Forwards Lost Sparkle in Second Half

MARKSMEN WANTED

(By CRUSADER)

LUTON TOWN 1
(Payne)
COVENTRY CITY 1
(Bourton)

LUTON. — Dolman ; Mackey, Smith ; Finlayson, Nelson, Fellowes ; Hodge, Martin, Payne, Roberts, Stephenson.

COVENTRY.—Morgan ; Astley, Smith ; Frith, Mason, Curtis ; M'Nestry, Lauderdale, Bourton, Lake, Liddle.

Referee.—W. Walden, Nottingham.

Why could not Luton Town overcome their rivals for promotion? They had seventy-five per cent. of the game—ninety per cent. in the first half, and yet failed. I am quite sure there was not a single Coventry supporter, official or player, who felt at half-time that the County had more than a ghost of a chance of sharing the spoils, yet they did get their invaluable point, and I am going to say that they deserved it. Fortunate the City were indeed, but the tactics of the Town in the second half went a long way to undoing all the advantage gained in the first period.

FORWARDS FAIL

Had Luton Town forwards maintained the sparkle of their first-half play, had they retained their methods of a five-line attack instead of falling back and losing nearly all positional sense, they must have won, for the City defenders were nearly played out when they crossed over The slow restart by the Town, and the nervy state of half the players gave the desperate City players renewed courage, and strengthened their hopes, with the result that if in one of their spasmodic assaults they had snatched a victory it would not have been surprising.

Here is an extract from a letter I received on Saturday evening from an old player. I cordially agree with every word of this extract, and I shall be surprised if the directors have not considered the position in the same light to-day before the selection of the team. The writer is referring to the febrility of the Luton attack :

> I have seen matches home and away, and I think that Luton have been in the goal-scoring zone more than any other team in the Third Division with negative results.

That confirms my reports which, week after week, with monotonous regularity, have claimed the same thing, and people who have not been to the away matches have smiled as infidels smile. They have asked, "Why have we not got goals?" It is simply because the marksmanship has been too bad for words, and the only hope for the match to-night at Coventry was that there would be such changes in team work, if not in personnel, as would give us a chance to beat the City defence.

WOULD CITY HAVE MISSED THEM?

Coventry's halves and backs were beaten or drawn out of position often

enough in the first half to have provided a winning score for Luton at half-time, but the goals were not there. In the first twenty minutes there should have been three or four goals. In the second half there were again more opportunities than the visitors had, and a good job, too, for if the City forwards had seen half the chances that went to Luton the championship would by now have been theirs.

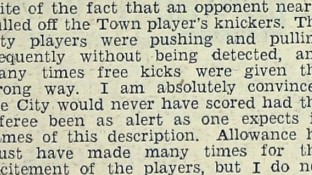
Payne strove his hardest, and his goal in the first half, in spite of the attention he received from Mason and others, was a capital effort, and stamped him the opportunist he is, but others failed to shoot well when they had the chances. Stephenson, from whom we expect so much, was brilliant in flashes. He showed clearly enough that he had the pace, but did not stand up to the opposition as he can do when he likes. Then Roberts, tremendous worker, one of the biggest-hearted players we have, was hopeless or luckless in front of goal ; Martin was foraging behind the pack, and Hodge was clever enough to beat opponents with a variety of tricks, but did not finish his approach work with anything like the efficiency he should have done.

DEFENCE WOBBLED

The half-backs were great workers, too, and Finlayson especially ; there was no fault to be found with either of the flank halves before the cross-over, but afterwards Fellowes seemed slow in clearing when the City were most assertive, and somehow the defenders generally became shaky and unconvincing when the City forwards began to race out of position. Nelson played finely all through, and Bourton should never have been allowed the goal he scored. Smith was never safe against M'Nestry, but Mackey had a good game, despite the fact that he was facing a tricky and speedy wing.

OFFICIAL ERRORS

Now let me say that the City owed their



equalising goal to official errors—two of them. In the first place the referee penalised Finlayson when the free kick should have been the other way, for Lauderdale fouled the half-back. When the free kick was taken, Bourton deliberately pushed Nelson away as the ball was kicked, and the Luton half-back was unable to recover in time to tackle the centre-forward.

Loth I am to criticise this referee, because he was so transparently honest in his work, but that he was not quick enough to detect original offences time after time was certain. There was an occasion when he penalised Finlayson in spite of the fact that an opponent nearly pulled off the Town player's knickers. The City players were pushing and pulling frequently without being detected, and many times free kicks were given the wrong way. I am absolutely convinced the City would never have scored had the referee been as alert as one expects in games of this description. Allowance he must have made many times for the excitement of the players, but I do not like to see at any time referees being chattered at by players, and Lauderdale lived up to his reputation in this respect, and got away with a lot of tricks.

GREAT DEFENCE

The City had a grand goalkeeper in Morgan, and Astley was the master mind at back. This player figured against Luton Reserves at Griffin Park when Ron Stevens was playing his second game in the Town colours, and the youngster had the experienced defender guessing nearly all the time. That was why I hoped for so much from Stephenson, but Astley was too good. Smith also played like a champion. Mason did well in spite of ankle injury, and there was a good deal of cleverness in the work of both Frith and Curtis, the latter especially showing what to do with the ball in the second half.

M'NESTRY THE DANGER

M'Nestry was the most dangerous of the City forwards, because he was so unorthodox. Here, there and everywhere ; once heading away from under the Coventry bar when the goalkeeper was beaten, and within a few seconds racing through to bother Smith at the other end. Lauderdale is a clever player, but I would hate to see him in my side because of his methods ; I like both Lake and Liddle, especially the former, for he is a grafter all the time, and is not afraid to go through.

PAYNE'S GOAL

I have said that the Town had so much more of the play. They missed a lot of chances before PAYNE scored. It has been described as a lucky goal ; well, that is a matter of taste, but I never agree that it is lucky when a player has the

courage to shoot first time for goal if he has a reasonable chance. Martin's overhead kick did not look like the prelude to a goal, but as the ball came down Payne hit it hard, and Morgan had not the slightest chance.

THE EQUALISER

Coventry's equaliser in the second half came as I have stated already. BOURTON certainly pushed Nelson out of the way when the kick was taken, and the ball came just right for him to meet it, and a beautiful hook shot it was that beat Dolman.

In the closing stages the Town pressed fiercely, and there was a terrific slump on the City goal-line in which Morgan got to a header from Roberts, but the ball was scrambled away somehow while the referee was whistling for a free kick.

It was a disappointing finish, but as a spectacle the game was vastly entertaining, and those hundreds of late-comers who failed to get admission missed an exciting struggle.

RECORD ATTENDANCE

The attendance eclipsed all previous records at the Luton Town ground. The receipts, of course, were not nearly so large as in several instances, but the official figures of attendance were 23,142 ; receipts £1,427 18s. 6d.

The previous best figures for official attendance were 23,043, when Chelsea visited Luton for the re-played Cup-tie in January, 1935.