

LUTON DISAPPOINT

DEFEATED BY THE NIPPY MEN FROM SOUTHEND

Missed Opportunities

(By Crusader)

LUTON TOWN made a sad mess of their first Saturday home game. The supporters declined to allow the weather to mar their afternoon's sport, but what the elements could not do was achieved by the poor exhibition of the home side, and the crowd, which had expected so much, went home sadly disappointed.

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Naturally, there was a lot of mind searching, and the officials must have been as busy as the rest of us in that respect—perhaps a good deal more so. It was obvious that they would have to re-consider the constitution of the team for yesterday's game at Gillingham. The forwards, from whom so much had been expected, because of the inclusion of reputable goal-scorers, completely failed.

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A lot of criticism has been levelled against the half-back line, but, while a measure was merited, I think the big deficiency was in attack. Every failure of the forwards to combine after they had been put in possession meant that the middle line had to work so much harder. A little thought shows the reasonableness of this argument. Take the magnificent work of Fred Kean; had half his splendid efforts met with the support they deserved, the Town would have won quite comfortably.

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But they lost, and it is useless to cry over spilt milk; the best thing is to try the cow again. We have the consolation of knowing that results in League games all over the country were topsy-turvy from the form point of view. As I mentioned last week, it is better that we should get the worst over now, and there can be little doubt that the form of the team is not comparable with what we know they are capable, as instanced in the last three months of last season.

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Lots of supporters applauded the selection of the forward line, but there is always a danger of sacrificing combination to possible marksmanship when there are so many centre-forwards in a team. Had the shooting been fairly good, the game would have been won; it would have been entertainment enough for the supporters if the very simple chances that were created somehow had been taken; there would not have been much criticism of the means if the effect had been achieved.

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While Southend played much more effective football, they did not get anything like the easy chances that fell to the Town, and, though they might have gone away with a feeling that they had been very unfortunate to lose, it is hard to imagine that they would have failed with such gifts as were presented to the Town inside-forwards. Loasby missed three golden chances, all from close quarters, when only a tap was required to score, and Rennie missed a couple. Southend had nothing like them, except on one occasion—the first goal.

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The question arises as to whether it would be better to return to the constitution of the forward line as it was at the beginning of the year. That is a matter for the management, but it is worth bearing in mind, the only change that would be necessary being the presence of Kean, and, if ever there was a new player to whom the crowd took a fancy, it was the old international. If any player could have won the game "off his own bat" it would have been the right-half.

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The superior speed and control of the Southend forwards in the early stages laid the foundation of their success. The Town could not withstand the strategy and pace, and both the goals they scored in the first quarter of an hour were well deserved. The first came after six minutes, when Imrie had made a magnificent save at full length from Crompton. Even while the crowd were applauding him, however, the ball was slipped into the net by Baron, who was usually on the scene when a chance offered.

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The second was a delightful point, for which Jones deserved as much credit as the scorer. Taking a pass in midfield, he varied his usual practice of passing to the wing, and sent the ball accurately up the middle, and Crompton took it in his stride and ran through to score a fine

goal, with the Town defence as open as a public park. The goals were object lessons in taking chances, but the Town could not profit by them.

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They certainly improved a great deal, putting more speed into their work, and, though there was still an absence of combination, they made things hum for the Southend defence. They should have scored twice before actual success came, for Rennie and Loasby failed badly. Rennie made amends somewhat when he got home a fine shot five minutes before the interval. For a few minutes it appeared as though the Town would level up, so strongly did they attack, and the ball was constantly in the United goal-mouth, but it could not be forced home, and, at the retirement, the visitors were in the lead.

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There was a lot of scrappy play for a while after resuming, and the United lost a lot of their snap and sparkle, but they increased their lead by a further instance of opportunism. Hodgson conceded a corner, and the kick was nicely placed. None of the Town players had been covered, and little Donovan dashed in from the left and, leaping high above the others, nodded the ball downwards, and it flew right away from Imrie's outstretched hands and travelled into the net.

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The United often threatened after this, and, though they never again touched their first half brilliance, they were always dangerous when on the move. The chances, however, came to the Town, and it was exasperating to the crowd to see the splendid work of Kean rendered void by the weakness of the inside-forwards. Loasby twice and Rennie failed in the most extraordinary fashion only a yard or two from goal. Kean, time after time, planted the ball in the goal-mouth, and it was positively amazing that such gilt-edged chances should be missed.

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Imrie and Kingham played splendidly in the Town rearguard, but Tom Hodgson has not yet shown his best. It was unfortunate that Fraser could not play, for though his substitute, Jones, was a great worker, he was prone to wander from position, and this was one of the reasons his namesake on the other side did so much as he liked. Still, Jones is a very useful player, and everybody would give him credit for whole-heartedness. Gale is not yet himself, but will come along all right. Kean was the best player on view, and his positional play, both as a defender and an attacker, were as near ideal as one could expect.

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The forwards were mainly responsible for the defeat. Had they taken their chances the points would have been held all right. Their general work did not deserve goals, perhaps, but the chances came to them from the rear, and the marksmanship was wretched. M'Nestry made one or two good efforts with the aid of Kean, but Loasby was lost completely, and showed no idea of filling an inside wing position. I doubt if he liked the job at all, and would have been glad to see him exchange places with Tait. Rennie was poor in front of goal, and there was not much combination with Bryce, while Tait was energetic, but required a lot of room, and he could not get in a shot.

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Altogether, it was a game we would like to forget, but we can only do that if the team wipes out the memory by rising to the standard they showed last season. That is what we want. Saturday's defeat meant a loss of two points, for the corresponding match was won last season. This is written before the game at Gillingham, but there is another hard match on Saturday at Craven Cottage, and the outlook is not very pleasant unless there is a great improvement.

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SOUTHEND UTD. 3
LUTON TOWN 1

LUTON TOWN.—Imrie; Kingham, Hodgson; Kean, Gale, Jones; M'Nestry, Loasby, Tait, Rennie, Bryce.

SOUTHEND UNITED.—Moore; French, Robinson; Dixon, Wilson, Donovan; Barnett, Jones, Baron, Pike, Crompton. Referee, Mr. J. F. Farmer, Chatham.