

FUTILE FORWARDS

LUTON TOWN YIELD ANOTHER POINT AT HOME

Reading in Luck

(By Crusader).

LUTON TOWN 1
READING 1

LUTON.—Harford; Kingham, Mackey; Kean, McGinnigle, Fraser; Mills, Hutchison, Rennie, Alderson, Roberts.

READING.—Mellors; Rowe, Richardson; Johnson, Allan, Barley; Ritchie, Eaton, Gamble, Oxberry, Chandler.

Referee: Mr. J. M. Wiltshire, Sherborne.

ONCE again Luton Town utterly failed before their own supporters on Saturday, when they allowed Reading to take away a point. It was an extraordinary result on the run of the play, and the only consolation, if any, came later in the evening, when the topsy-turvy results of League games were revealed. Now and then players, and perhaps a few supporters, have felt that the forwards were being unduly blamed for the poor return, but surely none would ever attempt to say that the fault was other than with the attack. So vastly were Luton the superior side in approach and balance of attack that one wondered how on earth the Reading team had been able to reach and to hold a respectable position on the table, and yet with all the play the Town forwards were so ineffective that they could not beat a defence that was never more than mediocre, and in which there was nothing greater than courage and determination.

A SOFT KEY

The game opened on a soft key, and, as far as the Town forwards were concerned, it never rose above that tone. One searched round for some excuse, and all that one could suggest was that the ground was 'ricky,' for in places the ball travelled as though it were hitting concrete, and in other parts it sagged. And that was as much as the most generous could discover. There was an instant mastery over the Reading front line, and their defenders were placed in difficulties almost at the start. When the ball was kept on the move by the Town forwards, well supported by the middle men, it usually arrived somewhere in the neighbourhood of Mellors, but there was inability to control for a shot by the inside forwards, and the wingers were apt to boot the ball too hard in their centres. Mellors' troubles, however, were generally very slight, and apart from three or four efforts of which he had good sight and ample time, there was little in the nature of a severe test. So consistently did the Town halves and backs master the Reading forwards that before the Town scored Harford's job had been limited to the taking of a couple of goal kicks. He had not a shot to save until the Town had taken the lead.

RENNIE WITHOUT RELISH

Play had been in progress nearly a quarter of an hour, during which Chandler, the Reading left winger, had only one kick, whereas all the Town forwards had chances to show their paces and their skill, but from long or short range they quite failed to get in a scoring shot. Most danger came from Mills and Roberts, though they did not show a lot of gumption. Hutchison was notable for dainty initiation, but usually when his passes came along they were so tardy that the Reading defenders were in position again, and the Town leader was crowded out. Nevertheless, Rennie was not relishing his job. It was galling to see the very fine work of the Town halves all come unstuck through the ineptitude of the forwards, and they had not the same ground for complaint as the Reading attack, who usually had to climb up for the ball. The Town forwards were getting it along the ground very well, but there were not three decent passes through the middle during the first half, a fact that the raucous critics of Rennie were overlooking.

THE GOAL

Mellors made a good save from Hutchison, and once Rennie tried to flit the ball when it was right under the bar and the goalkeeper nowhere near. Had he restrained himself the ball would have dropped on his head and he could not have failed to score. Rowe once saved his goal by a desperate bit of work when Mellors was out of position, but these escapes were as nothing to the bad marksmanship of the attack. Had Rennie been in anything like his average shooting form he must have given the Town a substantial lead before the interval. He had the privilege of scoring the first goal, and it was very neatly done. A clever pass by Hutchison enabled Mills to race away and centre, and RENNIE, at an acute angle, managed to direct the ball downwards and it found the net right away from Mellors. Following this the Town goal should have fallen, but Chandler, after beating both Kingham and Mackey by astute footwork, could not get any powder behind his shot, and Harford had no difficulty in accepting it under the bar.

Roberts was responsible for a few bright efforts when he ran inside, but if his final pass proved accurate, his colleagues could do nothing with it; while on the occasions he tried himself the direction was pitiful. Apart from a few rushes by Bamble, who was trying desperately to make a good show in his first game for the visitors, and one or two runs by Ritchie, Reading saw little of the ball, and their endeavours were crude and even less troublesome than those of the Town. Up to the change of ends Harford's job was the easiest he has had this season.

