

Sit-down antics store up trouble

87/88

WHEN AN OPPONENT halts a passing move, sits on the ball and waves a "Come and have a go if you think you're good enough" invitation, you know there are a lot of harsh questions to be asked.

It happened at St James's Park, Newcastle, on Saturday, when the Town's humiliation was compounded by the contemptuous bad sportsmanship of Newcastle's senior professional Kenny Wharton.

It provoked an inevitable angry response in an unsavoury episode made no better by the refusal of Newcastle manager Willie McFaul to criticise Wharton's action.

Steve Foster and Danny Wilson led the Town's verbal assault on Wharton when the final whistle sounded, three minutes after he had sat on the ball.

The flare-up as the teams left the field was nipped in the bud, with Town boss Ray Harford reminding his men that their self-discipline had already been subject to a searching examination.

SCORE-LINE REVERSED

And it has not always passed the test as Newcastle exacted full revenge for their heaviest defeat of the season, also 4-0, at Kenilworth Road.

Wharton's action was, as Mr Harford said, completely out of order, taking the mickey out of fellow professionals. Mr McFaul said it was no more than a carry-over from the Kenilworth Road game, when Les Sealey did the same.

In the North-East papers on Saturday morning there had been long articles about Newcastle skipper Glen Roeder recalling the pain of his last visit to Kenilworth Road. But his comments were about Luton taking the mickey out of Newcastle in terms of playing, with no hint that he was worried about gamesmanship.

NEARLY TWO MORE

On the day Newcastle were fired up, the Town were not, and we came home glad that it was only 4-0, because Newcastle hit the woodwork twice.

Wharton's action, which should have brought him a booking for ungentlemanly conduct, underlined the gulf between the attitudes of the two sides.

Newcastle put on a good team performance, while the Town were another awayday shambles for most of the game.

**NEWCASTLE UTD..4
LUTON TOWN.....0**

Mick Harford returned after flu, with Brian Stein dropping out to rest his injured arm. Ian Allinson, who made a Saturday morning 250-mile dash after becoming a father overnight, was relegated to sub, with Kingsley Black going into midfield.

Newcastle also played four across the middle, and if exchanges in that department were fairly even for some spells, the difference in the vital areas near the penalty areas were most marked.

Paul Goddard and Michael O'Neill looked much more potent than Mick Harford and Mark Stein. Harford, as always, gave everything, but with little support, and for a lot of the game had to work in defence as Newcastle threatened to run riot.

TWO SUBS SENT ON

Mark Stein and Ashley Grimes were both substituted as the Town searched in vain for some sort of rhythm. Stein had been ineffective, while Grimes struggled to hold Paul Stephenson. He was booked for the second of two blatant body-checks as the Town's discipline cracked.

And while the Town never threatened a goal, O'Neill, an £80,000 bargain buy from Coleraine, helped himself to the first hat-trick of his career, with the Town's defensive frailties ruthlessly exposed.

There was a ten-minute spell early in the second half, when the Town were two down, when they looked more like the Luton Town of old.

Danny Wilson and Darron McDonough started driving forward, but the nearest shot at goal was a 25-yarder by McDonough which went wide.

NERVES SETTLED

Newcastle showed signs of getting nervous in that spell, but their third goal in the 62nd minute settled them, and gave them the mastery that enabled Wharton to display his appalling bad sportsmanship in the closing minutes.

Harford did well to control his natural instincts as he weighed up the situation. But the fact that a player could get away with such micky-taking in the First Division was also a reflection on how sound the beating had been.

PARTY TRICKS JUGGLING

Paul Gascoigne, kept quieter than usual by Wilson's determined work, added to the home fans' laughter by putting on a few party tricks, juggling the ball in an act that would have been credit on the stage. At least his micky-taking was an exhibition of skill, and not just arrogance.

But football will not have gained much from those closing minutes. If Mr McFaul thinks it was perfectly all right because the same thing had happened at Kenilworth Road in October, what will he say when Newcastle next come to Luton?

