THE BATTLE AND THE BREEZE

HARD-EARNED POINT FOR LUTON

Ball's Usual

(By CRUSADER)

GILLINGHAM 1
Baldwin.

LUTON TOWN 1
Ball.

GILLINGHAM. — Holland; Marsden, Lester; Randle, Barrie, Kidd; L. Balcombe, Anstiss, Baldwin, Doncaster, Williams.

LUTON. — Coen; Kingham, Mackey; Colquhoun, Thayne, Smith; Crompton, Martin, Ball, Roberts, Stephenson.

Referee: R. G. Rudd Kenten.

GILLINGHAM played a desperate game, even more so than usual, and they were evidently keen on preventing the TOWN from escaping defeat for the fourth season in succession.

At times they threw themselves into the battle with utter recklessness, and very nearly brought off a victory by these methods.

There was no comparison between the sides for football skill, though now and then there were quite delightful passing bouts by the home left wing, backed by Kidd. In general, however, the whole team went in for kick-and-rush methods, accompanied by lusty charging and fierce tackling, and at the end Horace Pakes, who had been fearful almost every minute that he would have to rush on for more serious trouble than was actually experienced, must have been very pleased that the team came off whole.

HELPING BREEZE

Gillingham, with the aid of a strong breeze, had the lion's share of the game in the first half, and though the goal they scored was of a rather fluky character, perhaps their courage and determination merited the half-time advantage. In the second half they were very fortunate to escape defeat. There were periods when the Town almost bombarded Holland, and few spectators could have hoped that the home side would avoid defeat. Luton supporters visiting Gillingham for the first time came away with a good opinion of the ground, and probably a worse opinion of the crowd, though it has not been the usual experience of the Town team to find so much hostility, and no team ever gave cause for less antagonism in that respect.

STONE THROWN

There was an incident in the first half about which Gillingham may hear further. A huge kick from the Gillingham rear sent the ball fast between the corner flag and the goal, and Balcombe tried to capture it; Mackey kept pace with him to see that he did not, and the home player, just before reaching the goal-line, decided to test his weight, and he is a biggish fellow, against that of the Town captain. As a result, Balcombe was knocked off his feet, and the ball passed out of play and landed against the fence. Mackey retrieved the ball, and as he turned round to bring it for the goal-kick, he was struck in the middle of the back by a stone. He reported the affair to the referee, and thereafter the crowd made a butt of the Town captain for almost the whole of the game.

BALL'S EARLY THRILL

Losing the toss, the Town had to face the breeze, which went direct from goal to goal. There was a quick thrust by the Town forwards straightway, and Ball got past the back to shoot hard; Holland managed to get the ball at the second attempt.

This escape seemed to rattle both the crowd and the home team.

Quickly the ball travelled from end to end, but the home team relied chiefly upon hard kicking and quick pursuit by the forwards, with eager challenging of the Town defenders, who, however, stood up well to their job. One tremendous kick by Lester had to be taken by Coen and from a centre by Balcombe, Anstiss headed well, but Coen was in the right place. When the Town got away, Holland did well to take a handful from Stephenson, and a clever move by Crompton and Ball also tested the resources of the home custodian. For some time Gillingham pressed heavily, but all their shots had to be taken from well out, and Coen's business was frequent rather than strenuous. Offside decisions against Crompton and Ball were given by a linesman who did not make allowance for the pace of the players, but on that score Gillingham also suffered now and then.

AN OFFSIDE DECISION

There was a hot thrust by the Town, and the ball was cleared from a scramble in the home goal-mouth; the ball was returned.

Ball was in an offside position, but made no attempt to interfere with the play, actually walking away to leave the ball, and Stephenson dasted through and banged it into the net, only to hear the whistle sound for offside against Ball.

I thought this was a bad decision in view of the negative aspect of Ball. Just afterwards Roberts began a dribble, and had beaten three men, when Lester slashed his feet from under him. This was a very bad foul, and Roberts was hurt. Whether the referee had anything to say to Lester, I do not know, but players have been turned off for much less. The free kick was taken by Stephenson, and a terrific shot, low down, must have beaten Holland had it been a few inches to the left.

A FLUKY GOAL

The first goal came just under half-an-hour from the start. There was some close play on the home right, and from long distance Randle banged the ball into the goal-mouth.

