

MATTHEWS GOAL TOWN'S SLENDER THREAD OF HOPE

NEVER RECOVERED FROM THAT BLOW

Forward Failings Again Contributed To Defeat

By CHILTERN

THAT slender thread of hope to which the Town were clinging that they could retain their Second Division status, virtually disappeared in the second minute of the second half at Stoke on Saturday, which was the precise time at which Stanley Matthews, the timeless wonder, chose to record his first goal of the season.

From the Stoke point of view nothing could have been more fitting than that the man who has put football in the Potteries on its feet again, should seal their bid for a place in Division I, but for the Town, it was the final nail in their coffin.

CONCEDING early goals after the interval seems to be a phobia that the Town have developed, because it happened in the final home match against Sunderland when Mulh all knocked all the stuffing out of them.

Of course, as Matthews, sensing the threat by a long through pass by McIlroy, started the ball past the helpless Baynham, the terraces erupted, and it just needed that to round off a great occasion — for Stoke.

Why The Concentration On Defence?

SO, in point of fact, the Town's second-half plan to throw everything into attack never really started, but I could not understand why there was so much concentration on defence before the interval.

Surely, the implication was clear. It was a match that had to be won if relegation were to be avoided, but after the first quarter of an hour when the Stoke defence looked rattled and came within inches of conceding a goal, the Town became less and less of an attacking force.

Instead of the seven-forwards fling which we should have seen, there were often five half-backs.

When Stoke Received Their Lucky Break

BUT, looking back, it was a lot to expect the Town, with this rather makeshift forward line, to win a match against a team poised to make the final blow in their promotion bid.

Maybe, had the luck been running with them, which it has not often this season, the Town could have got away to a flying start which might have made all the difference.

That was when Turner and Allen challenged each other for a long crowd from Davies and the ball flew off the foot of the half back to strike the bar and rebound gently into the hands of the waiting O'Neill.

When The Town Could Have Signed Mudie

IF it had not really mattered, then the ball might well have been deflected into the net off the woodwork, but that is the way things go when the tide is running against a team.

For a long time, Stoke scarcely looked dangerous, even though their midfield play began to improve and they used the ball

well in approach with Mudie, pushing the ball about, usually the focal point of their plan.

Ironical to think that the Town could not find this player for the best part of two seasons because the deal was as good as clinched one day and off the next, though the player was willing for the move.

McNally Made Frantic Attempt To Clear

ON the other hand, Stoke had no such second thoughts, and he has given them good service.

To press home this fact, it was Mudie who began the Town's downfall in the 33rd minute when he lobbed the ball into the net, despite the frantic attempt of McNally to keep it out after the impeded Baynham had only been able to push out a pass by Skeels.

Just before half-time, Mudie should have put out of court any question of a light back by the Town, but, from eight yards, he lofted the ball over the top.

Matthews Goal Was The End For Town

SO to half-time with the feeling as in so many away matches this season that the defence had done a sound job and that if only the forwards could find some punch from somewhere, all might yet not be lost.

But that Matthews goal not only strengthened the lead and provided publication for the fans, but settled Stoke into a more confident, better balanced combination than they had been previously.

After it, the Town were never in with a chance and, to make matters worse, McGuffie limped through the second half with a pulled thigh muscle heavily strapped.

Davies Was A Big Disappointment

NOT that I feel that that injury made a great deal of difference because the forward-line as a whole never suggested, after the opening stages, that they had sufficient power to break down a Stoke defence, once it had settled down.

Big disappointment was Davies from whom we probably expected too much after his recent goal-scoring feats.

Maybe, his recent injuries had taken their toll, but he was seldom out of the grip of Stuart and

FOR THE RECORDS

STOKE CITY: 2

Mudie, Mulhew.

LUTON TOWN: 0

Stoke City: O'Neill; Asprey, Allen; Clamp, Stuart, Skeels; Matthews, Violett.

Mudie, McIlroy, Ratcliffe.

Luton Town: Baynham; McNally, Bramwell;

Morton, Kelly, Groves;

McKechie, Turner, Davies,

McGuffie, Jardine.

Referee: E. T. Jennings.

Attendance: 33,644.

was far from the dangerous raider the Luton crowd have grown to know.

Sheffield Utd. Held Watching Brief Again

FOR the second match in succession, John Harris, manager of Sheffield United, was an onlooker which is an interesting point because it was Harris, the former Chelsea player, who brought Davies into professional football during the time he was manager of Chester.

So, there is no doubt that he has a long-standing interest in this player.

In Davies's favour, it could be said that there was little workable material for him because there was that weakness, that has been more or less prevailing these last weeks, on the wings.

Town Were Weak On The Wings Again

WINGERS play such an important role in present-day football and it is the Town's misfortune that during the last run in, they have been short in this respect.

Unfortunately, too, that they have had to make do without a class inside-left because McGuffie has not been a success there and for most of this match, Turner was battling away without a great deal of help.

Defensively, there was plenty of fighting spirit and determination and the way in which Groves came back into the team made one wonder whether it would not have been a good move to have recalled him earlier.

Groves Came Back With A Good Game

NOT, I must say, that most of his previous appearances

had merited it, but Groves had a very good game.

Nor was Morton over-awed by the prospect of facing McIlroy, but Kelly, though fighting hard, found some difficulty in putting the shackles on Mudie who continually used the ball to advantage.

Ratcliffe was a pretty considerable handful for McNally, who was often beaten for speed, but who never gave up, and Bramwell probably had the most unenviable task of all on this occasion because, even these days, Matthews is not the easiest man to mark.

Bramwell probably made as good a job of it as anyone else would, while Baynham, despite the two goals against him, had no cause for regret about his afternoon's work, which was assured and confident.

Reserves Round Off Successful Season

THE Town Reserves, who have never enjoyed the luxury of a settled team, due to constant calls by the seniors, finished a successful season at Kenilworth-road on Saturday with a 3-1 victory over Ipswich which ensures their sixth place in the Football Combination table.

They received a shock when Ipswich took a second-minute lead through Curtis, but Goldie put them on terms and then shot them into the lead by the 61st minute.

Their third goal was scored by Cone from the top corner after Millward had handled a shot by

Lornie which was bound for the net.

Struggled For Runs, But Town Won

IN the face of the handicap of again being without front-line bowlers, the Town gained another victory on Saturday when they beat new opposition, Parkfield.

Not that they were given a high target at which to bowl because the Town batsmen, after a very moderate start, had to struggle for runs, so that they occupied 125 minutes over making 100.

Best partnership was of 33 by Tom Clark, sitting unusually low at number 8, and Peter Webley, who was top scorer and, eventually, the declaration was made at 126 for 7.