

LUTON FIND THEIR FORM.

Refreshing Display against Bristol Rovers.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS

By "Vigilant."

"It is a long time since we heard a shout like that," remarked one of the Luton Town Directors as the more demonstrative of the local supporters sent the Blues off the field with a rousing cheer at the close of the match with Bristol Rovers on Saturday. The shout may, to some extent, have been one of relief that what was an anxious game for Luton had produced a couple of badly-needed points, but it must also have denoted the crowd's appreciation of one of the best exhibitions the Blues have given at home of late. The policy of the Directors in relying once more upon the forward line which has done so well since Stansfield and Walker had to drop out, through injuries, was thoroughly justified. There was always present in the attack an amount of dash which has so often been sadly wanting in many of the Blues' earlier displays; and the homesters have, perhaps, done nothing better during the whole of the season than the way in which they held up the Westerners against a formidable gale in the second half.

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Bushell was able to return to the centre-half position, and with the visitors introducing an amateur inside right in their forward line the teams to line out, under the charge of Mr. C. W. Gillett, the well-known Willesden referee, were as appended:—

Luton.—Naisby; Wightman and Potts; F. Hawkes, Bushell, and R. Hawkes; Brown, Streeton, Walden, Moody, and Stephenson.

Bristol Rovers.—Roney; Harvie and Bennett; Morris, Shaw, and Williams; Peplow, W. Hurley, Jones, Brogan, and Long.

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The conditions under which the game was contested were rather a change from what footballers have been accustomed to for some weeks past, for the winds of the week had had the effect of showing up the bareness of parts of the playing pitch to an extent not usual even at this period of the playing season. The surface was quite dry and crusted, and with the high wind there was in evidence the game was bound to be a fast, if not a clever one. As a matter of fact, the wind was the dominating factor of the game, and as it blew almost directly into the Town end goal it was a source of little satisfaction to a crowd of about four thousand when Bob Hawkes, for once, won the right to choose ends.

It was a tremendous advantage, though the force of the wind and the lively character of the pitch made it very difficult for the players to control the ball. For once, however, the home forwards adapted themselves admirably to the conditions, casting aside scientific close passing for the dash of the open game. This style of play was bound to pay, and Walden in the centre and Brown and Stephenson on the extreme wings lost few opportunities of keeping the ball on the swing. The result was that the Blues at the start attacked almost continuously, and were frequently threatening danger. Walden was within an ace of getting through with a fast run in the first minute or two, and then from a centre by Stephenson Moody was only half a second too late in attempting to utilise a forward push from the centre—he missed the goalkeeper and crashed against the upright, fortunately without doing any damage to himself.

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Luton should have had a penalty award quite early on, for Walden was deliberately pushed off the ball in the eighteen yards' area. The incident occurred almost under the referee's nose, but Mr. Gillett did not appear to think it called for an award, and all Luton could get was a corner, which proved of no value. The Bristol defence were doing well in the teeth of the gale, for there was nothing half-hearted about the home attack, and Bob Hawkes was delighting the crowd with some of his most brilliant work at half-back. One movement by Walden, Moody and Stephenson was quite a work of art, and Bennett was very fortunate to be able to block an effort which deserved to be crowned with success. Another very lucky escape the Rovers had was when Roney had to go on his hands and knees to save from Walden, the attentions of Moody and Stephenson being eluded by the goalkeeper with considerable difficulty.

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This last movement was a capital illustration of the part played in the game by the wind. Thanks to the speed and cleverness of their outside wingers, the Rovers had made one or two visits to the other end without becoming exactly dangerous, and on the last occasion the result was a goal kick. Considering the wind, Naisby's kick was a very poor one, but Fred Hawkes turned the ball up into the air, and with the back only effecting a partial stoppage, Walden went sailing through, and almost made the movement a scoring one. The wind also played no little part in Luton's opening goal, for it carried a lofty centre from Brown into such proximity to goal that the Bristol backs were clean outwitted. The result was that Moody was left finely placed. All the backs could do was to attempt to sandwich him, and in this attempt one of them—it appeared to be Harvie—pushed him off the ball in such a way that Mr. Gillett had not a moment's hesitation in pointing to the penalty spot. Wightman was called up to take the kick, and with a terrific low drive he made no mistake with it, though Roney's effort to stop it was a very creditable one.

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One up in a quarter of an hour was good business, but it was very patent that for Luton it was a case of now or never, and there was no slackening on the part of the Blues. Fred Hawkes made a magnificent attempt to get through, and was only foiled by sterling defensive work, and Roney saved in brilliant fashion a high shot from Bushell. He took the ball from just under the bar, and it was a bit fortunate for him, when he was tackled by Streeton, that the Luton player was pulled up for offside. The visitors had frequently to concede corners, but they never wavered in defence. Twice in succession they had appeals for fouls against them. The first was on Walden in the penalty area, and was not given; the second was on Moody just outside the line, and was given, but the award brought no result.