Players and supporters will surely remember Saturday, and if there is bad blood between two sides before they kick off, what chance will football have of improving its reputation and image?

At St James's Park we saw provocation of the worst kind, condoned by the home fans, naturally, and by the home manager, which was unforgiveable.

The same adjective applies to much of the Town's performance.

They went a goal down from Newcastle's first corner, in the 16th minute. Grimes had conceded it to stop Stephenson, who received a short corner from O'Neill, gave it back and then watched, as did the Town's defence, as the 18-year-old took the ball gently in an arc to the edge of the penalty area before shooting into the far corner.

KEEPER'S CLEARANCE

Gascoigne nearly got the second when he burst clear from the half-way line, with the Town defence pushed up and left standing. Les Sealey raced out to make the saving clearance.

But he had no chance when Goddard, neat and nimble, took a short pass from Gascoigne, held off Foster, and played an inviting ball into O'Neill's path in the inside right position for the shot that made it 2-0.

It took 26 minutes for the Town to mount a serious attack, with Harford heading wide from Tim Breacker's overlap and cross.

But the last action of the first half was at the other end, with Neill McDonald coming up from defence to crack in a 30-yarder which Sealey deflected onto the bar. He then made a catch to deny the men following up.

REVIVAL HALTED

The Town's threatened revival after the interval was ended by another corner which Newcastle played short. Gascoigne and O'Neill worked the ball to Roeder on the edge of the box.

He anticipated the likely step forward by the Town defence, tried to dribble through, got the lucky bounce and with Sealey on his own more was able to draw the goalkeeper and square his pass to give Goddard a simple tap-in.

Sealey made a good save from Stephenson and there was another slight threat from the Town when Allinson replaced Grimes, going into midfield with Rob Johnson at left back.

Allinson set off a move which carried the ball via Harford and Stein to Black, whose drive was slightly too high to register his first league goal.

Black at least was cool and always willing to try, but with the team generally being swamped his chances to shine were very restricted.

WOODWORK INTERVENES

Gascoigne headed against the bar from a cross by Stephenson, and the fourth goal arrived with nine minutes to go when Stephenson's pass sent Gascoigne on a run down the middle.

Once again the Town's defence fell apart, and when Sealey made the last-ditch advance Gascoigne chose not to take a shot himself, but laid off the pass to give O'Neill an open goal for his hat-trick.

The fourth consecutive away defeat — and three on the trot where the Town have conceded four goals — became even worse to bear as Newcastle in general, and Wharton in particular, piled on the contempt in the last three minutes.

Mr Harford's kindest comment was that his men looked tired and jaded in the last half-hour. But in the privacy of the dressing room at Kenilworth Road on Monday much sharper things were said to a team that does so well at home and loses its way everywhere else.

THE MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Sealey; Breaker, Foster, Donaghy, Grimes (Allinson, 67 minutes); Johnson, Wilson, McDonough, Black; Harford, Mark Stein (Oldfield, 73 minutes).

NEWCASTLE: Kelly; McDonald, Anderson, Roeder, Tinnion; McCreery, Stephenson, Gascoigne, Wharton; Goddard, O'Neill. Subs: P. Jackson and Cornwell, not needed.

THE GOALS: Michael O'Neill hat-trick, 16, 25 and 81 minutes; Paul Goddard, 62 minutes.

OTHER STRIKES: Town three saved, four wide; Newcastle six saved, three wide, two hit the bar. Corners: 13-2 to Newcastle.

ATTENDANCE: 20,565.

REFEREE: Lawrence Dilkes, Mossley, Cheshire. Did well except for taking no action against Kenny Wharton's 87th-minute micky-taking of sitting on the ball.

BOOKED: Ashley Grimes, for the seventh time this season.

ENTERTAINMENT: It was probably a good game for home or neutral fans. It was humiliating for the rest of us.