

LUTON ECLIPSED.

FULHAM AVENGE CUP-TIE DEFEAT AT LUTON.

Poor Display by the Town.

By Crusader.

SUPPORTERS of LUTON TOWN will find it very hard to veil their profound disappointment that promotion has not been won. The final blow to high hopes, raised quite as much recently by the failures of rivals as by the merits of the Town, were finally dissipated when the team completely failed to account for FULHAM in the match at Luton on Saturday. Not only did it mean the crushing of hope, it was also a blot on the proud record of an unbeaten series of matches extending from November 5th, 1927.

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Actually it was the fortieth competitive game at home since Queen's Park Rangers defeated the Town at Luton on the date mentioned, and only one other club of the 24 clubs in the League had such a record—Stockport County. Defeat had to come some time at home, but all would have preferred that it be deferred until a Second Division club had the opportunity. Fulham's success was all the more remarkable in that they had been heavily defeated by the Town in a re-played Cup-tie at Luton, on December 13th.

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With the exception of a brief period in the second half, the Town were never the equal of their masters from Craven Cottage, and it was a mastery wrought by the enthusiasm of youth associated with speed and skill. Fulham's victory was well won, and I do not think there was one of the 13,000 spectators that would have denied the visitors the credit of earning the reward, even allowing for mistakes made by the referee, and there were plenty of these, in all conscience.

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Just before the game I expressed to a supporter of the Town the view that I feared the referee more than Fulham, not because Mr. Elphes would be wilfully unfair, but because I thought the match was too big for him, and I am sure that was the case. For some reason he did not take the game at Fulham. I do not know why, though it may have been illness, but he certainly should not have had the handling of this match. There were at least three occasions when Luton should have had penalty kicks, while a reliable spectator informed me afterwards that when he disallowed a goal scored by Fulham owing to offside, the ball was played to the scorer by a Luton player.

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Making the fullest possible allowance, however, Luton were beaten by a better side, and it would have been a travesty of merit had Luton won and gone on to promotion as the result of this game. When one considers that no fewer than ten of the team are re-engaged for next season, and the eleventh has been offered terms, one is bound to say that if they cannot do better than this then the Town appear to have signed on the framework of a reserve side for next season.

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But they can do and have done far better, and I attribute the defeat mainly to wrong tactics, and to the superior fitness, as well as greater ability, among the players of Craven Cottage. Fulham fielded three or four players different from the side that lost at Luton in the Cup-tie, but these did not make the difference between defeat and success: the difference was on the Town side, where there was neither the confidence nor the skill that was produced in the previous meeting.

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Within the last two or three weeks one who has been associated with the club for many, many years told me that there was not even the skeleton of a promotion side in the Town team if Rennie were excluded, and a glance at the goal average supports that opinion strongly. We are apt to impose upon the rearguard all the blame for the "goals against," but anyone who has followed consistently the Town this season knows perfectly well that the trouble has been chiefly at half-back, and in no game has this been so plainly apparent as on Saturday.

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I have seen the forty League games the Town have played, and time after time have tried to point out that here lay the secret of the teams that have beaten the Town—superior half-back play. Some supporters and several players have differed from that view, and though the former generally have come round to the same opinion now, the latter will not, because they are the players concerned. Well, let it remain. I am convinced that until there is a radical change in the play of the halves—I do not say in the personnel, because they can play the more effective game if they will—there will be no promotion for Luton.

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Fulham's middle line play was a distinct contrast from that of Luton, and this particularly applies to their flank halves. Whereas Temple and Penn were given all the elbow room they could desire, Daly and Bedford were watched and dogged and tackled immediately they got possession in a way that reduced their effectiveness by half, and this grip on the game, which, after all, is simply perfection in the art of positioning, made all the difference.

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It is old-fashioned, perhaps, but give me the man that can sum up quickly the right position according to the fluctuation of the play and the strength of the opposition, and whether he is clever in footwork or not, he will be a big obstacle. This was the saving grace of Fulham on Saturday. He came in for criticism along with the others, but did go the pace for the full period; he was doing something to hinder the other fellows, and it was well he did, for they had plenty of openings, thanks to the brains of the wingers.

