

Christmastide Did Not Bring Good Cheer

LUTON TOWN TEAMS LOSE FOUR GAMES

Confidence and Determination Missing

Luton Town shocked their supporters by losing two of the three holiday games. It had been fondly hoped that they would be able to retain their leadership, and had they managed to take three points they would have done so, thanks to the good turn that Watford did themselves and the Town by defeating Brighton on Monday.

Reference to the failings of the Town are plentiful enough in other columns, but they faulted badly at Southend after giving a really good display against Notts. County on Christmas Day. They were good enough in the stylish football they played in the first game, but there was missing from their other two games the necessary spirit and determination that wins matches.

DAWES' ARRIVAL

The first appearance of Dawes on Christmas Day could be described as a success, even if he did nothing better than others. Naturally he needs a little time to settle down, but that he was alert to the opportunities was proved by the manner in which he paved the way for the winning goal.

Stephenson played well till hurt, and curiously enough, Rich, quite knocked out in a collision, seemed to play better when he returned to the field. Payne, apart from scoring the valuable goal, was moderate, but Roberts played finely whether at inside right or inside left.

The lack of experience of Stevens was apparent at Southend, although the lad has always shown that he has the right spirit. He did as well as the others in either of the two later games, and when Hodge came back into the team on Monday he was clever as ever, but brought no more thrust into the finishing.

THE DEFENCE

The halves could not reproduce on the other days the form they showed on Christmas Day, when each man played magnificently. Mackey was grand in the first two games, and Smith did better at Southend and Nottingham than he did at home. Hubbard played at Nottingham instead of Mackey, and proved conclusively that he can be relied upon in emergency. Dolman is perhaps the one player who can be congratulated on his efficiency in each of the three games.

RESERVES DOWN

Luton Town Reserves also failed to make the most of their opportunities, for they were the better side at Lea Bridge on Christmas Day, and were beaten because they lacked punch in front of goal.

On Saturday they gave a dazzling display and trounced Reading Reserves far more severely than the score indicates. It was one of the finest exhibitions of forward and half-back play seen on the ground for much longer than this one season.

Yet on Monday they were again beaten by the Orient Reserves in a match which was remarkable for the amount of pressure Luton exerted, and for the poor return they had for it.

FOUR POINTS DROPPED AWAY

At Luton on Christmas Day.

LUTON TOWN	2
Roberts, Payne	
NOTTS. COUNTY	1
Ferguson	

Attendance: 18,000.

LUTON.—Dolman; Mackey, Smith; Finlayson, Nelson, Fellowes; Rich, Roberts, Payne, Dawes, Stephenson.

NOTTS. COUNTY.—Blyth; Mills, Feebury; Corkhill, McLennahan, Julian; Rickards, Chalmers, Gallacher, Ferguson, Fallon.

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

At Southend on Saturday.

SOUTHEND UNITED	3
Lane, Dickinson and Goddard	
LUTON TOWN	0

SOUTHEND UNITED.—Mackenzie; Nelson, Robinson; Harris, Turner, Spelman; Bird, Lane, Dickinson, Goddard, Oswald.

LUTON TOWN.—Dolman; Mackey, Smith; Finlayson, Nelson, Fellowes; Rich, Roberts, Payne, Dawes, Stevens.

Referee.—W. J. Lewington, Croydon.

At Nottingham on Monday.

NOTTS. COUNTY	2
Chalmers, Mardon	
LUTON TOWN	1
Rich	

NOTTS. COUNTY.—Blyth; Mills, Feebury; Corkhill, McLennahan, Wyness; Rickards, Chalmers, Gallacher, Mardon, Fallon.

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

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

CHRISTMAS FARE

A year ago NOTTS. COUNTY provided one of the most strenuous struggles of the season at Luton, and again on Christmas Day they made a tremendous fight, and for a long time the issue was in the balance. It is not exaggerating to say that Payne won the match because he scored a goal which few if any other players of the Town could have scored.

