
Luton's Stirring Win on the Post.

Brilliant Recovery against Cardiff.

By "Vigilant."

Luton Town's first meeting with Cardiff City in Division I. of the Southern League, on Saturday, resembled in many respects the vividly remembered match of three Christmases ago, when the two clubs were running nearly neck and neck for promotion, and the Blues put a spoke in the Welsh team's run of successes. It rained heavily and blew unpleasantly throughout the afternoon, following on an intermingling of snow and rain during the morning, and if the pitch was not quite so watery as on that memorable occasion two years ago, its condition was almost as bad, especially when the mud began to get churned up, and the rain burst down with hurricane violence—as if merely to demonstrate that matters could be worse. But, just as was the case two years ago, both teams seemed inspired with the same determination to show that they could master the worst conditions. There was the incentive for this, as a victory for Cardiff would have placed them strongly in the running for championship honours, while Luton could not afford to lose the points if they are to steer clear of the bottom two. As a result, the game proved of a ding-dong character, brim full of excitement from start to finish. On the run of the first half, the homesters should have been well in front, but such was their luck—and it was only luck, coupled with some of the finest goalkeeping seen on the ground—that they were in arrears at the interval. After the change of ends Cardiff more than held their own, in spite of having to play one short, but after a penalty goal had brought Luton an equaliser, the Blues played up in magnificent fashion, and pulled a grand game out of the fire in stirring fashion. Unlike the game, the attendance bore no comparison to the Christmas match of two seasons ago, for strong as was the attraction, the weather was naturally a great deterrent, considerably the greater proportion of a crowd of about four thousand being soldiers.

Cardiff were in the fortunate position of being able to play practically their full strength, although a change in the forward line brought in the ruddy-haired Devlin and caused Goddard, the old Liverpool and Glossop outside right, to take the position in which he secured International honours some few seasons ago. Luton, on the other hand, had about as much difficulty in arranging their team as ever they had this season. It had been intended to make three changes, Robinson for Dunn at back, Heath for Wilson at centre-half, and young Frank Gilder for Hoar at outside-left, but the filling of the outside-left berth proved an unexpected source of trouble. The first idea was to send Hoar to Cardiff because of Gilder being unable to get leave for the journey to be undertaken by the Reserves, but Hoar was taken with a bad cold, and a substitute had to be found for him, and on top of this a wire was received from Gilder to say that he could not even get leave for the match at Luton. The news only came on Saturday morning, after the Reserves had left, so Hoar was fetched out from Longrave. He was, however, obviously unfit and under these circumstances there was no alternative but to press into service Frith, who has recently been having trouble with his toe as a result of which he is expecting to get his discharge from the Army. Bob Hawkes accordingly agreed to try his hand at outside-left, and Heath gave way to Frith at centre-half, and took Bob Hawkes' place on the wing. These changes made the teams read:—

Luton: Mitchell; Elvey, Robinson; Fred Hawkes, Frith, Heath; Roberts, Wileman, Simms, Rollinson, Bob Hawkes.

Cardiff: Stephenson; Doncaster, Layton; Harvey, Keenor, Hardy; Goddard, Devlin, G. West, Barnett, Evans.

Right from the start the teams set up a pace which was astonishing under such atrocious conditions, the more so as it was accompanied by football of a really high order, and passing movements that could not have been excelled under the most favourable conditions. Luton had the first look in, and Bob Hawkes celebrated his appearance in a new role, by twice giving Stephenson warm handfuls, first getting into the centre and driving away, and then lifting into the goal-mouth a high centre which the goalkeeper fisted away with great difficulty. Wileman would often have scored from the chance this afforded him because the ball came nicely to his feet, and he blazed away in his characteristic fashion, but half-volleyed a non-stopper over the bar. Then came a spirited response from Cardiff, and for nearly ten minutes they were simply irresistible with their forward work. Robinson, in stopping West, kicked the ball hard on to him, and it rebounded out to Evans, who, with a clear field, got the ball across the goal. It should have been a gift for the Welshmen for Mitchell was helpless and unassisted, but Goddard imperfectly trapped the ball, and had to shoot hurriedly with the result that he hit the under part of the cross-bar, and the ball returned into play. The Luton defence were not exactly shining, being very much inclined to muddle. One mistake let Devlin through and Mitchell effected a great save on the ground, but almost immediately afterwards Heath got in the way of some of his colleagues and prevented a clearance, and a muddle up was promptly taken advantage of by West, who scored a low first-timer just inside the post.

