

BALL AND PAYNE MAKE THEIR MARK

Hodge Shows His Skill

(By CRUSADER)

LUTON TOWN 2
Ball, Payne (penalty)

WALSALL 0

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

WALSALL.—Leckie; Shelton, Wiles; Richmond, Morgan, Bradford; Bell, Harwood, Cunningham, Green, Bulger.
Referee.—G. Dutton, Warwick.

FREQUENTLY last season we saw Luton Town overwhelm opponents in midfield play, and then fail badly in marksmanship. I am not going to say that their shooting was not open to much improvement last night in their game with Walsall, but it was refreshing to see forwards banging away at goal persistently instead of trying to walk the ball into the net. To that extent, at least we can congratulate the team on a phase of football that is more likely to succeed in these days than the very close pattern weaving right into the goalmouth of the opposition.

BRILLIANT LECKIE

That they did not score more than a couple of goals was due in the first place to brilliant goalkeeping by Leckie, the Walsall custodian and secondly to sheer misfortune. I am sure everyone will agree that the Walsall goalkeeper, small as goalkeepers go, gave a display equal to anything we have seen on the ground for a few seasons. That he was fortunate very often is true, but, on the principle that none but the brave deserve the fair, he was certainly deserving of all that could come his way by accident.

HARDLY A MATCH

It could hardly be called a match at all as between teams, for it was for an hour and a quarter a long series of swinging attacks on the Walsall goal followed by incisive bombardments, the constant failure of which were enough to have taken the heart out of a team. I do not propose to enter into details of the play for that reason, because it was so much one-sided that it would be wearisome to relate the almost numberless assaults that Luton made. No sooner thwarted than back again: corners galore, shots from all quarters, some striking opponents massed in front of their goal; some brilliantly diverted by the agile and the wise positioning of the goalkeeper; some missing by inches, and at least half a dozen times the white dust flew off the woodwork.

SOMETHING MISSING

Throughout the first half, and for thirty minutes of the second this was the story, and the Luton halves became forwards, and the backs became marksmen, or at least, filled the positions that half-backs are supposed to own and only at rare intervals did the Walsall team find a way into Luton territory.

There was something missing from the middle in the rounding off of Luton's attacks, and a little snappier shooting when they were at close quarters would, perhaps have made a lot of difference to the score but one cannot be sure of that, for there were saves by Leckie that bordered on the miraculous, and it would tax his wits to explain how he managed to save some of the drives that were dead on the target, and appeared to be right beyond his reach.

BALL'S GOAL

So it went on with the Town carrying on the good work in the second half, too, and then someone had a brain-wave, and Ball and Payne were instructed to change places. Within a few seconds of the instruction the Walsall goal fell. There had been a brilliant bit of work by Hodge, and the ball was repelled and went out to the left; Fellowes raced up, and swung it right into goal and apparently Leckie pushed it out when at full stretch, and it went to the head of BALL, and then returned past Leckie into the net. It was hard luck on the goalkeeper to be beaten after giving such a fine exhibition, but it would have been cruel luck for the Town to have been denied the victory after having so much the better of the game.

Walsall hit back after this, and they gave more trouble in the next five minutes

than in the whole of the match together, and Dolman made the one save that gave him cause for anxiety, diving to push the ball round the upright. Then there was a resumption of the pressure at the other end, and when Harwood, who had fallen back to assist the defence, and one hardly knew who were defenders and who were attackers as far as the players other than wingers were concerned, was adjudged to have handled the ball in the penalty area. PAYNE'S shot from the penalty spot was the right sort, too good for any custodian.

A misunderstanding between Nelson and Mackey almost gave Walsall a goal, but there was no more score, and in the last five minutes the Luton forwards and halves battered and banged away at the Walsall goal sufficiently to have reached double figures even in that time, had there been just a little good fortune for them.

TOWN DEFENCE

Dolman was a spectator; he had one shot to handle in the first half, and saw two others go wide, while once or twice the backs allowed him to have the ball and clear. Both Mackey and Smith were on form and played grandly, and no fault could be found with the defence save that or the misunderstanding towards the end. Nelson was master of midfield, but had not a lot to do except to assist his forwards, and Finlayson and Fellowes did a lot of attacking, the former especially shooting well.

HODGE OUTSTANDING

Hodge was the outstanding player forward, and if he plays so in every game he cannot be displaced. His trickery and his centring were very good indeed, and deserved conversions. Payne was a bit clumsy at times, but a great trier, and made some very good passes, while his strength in challenging the defenders meant a great deal. Ball was also a worker, and distributed well, although he was well held in general by the stalwart Morgan. Roberts played finely throughout the piece, even if his shooting was still lacking, although he had terrible luck with magnificent shots. Stephenson was good and moderate, but altogether there was a fight and vim about the line that may mean a tremendous lot if they are kept together and—shoot better, even than they did.

WALSALL WORTHIES

Leckie took the main honours of the match; he played a grand game, and deserved the plaudits of the crowd, which he so often received. His backs were workers all the time, and Morgan did well, but the forwards had very little chance, though I liked Cunningham's efforts, and the trickiness of Bulger, who is a very promising youngster.

Attendance 11,045.

Receipts £580 9s.