

Crusader Comments

ON LUTON'S SURPRISING SUCCESS.

SATURDAY'S victory was surprising to most of the LUTON TOWN supporters, for they could hardly credit that a side such as COVENTRY CITY, with far larger resources, would have to taste the bitterness of defeat for a third time in succession before their own crowd. Before the game the City officials told me that if their team were as good at home as away they would be getting crowds of 20,000. They were confident, however, that they would win this match, and were fielding what they thought was their best team.

For our part we were hoping that there would be a repetition by the Town of the splendid form shown against Fulham, and then we could not see how they could lose, but there was always the feeling that they rose above their average in that game, and in all the circumstances we should have been satisfied with a point. Before we started out that was definitely said by the officials, but I pinned my faith to the fact that there was such good spirit in the team that they might well rise superior to anything the City could show.

On the run of the game it could not be said that their general play deserved more goals than Coventry's, save that the City forwards could not penetrate the defence in such a way as to provide really comfortable openings. Rarely was there a gap in the rearguard, and if a City forward did manage to wriggle into position for a shot he was usually barred just when he felt that the moment was ripe for a shot. This was mainly evident in the first twenty minutes in each half, and largely due to the fact that the Town halves were puzzled by the width of the ground, and the affection the City wingers showed for the touch-line.

Still, one could count the narrow escapes of the Town goal on one hand, and the best shots came from well out. On the other hand, the Town forwards worked into the danger zone, and every forward was able to drive at goal from a range that would have been disastrous but for the very fine defence of Crown and Tilford. The former so arranged his forces that there was usually a stout barrier in front of goal, and in the second half, when the Town were giving of their very best, the City forwards and halves had to fall back into the penalty area to assist.

The players never spared themselves, and the game might have taken an unpleasant turn had the referee not been very quick to deal with infringements. Now and then he erred, and this was the case when he gave the free kick against Kingham, from which PICK opened the scoring with a grand shot. Kingham was playing the ball, trying to head it, in fact, when an opponent ran backwards into him, and the Town players appealed for a free kick, but the award went to the City.

So far from discouraging the Town, however, it only made them play better, and after the City goal had narrowly escaped from Bryce's corner, and shots from Rennie, Dent and M'Nestry had rattled within inches, Heslop had the hardest luck with a glorious first time shot that thundered against the bar and rose high in the air to fall the wrong side. The goal came as a result of neat work between Heslop and Rennie. The latter gave the winger a pass, and without trying to do any fancy work the winger returned it when he had drawn the opposition; RENNIE ran round Tilford with consummate ease, the ball beautifully controlled, and as Allen dashed out the centre-forward shot hard and low into the net.

Equality at the interval was a fair reflex of the merits of the teams. The City had shown better understanding forward, but the Town the sterner and more intelligent defence. Moreover, the movements of the Town had been notable because they kept the ball on the carpet the better, and the City had relied to a great extent upon the speed of Pick, who had responded well, and was always a source of trouble.

For a long time in the second half the Town had to give most attention to defence, and though Banes had nothing of a very serious nature to accept, there were a few thrills. The halves were also working so well with the backs that the retreats were always well covered, and the attackers had to shoot before they could assume really effective position. Then it was that the Town began to strike back, and the City defence had hot work.

Many times there were prospects of a goal, and every forward and half-back had a try, while once Kingham came tearing up the middle and drove in a fine shot, for which Allen safely positioned. When the goal did come it was thoroughly deserved, and though Rennie again had the pleasure of scoring, it was a co-operative effort, for half a dozen players had something to do with the movement. The left wing were the agents in the advance, and Bryce eventually presented the ball so that RENNIE could see most of the target, and the ball traversed that ten or twelve yards with such velocity that Allen had scarcely begun his effort before the ball had come back to him from the rear of the net.

The Town had the game well in hand after this, but in the last despairing effort of the City, Reay managed to get clear on the right to centre the ball from near the flag; Roe, who had been striving desperately hard against his old team, was rightly positioned, and could he have headed the ball rightly the result would have been a draw. He could not divert it downwards, however, and it sailed just too high, and before Banes could take the goal-kick the end was signalled.

It was really good work by the whole of the team. Brilliant movements and individual play there were, but in general it was the splendid spirit and co-operation of the team as a whole that determined the success, and if one or two players showed up to better advantage than others it was because they had the more opportunity, and because they were conscious of the assistance at hand.

This was why Kingham was the best back on the field. He had Hodgson covering him when he went out to deal with the lively Pick, or Clark would fall back, and though the City left winger did many exceedingly clever things, the City would never have scored but for a lucky chance from the free kick. Both backs were in grand form again, and with Banes alert and not required too often, the charge was quite as safe as in the previous game.

All the halves were bothered by the amount of ground that had to be covered to keep in touch with the opposing wings or the area in the middle of the field, and Clark was often running inside to the assistance of Gale in the first half. When they had developed understanding, however, they played finely, and in the second half the home forwards in vain strove to overcome them. They wore down these attacks, and took a strong hand in supporting the forwards.

Gale was a great stumbling block to advances down the middle, and his physique and far-reaching legs foiled Phillips and company time after time, while his long shots to the wings were invaluable. Clark put in grand work, and here again was evidence of steady mastery over the better of the Coventry wings, and the ball was nicely served to the front liners. Fraser's football was delightful as ever, and if he does not score soon as a result of one of those brilliant runs that have become a feature of his play, I shall be surprised.

The magnificent understanding between Fraser and his left wing was one of the most entertaining features of the game. Bryce has never played better, and his determined harassing of the opposition, and tantalising dribbling, were factors in the ultimate downfall of the City. Fred Dent was cool and effective as ever, and this in spite of the ground being unfavourable. M'Nestry's play suffered somewhat through his injury, but he and Heslop got on well, and their speed upset defensive calculations time after time.

Rennie must be getting back his confidence, and if he will only take upon himself more often the responsibility of going through single-handed, as he did when he scored the first goal, he will rapidly increase his bag. None could have done it better, and that he has not lost that devastating shot was apparent. Another thing I liked about the forward play was the way the wingers centred. There were fewer shots from difficult angles, and Bryce in particular has discovered Rennie's speciality.

For the City, who will not lose many more games at home, Allen could not be blamed, for he had no shadow of a chance with either scoring shot. Crown was the better of two good backs, and the middle men played a rugged game, though Baker was disposed to infringe the laws. Pick was the most conspicuous forward, and Lake a useful partner, but with the exception of the former the Town defenders usually had the measure of all.

The City supporters were generous in their praise of the Town, though they wanted to see the City win, and the cheer when Rennie won the match was as hearty as when Pick opened the scoring. There were 10,300 present, and I should imagine that 10,000 of them cheered that goal.

LUTON TOWN 2

COVENTRY CITY 1

COVENTRY.—Allen; Crown, Tilford; Smith, Baker, Bell; Reay, Roe, Phillips, Lake, Pick.

LUTON.—Banes; Kingham, Hodgson; Clark, Gale, Fraser; Heslop, M'Nestry, Rennie, Dent, Bryce.

Referee. — Mr. W. E. Lewington, Croydon.