

Lil's cup is full of happiness

LUTON TOWN 3, CHARLTON ATHLETIC 0

MAKING his first appearance since collecting his Second Division championship medal in the final league game of last season, Lil Fuccillo hammered two goals at Kenilworth Road on Tuesday night to put the Town within easy reach of the third round of the Milk Cup.

His goals saved the Town's blushes against a hard-running Second Division side who could have upset the formbook if they possessed a man with similar finishing power.

David Pleat and Charlton manager Ken Craggs were both at pains to say that with the second leg of the tie still to be played at The Valley in three weeks' time, the game is not yet over.

The odd thing on Tuesday night was that although the Town had more possession, and did a lot more attacking than their opponents, Charlton ought to have been two up before the Town scored.

Steve White and Derek Hales, back on the ground where they both scored some memorable goals, missed easy chances when the Town's back four was caught square by direct long passes.

Hales was barely six yards from goal when he shot wide with only Jake Findlay ahead of him, and White beat Kirk Stephens for pace for a similar chance and put the ball wide.

Charlton used Billy Lansdowne as a sweeper and packed their defence well. The contest was between a side trying to play their way through towards goal and a visiting combination prepared to defend in depth, draw opponents forward and then try to get into space in attacking positions at high speed.

Better finishing would have given Charlton the edge, but they were on their way out of the cup when Lansdowne tripped Brian Stein in the 23rd minute. Stein took the penalty to score his ninth goal of the season.

Carl Harris wasted another good chance before Fuccillo volleyed the second goal, in the 44th minute, after a shot by Ricky Hill had been blocked.

The Town piled on the pressure after the break, without looking at their peak, and goalkeeper Nicky Johns rescued Charlton with marvellous saves from Kirk Stephens and David Moss before Fuccillo scored the goal that might be vital. He took a pass from Stephens on his chest, and hammered the ball into the net five minutes from time.

DETAILS

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Goodyear, Donaghy, Money; Hill, Horton, Turner (Antic 73 mins); Stein, Walsh, Moss. Sub: Kellock, not needed.
CHARLTON: Johns; Curtis, Elliott, Berry, Lansdowne; Walker, Bullivant, Mehmet, Harris; White, Hales (Gritt, 82 mins).
THE GOALS: Brian Stein, penalty, 23 mins; Lil Fuccillo twice, 44 and 85 mins.
OTHER STRIKES: Town ten saved and nine wide; Charlton three saved and ten wide. Corners: 11-2 to the Town.
ATTENDANCE: 7,030, lowest of the season.
REFEREE: Alan Robinson, Hants.
ENTERTAINMENT: Patchy, but a good second half from the Town, and Fuccillo's goals were both crackers.



3526 ● POINT-SAVER: Ricky Hill's flying header leaves Gary Bailey down and out.

SOUR GRAPES AS RON GETS THE PIP

IF MANCHESTER United failed to live up to their reputation at Kenilworth Road, their performance in taking away a point was world class compared with the sour reaction of manager Ron Atkinson.

The biggest crowd of the season saw a match which was short of the attacking flair we have grown to expect from the Town, mainly because, United's system was to concentrate on getting the defence right first.

The Pressbox was packed with experienced football writers and the unanimous view from them was that United had won the first half and the Town the second, and that a draw was fair for both teams.

Mr Atkinson, however, running a club that needed a boost after being beaten in Europe three days previously, was smarting at the news that Liverpool had just gone down to their first defeat of the season.

"We threw away two points," he declared. The gripe, of course, was that if United had won they would be two points clear at the top of the First Division today, instead of behind Liverpool on goal difference.

The United boss moaned that his side created more chances, and for good measure added that they should have had a second-half penalty for a push on Frank Stapleton as he dived in to try to get his head to a hard far post cross.

Lucky Luton, he said, had cleared two goal-bound efforts off the line when Jake Findlay was beaten. "That's why we have defenders," commented Town boss David Pleat.

What Atkinson chose to forget was that apart from

REPORT BY BRIAN SWAIN PICTURES: MARK RICHARDS

those two scares and the goal, Findlay had only one save of note to make, when he went down to block a header by Kevin Moran from a far post corner in the first half.

At the other end Gary Bailey made the save of the match when the Town were looking for a late winner, flying to his right to tip a drive by Mal Donaghy round the post.

And the United 'keeper was rescued by Mike Duxbury soon afterwards, when Paul Walsh's stinging cross-shot proved too hot for Bailey to hold.

DEFENCE

United put up a very good defence, and Brian Stein and Paul Walsh were well policed by Moran and Gordon McQueen. The four-man midfield was less concerned with attacking than defending. When the Town moved forward, all four middle men back-pedalled to fill up space and crowd the Town out.

In terms of the result, it worked well enough, and

it was Atkinson's bad luck that when United broke out and found a lot more space at the other end of the field the Town's defence held them.

Clive Goodyear had his best game of the season against Stapleton, even though United had chances to create danger behind Kirk Stephens and Richard Money when they moved forward in support of Town attacks.

I made Mal Donaghy man of the match for his consistent marking and tackling, his instinctive covering and his willingness to burst through and join attacks.

United looked as though they thought it was all over once they had taken the lead in the 13th minute. The Town had looked tentative and tense, and a free-kick move involving Ray Wilkins and Remi Moses took the ball from left to right and back again, with Ashley Grimes whacking in a low shot from the angle of the penalty area.

Goal-saving clearances were made before and after that by Money, from Stapleton, and by Brian Horton, from Moses.

After the break the Town's midfield took charge of United's, and with Ricky Hill getting further forward the visitors were second best for a long time.

The equaliser came after Moran body-checked Stein in midfield and was booked. Horton sent the free-kick into the penalty area and United's organisation was exposed. They used a two-man wall which was by-passed by Horton's kick, and with Moran and McQueen marking Stein and Walsh, Hill was able to steal through ahead of Stapleton to glance a header under Bailey's body into the net.

And until the last ten minutes, when tiredness on a soaking pitch seemed to get to them, it was the Town who looked the more likely to sneak victory.

I wondered if deep down Mr Atkinson realised that, but didn't want to admit it. Perhaps that was why he was so giggled at seeing the new boys give his multi-million pound side a good run for their money.

UNITED DETAILS

LUTON TOWN 1 MANCHESTER UTD 1

Half-time: 0-1

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Goodyear, Donaghy, Money; Hill, Horton, Turner (Antic 73 mins); Stein, Walsh, Moss.

UNITED: Bailey; Duxbury, Moran, McQueen, Albiston; Wilkins, Robson, Moses, Grimes; Stapleton, Whiteside. Sub: Macari, not used.

THE GOALS: Ashley Grimes for United, 13 mins; Ricky Hill for the Town, 59 mins.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town seven saved and six off target; United four saved and six wide. Corners: 7-5 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 17,009, highest of the season so far.

REFEREE: Brian Stevens, Gloucester. Hawk-eyed in spotting bookable offences, but treated both sides alike.

BOOKINGS: David Moss and Clive Goodyear of the Town, and Kevin Moran of United, all for fouls.

ENTERTAINMENT: United were a bit of a let-down. Despite their reputation, the strength of their game was in well-organised defence, and a midfield that concentrated on falling back more often than moving forward.



● SPOT ON: Brian Stein, taking over from David Moss as the Town's penalty taker, places his shot carefully to put the Town ahead against Charlton with his ninth goal of the season.

● KILLER: Lil Fuccillo hammers his second goal of the game to complete a happy return to first team duty by making it 3-0 against Charlton.