

Flash of inspiration brings justice

WELL-ORGANISED almost to the point of blatant time-wasting, Cambridge United got the point they came for to open the Second Division season at Kenilworth Road. But after the shock of the League Cup defeat, there was at least a ray of hope in some aspects of the Town's performance, even if it did take a flash of individual brilliance to snatch a late equaliser.

Supporters, loud in their abuse when Gillingham were the visitors, seemed to sense that a good show against Cambridge was all the more important for them as well as for the team. They were patient, if puzzled, and perhaps the roar that greeted David Moss's lovely goal two minutes from time was a sigh of relief as well as a cheer of celebration.

Methodical in defence and cautious in midfield, Cambridge never deserved both points. Goalkeeper Malcolm Webster kept them in the game as the Town had much the better of the first half, making a flying save from Ricky Hill, intercepting a dangerous cross from Kirk Stephens and being lucky to see a cracking volley by Hill flash wide by a yard.

OVER THE BAR

He was even luckier in the 71st minute when he was flat on the ground after a header by Moss had been blocked near the line—Brian Stein controlled the ball quickly, then saw his shot hit Webster's foot and fly over the bar.

Alan Birchenall's recall to midfield, with Mal Donaghy moving back to defence to make

up for Mike Saxby's absence, seemed to me to provide a better-balanced Town unit.

Cambridge rarely looked like breaking through until Kenilworth Road old boy Alan Biley punished a brief lack of concentration in the 80th minute. He chased a long clearance, burst clear of Paul Price and Donaghy, and hammered a shot over Jake Findlay.

The ball bounced downwards off the bar, and linesman Keith Miller of Epping awarded a goal despite Town protests that the ball had not crossed the line, and that the linesman was not in the right position to judge.

ONE TOO MANY

Cambridge tried to use time up to hold on to their lead, and with the Town attack again short of bite in the penalty area they nearly got away with it.

But Lindsay Smith gave away one free kick too many when he tripped Stein just outside the area, and Moss bent his shot around the wall and low into the corner of the net to open the Town's league goal account for the season.

The big puzzle, of course, is why the Town's front three, joint leading home scorers in the Second Division last season, failed to click, and manager David Pleat said: "I still believe that Hatton, Stein and Moss are capable of getting goals.

"At times they didn't have the necessary half-yard, and perhaps as a trio they're not as sharp as they were last season. But I've still got

a lot of faith in them, and I thought we played brightly at times."

COMPETITION

The game's biggest success was Wayne Turner, who came in at left-back for his first full league match. After early nerves he settled down to prove that he will provide very real competition for Mark Aizlewood's position.

The day's biggest raspberry goes to referee Bert Newsome for booking Alan Birchenall when the player gave the crowd a laugh by hiding the ball up his jersey when a free kick was given. It was ironic to see a yellow card for time-wasting in view of the way Cambridge used up time at every available opportunity later on.

Moss received his second booking of the season for a foul on Biley and Cambridge's Steve Spriggs was cautioned for a remark to the ref when Moss equalised.

MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN 1, CAMBRIDGE UNITED 1

HALF-TIME: 0-0

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Donaghy, Pride, Turner; Hill, Birchenall, Grealish; Stein, Hatton, Moss. Sub: Heale, not used.

CAMBRIDGE: Webster; Graham, Stringer, Fallon, Smith; Spriggs, Cozens, Buckley; Christie (Murray, 68 mins), Biley, Finney.

THE GOALS: Alan Biley for Cambridge, 80 minutes; David Moss for the Town, 88 minutes.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town nine off target and five saved; Cambridge four off target and three saved.

ENTERTAINMENT: Plenty to enjoy in the Town's build-up work, but a lot of frustration as well.

ATTENDANCE: 8,202 including a large influx from Cambridge.

REFEREE: Bert Newsome—Town players think his linesman let him down by giving a goal when Biley's drive hit the bar and bounced down.