

JUSTICE DONE AFTER A CLANGER

A MISTAKE by referee Derek Lloyd almost clouded the fact that soccer justice was done at Kenilworth Road when Luton Town and Ipswich took a point apiece from a game neither deserved to lose.

Physical power threatened at times to allow Ipswich to muscle the Town out of the contest, but at the end both managers accepted the draw. And if several players of each side had off days, the man who fell shortest of First Division standard was the referee.

He was probably the only man in the stadium who thought Alan Brazil was inside in the 12th minute. A linesman flagged, the Town's defence hesitated and Brazil, as surprised as anyone at the silence of the ref's whistle, went through the formality of shooting underneath Jake Findlay into the net.

Mr Lloyd thought Brazil was onside because the through-pass to him was played by a Town player, Ricky Hill. TV evidence

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PICTURES: MARK RICHARDS

proved, however, that Paul Mariner made the pass. The ref made a mistake and it took the Town too long to shrug it off.

Luckily for them, he missed another offence later in the half—Ipswich could easily have been two up at the break because Brian Horton got away with a

crafty nudge on John Wark to prevent him making contact with a teasing cross by Eric Gates. That should have given Ipswich a penalty.

Earlier, Ipswich had created the best chances as they attacked the Oak Road goal with driving wind and rain behind them. Findlay had to work hard to stop a 20-yard drive by Wark and then scramble to recover the ball as it bounced away from him. He got there an inch or two before Brazil's follow-up attempt.

Brazil dragged Mal Donaghy out of position in another attack and pulled back a good chance which Gates wasted by shooting wide of Findlay's left hand post, and the goalkeeper then had to make a hurried punch to keep out a shot by Steve McCall.

Ipswich could argue that they deserved to be ahead at half-time even if the goal was down to the ref. At that stage their four-man midfield looked good behind the mixed Ipswich attack—Mariner was all niggles and intimidation, while Brazil was a danger every time the ball was delivered to his feet.

They gave the Town's defence a thorough test, and the back four emerged finally with considerable credit.

I only wished that Paul



● EQUALISER: Brian Stein turns away as his penalty goal hits the net.

Walsh at the other end had been given the sort of service Brazil enjoyed. All too often the Town tried high crosses towards the edge of the penalty area, and Walsh and Brian Stein had little chance of winning them against the towering figures of Russell Osman and Terry Butcher.

But Stein's trickery on the ground nearly paid off just before half-time when a cross-shot bounced off the bar with Paul Cooper beaten. Before that Cooper had done well to deal with a free-kick by David Moss, and was lucky to see a flashing volley by Lil Fuccillo whistle just wide of the target.

Ipswich were forced back more in the second half, with Hill getting further forward as the Town realised it was a day for physical endeavour and commitment rather than pretty-pretty football.

Too much of the tackling was over-rugged, and the hapless Mr Lloyd was set too many problems for his ability. But, as Town boss David Pleat said later, even referees have off days, the same as players do.

The Town thought they should have had a penalty a minute into the second half when Stein tried to go through a tiny gap between

Osman and Butcher. He fell down, but Mr Lloyd didn't think it was a foul. He may well have been right.

Certainly there was no doubt about the foul in the 59th minute when a period of Town pressure ended with Mariner putting in a reckless challenge on Kirk Stephens.

Stein took the penalty, and it was his best one yet. Cooper is the most successful spot kick saver in the First Division, but although he got a hand to the ball Stein's power and precision was too much for him.

Each side had half-chances to snatch victory after that, with Richard Money going close twice and Brazil forcing another sharp save from Findlay.

The Town earned their point the hard way, and every single man in the side deserved it. Clive Goodyear came through a hard physical test with top marks, and so did Mal Donaghy — his nose was broken in a collision with Brazil in the tenth minute. He played on as though nothing was wrong, went to hospital to have an operation to re-set the nose, and will be back and ready for more against West Brom on Saturday.

Top teams all falter

ALL EIGHT top teams in the First Division failed to gather three points this week, and the Town's draw against Ipswich dropped them three places in the league table, to 11th.

With the season entering its second quarter, they have 1 point from ten games and that average will leave them well clear of the relegation scramble. They are seven points below top place and four points above the bottom three.

Leaders Manchester United stayed two points clear at the top with a 0-0 draw at Liverpool. That result would have let in West Ham to take first place if they had won, but Southampton beat them 3-0 at The Dell.

West Brom, who entertain the Town on Saturday, dropped place to fourth after losing 2-0 at Arsenal, and Watford also dropped a place, to fifth, when Aston Villa beat them 3-0 at Villa Park.

That leaves Watford on 17 points, three ahead of the Town. Stoke are one of the teams who overtook the Town in the First Division table, with a 3-0 home win over Brighton. Watford's failure at Villa Park cost the Town a place and Everton also moved up above the Town with a 3-0 win at Swansea, who have now won only one of their last six league games.

Down at the bottom Birmingham are five points adrift of the safety mark after a 1-1 draw at Nottingham Forest. Norwich are 21st after a 0-0 home draw with Spurs. Ipswich, Southampton, Notts County and Swansea are the other teams hovering over the brink.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 1 IPSWICH TOWN 1
Half-time: 0-1

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Goodyear, Donaghy, Money; Hill, Horton, Fuccillo; Stein, Walsh, Moss. Sub: Kellock, not used.

IPSWICH: Cooper; Burley, Osman, Butcher, Gernon; Mills, Wark, McCall, Gates; Mariner, Brazil. Sub: D'Avray, not used.

THE GOALS: Alan Brazil for Ipswich, 12 minutes, with referee wrong to over-rule linesman's offside flag; Brian Stein, penalty, 59 minutes, after Paul Mariner fouled Kirk Stephens.

OTHER STRIKES AT GOAL: Town seven saved, four wide, one hit the bar; Ipswich six saved and six off target. Corners: 6-6.

ATTENDANCE: 13,378. Higher than First Division gates at Coventry and Swansea.

REFEREE: Derek Lloyd, Fernhill Heath, Worcestershire. He's a qualified referee instructor, according to the match programme. He performed like a learner.

ENTERTAINMENT: Very good in patches on a greasy pitch and in wind and rain, but too much of the game was too physical and the Town's passing was sub-standard at times.

BOOKINGS: David Moss for dissent over the offside goal; Brian Stein for encroachment at a free kick; Osman and McCall of Ipswich for fouls.

