

SENDING-OFF IS A CONVENIENT EXCUSE

COMPLAINTS over a sending-off, with Lil Fuccillo being accused of play-acting to accomplish it, gave Oldham manager Jimmy Frizzell the chance to steer thoughts away from the harsh truth at Kenilworth Road on Saturday.

He had seen his third-placed side all but over-whelmed by a Town performance which never had to hit the heights to collect three more points.

Mr Frizzell must have been concerned that some of Oldham's wounds were self-inflicted. They gave away an early penalty and then lost all hope of snatching a point when Darren McDonough was sent off in the 28th minute.

Their ambition had looked limited from kick-off, when they strung four men across midfield in an attempt to deny the Town space to build attacks.

Even after the early goal that policy showed no sign of being changed.

Paul Fitcher, who had a tremendous match apart from one fatal error, was trying to do a covering job when he pulled down Brian Stein, and David Moss netted his ninth penalty goal of the season.

Oldham tackled hard, but McDonough overstepped the mark in the 28th minute, when his studs ripped down the side of Fuccillo's calf in a crude late tackle.

Frizzell complained that the sending-off decision, apparently harsh by today's standards, was made because Fuccillo stayed down a long time. Strangely, he made no comment on the fact that the tackle might easily have broken Fuccillo's leg for a third time.

Fuccillo and his manager angrily dismissed Frizzell's accusation. "There's nothing fake about these," said Fuccillo, showing stud-mark cuts stretching from just below the knee down to his ankle. "I stayed down because I was hurt and in pain."

The Town cantered through the rest of the match, and the effect of facing only ten men did them little good — they often seemed to be playing without real urgency,

LUTON TN 2, OLDHAM 0
(Half-time 1-0) 81/82

as though they knew that the points were safe.

They sometimes tried one pass too many, but some of the build-up work was a delight to watch. Goalkeeper Peter McDonnell kept Oldham's scoresheet respectable, but the Town were so much on top they should have scored four or five. When the keeper was beaten, a 25-yard drive by Mark Aizlewood crashed against the post.

Kenny Clements was booked for dissent, and Ged Keegan was lucky to escape with no more than a booking for a dreadful foul on Brian Horton as Oldham struggled to compete against a side that was much too talented for them to handle.

Sadly for McDonnell, all his good work was unavailing, and he took the blame for the second goal, in the 55th minute, when Moss curled an inswinging corner into the net at the angle of near post and bar.

McDonnell palmed the ball in, and the Kenilworth Road scoreboard unkindly called it an own goal. Moss and players in the goalmouth were sure the ball was over the line before McDonnell realised the danger, and that his intervention made little difference.

Match details

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens; Goodyear, Donaghy, Aizlewood; Hill, Horton, Fuccillo; Stein, White, Moss. Sub: Antic, not used.

OLDHAM: McDonnell; Edwards, Clements, Fitcher, Ryan; Keegan, Heaton (Anderson, 73 mins), McDonough, Atkinson; Wykle, Palmer.

THE GOALS: Moss penalty, 8 mins, after Fitcher downed Stein; Moss direct from a corner, 55 mins.

OTHER STRIKES AT GOAL: Town nine saved, 13 wide and one hit a post; Oldham two saved and three wide. Corners: 11-5 to the Town.

SENT OFF: Darren McDonough, 28 mins, foul on Lil Fuccillo. Booked: Kenny Clements for dissent, Ged Keegan for a foul on Horton.

ATTENDANCE: 11,506.

REFEREE: Maurice Robinson, Sutton Coldfield.

ENTERTAINMENT: Spoiled a little because Oldham were so poor that it was no real contest. The Town might have done better if they had been faced by 11 enthusiastic players for the whole game.