

GILLINGHAM'S JOY

FIRST VICTORY AT LUTON SINCE THE WAR

TOWN TEAM OUT OF LUCK

(By CRUSADER)

GILLINGHAM	2
(Fisher, Doncaster)	
LUTON TOWN	1
(Martin)	

LUTON TOWN.—Coen; Mackey, Smith; Finlayson, Nelson, Fellowes; Crompton, Martin, Boyd, Roberts, Stephenson.

GILLINGHAM.—Holland; Turton, Lester; Randle, Barrie, Hopkins; Tadman, Watson, Fisher, Duncan, Doncaster.

Referee.—A. A. Horwood, Walton-on-Thames.

HOW shall we account for the amazing lapse of Luton Town in this important game? That they were well beaten cannot be denied, and making all allowance for the disorganisation that followed the injury to Mackey, the Town never had a real grip of the game. Conditions beat them, and Gillingham, making light of the difficulties of a sticky pitch and the miserable weather, were entitled to the spoils. Had it not been for the big rally in the closing stages, when they certainly did have much hard luck in failing to draw level, one would have said that if either team deserved to be at the head of affairs it would have been Gillingham, whose first victory at Luton this was since the war.

LOSS OF FORM

Luton's display was reminiscent of the awkwardness and lack of understanding that characterised their play in the early stages of the season, and there was a complete absence of that fine balance and sense of positioning that has meant so much in their rise to the top of the table, and in their splendid performances in the Cup-ties. Where have these qualities gone, for they have not been so patent in the matches they have played since they went to Manchester?

ARE PLAYERS STALE?

I think the answer must be that some of the players are getting stale. There was a lack of pace and determination in their play, and none of the enthusiasm, save in one or two instances, that has been so marked. Players may be as keen as ever; indeed, I am sure they are, for they were all unhappy about this defeat; but they never appeared to be enjoying the game as they were wont to do before their exit from the Cup competition. On the other hand, the Gillingham players seemed to be keyed right up to the occasion; they were speedy, confident, vigorous, and began and finished like a side that knew they could win.

This has been the spirit so manifest among the Town players until the last few games. They will have to get it back if they are going to retain their leadership of the League, and I think that there will have to be a little new blood transfusion in order to allow some of them to recuperate.

A WEAKNESS EMPHASISED

The fact that Mackey was far from himself was obvious in the first half, or he would never have been beaten so often by Doncaster, and Gillingham's free distribution of the ball and variation of tactics emphasised the weakness. The Town flank halves were often out of position, though working hard, but they could not find the powers of recovery that marked the play of the opposition. Above all, there was so frequently the tendency to try and scramble the ball through the mud in the middle, very much in contrast to the swinging passes that Gillingham exploited.

GILLINGHAM LEAD

In the early minutes the Town had the better chances from fast exchanges, and Stephenson failed to direct the ball past Holland at close range when he had a good chance. Gillingham were very speedy, and their wingers got the ball across well, and as the game wore on, the narrower escapes came at the Luton end, Mackey twice blocking shots, and Coen being fortunate to get the ball away. Boyd made several delightful touches that had the opposition guessing, but before he could get in a shot he was covered up again, and the visitors deserved their lead when they changed their open methods for once, and bright, close passing by the inside forwards enabled FISHER to run right through the defence and beat Coen with a shot along the ground. The merit about the goal was that it came from perfect understanding and co-operation.

ESCAPES FOR BOTH

In subsequent play the Town were on top, and threatened the Gillingham goal again and again. Stephenson again failed to aim straight when Roberts gave him a delightful pass, but there was some lack of punch when the ball was at close quarters following severe tussles in the Gillingham goalmouth. But Gillingham were unlucky, too, and once Watson hit the post when with a little more accuracy of aim he could hardly have missed, for Mackey got the ball away as it came across goal.

It was from the respondent raid that the Town equalised, and the goal was the outcome of the best bit of combination they showed during the afternoon. Roberts manoeuvred until he could give Martin a pass, and the latter and Boyd beat the defence before the centre-forward gave MARTIN a pass, which he took on the run and finally scored with a grand effort that gave Holland not the slightest chance.

Give and take play followed, and each goal was assailed without success before the interval.

LUTON TOWN	1
GILLINGHAM	1

What hopes there were of a revival of the Town after change of ends were dashed somewhat when it was seen that Mackey had to go to outside-right, and this

led to a complete reshuffling of the team. Crompton crossed to outside-left. Stephenson came inside, Roberts dropped to right-half and Finlayson to right-back.

For some time the visitors were the more aggressive, and kept trying to beat Coen with long shots. There was nothing like a sustained attack by either side until the Town got going, and then Boyd had very hard luck. He was right through, and crashed in a terrific shot which struck Holland under the chin and a second shot hit a defender and also damaged him. Holland was right out and there was a long stoppage before Hopkins donned the jersey the ambulance men carrying off the goalkeeper. However, they restored him before Hopkins had a single opportunity to show whether he could keep goal or not.

