

Crusader Comments

ON THE LATEST VICTORY BY LUTON TOWN.

OUR faces will soon wear a set smile if LUTON TOWN keep up their victorious progress. Apart from the setback at the hands of the Palace in the first match of the New Year the programme from Xmas Day onwards has been excellent, and there has been little backwash since the tide turned with the reconstitution of the team at the end of October. The record from that day equals anything in the League, and is well worth special note:

		P	W	L	D	F	A	P
Home		7	5	1	1	18	5	11
Away		8	3	3	2	7	7	8

A season's run like this would almost assure promotion, especially when it is remembered that one defeat away followed a strenuous Cup-tie replay two days before.

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Perhaps even more impressive is the fact that three consecutive games have been won since the forward line was reconstructed: won even more decisively than the scores suggest. The rise in the League table has been more than satisfactory, and the prospects for this month are bright. Bristol Rovers may not have an impressive position in the League, but, like the Town, they have come to their best during the last two months, and represented a tough proposition when they strode on the field on Saturday.

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Afterwards they admitted frankly that they had been beaten by a much better side, and though their manager, Captain Prince-Cox, is a master of blarney when in his natural jestful mood, he is a good sportsman, and his tribute of praise can be realised at full value. The Town's old players, Black, Dennis, and Pointon, were good enough to hand bouquets to the winners.

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As a rule in which players of one side have been prominent members of the opposition are classified as "needle," but this was a refreshing exception of two trips that resulted in goals, one to each side, and a few vigorous charges exchanged by the Town attack and the Rovers' defence, the game was as clean as could be desired, and a credit to the players. A few years back the games with the Rovers were inclined to be peevish, but latterly there has been really good feeling, and sportsmanship was sustained on Saturday.

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To my mind the Rovers played even better football at Luton than when they beat the Town by five goals to one at Eastville in September. That is a rather big assertion, but the previous meeting was remarkable because of official errors. In this game the same referee was more competent, though he missed one or two infringements, and early in the game Yardley was fouled close in goal without the offence being penalised.

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In the game at Bristol the Rovers won by dash and persistence against a ragged team; in the return game the Rovers played more skilful football, and had the Town been no better than at the first meeting, the Rovers would have completed the double. There has been a great change, however, and the Town may now fairly be described as equal to any side in the Division. Had this combination been discovered at the beginning of the season Notts County would not have been in such a happy frame of mind.

The three former Town players were obviously eager to do well, and soon Dennis had an opportunity of showing his ability as a half-back. He has done splendidly at full-back, but the move to the middle line is likely to be of greater value to his side. Always as good with his head as any player the Town have had since the war, he intercepted long passes, and cleared several dangerous situations. Bryce and M'Nestry were a hot packet, however, and being freely fed gave Dennis and Russell a heap of trouble.

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Berry soon showed his ability, but headers from M'Nestry and Yardley rose over the bar, and a great drive by Clark was travelling at express rate for the mark when Russell got his head in the way. Corners were forced, but the goal escaped, and then the Rovers, showing pretty footwork on the right wing, where Black fed Pointon and Forbes with dainty touches, caused the Town rear-guard some care. The Town were having the better of the game generally, but Edwards evoked applause by a fine save when Pointon was through, and Kingham and Hodgson were in demand often.

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However, the success of the Town was only a matter of time, so well were the middle and front lines playing, though the opening goal did come from a free-kick direct. M'Nestry had confounded the defence, and was rushing through when tripped by Russell a few feet outside the penalty area. RENNIE took the shot, and his aim was true in spite of a barrier of players, the ball landing inside the upright the while Berry was in the middle of the goal, his colleagues probably being more of an obstruction than a help.

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The fast movements of the Town gave Berry and his backs cause for uneasiness continually, although the Rovers were by no means idle. Still, Edwards' task was almost a sinecure, and with Yardley showing as much dash and courage as any leader could provide, and the wings working effectively in conjunction, the ball was generally in the Rovers' territory, and too close to Berry for his peace of mind.

