

CITY STRUGGLE TO FIND TOUCH



Paul Richardson makes a fine pass during a goalmouth incident against Luton.



Garth Crooks fights his way goalwards after beating Jimmy McNichol in a Stoke attack on the Luton goal.

STOKE CITY striker Viv Busby was recalled in place of Terry Conroy as manager Alan Durban aimed for a sixth successive home win, against Luton Town, at the Victoria Ground.

Stoke reverted to the line-up that produced a deserved point at Blackpool last week, with Busby again expected to fill a wing role against his former club.

Luton were refused League permission to play 18-year-old Welsh youth centre-half Mark Aizlewood, signed from Newport for £50,000 this week, as mathematically they could still be involved in relegation issues, although they were just one point below Stoke.

Former Stafford Rangers goalkeeper Melija Aleksic, returned after missing four games through injury with

PETER HEWITT REPORTS

task of stopping Brendan O'Callaghan from continuing his spell of four goals in five games.

STOKE CITY. — Jones; Marsh, Scott, Kendall, Smith, Dodd, Waddington, Richardson, O'Callaghan, Crooks, Busby, Substitute, Cook.

LUTON TOWN. — Aleksic; Price, Carr, Hill, McNichol, P. Futcher, Stein, West, R. Futcher, Fucillo, Boersma, Substitute, G Jones.

Referee: Mr. N Midgeley, of Salford.

Howard Kendall was presented with his Player of the Year Award from the London, South and West Supporters' Club before the game and was soon showing his skill as he sparked off a left-wing raid with Crooks and Scott which led to the full-back pulling the ball back inside to set up a simple goal chance for Busby, who blasted over.

Paul Futcher turned quickly in time to stop Crooks racing through on to a Richardson pass and Stoke opened confidently in a slightly altered 4-4-2 formation that saw Busby in an attacking mid-field role.

Aleksic did well when he went down to stop a close range angled drive from Richardson, bursting in from the left.

Luton, who might easily have been two goals down, came back quickly with Ron Futcher slipping the ball away from Smith and his angled shot was coolly flicked off the line by Dodd for a corner.

Scott had to hold a sponge to his nose after taking a bang in the face and then a good run by Busby through the middle sparked off another promising Stoke raid as he found Waddington whose cross was turned over by Crooks.

Luton came back with Jones going full-length to touch out an effort from Hill.

Disallowed

Luton had the ball in the net after 25 minutes when Ron Futcher volleyed home a free-kick, but he was ruled off-side.

Stoke were wasting far too many chances and when Waddington slipped the ball inside it was Crooks who again hit over from about 12 yards.

Another good run by Busby, cutting inside three men from the right, led to Richardson crossing into the goalmouth for O'Callaghan to get up well only to see his header scrape the right hand post.

It took a fine diving save by Aleksic to turn round a swerving 25-yard drive from Richardson.

Smith made a good tackle on Fucillo, who had burst between Marsh and Dodd, and then Stoke soon pushed back on attack although finding that Luton's back four were gaining confidence.

Stoke should really have been coasting home at this stage but instead they found themselves with a battle on their hands. Slight hesitancy by Richardson allowed Aleksic to smother his final shot after O'Callaghan had caused trouble in the air.

Half-time:—

STOKE CITY 0, LUTON 0

Marsh managed to sweep the ball away from Ron Futcher in a quick Luton break. O'Callaghan rose high to a Marsh free-kick only to nod over and then the Luton 'keeper beat Stoke's tall centre-forward to a long cross from Richardson.

Boersma struck a free-kick just over the bar and it was left to the Bothen-enders to try and revive Stoke, who seemed to have gone off the boil.

Stoke needed to step up their pace in attack and again went close when Kendall produced a full-length save from Aleksic, who failed to retain possession but managed to grab the ball at the second attempt.

Dodd was too casual and almost let in Boersma but he

recovered with a tackle on Ron Futcher.

The crowd were beginning to get impatient, however, at Stoke's inability to find a way through.

Ron Futcher was booked for a tackle on Marsh following an earlier warning, but Stoke were mistiming their passes as they attempted to break the deadlock.

Over bar

Aleksic punched out a long free-kick from Scott, with Marsh chipping the rebound over the bar as Stoke had Cook warming up on the track as a warning of the urgency required.

Jones lost possession when he came out to dive at the feet of Boersma, but the Luton striker slotted his cross over the goal-line as Stoke brought on Cook for Busby.

Stoke were regretting their first-half missed chances as Luton began to come more into the attacking game, although the City defenders were covering up quickly.

A game that began brightly enough became something of an anti-climax with both sides feeling the effects of a season's wear and tear.

Attendance: 15,544.

Stoke C.	...	...	...	...	0
Luton	...	...	...	...	0