

REFEREE BELOW PAR BUT TOWN DESERVED TO LOSE



● THE TOWN'S ONE MOMENT OF JOY: Brian Chambers, on the right, watches his back-heel carry the ball over the head of goalkeeper Montgomery into the net.

THE VEXED QUESTION of referees, and the decline in their standards which even Ted Croker has noticed, came close to obliterating the facts as the Town slumped to their worst home defeat for two years against Southampton.

But Town boss Harry Haslam resisted the temptation to blame all his side's troubles on another display of inconsistency by the man in black.

Mr Bryan James, of Croydon, might have had a bad game. But so did the Town, and Mr Haslam said: "I wouldn't want to take any credit from Southampton—they played well and we didn't."

Controversy raged around three decisions which Mr James had to make in the penalty areas. He gave one penalty, which set Southampton on the way to victory, and turned down two others, either of which might have put the Town back in the game when they were trailing by two goals.

Added to that, Mr James made Southampton take a free kick twice after the first attempt had been cleared, and the net result was Southampton's second goal.

Harry Haslam said after the game: "I thought the penalty against us was harsh. And I thought we should have had two. If either had been given it might have been a different result."

Steve Buckley was the unlucky defender whose body-check on Mick Channon led to the first goal. He had a nightmare match.

Both sides had created two good chances in a lively opening — Deans was unlucky to see a shot deflected for a corner while Ted MacDougall nearly scored with a header after Nick Holmes broke free down the Town's right.

The crucial first goal came after Alan West, well below form, failed to clear in his own penalty area. John Faulkner booted the ball to the edge of the area and Channon tried to wriggle his way through. He made a meal of his fall as Buckley collided with him, and the penalty was given and converted by David Peach.

Report by **BRIAN SWAIN**
Pictures: **TREVOR CHYNOWETH**

That, in the 12th minute, was the beginning of the end. After 39 minutes Buckley fouled Steve Williams about 25 yards from goal. Jim McCalliog took the free kick and Paul Futcher headed it away. Mr James confused everyone by ordering the kick to be retaken, and before the Town defence could regroup, Peach whacked the ball low into the net. It was tough luck on Keith Barber, because although he was at fault then, he had come desperately close to saving the penalty.

The Town had their best spell in the first 20 minutes of the second half. Fleetingly, they matched Southampton in midfield, and drove home some tremendous attacking moves.

Rodrigues was put on the rack by Aston, and I would have given a penalty for his tackle which sent Lil Fuccillo sprawling in the 48th minute. So would Dixie Deans — he was booked for telling the referee so.

West hammered a 25-yard drive which bounced off Jim Montgomery's chest for a corner, and Mel Blyth tripped Jim Husband from behind almost on the penalty spot.

Again, I thought the incident should have been penalised, and the angry crowd gave the referee the bird when he did nothing.

A goal came eventually, when Deans rose to head on a long through-ball by Paul Futcher, and Brian Chambers managed to flick the ball in past Montgomery.

But Southampton stood firm, and within eight minutes MacDougall scored from close range after Buckley failed to head clear a long cross from Peach and Williams squared the ball back across goal.

Five minutes from the end, Williams robbed Fuccillo near the half-way line, and with the Town defence caught on the rebound he fed Holmes, who galloped through on his own and scored with a shot off the post as Barber raced out to try to save.

For many Town supporters it will be all too easy to blame their troubles on to the referee. But despite him the result was probably right, even if the margin wasn't.

Aston's return gave the Town's attack a more balanced look, and caused most of the damage which was inflicted on Southampton.

But on the day the Saints were the better side, particularly in midfield and mobility.

Their midfield men won control, and regularly moved up quickly in support of Channon and MacDougall. And their finishing was an object lesson in how to punish mistakes.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 1, SOUTHAMPTON 4
Half-time: 0-2

TOWN: Barber; Price, Buckley, Faulkner, Paul Futcher; Chambers, West, Fuccillo; Husband, Deans, Aston. Sub: Carr, not used.

SOUTHAMPTON: Montgomery; Rodrigues, Peach, Waldron, Blyth; Holmes, Williams, McCalliog, Fisher; MacDougall, Channon. Sub: Stokes, not needed.

THE GOALS: Peach, penalty, for Southampton, 12 minutes, after Buckley and Channon collided in the area; Peach, 39 minutes, direct from twice-taken 25-yard free-kick; Brian Chambers for the Town, 69 minutes, laid on by header by Dixie Deans; Ted MacDougall, 77 minutes, ball laid back by Williams; Nick Holmes, 85 minutes, solo goal after run from the half-way line.

REFEREE: Bryan James, South Croydon: another case of inconsistency: the penalty against Buckley may have been harsh, but Southampton defenders went unpenalised for two incidents which were even clearer fouls.

ATTENDANCE: 12,123—only three in the Second Division were lower.

ENTERTAINMENT: Very good for Southampton's supporters, but the Town's rating was low.

BOOKING: Dixie Deans, for dissent, over a penalty claim which was turned down.

3251 23/10/76