

WEAKENED DEFENCE

EXPLAINED LUTON'S DEFEAT AT CHARLTON

Forwards Again Played Well

(By Crusader)

CHARLTON ATHLETIC 4
(Boulter 2, Hobbis, Allen)
LUTON TOWN 2
(Roberts Ball)

CHARLTON.—Bartram; Smith, Oakes; Harris, Turner, Dodgin; Wilkinson, Robinson, Allen, Boulter, Hobbis.

LUTON.—Coen; Kingham, Smith; Brown, McGinnigle, Fraser; Crompton, Bell, Ball, Roberts, Stephenson.

Referee: D. G. Kirby, Coventry.

AS a football side, Luton Town were fully the equal of Charlton at the Valley. There need be no misgivings about that.

At full strength, the Town could have won the match. They lost because the weakened defence could not stand up to the hammer and tongs methods of the home forwards.

That, in brief, is the story of the defeat, though there were other features that were not pleasing to retrospect. The second goal and the fourth goal scored by Charlton were due to sheer collapse of the defence, and the third goal was an offside goal if there has ever been an offside goal scored this season. The referee allowed more pushing and shoving, and sly tricks, than we have had for a long time, and to me he appeared to be swayed by a crowd anxious to see their favourites overcome a team that had beaten a First Division side. In a previous game this season the same referee did far better than in this match. In spite of this, however, the reason for the defeat was mainly attributable to weakness in defence.

STEPHENSON SHINES

Both goalkeepers had an early touch, and play travelled quickly from end to end, the Town holding their own well, though they were facing a very cold breeze and a fine drizzle. The home defence soon showed their mettle, but Stephenson proved that he was on his best behaviour, for he gave a lot of trouble to Smith, and in the early stages it was the combination of the Town left wing that caused most anxiety to Bartram and his backs. Similarly, at the other end, the Charlton right wing brought the danger.

Wilkinson was twice baffled before he got over a good centre after Smith had missed the ball; Allen went to meet it with McGinnigle close up to him, and the centre-forward craftily allowed the ball to go on, and BOULTER raced in and scored a very fine goal, about which there could be no quibble.

HARD PLAY

Just before this, Ball had taken a long pass up the middle, and he beat Turner neatly, but in the scuffle, lost sight of the ball, and the big centre-half was able to recover. The Town forwards played strongly, and Roberts and Stephenson broke through twice, Bartram saving well, but the ball was soon back again, and Coen was called upon several times. Crompton got the ball across well, but Turner's headwork was good, and he never hesitated to have a go at Ball, using his hands on the centre-forward's back twice without earning the intervention of the referee. Fraser once went right through, but at the finish he could not get in a centre because the ball travelled too fast for him. Allen sent over at the other end, and Charlton pressed hotly for a time, swinging the ball about finely. Fraser and Stephenson again made hash of the home right flank in defence, and the captain got over a splendid centre for Crompton to shoot hard into the side net.

LEVEL PEGGING

Stephenson got through from a wide pass by Bell, and, from his flag-kick, the home goal was in danger for some minutes, and Bartram saved nicely from Crompton. The Town were playing splendidly at this stage, and they fully deserved the equalising goal.

Fraser sent the ball out to the right after a neat dribble up the middle, and, from Crompton's centre, Ball deceived the backs by heading backward; ROBERTS snapped up the ball, and, without hesitation, shot hard and true just inside the post, Bartram having no chance.

There was no slackening of pace, and each goal was assailed in turn. Wilkinson and Robinson then did a bit of clever headwork, and the ball was banged right across goal; it appeared that both Kingham and Coen might have got to the ball, but it alighted right across goal, and HOBBS, rushing in, managed to collect it, and, from almost under the bar, turned the ball past Coen.

BEAUTY BY BALL

The game was fast and vigorous, but the Town had to defend again for some minutes, and then the referee had a word with Ball and Turner, who were at loggerheads owing to the free use of the centre-half's hands on Ball. The Town played strongly, the right wing being more prominent than in the early stages, and Crompton did good work, giving Oakes no peace. Bell and Brown made a strong move, and the former eventually forced a corner.