LUTON 1
READING 0

Whether there had been a heart-to-heart talk in the Reading dressing room at half-time, I do not know, but the visitors came out and re-started with more energy than either side had shown in the first session. Harford had to save straightway from a dash by the visitors' right wing, and twice more he handled in quick succession, the Town showing no great hurry to amend their position. With the crowd shouting for something to happen, Roberts took it into his head to do something, and he drew Rowe and then lifted the ball right into the goal-mouth; it appeared to be just the right type of pass for Rennie, but he missed the ball completely, and Mellors easily saved. From this point the play deteriorated until it became almost farcical, for however the Town halves and backs fed their front line, all the attempts to score were futile. The crowd groaned time after time as the attacks came to nothing. A flag-kick from Roberts was misjudged by the visiting defenders, and the ball hit the upright, but there was no one able to take advantage of the blunder, and the sequel to all the misses at Mellors' end came just afterwards.

GAMBLE'S GOAL

Ritchie, who had been dangerous when he got the opportunity, collared the ball just inside the Town half, and skilfully outwitted the defenders by running inside. He went on without obstruction until he was right in front of goal, about ten yards out, and then he had so much space that he could have shot without giving Harford a chance. Instead, however, he passed to GAMBLE, who was better placed, and he shot into the net, an appeal for offside being negatived. I thought he was offside, but even if he were, it was no more than could be expected in the circumstances. Little as the visitors deserved to be on equality, the Town had earned the trouble for themselves by their erratic play and missed chances at the other end.

SCRAPPY FINISH

The last half-hour was so scrappy and ragged that the crowd treated the match as a comedy. So often had the Town failed that there appeared to be nothing more to expect, and derisive and sarcastic comments were freely shouted to the forwards. The halves and backs were urged to try and get a goal, and they certainly came as near success as the forwards. All the backs and halves worked hard, and Kean and Fraser were frequently rushing into the Reading penalty area to try and do some damage, but all to no purpose. Corners were forced, and centres were placed quite neatly, but the inside forwards could do nothing right at close quarters. Reading made a few spasmodic rushes, but they were even worse than the Town, and the game ended without a cheer for either side.

DEFENCE ALL RIGHT

Apart from a brief period in the second half, when they seemed to be fed up with the failures of the forwards, no fault could be found with the Town defenders. They were always the masters of the visitors' attack. Harford had a holiday, and Kingham and Mackey were good enough to deal with what their half-backs left for them to undertake. Mackey, especially, had a good day, and it was amusing to see the way he countered the strenuous efforts of Gamble, who was very well watched, and might well have done a lot of damage had he been allowed to run loose. It was in the middle line again, however, that the Town's best was to be found. They played finely to a man. Kean worked himself almost to exhaustion, and none could have done more than he to put life into the attack. Fraser was brilliant, especially in support of the forwards, while McGinnigle gave one of his best displays.

FORWARDS!

One hardly knows what to say of the attack. Rennie's return to the leadership was expected to bring goals and he was the butt of most of the discontent of the crowd. It appeared to me that he did not trust his knee, and now and then he was limping, but there was no enthusiasm in his work, even if one makes allowance for the lack of support he received from his colleagues. Hutchison did a lot of clever things, but somehow he does not seem to attain the same understanding with his colleagues when he is in the first eleven as he does with the second string. Certainly he was the brainiest unit in attack. Alderson was not the effective player we saw in the Cup-ties; he was ponderous and slow, and did not control well. Mills and Roberts were inconsistent, sometimes showing high class, and just as often going to the other extreme. Taken generally, it was the worst display the forwards have given this season.

Reading were just a side of worriers and workers, and after giving praise to their defenders for ceaseless resistance, nothing further need be said.

Attendance, 6,219; receipts, £351 10s. 1d.

Ball was won by Basil Spary, 38, Holland-road, Luton. Ticket 65242.