Curiously enough it was from this point that Cardiff lost their hold on the game, although they retained their lead. The homesters put in a lot of really fine forward work, and although the condition of the turf occasionally caused chances to be lost through slips, there was one particular five minutes or so when the slightest luck would have brought the Blues at least a trio of goals. It was Stephenson mainly who stood in the breach and saved his side by a succession of really miraculous, some of them almost hair-raising saves, but Layton also chanced to get on the spot twice, and effect two of the luckiest clearances.

imaginable when even Stephenson's miraculous mood could not have availed.

Stephenson started off by just keeping out a surprise deflection by Rollinson from a centre by Frith, and saved another from Rollinson at full length, but these achievements were completely overshadowed by the marvellous way in which he dived across the goal and pushed aside one of Simms' hardest drives—one that was straight and true from the foot and seemed a certain scorer. From the corner Stephenson again seemed beaten, but Layton luckily stopped a header from Rollinson, and thus encouraged the goalkeeper darted across and kept another one out from Simms. This performance he repeated with marked cleverness in getting round the post a cross drive from Wileman, and from this corner Layton was once more to the rescue in saving from Fred Hawkes. One of the Cardiff players seemed likely to do Luton a good turn by deflecting a shot from Simms, but Stephenson again managed to get across to it in the nick of time, and although he was hurt in throwing himself at the ball he was successful in preventing Roberts from doing any damage. Cardiff were hardly ever dangerous until the last ten minutes of the half, when Mitchell had to go full length to save from West, and Luton were most unlucky to cross over without a score. Rollinson had two good chances of altering this, for first Simms gave him an open chance, and then Bob Hawkes placed him so beautifully that he was able to take any amount of time for his shot. He was, however, just as far out with his deliberate aim as with his first-time effort, and so the interval came with the score—

Luton 0, Cardiff 1.

Against a strong wind, which was steadily growing in force, Luton were now in for a hard uphill fight, and in the first minute Devlin was within all ace of scoring. In this effort, however, he cut his eye so badly that he had to retire and seek the aid of a local doctor for the insertion of some stitches. The Blues had another very narrow escape when Burnett called upon Mitchell, for Goddard almost turned the ball in, but within ten minutes Luton were on level terms, in spite of another great save by Stephenson. A centre from Bob Hawkes gave Roberts possession right in front of the goal, but he shot in straight, and Stephenson effected a glorious save at the expense of a corner. Following on the flag kick Wileman middled the ball into the goal mouth, and Simms headed in with such effect that Stephenson experienced some of his first half difficulties. The spectators were on the point of speculating whether the goalkeeper would be equal to the emergency when the sound of the whistle was detected, and it was found that the referee had awarded a penalty for a running kick aimed at Simms as he was in the act of rushing the goalkeeper. Robinson was called up for the kick, and amid great enthusiasm he showed the way to beat the formidable Stephenson.

Still even now it was anybody's game. Cardiff were playing one short, but the assistance given them by the wind was such that they more than held their own in midfield, and the Luton defence had the more worrying time. There were times when the homesters were simply penned in their own half, but the heavy rain which set in just before the interval had made the playing conditions very much worse than before the change of ends, and neither set of forwards were so effective in front of goal. Occasionally the Blues varied matters by hot assaults, in one of which the Cardiff goal had two very narrow shaves, and the ball was burst, but it was not until the last five minutes or so that Luton were really prominent for the first time since they had been on level terms. They played with the utmost virility, and a couple of minutes before the whistle finally sounded they were rewarded with a winning goal, for which most of the credit is due to Roberts. Getting the ball from Simms the outside winger had a rare tussle with Layton before he got clear, and then, taking the ball right up to the goal line he centred for Rollinson to be provided with what should have been the easiest gift. The ball came across beautifully right in front of the goal, but once more Rollinson disappointed, for he shot straight at Stephenson from only about three yards range. Stephenson could not have got out of the way if he had tried, and he did no more than let the ball hit him, but fortunately for Luton it rebounded across to Bob Hawkes. Bob was up against a very difficult proposition, but he rose to the occasion splendidly. He trapped an awkward ball in the most perfect way imaginable and, tricking Doncaster, steered it into the net with such a touch of finish that some folks actually went away describing it as an easy goal. Anyway it put paid to Cardiff's hopes in leaving the final score—

and both Elvey and Mitchell played great games, the full back being in one of those delightful moods in which he anticipates almost everything and gets there every time.

Luton have now gone above Plymouth Argyle with a record of 22 points for 34 games and a goal average of 39 against 47, and as Croydon Common and Bristol Rovers both came down on Saturday they should be getting near safety. They have two trips away this week, to Coventry in the Southern Charity Cup-tie on Wednesday and to Exeter in the League on Saturday.