

LUTON'S LAPSE.

LIFELESS PLAY AGAINST READING.

ARE the Town team going to be one of those irritating combinations that do better away from home? It is yet early to foretell, but it is true that they gave Bournemouth and Watford crowds better value than they gave Luton on Monday. Since the game I think I have heard every player blamed for the defeat, and I have not heard a single excuse. Some have declared most emphatically that there was no comparison between the teams, giving Reading credit for quality they do not possess; some have blamed the forwards, others the half-backs. It is refreshing to know that none blamed the rearguards as a whole, though one gentleman opined that Mingay should have stopped the one shot that scored. He must think the Town goalkeeper is an octopus.

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Sweeping condemnation is no good, either to the Club, the team, or the individual player, even though we cannot blink away facts. Conspicuous above all other faults, I think, was that which appeared to afflict more than half the side—holding on too long. I have seen five consecutive games of the Town, and it is decisively borne in upon me that the new rule is to revolutionise the game. While it has been nothing unusual to find half-backs playing throughout a season, without a holiday, I think the middle-man who does that this season will be either very fortunate or wondrously strong, and clubs will have to get more players for the middle line than heretofore.

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A crafty middle line has been the desire of every club in modern times, but there will be more truth than before in the idea that the battle is to the swift and the strong. "The agriculturist" is going to be a more potent force than hitherto, and the bigger and stronger the man, the better will he be liked. It may be that the skilful man will always be in demand, but he will have to get elastic boots and use muscle developers in his spare time. Frankly, I could not see a superlative on the Reading side: They didn't want one, either. Rejoicing in a considerable advantage in physique, they made science the third element. The first essential was a hefty kick, and the second, nimble feet.

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Man for man I am sure the Town were as skilful, and could be as fast, but in trying to be clever they lost effectiveness, and played into the hands of the dashing "Biscuiteers." When someone suggested that Reading would win promotion it was laughable, because I think there are half-a-dozen sides in the League that can play this type of football more effectively—Plymouth, Northampton, Brighton, Bristol City, Millwall, and, when they get going, Swindon. Luton could, too, on their form at Bournemouth.

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The result is the standard of common judgment, and because Reading got the goal many supporters were inclined to give them all the kudos as well as all the points. A few moments' reflection, however, will prove that the Town had much the better of the run of the play. Compare the scenes in Duckworth's goal area with those in Mingay's. How many more narrow escapes did the Reading goal have? How often had Duckworth to do something nearly sensational to save his side? In my notes, compiled as the game proceeded, I find that the Reading goalkeeper was in demand thrice to Mingay's once in the first half, for what could be called real saves.

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Duckworth never got anywhere near the edge of his penalty area, yet Mingay was often seen there. The poor understanding and the lack of finishing power, as at Watford, was the biggest cause of the Town's defeat. Some of the Reading supporters were in a perpetual sweat, for after a somewhat flash opening, the visitors had to thank their defence for a great deal. And what a great pair of defenders are Eggo and McConnell. Big, strapping fellows the whole team, but I should think this pair the strongest of the side. They were harder worked than the Town pair, but were gluttons for it, and never stood on ceremony at all.

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It was a lusty game, and it was likely to end without a goal, but there was some loose play—there is bound to be, it seems, at some period of the game—on the right flank of the Town, with the result that Robson got the ball to DAVEY, who sprinted in, and although once baffled, he recovered and cleverly beat Mingay, to give his team their fourth victory in six games, and to retain an unbeaten certificate.

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What is to be done? Many have asked and at the same time solved that problem—to their own satisfaction. If this were to be the last lapse I should say "let well alone," because there was nothing like the same style in the match at Bournemouth. If, however, the players cannot return to the simpler style of play, then I am certain the

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directors will make changes. I do not know, intimately, what the arrangements are between the manager and the directors, but it does seem to me that money will have to be forthcoming to provide more men, unless the manager can educate the players to the wisdom of following the methods they used in the matches they won. If that can be done the team will win, but if it cannot, then the plight will be as bad as last season.

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Mingay kept goal well, and better back play than that of Anderson and Graham could hardly be desired. The former was brilliant in the extreme, and I am convinced that if his display had been witnessed by big club agents he would have been booked at once. The halves had a fierce opposition to encounter. Jennings put up a hard game, as usual, and he did sterling work. So did Walker and Neal for an hour, but I thought the former got fagged. It is not surprising, and, as I have already said, the demand upon the stamina of half-backs is too excessive under present conditions. Neal also lost some of his ginger, but both went out to the last ounce to try to save the game in the last quarter-of-an-hour.

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These halves are good enough, however, if the forwards can do their part. Shankly still more than holds his own, but there is a lack of understanding that is pulling back the team, and that is the main cause of the defeats sustained this week. Reid, at the end of last season, promised to become a really firm partner of Dennis. He has done well in one or two games this season, but not to the extent we hoped. I refuse to join in the chorus of abuse, for I am still hopeful that he will return to that form, but he should not have played on Monday. Bedford was chosen in the event of the Welshman not recovering from his injuries, but he declared that he felt all right, and was permitted to play. He was not all right; more often than not he was wrong.

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So Thompson and Dennis suffered. Both want forward passes, with plenty of elbow room, and they are not getting it. Moffat was sparkling betimes, but apt to hold on too long, and the opposition was too big to allow of that. Otherwise he is a smart little player, and can be a peck of trouble to opponents.

Reading are a finely-built team, with speed and brawn in plenty, and they have evidently been coached to the necessities of making their style fit the altered conditions.

CRUSADER.