

DISAPPOINTMENT

THRILLING FINISH SAVES A POINT FOR LUTON

PLUCKY VISITORS

(By CRUSADER)

LUTON TOWN 1
SOUTHEND UNITED 1
LUTON—Preedy: Mackey, Reece; Kean, McGinnigle, Fraser; Bell (S.), Martin, Bell (T.), Stephenson, Russell.
SOUTHEND.—Whitelaw; Stevenson, Robinson; Williams, Wilson, Smith; Oswald, Jones, Johnson, Cheesmur, Clark.
Referee.—Mr. W. J. Lewington, Croydon.

DISAPPOINTMENT was writ larger and larger on the faces of Luton Town followers on Saturday. They had responded to the efforts of the directors by turning up in something like record numbers for an opening game, and my first hope is that they will not allow this disappointment to damp their enthusiasm. I am going to say that the Town played well, but not nearly so well as they can and will play when they have settled down. The hard ground and light ball tended to nullify the advantage of choice of ground and to put Southend on a more level footing, and all credit to them, they made full use of it. In several respects they played better football, though they did not do so much pressing. What they did, however, was performed with better method and understanding, and that was why they nearly won.

GRIM DEFENCE

In their defence there was a fierceness and determination that seemed to surprise some of the Town forwards, and there was not the necessary spirited reply to break down the will of the opposition. It would not be correct to say that Luton had the better chances, though they were in the Southend quarters more often than Southend were threatening Luton's goal, for they could not make the chances so plain as were those made by the visitors, and actually, the visitors should have won the match on the superior opportunities they had. Not all the vigilance and agility of Preedy would have availed had the Southend forwards shot better when they had overcome the Town backs, and though the visitors were probably content with a point at the finish they would not have been begrudged their success had they taken both.

CHANCES MISSED

After the opening stages, in which the Town promised more than they ultimately fulfilled, Southend began to strike back; their backs lammed the ball hard and went for the man without hesitation, and the nip in their tackling seemed to upset the balance of the Town attack. The visitors' wingers moved in a manner that chilled the enthusiasm of the crowd, and the Town backs were none too happy in their resistance. Clark missed a great chance by shooting tamely wide when Mackey had been completely beaten by the bounce, but at the other end, Martin might have been successful had his head made contact correctly with a fine centre from Sam Bell.

HITTING BACK

There was plenty of life in the Town middle line, and Fraser achieved brilliant things at this stage. Once he came right through, and we looked for the first goal from him, but his very hard shot cracked the head of a defender and glanced behind. The Town accepted this inspiration, and worked finely, and Russell made a grand run and wound up with a drive that almost knocked off Wilson's head. At least, the centre-half seemed dazed for a while, though others thought he was foxing, and had actually stopped the shot with his bunched arms. There were lively exchanges before the cross-over, with Southend again missing chances; Preedy made a fine save from Cheesmur, but the latter and Clark had the goal almost at their mercy just afterwards, and failed to score.

LUTON 0
SOUTHEND 0

The Town re-started quite strongly, though the only real threat came as the result of a free-kick, Bell heading wide when Whitelaw was beaten. However, Southend responded very gamely, and they took the lead when Fraser used his hands to stop a pass by Williams to the right wing. Williams took the free kick, snaked the ball along the ground to Jones, who returned it, and then there followed a neat triangular movement on the right: Oswald centred right across goal, just too far out for Preedy to get the ball, and JOHNSON headed a very nice goal. Following a light skirmish by the Town, Southend took the game in hand for some time.

DESPERATE PLAY

It was some time before the Town halves got a grip on the game again, and then there was more trouble for the visitors' defence. Martin played better, and in one raid he dribbled through and shot hard and low, Whitelaw just managing to save at the expense of a corner. Other corners followed, but the pressure was relieved, and the Southend forwards fought back vigorously, and a fine effort by Clark was splendidly saved by Preedy. There was a touch of desperation about the play of the Town now, and they began to reply as vigorously as they were receiving. Russell bored through, and Martin got too far under the ball; Stephenson was knocked off when he essayed to reach the ball after Whitelaw had failed to hold it; and time after time the goal was in danger, though not a good shot was put in save for one drive by Tom Bell, which Whitelaw saved at the second attempt.

THE EQUALISER

The visitors concentrated on defence, and the Town hammered away from all quarters, yet there seemed some deficiency in their methods, and the Southend defenders were too quick on the ball. Fraser worked in the shadow of the stand like a Hercules, and on the other flank Kean was putting in all he knew, while Mackey made raids into the other half. Wilson was the mainstay of the opposition at this stage, for Stephenson was suffering from a hard knock sustained in a clash with Russell. Hundreds of spectators were leaving the ground when the surprise came. Martin obtained, and after evading two or three opponents, sent the ball out to the left; Russell—whether he tried to shoot or centre matters not—sent the ball spinning along the ground across the goal-mouth; Wilson tried to reach it, Tom Bell and Stephenson both endeavoured to plug it, but tantalisingly it squirmed under their feet; SAM BELL sized up the situation and raced in to hit with terrific force, and Whitelaw dived in vain.

WAS IT A GOAL?

Then came the hottest period of the game, and the Southend goal had escapes every few seconds. The ball was swung across goal from side to side, and there was a packing of the goalmouth; the Town forwards and halves flung themselves into the fray, but just as strenuously the Southend players fought back, kicking anywhere for safety. Suddenly, Stephenson got a chance, and drove the ball in hard and low; Whitelaw dived, but was beaten by the pace as the ball hit the foot of the upright, level with the goal-line, went along behind the goalkeeper's swaying legs, and careered out near the farther post. The Town players rushed to congratulate Stephenson, and the spectators were jubilant, but the referee shook his head and refused to allow the goal. That was a minute from the end, and there was not another chance.

