

BEATING A HANDICAP

LUTON TOWN GAIN A POINT AT BRISTOL

Team Changes Work Well

(By Crusader)

BRISTOL ROVERS 0
LUTON TOWN 0

BRISTOL ROVERS: Deby; Pickering, Donald; Irving, Routledge, Eyres; Wyper, M'Nestry, V. Gibbins, McKay, Green.

LUTON TOWN: Imrie; Kingham, Mackey; Brown, McGinnigle, Fraser; Mills, Hutchison, Rennie, Nelson, Rowe.

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

CAN we take LUTON TOWN'S display at BRISTOL as a happy augury for the big holiday programme? If they serve up the football and the splendid fighting spirit they showed at Eastville, then they will have a very good Easter. Their play was reminiscent of their best in the several Cup-ties they won, and had it not been for the very severe handicap of having McGinnigle a passenger for fully three quarters of the game, including the period he was away altogether, they would have won. The Rovers were almost swept off their feet in the early stages, and any idea they may have had of reproducing the fine form exhibited at Luton, and bringing off a good victory was speedily dispelled by the manner in which the Town opened out from the start. True the Rovers had the better of the game as a whole, but there were extended periods, especially in the second half, when they had to fight desperately hard to keep the Town from winning. The defence earned the highest praise, for they sadly missed the assistance of McGinnigle as a defending half, well though Fraser played in that position. It meant that the forwards were disorganised for the rest of the game, but every man seemed to sense that his very utmost was necessary, and to give it accordingly. The team changes worked very well, and there was really wonderful fighting spirit fore and aft.

A GOOD START

When Fraser lost the toss it meant that the Town had to face wind and sun, but they quickly gave an earnest of what they intended, for before a Rover had touched the ball, or any other Luton player but the forwards, Rowe had taken a drive at goal. The ball was kicked off and at once switched out to Mills, who returned it and each man in the line passed the ball to his neighbour on the left, and finally Rowe was left with a shooting chance, but lifted the ball over the bar. This was no mere flash in the pan, for the Town halves, playing well up to the forwards, tackled opponents promptly, and by swinging passes they made repeat attacks that soon had the Rovers rattled. Brown shot wide, and then a deft touch by Hutchison sent Nelson through, and he was on the point of shooting from three yards' range when a defender lunged the ball desperately behind for a corner kick. M'Nestry soon proved that he meant business, and was the live wire of the Rovers' attack, but Imrie had nothing to do except to prepare, and the ball was soon at the other end.

IMRIE PENALISED

Pickering worked magnificently, and several times saved the Rovers' goal by his relentless tackling. Mills was very active, and once darted through a ruck of players with the ball at his toe, but on the hard ground it moved too fast for him, and with the Rovers' goal packed at this stage he was prevented from reaching it before it had passed out of play. After Nelson had been badly tripped Mackey dropped the ball into the goal-mouth, and a typical Rennie shot crashed into a defender. Gibbins and M'Nestry worked cleverly enough, but either Kingham or Mackey kept them at bay when they had passed the middle men, and such work as fell to Imrie was of a light nature. In one attack, however, he was adjudged to have carried the ball more than the stipulated distance, and a free kick was given against him when it should have been the other way owing to the manner in which he was tackled by the Rovers' forwards. There was much excitement as the referee placed the ball for the kick almost on the edge of the goal area, and directly in front of goal. M'Nestry and Gibbins went to take the kick, and first one and then another Town player went and stood beside the player who was to receive the pass, and it was about a minute before the kick could be taken. Eventually it was managed, but Hutchison had so placed himself that he was able to block the attempt at a shot, and the ball was scrambled away. The Rovers, in strange contrast to their game at Luton, adopted kick and rush tactics, and their backs and halves lifted the ball into the air too frequently to enable the forwards to do much good, for it travelled fast after bouncing on the hard ground.

MCGINNIGLE INJURED

The injury to McGinnigle took place in midfield, and followed a tussle between him and M'Nestry, with Gibbins close at hand, and M'Nestry's elbow struck the Town pivot a hard blow in the eye. Blood poured from a deep gash, and the referee promptly stopped the game, and Horace Pakes had to take the centre-half off. Fraser went to the vacant position, and Nelson dropped back to half, with the four forwards spread out a little more. When play was resumed Eyres started to dribble near the centre-line, but Mills so pestered him that he was forced to run right back almost to his own corner flag, and though he cleared, the ball was returned and Rennie made a good effort to capture the ball as it bounced in the goal-mouth. Following a sharp assault by the Rovers' left wing, Imrie had to push behind a hard shot from McKay, and then there

was a short fusillade of the Town goal, but the defenders packed well and tackled swiftly. McGinnigle returned to play on the extreme right, Hutchison crossing to inside-left, and Mills going inside-right. McGinnigle tried hard to get the ball across when it came his way, but was handicapped by the mass of plaster and bandage and could not see properly. The Rovers had the better of the exchanges to the interval, but the defenders played grandly, and there was no really dangerous shot at that end, the best effort being from Rennie, Beby saving well. Half-time:

ROVERS 0
TOWN 0

When the Rovers lined up again it was seen that M'Nestry was at centre-forward, McKay in his usual position at inside-right, and Gibbins inside-left. M'Nestry was prominent at once, but Mackey charged him off, and the Town right wing went through, and Brown followed up to take a pass back from McGinnigle and try his luck. Beby stopped the shot, but could not hold the ball, and had to pick up sharply before Rennie was on him. Mackey again stopped the mercurial M'Nestry in clever fashion, but the Rovers returned, M'Nestry making tremendous efforts to break through. Once he was allowed to go from an obviously offside position on the right wing, and shot well, the ball travelling right across the goal-mouth. Then there were two very bad offside decisions that kept the Town on the defensive. Twice Rennie got the ball out to Rowe, who was waiting inside his own half, but when he raced up and caught the ball he was whistled offside. On the second occasion the Town players protested strongly, but the referee paid no heed. A quick assault in which Mills and Hutchison were noticeable for hard work, gave Rennie a chance, but Donald got in the way, and when the ball went to Hutchison that played shot over.

BROWN ON THE SPOT

M'Nestry then sprinted out on the right and outdistanced opposition, before banging in a terrific shot which sailed a foot too high. Again M'Nestry led a forcible assault, and managed to tip the ball to Gibbins, who was not five yards out, with only Imrie to beat, but as he placed the ball for his shot Brown darted in and kicked the ball off his toe. It was returned from the right, and M'Nestry got in a fierce drive which struck the post and rebounded. It was some minutes before the Town could get going again, but it was clear that the players were concentrating on filling the gap caused by McGinnigle's defection, and did it well. Nelson worked heroically, and from one of his clearances the ball was taken down, and Rennie sent out to Rowe, who sprinted in and drove hard at goal, Beby making a fine save by tipping the ball over the bar. From the flag-kick Mills got hold and tried to rush the ball through, but was beaten close in. Kingham fouled Green, and from the free kick Imrie brought off a good save. Once more Nelson sent Rowe away, and from his centre Donald was forced to run the ball behind. The flag-kick was cleared, and then there was some incident in midfield which resulted in a stoppage while the referee spoke to Rennie and Donald, who had not been getting on very well from the start.

DESPERATE EXCHANGES

Nelson made a great clearance from a corner kick, and Rennie snapped up a loose ball and went away to the left before driving the ball across, but there was none up to take the pass. M'Nestry tried hard to bore through, but with Fraser blocking his path, and Kingham and Mackey always ready to meet the centres from either wing, he was not doing so well as at the beginning of the half. Beby again saved finely from Rowe, and Kingham robbed Gibbins very neatly. The Town were playing with more confidence than ever, and Beby was often in action. From a free-kick against Irving, Mackey, from the centre-line, drove in a great shot, which Beby was glad to tip over the bar. The Rovers came back, and Imrie had to hit up a centre from Wyper, and as the ball came down almost straight under the bar, his height and reach enabled him to get there first and punch away. Mills and McGinnigle, with Brown helping them along then took play to the other end, and Mills lifted the ball out to Rowe, who beat Pickering, and then turned the ball across goal for Rennie to fire on the run, and a flashing drive made the spectators gasp as the ball rose and scraped the bar in its flight. A few inches lower and it must have been a goal. Just afterwards Imrie took a goal kick, and the ball bounced out of play at the other end of the field. The Rovers strove hard in the closing stages, but could make no impression on the Town defence, and the game ended with the ball in the Rovers' half.

GREAT DEFENCE

It was fine to see Imrie back in something like his very best form. He did not have a tremendous amount of work, but such as came his way was accepted with confidence, and he cleared expeditiously. Kingham and Mackey were a grand pair of backs, their kicking and tackling being sure and strong, and they had little difficulty in holding anyone save M'Nestry. Both played remarkably well, and so did the halves. Brown was very clever, and showed a speed in recovery that was disconcerting to the opposition, while he gave splendid service to his forwards. McGinnigle was always prominent in the early stages of the game, and after his departure Fraser went centre-half, and showed as much skill there as on the flank. Fraser was

suffering from a damaged knee and ankle, and must have been in pain, judging by the extent of the swelling at the end, but stuck to his work grimly, and was always too much for Gibbins. Nelson played a magnificent game at left-half and did well while he was in the attack. He stuck to Wyper and McKay, and never gave them a moment's peace when the ball was in their neighbourhood, and his clearances were always prompt and useful. He also found time to take a hand in the attack. •

PLUCKY FORWARDS

Rennie did not get a great many chances, and had very hard luck with two shots. He distributed well, and Rowe responded valiantly. The winger gave a lot of trouble to Pickering and Donald, and put up one of his best shows. Hutchison, if not so prominent as at Newport, did very fine work, and but for sharp tackling would have been a dangerous forward. Mills played a capital game and was tireless both in his efforts to penetrate and in the way he fell back to assist the defence. The team spirit has never been better, and the point was thoroughly merited.

Bebby kept goal well for the Rovers, and Pickering was a powerful back. There was not much to choose among the middlemen, but Kyres was probably the most useful, while M'Nestry was by far the best forward on the field.

There were 6,000 spectators.