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The second goal came when the interval was at hand, and was the culmination of a fierce assault in which the goal escaped two or three times before YARDLEY got his head to a rebound from Russell, who had fallen to the rear of the custodian, and thence it went into the net. So the Town had a winning lead when the breathing space was signalled.

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TOWN		2
ROVERS		0

A brief period of work for the Town defenders was followed by assertiveness of the Town middle line. McGinnigle and Clark were applauded for brilliant work, and the latter laid the plan for the second goal. After making a lot of ground he slipped the ball into the middle, and Rennie deftly turned it along for Yardley, but the centre-forward was forestalled by M'NESTRY, who rushed between the backs, keeping the

ball under control, and as Berry came out the inside-right shot, and though the ball touched the goalkeeper, it found the net all right.

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The Rovers put in all they knew at this period, and their right wing was always dangerous. Little was seen of Dix save for a timely pass or two, and Forbes, splendidly assisted by Black and Pointon, was the principal point of peril. Fraser never had him completely under control, his footwork being very good, and yet Yardley had a better chance than the Rovers' inside men after Fraser had opened up a passage for Rennie and Slicer. The centre-forward, however, was frustrated by Berry's advance.

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It was a needless trip by Fraser that enabled the Rovers to score, for he brought Forbes down just inside the penalty line during a quick dribble, and a spot kick was the correct award. DENNIS made no mistake, Edwards having not the slightest chance. For a time the Rovers made a big fight, but were driven off, and then the Town were in command to the end. Berry kept goal in masterly fashion, but after M'NESTRY had once beaten him, and been given off-side, the same player headed in a centre from Slicer.

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Edwards had one or two opportunities to show his style, though there was nothing particularly troublesome, and then in the closing stages the Town's attack missed several real openings by inability to master the treacherous conditions underfoot. Had there been reasonable foothold for their shots Berry could not have hoped to save efforts from Rennie, Slicer and Yardley, but he kept goal so well that he was worthy of the little cheer he received at the close.

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Edwards's merit was not fully proved, for he was so well protected by Kingham and Hodgson. He made three or four good saves, but had not a tithe of the trouble that fell to Berry. The Town backs were masterful as ever, and in a strong and relentless middle line all did well, with McGinnigle showing his very best. He has no equal for control, and Clark and Fraser were splendid assistants.

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The Town attack again proved almost irresistible, and it was fortunate for the Rovers that travelling was difficult. The ball played tricks on a ground that was very hard under an inch of mud. As against Southend and Watford, the Town inside wingers played a vastly different game. M'Nestry, doing the unorthodox and unexpected, carried confusion into the ranks of the opposition, while Rennie's positional play and precise passes paved the way for frequent assaults from Slicer and Bryce. The latter has but to get the ball across to bring the line to a standard of brilliancy. Slicer did very well again, and Yardley was better than ever, and is undoubtedly in his right place with the line so constituted.

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Berry was a fine goalkeeper, and saved his side from a heavy defeat; the backs were stout-hearted, and kicked and tackled well, while Black and Dennis played splendidly against their old colleagues, and frequently won applause. Dinsdale had a bigger task than he could manage, fine player though he is, and Pointon has evidently settled down at inside-right. He was better than Dix, for he gave Forbes plenty of work, and the latter responded well. The other units of the line were nippy, and their combination better than their finishing.

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LUTON TOWN	4
BRISTOL ROVERS	1

Eight thousand spectators saw the following:

LUTON. — G. C. Edwards; Kingham, Hodgson; Clark, McGinnigle, Fraser; Bryce, M'Nestry, Yardley, Rennie, Slicer.

BRISTOL ROVERS. — Berry; Price, Russell; Black, Dinsdale, Dennis; Forbes, Pointon, Attwood, Dix, Young.

Referee: Mr. F. W. Reeve, Devonport.