

Town Beaten by Odd Goal

FORWARD LINE LACKED METHOD

(By CHILTERN)

NOTTS COUNTY 2
Chalmers, Mardon

LUTON TOWN 1
Rich

NOTTS COUNTY.—Blyth; Mills, Freebury; Corkhill, McLenahan, Wyness; Rickards, Chalmers, Gallacher, Mardon, Fallon

LUTON TOWN.—Dolman; Smith, Hubbard; Finlayson, Nelson, Fellowes; Rich, Roberts, Payne, Dawes, Hodge.

Referee.—W. E. Ross-Gower, Abbey Wood.

LUTON TOWN received another setback in their bid for promotion when they visited NOTTS COUNTY yesterday. They were beaten by the odd goal, and that may be considered a good performance, for the County are a difficult side to hold. Yet Luton might have won the match easily had they played with more of their old spirit, and if they had shown more punch at close quarters.

No Luton supporter was very optimistic as to the outcome of the encounter, especially after the fine display put up by the County on Christmas Day, but had the Town forwards shown more virility, and shot more accurately, they would have shared the points at least.

GRUELLING GAME

It was a gruelling game with the Town having as much of the play territorially, but never being as dangerous as the County in front of goal. At times I despaired of the Town ever finding the net, but, of course, credit must go to the grand defence of the home side. They were on the top of their form, and their desperate tackling was a deterrent to the Luton forwards.

The Luton front line as a whole, had an off day, and the cause is rather difficult to fathom. There are many opinions, but I have noticed this lack of punch and finishing power for some weeks, and this is reflected in the "goals for" column for several of the recent matches.

They do well up to a point, and then their confidence seems to leave them. Yesterday there was little method about their attacks, and few real openings were made. Cohesion was lacking, and I think that the chief need is a schemer of the calibre of George Martin.

THE GAP

One thing that is very noticeable, and I have heard comments on it, is the gap between the halves and the forwards. There is no link between the two, and the result is that the wing halves are being badly overworked, and the forwards are not getting a proper service. Roberts appears to be trying to be up the field, and to scheme at the same time. It is practically impossible, of course, but he is trying his best, and he was the most enterprising of the front line yesterday.

He is trying to do two men's work, and is not quite getting there. Martin, or another player of the same type is needed, or Roberts must be allowed to keep right back, and collect the stray balls, and no one must worry whether he scores goals or not. That seems the only solution, and that seems to be the problem that is facing the selectors.

NOT TOGETHER

Individually, the players are not having a bad time, but they are not together as they used to be. I do not like to judge a player on one showing, but as far as I could see from yesterday's game, Dawes has not solved the problem. He probably needs time to settle down, and is suffering from lack of support, but he had a thin time, and scarcely did anything outstanding.

Both wing men were poor in the first half, but after they changed places after the interval, there was some improvement. Hodge, however, still persists in fiddling, and while he might claim that he did not have the passes, it can be pointed out that he lost possession on a number of occasions through dalliance. He put in some beautiful centres, but seemed lethargic and tired.

NO DANGEROUS FORWARD

Rich was more successful on the left wing than Hodge, and he, too, put in good centres in the second half. Payne had a moderate sort of match, and we saw few of his dashes for goal. It is not being hard on anybody to say that we had no really dangerous forward, but all five can perfectly legitimately point to the County's cast iron defence, and the lack of service they received.

Another point that must be considered is that this was their third hard struggle in four days, but the same can be said of the County.

I do not intend to be too critical, but am merely trying to get to the root of a problem that has been apparent for some weeks.

When the game was re-started after the interval, the forward line had been com-

pletely changed, and Dawes led the line, with Payne and Roberts in the positions they have been occupying for the greater part of the season. This worked much better, but Dawes was completely held by McLenahan.

Finlayson and Fellowes both struggled on manfully, and they got through a tremendous amount of work. I liked Fellowes better because he recovered quicker, and slowness here is Finlayson's main fault. The latter, however, tried to get the attack moving, and to add punch to it.

NELSON HELD GALLACHER

Nelson did not strike his true form, though he held Gallacher well. However, when Mardon went in the middle, he found a different proposition, and the dash of this young player carried him through. The centre-half has an annoying habit of dribbling in his own penalty area, and he showed it several times. When the second goal was cleared it seemed he should have been able to push the ball back to Dolman, but the ball was bouncing awkwardly, and there may be some excuse in it.

Hubbard came in at the last minute for Mackey, who was hurt at Southend. Smith crossed over to right-back. Hubbard did not let the team down, and did all that was required of him, though he found Rickards a warm handful. Smith played his usual hard game, and showed no discomfiture at playing on the opposite wing. He might have given the ball more boot on occasion, but generally he had a good match.

DOLMAN'S WONDERFUL SAVES

Dolman made some wonderful saves, and even if he did appear to go down late for the shot that counted as the first goal, I do not think he had an earthly chance of saving, for Chalmers had the whole goal to shoot at. One clearance from Fallon in the second half was little short of miraculous, and we have little to grumble about at his display. He had some buffettings, and Gallacher was a big offender in this respect.

The County played real cup-tie football, and it was man or ball all the time. The Town tried to play more cleverly, and succeeded to a degree, but these tactics did not prove as fruitful.

It was a game of phases. Luton opened the stronger, and in the first quarter of an hour, they gave the impression that they would dictate the run of the play. They attacked fairly persistently during these opening stages, but achieved nothing tangible. Then the County began to have a period of supremacy, and they attacked for a time.

COUNTY MISS CHANCES

The Town defence had a trying time, but the County forwards frittered away several likely scoring chances, and they certainly should have taken the lead before they did. They scored their first goal five minutes from the interval.

It followed a rather half-hearted attack on the right wing. The danger appeared to have been cleared, but Mardon headed the ball down to CHALMERS, who was unmarked. The inside man had time to pick his spot, and he made no mistake with a low shot.

With their re-arranged forward line, the Town had more of the play after the interval, but Dolman had his work cut out to save a couple of hard drives. The Town attacked, but the County broke away, and MARDON chased a long pass down the middle. Nelson was in front of him, and appeared to try and pass back to Dolman. However, Mardon nipped around, and gained possession to beat Dolman from close range.

A BAD BLOW

This was a bad blow for the Town, and but for excellent goalkeeping by Dolman other goals might have come. Subsequent play was fairly even, and the exchanges were keen and fast. Injuries were frequent, but the home players were the worst sufferers, chiefly because of their own impetuosity.

Luton made a great effort in the last quarter of an hour, but it seemed hopeless to batter down the impregnable defence of the home side. The forwards could not get to close quarters, and both backs and halves tackled desperately hard.

AT LAST

The Town gained their reward three minutes from the end, when the long-awaited goal came. It was the result of a clever movement. Hodge pushed the ball through to Dawes, who centred accurately for RICH to run in and head into the net.

This was the tonic needed by the Town, and they threw everything into a last-minute effort to snatch a point. Roberts had a tricky shot saved, but the final whistle blew with the County still ahead.

COUNTY PLEASE THE CROWD

The win gives a decided fillip to the County's promotion chances, and it was
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a vital game for both sides. Despite the fact that both teams had had a gruelling week-end, there was no slackening in pace, and the game was interesting from start to finish. The County pleased the large crowd by their display, and yet I am told that they did not touch their form of Christmas Day.

It was certainly no disgrace to be beaten by one goal, but the Town do not seem to have the capacity for fighting back that was one of their best weapons last season. However, the fact that five of their last six matches have been played away may account for some of the loss of form, and their luck has not been any too good.

Let us hope that the New Year will begin in a happier vein than the one in which the old year has made its exit.