DONCASTER SCORES

The Town attacked again, and there were a few hot struggles in the Gillingham goalmouth, but there was no convincing siege. The visitors gave the heavy ball plenty of boot, and these tactics threw the Town off their game. Again and again, the visiting wingers, showing nice control and plenty of courage, got through and centred or shot, and Coen made fine saves. He was well beaten by DONCASTER, however, when the visitors attacked hotly, and the outside-left received a pass when he was quite unmarked, ran in and shot right away from Coen.

CONCENTRATION ON DEFENCE

There were twenty minutes to go, and the Town had the better of the game during this period. They attacked often, but Gillingham concentrated on defence chiefly, and, when the Town had chances, they failed to utilise them. Stephenson once had a glorious chance, but his first-time effort rose over the bar. Boyd shot directly into the goalkeeper's hands, and Roberts headed over the bar.

In the last few minutes, the game being extended owing to the several stoppages, Martin grazed the upright with a grand shot; Boyd was robbed when close in; and, a few seconds before the whistle, Smith came right up into the attack, and there were dramatic bids for the equalising goal; once it seemed as if the ball must be got past Holland, but a crowd of players lined the goal-line, and the ball was beaten out. Two or three corners were forced without avail, and the end came with the visitors good winners.

TEAM OUT OF TOUCH

Coen, Nelson, and Smith played well all through, and they could not be blamed at all for the reverse. Mackey was crippled, and seemed out of place from the start. Finlayson found the burden too much, and, though he and Fellowes helped their forwards a lot, they were not so serviceable to the defence. The forwards were never well together at any time, and there was little combination. The Gillingham backs adopted the right methods when they kept close up to the Town wingers, and Lester especially was right on top of Crompton all the time. In this respect they showed better strategy than the Town defenders.

Stephenson was a constant trier, but he was poor in his finishing, and the inside forwards were given comparatively few opportunities.

Gillingham's attack was very fast, and the players swung the ball about better, and worked for each other far better, and the team as a whole deserved their success.

There were 12,000 spectators, and the receipts were £684 15s. 6d.

HOW THEY STAND

LEAGUE III. (Southern)

	P	W	L	D	F	A	P
Coventry City	28	16	7	5	72	32	37
LUTON TOWN	27	16	6	5	52	31	37
Queen's Park Rangers	28	15	8	5	60	41	35
Reading	28	17	11	0	61	46	34
Crystal Palace	28	15	9	4	70	53	34
Watford	27	13	8	6	51	35	32
Brighton and Hove	28	14	10	4	56	45	32
Boscombe	28	11	9	8	44	38	30
Gillingham	28	12	10	6	45	42	30
Torquay United	28	12	12	4	45	44	28
Notts County	28	10	11	7	41	37	27
Millwall	28	9	10	9	37	51	26
Aldershot	28	10	12	6	31	38	24
Clapton Orient	26	10	12	4	38	39	24
Bristol City	27	9	12	6	29	35	24
Bristol Rovers	28	8	13	7	46	63	23
Northampton	29	9	15	5	44	73	23
Southend United	27	7	12	8	39	40	22
Cardiff City	28	7	13	8	40	49	22
Swindon Town	28	8	14	6	42	57	22
Exeter City	29	7	14	8	41	56	22
Newport County	28	7	14	7	40	79	21

LONDON COMBINATION

	P	W	L	D	F	A	P
Portsmouth	31	19	4	8	81	40	46
Brentford	31	22	7	2	73	37	46
Arsenal	30	21	6	3	78	28	45
Swansea T.	32	17	9	6	56	46	40
West Ham U.	33	16	12	5	80	62	37
Reading	32	17	12	3	75	64	36
Charlton Ath.	32	16	12	4	69	64	36
Chelsea	32	14	10	8	66	56	36
Crystal Palace	32	15	11	6	72	70	36
Queen's Park R. ...	30	16	11	3	62	46	35
Coventry City	31	15	13	3	64	53	33
Millwall	31	14	12	5	47	48	33
LUTON TOWN	32	14	14	4	86	78	32
Tottenham Hotspur ..	29	10	11	8	74	68	28
Northampton	32	10	14	8	58	62	28
Southend United ...	31	9	14	8	53	76	26
Clapton Orient	32	8	15	9	40	73	25
Fulham	30	9	16	5	57	58	23
Watford	31	10	18	3	60	91	23
Southampton	31	7	17	7	40	67	21
Leicester City	29	10	18	1	52	76	21
Bristol City	33	9	21	3	49	99	21
Brighton & Hove A ...	30	7	17	6	49	76	20
Boscombe	31	7	18	6	50	80	20