

SPORT AND MOTORING

Town Match Verdict ★★

SURVIVAL FIGHT IS A RACE AGAINST TIME

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JACK Charlton, who wants his teams to give away as little as he did when he was a centre-half, took his Newcastle men home on Saturday night moaning about the 2-2 draw they had achieved.

By contrast Town boss David Pleat was delighted with the way his make-shift combination, short of experience and guile, collected the point which was the very least it deserved.

Both teams could find evidence to believe they should have won. But Newcastle, despite being ahead twice, were let off the hook by the Town's failure to put the final touch to a lot of promising attacking, particularly in the second half.

The visitors worked to contain Town attacks, and to swamp the area near the 18-yard line.

The policy nearly brought them their first away win since the opening day of the season, because although Newcastle mounted fewer attacks than the Town, two breaks produced goals.

Except for those strikes, Andy Dibble hardly had a shot to save in the whole 90 minutes.

It was a day to see promise and bright hope for the future — and to worry whether the inexperienced but determined young players available can get through this season and keep the club in the First Division.

Mr Pleat took the first team squad to Houghton Regis on Saturday morning to see the latest youth team hammer Spurs 7-1 in the South East Counties League. But they, and some of the players thrust into the First Division cauldron already, need time to develop.

For Newcastle's visit, the loss of Paul Elliott was compounded when Frank Bunn and David Moss were ruled out by injury.

Stacey North replaced Elliott, and did well enough against England prospect Chris Waddle to suggest that he can fill the gap. He showed tremendous depths of character to overcome nerves and an early crucial mistake born of inexperience.

Colin Todd, in his first game in Division One for a year, was a lovely calming influence in an unusual defensive formation, while Ray Daniel found it hard to get into the game in his first league appearance for nine months.

Perhaps the most exciting prospect of the lot is Garry Parker, who shows signs of providing the back-up goal power that has been lacking in midfield for some time.

His first league goal at Kenilworth Road was one to remember, despite Mr Charlton's complaints that the ref should have ruled it out for offside against two colleagues.

Tim Breacker, another of the new breed, was asked to operate in a difficult role on the right side of defence and midfield and is another who can become a very good First Division player — if only Luton Town can stay in there long enough to give him and the other youngsters time to settle.

Inexperience was the cause of the first Newcastle goal, with North the luckless student of the harsh lesson that in pro football you do nothing to help the opposition.

Polite

His long throw adds a welcome new variation to attacking possibilities, but in the 15th minute one was cleared back to him. He was polite enough to return the ball to an opponent for Newcastle to take the throw. North was still trying to get back into a defensive position as Neil McDonald sent a long ball forward. Peter Beardsley left the thin cover behind and as Dibble came out floated a quality goal over his head from 20 yards.

Revenge was to be late but sweet for North as the Town fought to get back into the game. They always looked the better attacking team, with five men in midfield giving added support.

Newcastle countered by pulling men back, and working an offside trap to try to condense the action into an overcrowded midfield.

Steve Elliott, tireless and always willing to find openings for team-mates, started the move which led to the equaliser. He chased a probing pass by Daniel down the left wing, took out two defenders with a pass inside and Brian Stein's attempt to find a way through was blocked on the 18-yard line.

The ball ran clear to Parker, and he hammered a first-timer with his right foot into the net from 25 yards. Charlton's moan was that his defenders were purposely not attacking the ball, but racing out to catch Stein and Elliott offside.

Referee John Bray decided that even if they were in off-

side positions they were not interfering with play, nor seeking any advantage.

Stein, short of the confidence that made him such a good finisher a couple of years ago, might have had at least a hat-trick.

He wriggled through beautifully just before the interval, but shot wide; he lost a chance to a desperate tackle from a shrewd pass by Parker early in the second half; he had one cleared off the line from about four yards in a mad scramble; and from a neat pass by Ricky Hill he shot wide from ten yards when the Town had Newcastle on the rack after the interval.

North, Hill and Mal Donaghy had all gone close as well, but with 11 minutes to go the all-out attacking was punished for being un-

able to score. Kenny Wharton caught the Town with another quick break, eluded Donaghy's challenge and crossed hard and low from the left wing. McDonald's shot hit the bar and bounced down, and Pat Heard dived in to score.

Undeserved defeat looked likely then, but the Town took the point which was the least they deserved with an 87th-minute equaliser.

North powered a long throw towards the near post, Elliott's challenge unsettled goalkeeper Kevin Carr and as the ball ran loose Stein pounced for his fifth goal of the season. Mr Charlton, inevitably, blamed the goalkeeper.

He added that it was a lack of professionalism for any team to throw away victory at such a late stage.

● WORKER: Steve Elliott, whose efforts led to both Town goals, takes on his man.

● POINT-SAVER: Brian Stein's late equaliser on its way past Kevin Carr.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 2 NEWCASTLE UTD 2
HALF-TIME: 1-1

TOWN: Dibble; Todd, North, Donaghy; Breacker, Hill, Parker, Turner, Daniel (Hilaire 64 mins); Stein, Elliott.

NEWCASTLE: Carr; Brown, Anderson, Clarke, Saunders; McDonald, Heard, McCreery, Wharton; Waddle, Beardsley. Sub: Ferris, not used.

THE GOALS: Peter Beardsley, 15 minutes, superb chip after Town caught by a quick break; Garry Parker, 26 minutes, cracking 25-yarder; Pat Heard, 79 minutes, after good run down left wing by Kenny Wharton and shot on to bar by Neil McDonald; Brian Stein, 87 minutes, after Steve Elliott's challenge unsettled Kevin Carr on Stacey North's long throw-in.

OTHER STRIKES: Town four saved and seven wide; Newcastle two saved, two wide, one hit the bar in run-up to second goal. Corners: 5-4 to Newcastle.

ATTENDANCE: 10,009 — drop of 3,000 on last Newcastle visit, April 1982, when the Town were top of the Second Division.

REFEREE: John Bray, Hinckley — seemed finicky at times, but Jack Charlton thought he was a homer.

ENTERTAINMENT: Gritty determination had to compensate for shortage of experience, and Brian Stein's late equaliser was no more than justice.

● SHOOTING STAR: Garry Parker in typical action against Newcastle.

● SO CLOSE: Brian Stein leaves defenders flat-footed again for a shot at goal in the second half.