Hill was sent on in place of Brian Stein for the last 25 minutes, but the change made little difference.

And to prove that it wasn't their day, the Town let their best chance vanish six minutes from time. Phil Boersma slid through a superb pass down the centre for Lil Fuccillo to chase. He got through on his own and should have scored, but Peyton advanced quickly and saved with his legs.

So it might have been a 1-1 draw, but for football's sake I would rather not see teams succeed if they show the sort of attitude the Town did.

Match Details

FULHAM 1, LUTON TOWN 0
Half-time: 1-0

TOWN: Aleksic; Price, Carr, Faulkner, Paul Futch; Jones, West, Fuccillo; Stein (Hill, 65 minutes), Ron Futch, Boersma.

FULHAM: Peyton; Evans, Strong, Lacy, Gale, Money; Evanson, Margerrison; Mahoney, Greenaway, Mitchell. Sub: Gray, not needed.

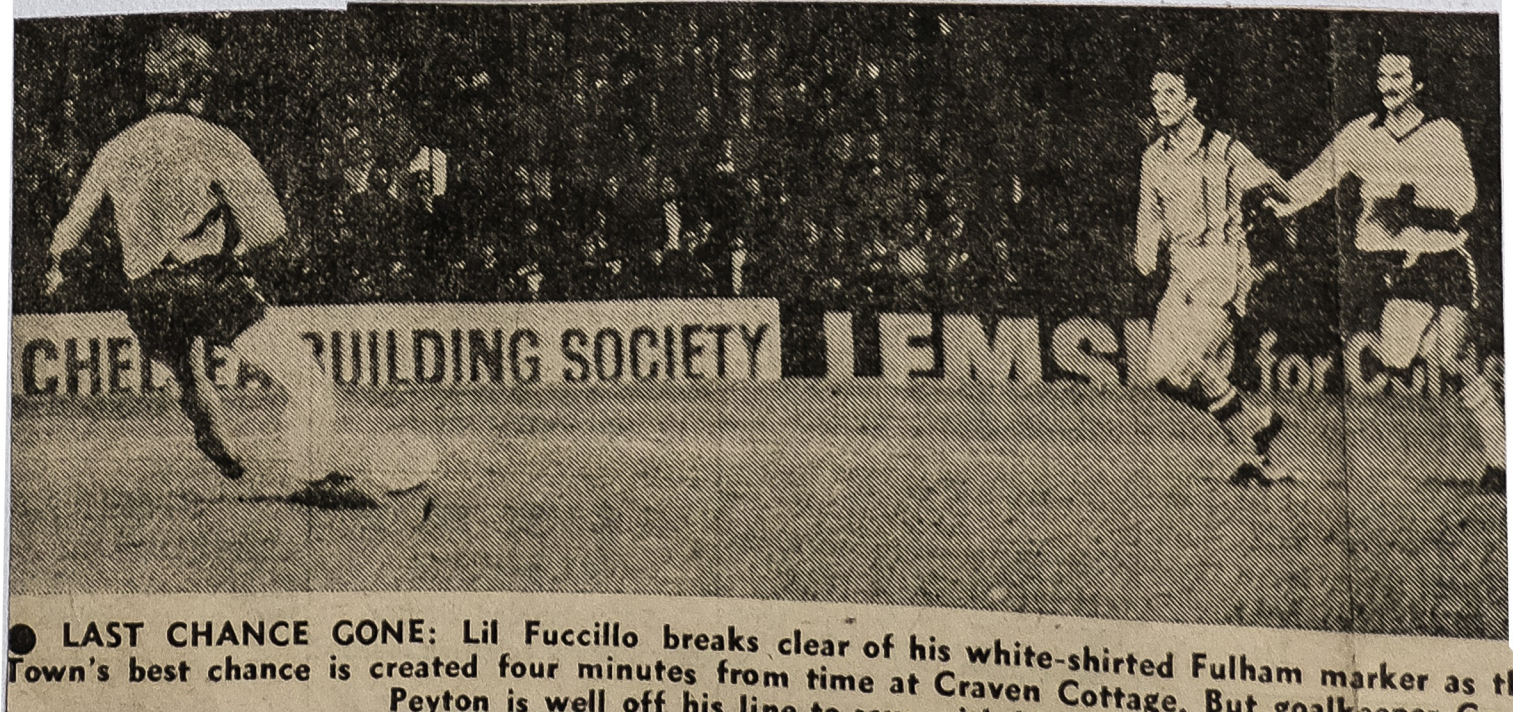
THE GOAL: Mahoney header, 14 minutes, after Carr failed to cut out a long clearance which left Greenaway clear to go down the flank and centre to the back of the penalty area.

BOOKING: Paul Price for a foul on Les Strong: ridiculous — it looked as though Price was done for the sins of others.

REFEREE: Alf Grey, Great Yarmouth: Allowed too many bad tackles to go unpunished, for which some Town players, notably Graham Jones and Ron Futch, can be very grateful.

ATTENDANCE: 7,996. And a lot of them thought their money had been taken under false pretences. They thought it was going to be a football match.

ENTERTAINMENT: Non-existent. The Town's worst performance for a long time, with wild kicking an unwelcome addition to their failings.



● **LAST CHANCE CONE:** Lil Fuccillo breaks clear of his white-shirted Fulham marker as the Town's best chance is created four minutes from time at Craven Cottage. But goalkeeper Gerry Peyton is well off his line to save with his legs.