

HALOM DOUBLE RUBS OUT BRIGHT OPENING

Ref has last word with a sending-off

By BRIAN SWAIN

THE TEMPTATION to blame the referee for the Town's failure at Oldham came easier to supporters than it did to manager David Pleat after a game which changed course completely at half-time.

An officious but not effective performance by Keith Hackett, a late replacement ref, culminated in the sending-off of Kirk Stephens five minutes from time. Four other players had been booked, all for dissent, but it had been a clean and sporting encounter throughout.

Players have to accept the ref's decisions every time, but this was a day when the ref himself caused the worst frustrations.

Quick to fish out the coloured cards, he missed two important incidents—Alan West handled in the Town's penalty area, and Ron Blair did the same at the other end.

So at least the mistakes cancelled themselves out, but rarely do you find two managers saying the same thing about a referee, quite independently.

Under the latest edict of football's rulers, managers cannot be quoted if they want to criticise referees. So David Pleat and Jimmy Frizzell both had to be silent at the post-match inquest. Suffice it to say that Mr Hackett had the sort of game that occasionally overtakes even the best players. He had a stinker.

Linesman P. Hindle of Blackburn was at the centre of the Stephens sending-off. He had given four foul throws in the match, which is a rarity in pro football. The fourth was against Stephens, and the player unwisely said a rude word as he ran back to his defensive position.

"Do you want him off?"

asked Mr Hackett, and in view of the word Stephens used the red card was justified in football law.

The game had already been lost by then, and Mr Pleat commented: "I'm not blaming the referee for the result. We were doing well until half-time, but we wilted under pressure in the second half.

"We're disappointed, but it's not a disaster—it's not the end of the season, is it?"

The change-round in fortunes defied logical explanation. It had been a smooth and confident performance by the Town in the first half, and they well deserved to be leading at the break.

Bob Hatton and David Moss combined to set up Moss's 18th goal of the season with an incisive passing movement and low cross-shot in the 43rd minute.

Brian Stein worked hard down the flanks, and the Town's more precise build-up and steady defence looked capable of earning the two points which could have put them on top of the table.

Vic Halom was bustling

all over the field to try to lift Oldham, and his manager's half-time advice changed things after the break.

"I told him to stay in his position in the centre of the midfield, knock the ball around a bit, and follow up down the middle," said Frizzell.

The policy paid handsome dividends. The Town's midfield faded, while Halom and Richard Kowenicki, a £15,000 bargain from Poland, grew in confidence as the minutes ticked away.

Mike Saxby had headed a "goal" which was disallowed for pushing in the first half, but had to concentrate on defence in the second as Oldham's pressure mounted.

Jake Findlay was in top form, but was left helpless when Halom scored a cracking equaliser in the 57th minute after Tony Grealish failed to control the ball.

SHARPER

From then on Oldham looked the more likely team to find the vital sharpness in the penalty area, and Kowenicki opened the Town's left flank in the 62nd minute. His cross was hammered at goal by Jim Steel and was brilliantly beaten out by Findlay, but Halom followed up to score his second goal.

The Town were never in it after that. Grealish produced the best tackle of the day to prevent Halom getting in for his hat-trick, then made a poor back-pass to give Simon Stainrod a chance. Paul Price cleared off the line.

Oldham played like a team hungry for points to escape from the threat of relegation, and the introduction of Steve White as replacement for Ricky Hill had no noticeable effect on the pattern of play.

The Town's 4-2-4 system was no better and no worse than we had seen for the previous 78 minutes. In fact Mr Frizzell commented that the Town's best attacking moves had been long clearances from Findlay, which by-passed the middle.



● ONE THAT DIDN'T COUNT: Mike Saxby, extreme above Oldham defenders to head into the net at Bournemouth. Near Saxby's head belongs to Oldham goalkeeper John Mallett. The referee ruled that the Luton defender had pushed him.

Match Details

OLDHAM ATH 2, LUTON TOWN 1

Half-time: 0-1

79/80

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Donaghy, Saxby, Price; Grealish, Hill (White, 78 mins), West; Stein, Hatton, Moss.

OLDHAM: Platt; Wood, Holt, Clements, Blair; Kowenicki, Halom, Atkinson; Valentine, Steel, Stainrod.

THE GOALS: David Moss, 43 minutes, low drive after exchange of passes with Bob Hatton; two-goal reply by Vic Halom, first in 57th minute after mistake by Tony Grealish, second five minutes later after Jake Findlay did well to beat out a drive by Jim Steel.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town three saved, eight off target, and one "goal" disallowed for a push; Oldham four saved and nine off target.

SENDING-OFF: Kirk Stephens in the 85th minute for calling a linesman a rude name

BOOKINGS: Wood, Halom, Moss and Grealish, all for dissent.

REFEREE: Keith Hackett, Sheffield: his yellow and red card actions will all stand up in football law, but he brought a lot of dissent upon himself with strange decisions.

ENTERTAINMENT: Very average Second Division after the Town had looked a class above Oldham for the first half.

ATTENDANCE: 7,555, about average for Boundary Park.

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