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I am not writing with feeling against any player at all, but simply because it

is so obvious that while individual players go their own way without consideration of their colleagues' merits or shortcomings, there will be ineffective effort in the rear, and ragged and wretched attempts at sustained attack such as we saw against Fulham. Apart from the rearguard, there was no division of the team that won praise, though individuals played well.

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For instance, Black, who an old supporter told me a week or two ago was the finest half-back in the country, could distribute the ball to better purpose than any other half-back on the field, yet while he was hanging to Craig the extreme winger was playing a solo in an open space. As for Miller, well, the crowd were very severe on his shortcomings, and I do not wish to say more, except that if Richards had not gone out of his own sphere to deal with the tricky right winger there would have been an even worse disaster.

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Banes had about the same amount of work as Mason, and did it equally well, while Kingham and Richards were the mainstays of the side. That indicates the progress of the game and superiority of the visitors. Kingham is not a hefty chap, but he played himself out, while Richards put up a great game, and to these two went out the sympathy of the supporters. I do not contend that Richards is an ideal back, but a crowd of 13,000 recognised what was due to him and Kingham, and they got more applause than all the rest of the side together. They deserved it, too.

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Fulham played like a team, and Luton as a number of units, each with the same purpose, but different ideas of attaining it, and there has to be far more ability than was evinced by Luton if the co-operative spirit such as Fulham showed is to be nullified. Many were disposed to blame the directors, but without good reason. They did the best with the material they have at hand, and I am certain that at least a couple of players have been included in the team of late as a sop to popular opinion.

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The team it was that failed, and did so because they were opposed to a younger, more enthusiastic, speedier, skilful and determined eleven. During the first half the superiority of the Fulham men was clear to all, and apart from a few shots by Rennie, who tried hard enough when he got the ball, the Town were not often dangerous. On the other hand, Temple and Penn was so troublesome that if Fulham had led by three goals at the change of ends they would not have had more than their due. PENN got the only goal of the half, with a header from Temple's centre after 40 minutes' play, but there had been at least four good openings missed before success came, and so Fulham deserved their interval lead:—

FULHAM	1
LUTON TOWN	0

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It was a similar story in the second half for half-an-hour, and the Fulham forwards showed far better understanding. Then came a Luton revival to some purpose. In the first minute of the second half they had deserved a penalty kick, for Dyer handled in full view right in the goal-mouth, but that was as nothing to the offences that were overlooked when Luton gave their best of the afternoon, shortly before Rennie equalised. Bedford and Daly were each badly fouled well inside the penalty area, the former's legs being swept from under him, and Daly being within two or three yards of the goalkeeper, right in the middle, when he was fouled.

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It had to be a good goal that was permitted, and it came—one of the centre-forward's very best. The movement that led to it was the Town left wing's best bit of the afternoon. Bedford got possession as the result of a characteristic effort by Woods, and after beating two men he returned to his partner, who re-transferred again; the winger passed back to RENNIE, who promptly got the ball under control and fired in a shot that would have beaten any goalkeeper.

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Could the Town have kept up the vigorous methods and the determination shown about this time they would probably have won. They restarted intent upon further lowering the colours of the visitors, but it was not to be, and a glaring error by the referee enabled Fulham to take the lead. Penn got through, and his pass brought trouble, but it was overcome, and Black was getting the ball clear when Craig brought him down with a palpable trip. The Luton players ceased play expectant of a free kick, but Fulham went on, and HALEY got possession unmarked and scored with a lovely shot.

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Coming so near the end that was too big a blow, and against a now listless opposition Fulham returned to their best. Penn dribbled right through to the line, and then presented AVEY with the easiest chance, and he made no mistake. This was the climax, but the score did not exaggerate the superiority of the London team. They were full value for their victory, even if one of their goals was a gift.

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FULHAM	3
LUTON TOWN	1
LUTON.—Banes; Kingham, Richards; Black, Fulton, Millar; Daly, Yardley, Rennie, Woods, Bedford.	
FULHAM.—Mason; Dyer, Bird; Oliver, McNab, Barrett; Temple, Haley, Avey, Craig, Penn.	
Referee.—Mr. P. E. Elphes, Maidstone.	