On the tricky ground the ball appeared to bounce away from Mackey, and BALDWIN jumped up and headed towards goal; Thayne tried to retrieve the ball, and Coen also went down to it, but it beat them, touched the post, and just crossed the line a few inches.

The Town rallied, and Martin and Roberts did clever work, but the home backs and halves defended strongly, while at the other end the Town backs usually compelled the home forwards to shoot from well out, and though Coen was often called upon, he took all that came comfortably, even if it were no easy matte. to avoid the lunges of the home forwards who tried to dispossess him. The game continued thus to the interval, which came with the home side leading.

GILLINGHAM	1
LUTON	0

With the breeze in their favour, the Town soon had the home defence in sore straits. Colquhoun was prominent with his right wing in much clever passing and dribbling, and once the half back was going through when his feet were swept from under him, but the appeal failed. However, mainly by keeping the ball on the right wing, which now had the advantage of the slope, the Town were attacking steadily.

Eventually, Crompton dropped the ball across splendidly; BALL leaped up in front of Holland and headed it over the goalkeeper's grasping hands, and into the goal it went, Stephenson racing through to leave no room for doubt.

HOLLAND BUSY

Apart from occasional raids, in which the desperate work of Baldwin was a factor, the home team were forced to defend, and again and again the ball was swept to the home goal-mouth, but the defenders managed to get it away. Holland was having plenty of work, for centres came from both wings, though the right wing had much more of it, and the triangular work of Colquhoun, Martin and Crompton continually threatened. Holland made a very fine save from a header by Martin, and then fisted out from Crompton, and cleared a header from Stephenson. It was a long time before the home side got away to any purpose, but a movement involving Doncaster and Williams nearly succeeded. The ball was centred, and Coen only just managed to reach the ball and fist it out in; he could not hold it, and there was a hectic rush by the home forwards, but Thayne and Mackey held them off, and the ball was cleared.

VAIN APPEAL

Gillingham came again on the right, and Balcombe rounded Mackey and centred, Baldwin diving at the ball to turn it past Coen, but it struck the side net with the custodian looking on. To this, the Town replied with strong attacks, and Martin, who was doing capital work, nipped in after a shot by Roberts had been blocked, and was on the point of shooting from four or five yards' range, when Barrie literally threw himself at the Town forward and brought him down heavily.

There was another vain appeal for a penalty-kick, and both players had to receive attention.

When the game was resumed, Thayne flung himself at Doncaster a few yards outside the penalty area, and a free kick was awarded, but this was cleared, and the Town set up further attacks, but Gillingham defended strenuously, and, as ever, and the end came without further score.

REARGUARD STEADY

It was a good point in the circumstances, for Gillingham are a very difficult side to beat anywhere, and particularly on their own peculiar ground. Coen did his work well, though many thought he should have prevented the goal. I could not see clearly exactly what happened, but it seemed as though Thayne was partly responsible, though the situation was so curious that it would be difficult to apportion blame aright. Kingham again played a very fine game, kicking cleanly and tackling with resource and fine judgment. He had a good deal to do, too, as Colquhoun threw almost all his energies into attack. Mackey also played a steady and reliable game, and had need to, for Tom Smith was not so good as usual. The Town left-half did not seem so fit as usual, and did not recover so well, though, possibly, the awkwardness of the ground upset his ideas. However he did good work at times, as also did Colquhoun, though the latter is disposed to stake all on attack. Thayne again played up to his best, and evidently enjoyed the rough and tumble stuff of his opponents.

FORWARDS

The forwards did not show equal relish, and that could be understood. Martin again played a really fine game, and was just about the best of the attack in approach work, while he also shot well. Ball was policemanned all the time by Barrie, and took the usual buffeting with good grace. He rarely had a chance for a shot, for passes did not come his way so neatly as usual from any source. Roberts worked hard, but the effect of the first-half bump appeared to reduce his speed and effectiveness, and Stephenson was not so conspicuous as usual. Crompton got the ball across well, but I would like to see him cut in a little more.

GILLINGHAM

Holland was a good goalkeeper, and the Gillingham backs played a lusty and determined game. Marsden was the steadier always, though Lester showed speed and kicked well. Barrie was a stubborn pivot, and the flankers worked very hard without serving their wings too well, though Kidd tried to do it. The forwards could play much better football, I am sure, if they kept their heads better. Baldwin was a hustling leader, and Balcombe did good work at times.

There were 4,000 spectators.