Crompton placed the flag-kick well, and BALL headed a glorious goal to make the scores even again. It was a beauty.

There was a scuffle in the Charlton goalmouth just before this flag-kick was taken, and the referee apparently took the names of Ball and Turner. Charlton tried hard to get the lead before the change of ends, but failed, and, at the retirement, the score stood:

CHARLTON ATHLETIC 2
LUTON TOWN 2

There was much confidence in the Town team when they restarted, and they appeared to have a good chance with the breeze behind them. They started with a warm attack, and Brown dashed through and banged the ball into the goalmouth, Turner clearing after a struggle with Ball and Roberts. Stephenson and Roberts next broke through, and the ball went across to the right, but Crompton was deliberately pushed off the ball by Oakes. It was some time before Charlton made a dangerous move, and then a wide pass found Wilkinson unattended. He drew the defence, and rattled the ball across goal.

Hobbis had only Coen in front of him, and the Town appealed for offside, but without success, the left-winger tried hard to shoot through, but the ball skidded from his foot to ALLEN, who netted.

ISSUE DECIDED

The Town again set up a furious attack, and the home rearguard had all their work cut out to hold them, but a liberal use of weight brought relief. Roberts and Ball

worked desperately, and Bell had a hard shot deflected by Oakes. Turner played a purely defensive game, and scarcely left Ball a moment, and, had the referee been able to follow closely what was happening, he must have penalised the centre half several times. Again and again, the home goal was attacked, and another equaliser was expected, but it did not come.

Eventually, there was a reply at the other end, in which Hobbis and Boulter had Kingham and McGinnigle beaten, and, after two or three shots had been blocked, BOULTER crashed the ball home for the fourth goal.

FORWARD STRIVINGS

The Town forwards played hard as ever, and strove desperately to get on level terms, and Brown and Fraser gave splendid support, but when the ball was returned the Town defenders could not stave off the resolute attacks of Charlton in the same manner as the pair at the other end. Coen saved brilliantly several times, twice at full length, and two or three corners were forced, from which the goal had escapes. When the Town forwards got away again, Ball received from the left wing and slipped the ball past Bartram as the latter ran out, but Oakes had wisely stepped back into the goalmouth, and kicked away from the line. Kingham was kicked, and limped badly after receiving attention, and the Town made another fierce assault, the forwards doing courageous work all along the line, but they could not better a way through.

In the closing stages Kingham went to outside-right, but could not kick the ball when it came to him, and he was eventually called from the field. Crompton went to outside-left, Fraser going back, and Stephenson playing at half. Stephenson held up Wilkinson cleverly, and set his forwards moving, and in one hot attack engineered by him he found it possible to rush up and try a shot, which whizzed only a foot wide. To the end the Town fought hard, but there was no real danger to either goal in the last few minutes.

THE PLAYERS

Coen again did fine work in goal, and it was apparently a misunderstanding between him and Kingham that enabled the Athletic to take the lead for the second time. As a pair, Kingham and Smith left a good deal to be desired. Kingham found the forceful methods of the home forwards discomfiting, and Smith was not so good at left-back as he has been on the other flank, although it must not be overlooked that the defence as a whole was affected by the game in mid-week. McGinnigle struggled hard against a powerful leader in Allen, who was always using his physical advantage to good purpose, and Brown and Fraser played cleverly all through, and gave their forwards a lot of work. Every man did well in attack, and it was good to see Stephenson do so much better. He was strong and assertive all the time, and once more he showed that he could play at half as well as forward. The others played splendidly, too, and they had the satisfaction of knowing that no forward line has done better than they did at the Valley.

For Charlton, Oakes was again a powerful figure at back, and a good captain. The halves all played resolute football, with Turner lucky to get away with so many infringements. Wilkinson and Hobbis were the most dangerous forwards.