

Quick goals by Hatton and Hill end the frustration

78/79 (F.C.)

THE virtue of patience brought its reward for the Town and their supporters at Kenilworth Road on Tuesday night when a tidal wave of attacking pressure finally broke down a stubborn rearguard action by fourth division Crewe Alexandra.

The Town more than earned their place in the last 16 of the Football League Cup, but it was a hard battle, with a late penalty reducing a two-goal lead and making a mockery of the Town's domination of an unambitious Crewe side.

Nineteen times the Town struck at goal, and a measure of their power can be judged from the fact that sweeper Mal Donaghy was the only outfield player not to have a shot.

Two "goals" were disallowed for offences seen by referee Alf Grey seconds before the ball hit the net, and the whole Town dressing room was convinced that Mr Grey missed two penalties, once when Brian Stein was held down by Jan Roberts in the first half, and then when the same defender upended David Moss in the last few minutes.

Moss had always looked the most dangerous man on the field, sprinting past veteran Warwick Rimmer with confident ease. But Crewe battled hard in defence, usually with five men in the back line and another four in midfield.

They reached half-time with the score-line blank, which for them must have been something of a success. ~~passes in all directions, and Town defenders were pushing up to add to attacking weight.~~

Goalkeeper Peter Caswell was in commanding form cutting out the series of high crosses that threatened his goal, though Crewe boss Harry Gregg, one of the all-time greats in the goalkeeping arts, blamed the Town for allowing Caswell to shine so brightly.

Too many crosses were too near the goalkeeper he said. When Caswell was beaten in the first half, in 45 minutes of steady Town pressure, he was lucky to see a shot on the turn by Bob Hatton flash past the post, and when Chris Turner netted after a scramble the referee spotted a foul on the goalkeeper.

But the pressure had to bring its reward, and after the patient probing for openings for 45 minutes, two goals in the first three minutes of the second half began the knock-out countdown for Crewe.

West and Lil Fuccillo fenced for an opening in midfield, and when the ball broke loose to Ricky Hill he produced a perfect dipping drive from 25 yards. It rose over a crowd of defenders, and Caswell, probably partly unsighted, stretched in dismay a couple of yards off his line as the ball passed over him but under the bar.

Three minutes later he was caught in almost the same position. This time it was a cross on the volley from the Town's right wing by Price, and as the ball flashed over the goalkeeper Hatton was already in position to score at the far post.

"What a marvellous player," said Gregg afterwards. "He's got heart, skill and brains, and he showed the lot. If I could afford the transfer fee to get him at Crewe I'd pay his wages out of my own pocket!"

Crewe were not quite buried, and were left with a glimmer of hope as Stein twice went close and then had one disallowed, apparently for obstruction.

With 20 minutes to go Crewe finally abandoned their suffocating 4-4-2 formation, and put on striker Peter Coyne in place of midfield man Kevin Tully.

The Town were cruising smoothly towards success, but they had a shock after Crewe decided to turn it into a game. Coyne went close to scoring with his first touch, and in the 71st minute the Town defence, unaccustomed to any sort of hard work, got itself into a tangle.

It ended with inexperience pushing Mal Donaghy into a suicidal tackle on Wilshaw, and even Mr Grey could not avoid seeing that it was a penalty.

Bowles scored from the spot, and for the last 20 minutes the Town did not look quite so sure of themselves.

Even so, Crewe rarely got into dangerous positions in the penalty area, and the best shot of the night came at the other end when Moss once more gave Rimmer three yards start and beat him before whipping in a curving low cross-shot which left Caswell chasing shadows as the ball flashed about a foot wide of the post.

Crewe details

LUTON TOWN 2, CREWE ALEX. 1

Half-time: 0-0

TOWN: Aleksic; Price, Aizlewood, Turner, Donaghy; Hill, West, Fuccillo; Stein, Hatton, Moss. Sub: Jones, not needed.

CREWE: Caswell; Rimmer, Bowles, Purdie, Roberts; Robertson, Wilshaw, Bevan, Tully (Coyne, 70 mins); Davies, Nelson.

THE GOALS: Ricky Hill, 46 minutes, 25-yard dipper; Bob Hatton, 49 minutes, far-post header from Paul Price's cross; Paul Bowles penalty for Crewe, 71 minutes, after Mal Donaghy downed Wilshaw.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town eight saved, seven off target and two disallowed; Crewe four saved.

ATTENDANCE: 6,602—lowest of the season, but they showed plenty of patient understanding as Crewe tried to stifle the game.

ENTERTAINMENT: Not Crewe's priority, and it took time for the Town to get going.

REFEREE: Alf Grey, Gorleston. He's on the FIFA panel, but didn't look worth it with this inconsistent performance.