SOUTHEND'S DESERTS

After the match the Town players were unanimous in their claim that the ball

was well inside the goal; David Jack, the Southend manager, said that he would have given a goal; and at least a dozen spectators who were immediately behind the goal asserted that there was no question about the ball being over the line. From the Press box that also appeared to be the case, with the referee too far from the scene to see clearly, and so Southend got the benefit of the doubt, which was quite, right, although it was hard on the Town to be deprived of the victory. Nevertheless, they would have been very fortunate to have had both points, and Southend deserved all they got for the magnificent display they gave.

TOWN DEFENCE AND—

Now a word about the players. Preedy was in no way to blame for the goal against him. He made several very fine saves, and his handling of the ball, if it might have been cleaner on two or three occasions, generally was very good. He has a big arm span, and he came out and punched clear when necessary. Mackey was not comfortable against a lively wing, and the best chances for the visitors came when he was beaten by the bounce and spin of the ball on the hard turf. Reece played splendidly, was sure in kicking and tackling, and will take a lot of moving from the position. In front of him was the best half-back on the field in Fraser, who gave a brilliant exhibition, and the forwards should have made better use of the support he and Kean provided. The captain played better than at the beginning of last season, though there was not so much triangular work with his right wing as we have seen. McGinnigle was a worker as usual, covering a lot of ground, but he could not play the third-back game as effectively as did Wilson. He will improve on this showing.

—ATTACK

The forwards were never well together. Individually they did good things, but there was a lack of understanding, and the pace of the line was made to appear slow because the tackling of the opposition was so energetic and determined. Sam Bell centred well, and Martin, after a moderate first half, played very well in the second. Stephenson was clever, but will have to find another yard of pace, and his first experience of Third Division football will have taught him a lot; he knows now that there is even less ceremony in this game than in the top class. He and Russell made good runs, and will damage a lot of defences. The latter threatened two or three times to win the match off his own bat, but Southend evidently knew him, and did not give him too much scope. Tom Bell was a trier, as usual, always in the thick of the fray, but he had few chances for a shot, as Wilson invariably bobbed up at the wrong moment for the attacker and blocked his way.

THE VISITORS

Southend's defence was very strong. Apart from Wilson, there was no other player of unusual physical proportions, but every man was a fighter, game and even fierce in tackling, recking nothing of the will of the opposition, and wrecking assault after assault with grim zeal. Whitelaw did not have such stiff propositions as Preedy, so well protected was he by his backs, including Wilson. The latter was the mainstay of the defence, and rarely did he play in advance of his backs. Williams played finely, but often transgressed without penalty the laws of the game, and Smith played good football. Jones was the brains of the attack, Cheesmur did clever work in a quieter way, and Oswald and Clark were clever little wingers. Johnson did not have more chances than Bell, but required a lot of watching.

The attendance was 12,263, and the receipts £554 5s. This was a splendid send-off from the supporters, and it is to be hoped that it will be maintained, and increased.

LONDON COMBINATION

Watford Reserves v. Luton Town Reserves

A good crowd anticipated a keen game for the opening match of the season. The ground was very hard and uneven, and it spoiled the game to a large extent. The players were unable to get the ball properly under control, and the spectators kept crying to them to keep it on the ground.

Watford set the pace, and were very fast. Coen was the first in action, and headed the ball cleanly, punning out several dangerous centres.

It was fully ten minutes before Luton got away, and Rennie had a shot, but was well wide. Inayne was using his head well, and Hunt was bottled up. Cook was slow in opening out the game for Luton, and the wingers were starved for passes. The quickness of Watford showed Luton to be a poor combination, and it was only occasionally Luton got away. The half-backs were running out of position and leaving Kingham and Coote to bear the brunt.

Watford scored after thirty minutes through LANE, who was playing a very clever game at inside-right. The ball came over from the right wing too high for Coen to reach, though he attempted it, and it was lobbed back for Lane to score with a dropping shot just under the bar.

Luton played better after this, and Hackett worked hard and with any amount of pluck. The inside forwards tried hard to put Cook through, but Reed never left him a yard. It was a hard game, and the heat began to have an effect on some of the players, and all of them were ready for a breather.

Half-time:—

WATFORD RES. 1. LUTON TN. RES. 0.
The second half was just as keen, with Luton having a full share of the game, and with the wing halves taking the Watford inside forwards and the full-backs covering the wingers, the Watford team-work fell off considerably.

Still the Luton wingers did not make ground as they should have done, especially Brown, whose great speed should have carried him past the Watford defence easily.

Hutchison was clever, and with Rennie, played well up to a point, but never finished well. Hackett still tried hard, and had bad luck when he was knocked off the ball in the act of shooting.

Hutchison went through and was brought down in the penalty area, but the claim was disallowed.

Watford wanted that second goal to make sure of the points, but Coen, Coote, Kingham and Thayne defended well. Coen made a remarkable save when he put one shot over the bar.

Smith was a worker, but both he and Beck wandered too much. After 25 minutes, McHugh was penalised for carrying, and Brown placed the free kick so accurately that COOK dashed in and headed a great goal. A minute later Cook took deliberate aim, but, luckily for Watford, it hit a defender, and it was scrambled away. Result:—

WATFORD RESERVES 1
LUTON TOWN RESERVES 1