

ANOTHER AWAY FLOP LEAVES THE MANAGER BAFFLED AGAIN

THE RITUAL of Press conferences after soccer matches is one of the most enjoyable parts of the duties of covering football for reporters. But it's beginning to become a difficult chore for Town boss David Pleat.

He might as well prepare two scripts, one for use at Kenilworth Road and the other to be packed along with the boots and kit for away trips.

The visit to Orient raised all the old questions about the Town's away failures—and produced the same answers. In a nutshell, Pleat once more had to tell the Press that he really hadn't a clue as to why his team can be so marvellous at home and so poor away.

Publicly, that was his reaction again after Orient, without a home win since August, and averaging only a goal a game at Brisbane Road, picked up both points.

Privately, I hope, there has been some tough talking this week because in my book this was one match where the reason for failure could be pinned down. It started and finished with the defence, with a crazy equaliser undoing the good work of an impressive opening by the Town.

Traditionally, Orient is not the place

to visit to expect classic football. But this time the spectators got value for money in terms of entertainment, with both sides adventurous in their attacking.

But although it's nice to win friends, the odd point or two would also be welcome and, to press home a serious promotion threat, teams like Orient should be relieved of at least one point.

The Town looked good for both in the early stages, despite a hectic start in which the defence looked vulnerable to attacks down the flanks.

Paul Price was again used as sweeper, with Mal Donaghy at right-back and this time the tactics were not able to hold the opposition.

Orient pushed men forward to set up a steady supply of high centres for their tall front runners, Joe Mayo, Ian Moores and Peter Kitchen.

The trio was always ready to switch positions, and Price and Chris Turner both had difficulty in competing in the air against them.

But Lil Fuccillo and Alan West gave the Town the upper hand after the early storm had been weathered, and they engineered a beautiful opening goal, in the 13th minute.

From a free-kick a few yards outside the box West swerved his hips and dummied to push the ball to his right. The wall swayed in that direction, and by the time they had recovered West had switched the ball left, and Fuccillo carefully shot through the gap into the corner of the net.

Orient started wilting, and might have been finished off three minutes later. Bob Hatton battled down to the by-line, and crossed accurately, only for John Jackson to tip David Moss's header over the bar.

Orient got an even bigger lift a minute after that when they were given a soft equaliser. Hatton lost possession in the Orient half, and Ralph Coates and Moores worked the ball down the Town's right flank.

Coates lofted a long centre towards goal. Price was under it, with no pressure on, but after starting to go for the header he drew back, and he and Milija Aleksic watched in

Report by Brian Swain Pictures: Steve Templeman

horror as the sweeper's dummy left the goalkeeper stranded, and the ball bounced gently into the goal.

Aleksic said later he had shouted "Away" to Price, the normal yell for "Get rid of the damn thing". Price thought he heard Aleksic yell "Leave it".

The game developed into an entertaining affair, with two sides taking risks in the search for goals, and Turner constantly moving up to become a second centre-forward.

Brian Stein was forced to give second best in the air to Paul Went and Nigel Gray, and as Orient boss Jimmy Bloomfield said later, Turner posed most attacking threat to the home side.

"He's a rare footballer, an attacking centre-half,"

commented the Town manager. As things turned out, the Town were just as much in need of a defending centre-half.

Turner missed a superb chance set up by Hatton when he headed wide after Jackson had been beaten by Hatton's centre.

Coates and Tony Grealish began to compete on level terms in midfield, and with Moss given very poor service, the Town's attacks gradually subsided in the second half.

Turner's charges forward left holes at the back which were not always plugged, and after Grealish hooked a chance wide from five yards, Moores had a scoring effort disallowed for offside.

Aleksic produced the save of the match, diving to his right to keep out a

header by Kitchen, who beat Turner to a cross by Coates, and then came two goals in 11 minutes to end the Town's challenge.

A foul by Price on Moores led to the first, in the 66th minute. Grealish sent the free-kick towards the far post, and Mayo won the ball in the air, knocking it back for Kitchen to score from close range.

Mayo should have scored when he robbed West in midfield and went through on a solo run. Aleksic, horribly exposed, tried to bring him down, but Mayo got past him, then put the ball wide of the empty net.

But Orient's killer goal arrived soon after, with Mayo outstripping Donaghy down the left wing and crossing low for Kitchen to take another goal with ease from close range.

It finished the Town, whose attempts to get back into the game were none too impressive until Fuccillo scored again 20 seconds from time with an angled drive from a pass by Hatton.

Match Details

ORIENT 3, LUTON TOWN 2

Half-time: 1-1

78/79

ORIENT: Jackson; Fisher, Roffey, Gray, Went; Grealish, Hughton, Coates; Moores, Mayo, Kitchen. Sub: Chidozie, not used.

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

THE GOALS: Lil Fuccillo, 13 minutes, cracking drive from neat short free kick routine; Ralph Coates, 17 minutes, intended centre, with Paul Price dummied to head clear; Peter Kitchen, 66 minutes, close range effort after Mayo outjumped defence to head back a free kick; Kitchen again, 75 minutes, from low cross by Mayor; Fuccillo, 89 minutes, angled drive in off the far post.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town six off target and five saved; Orient nine off target, three saved and one disallowed for offside.

ATTENDANCE: 7,035, lowest in the top two divisions.

REFEREE: D. V. Reeves, Middlesex: out of luck with an advantage decision when he might have given Orient a penalty, but did a good job.

ENTERTAINMENT: Good quality in terms of excitement, but Town fans would have preferred a tighter grip on things in defence.



● OLD PALS MEET AGAIN: Alan West on the ball, evading Ralph Coates, who used to be his team-mate at Burnley before moving on to Spurs and then Orient.