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The game had been going twenty-three minutes when Moody registered Luton's fortieth and his eleventh League goal of the season. It was the result of brilliant work on the part of Streeton, who sped by the backs on the wing, and capturing the ball close to the line, when he seemed to have been beaten for pace, got across a magnificent centre. Stephenson, splendidly placed, headed in straight and hard, and Roney stopped it, but before he could gather it Moody was there and had it through. The gilt was rather taken off this goal, however, by a surprising success on the part of the Rovers in the next minute. Breaking away after Walden had just missed the cross-bar with a magnificent drive, Hurley was allowed to go on from what certainly appeared an offside position. The defence were caught napping, and they were never able to recover. Pellow, receiving, beat off Potts's challenges, and accurately slung the ball across for Brogan to head it right away from Naisby in the opposite corner of the net.

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There was never any danger of the Rovers equalising, but on the other hand the half had nearly run its course before the Blues were able to improve on their goal lead. They were always trying

hard, both Stephenson and Brown infusing a lot of dash into the attack. Stephenson, in fact, was quite the hero, for he showed a rare turn of speed, and was quick to utilise opportunities. With a first-time effort, after scrambling play in front of goal, he drove a real "blinder," which Roney would never have stopped if it had been an inch or two lower, and another fine effort of his Roney just fisted over the bar. At corner-kicking the outside left did not shine early in the game, but when he did get one right it was a rare handful for the goalkeeper. Roney was nearly caught napping by a long drive from Wightman. He evidently expected the ball to go wide, but it struck the post, and left Walden with the goal open. The centre was, however, following up so fast that he was as much surprised as the goalkeeper. He could only chance his luck, and luck was not his way.

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Streeton had been doing a lot of brilliant work without ever seeming to be in luck's way, and three minutes from half-time he led up to the scoring of Luton's third goal. Keeping the ball close, he worked through across to the left, but had his shot barred. Walden and Moody tried to break through the knot of defenders, and where they failed Stephenson succeeded. Still the defenders kept the ball from goal, but as it came out Fred Hawkes met it and with a low shot brought Roney to his knees. Walden and Stephenson were on him like a flash, and again Stephenson came out on top, bundling the goalkeeper and ball through. So the interval came with the score:—

Luton 3, Bristol 1.

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In view of the handicap Luton had to face in the second half, one could hardly regard this as a winning lead, but the homesters simply astonished their supporters by the valiant way they fought against the wind. Adopting the principle that the surest defence is a sound attack, they showed up to even better advantage in the matter of play than they had done in the first half, and for twenty minutes were rarely out of the Bristol half. Their attack was quite brilliant. In the first couple of minutes Moody twice got very close, only to shoot rather weakly, and Streeton was unfortunate to have non-success attending a fine effort. It was, however, Stephenson who pleased the crowd most, his dashing work causing thrill after thrill. A grand run on the left was followed by a centre which was very luckily headed away, and for some minutes he gave the right back a warm time of it.

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After ten minutes, Brown was kicked in the face, but he was able to resume after attentions from the trainer, and immediately he got across a fine centre, from which Stephenson only just missed the mark. Luton really ought to have scored a minute later. Moody pushed the ball by the backs, but it bounced rather awkwardly, and Walden left it to Streeton, only for Tommy to be unable to get it under control with the goal almost undefended. Then, from a corner forced on the right, Walden headed by, and a shot which the centre put across the goal Stephenson was unable to reach. Bob Hawkes was showing great form in backing up the forwards, and Walden, Streeton and Brown were prominent in attack after attack, the combination of the whole line leaving little to be desired. One moment in particular was of the brilliant order. Streeton let the ball go across to the outside right, and Brown slung in a lightning shot, which Roney could only knock down, while Bob Hawkes missed the bar by inches with a rising drive.

This was practically the end of Luton's supremacy. The first time the Rovers effectively got away, Wightman gave away a corner. This was nullified by a free kick award against the Rovers, but although Luton broke away again, their attack this time was beaten off, and the play gradually settled down in the Luton half. The Rovers, however, rarely got really dangerous, Naisby for some time having nothing difficult to do. The best effort, until the last ten minutes, was a rising shot from Peplow, which skimmed the bar, but later Naisby had to show his smartness on at least two occasions. With the ball suddenly crossed into the centre from some touch-line work, Hurley headed in at close quarters. Naisby only just captured it on the line, and taking to the ground rolled the ball clear of the goal for Wightman to clear into touch. The goalie had to fall in making another fine save from a shot by Hurley, which appeared to be going away from him as he made his effort.

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These were about the only instances in which the Luton goal was in danger. Much of the play ruled on the touch-line, the home defence resisting the Rovers' efforts so stubbornly that the ball was frequently out of play. It was not interesting football, but it was quite the right game for the homesters to adopt, and in the last few minutes they showed how completely they had broken the back of the visitors' attack by once more taking up the running. A sterling shot by Brown from the corner caused Roney to bring off a very hot save. The Blues also forced a corner, which threatened danger, but Roney again saved, this time from Walden, and consequently the end came with the ha'f-time score still holding good:—

LUTON 3, BRISTOL 1.