In the first half the County were almost, but not quite so good as the Town. At no time were they playing as good quality football from the entertainment aspect as the Town, though there were passages that were delightful in construction, and were certainly as menacing as anything the Town produced.

The trouble with the Town was that they were more delightful than effective, and thousands of spectators would agree that their football in the second period was as good as any critic could expect, save that against the rugged opposition it lacked the goal-getting punch.

The County's forceful raids, in which they often booted the ball hard, and in which they were not afraid to get "stuck in," were relieved by a few masterly touches by Gallacher, though as a penetrative unit he was virtually blotted out by Nelson.

When the Town kept the game open they were masters of the midfield, and it was

from a rhythmical bout that they scored the first goal. Stephenson scooted past the burly Mills, and then lifted the ball right across goal; Rich met it with his head, and with the nicest care headed it across to ROBERTS, who very deliberately hit the ball with his head right away from Blyth. It was a gorgeous goal, and the pity of it is that such goals are scarce.

The County struck back strongly, and the best defensive work came from Mackey, whose general play was of a high order; again and again he tackled promptly when the danger was really grave. Unfortunately when the County equalised the disposition of the Town's defensive elements was all wrong.

THE EQUALISER

Smith, who was playing too far away from such a strong and vigorous winger as Rickards, was beaten and the ball was swung right across in much the same fashion as Stephenson had done. FERGUSON was tackled, either by Nelson or Mackey,



H. W. DOLMAN

but managed to drag the ball past the opposing foot, and then his aim was fine, and Dolman had no chance.

In the second half the Town got right on top, and the County's raids became fewer, but try as they would the Town could not beat a way past the opposition, though there were chances that should have been goals. Weakness in carrying home the thrust was the trouble, and the County's defenders clustered round their goal to good purpose. One noticeable factor was that the half-backs could get right back to assist and so loop-holes were fewer.

PAYNE'S WINNER

It wanted six minutes—allowing for time taken off—to the end when the winning goal came. Stephenson grabbed the ball as it had been out of play, threw in quickly, and Dawes had sensed the move; that player raced clear of the opposition, and was practically on the goal-line when he swung the ball right in front of goal; PAYNE darted in and beat Blyth and another opponent for it, and headed into the net.

That was the last incident of note in a grand game. The County players, who had been wasting time as cutely as they could, now tried to hurry themselves a little, but they were countered by relentless opposition, and they did not get near scoring again in those last few minutes, but we were all glad to hear the final whistle.

LISTLESS PLAY AT SOUTHEND

Very different was the display of the Town at Southend on Saturday, and our representative, "Kay Bee," seeing the team for the first time this season, said he was immensely disappointed. His impression was that they were a weary lot, perhaps cleverer individually than the United, but never so lively, and they were actually lucky to get away with so light a deficit as three goals.

That makes bad reading, but is a considered opinion, and it has been confirmed by others who saw the game. There was no score in the first half, thanks chiefly to the very fine work of Mackey, Smith and Dolman, but the team generally lacked decisive thrust, and some of them were very slow.

OFFSIDE APPEAL FAILS

When Southend scored through LANE midway through the second half there was a strong appeal for offside, but it failed, and although the Town put all they had into attack to try and recover the lost ground, they did not play any better as a side, and actually it came as no surprise when the gaps that were left in the defence were utilised by the United forwards, and two goals were added in the last ten minutes through DICKENSON and GODDARD.

The Town made a moderate side like Southend look really good, and so one can estimate in some measure how much off colour they were. Southend deserved their success on the run of the game, for they were quicker on the ball, and had far more determination and balance than the Town, who had Stevens instead of Stephenson at outside left.

SOME LITTLE IMPROVEMENT

The return game at Nottingham on Monday saw some little improvement, but not sufficient to overcome a team of the calibre of the County, says "Chiltern." The team travelled on Sunday, and although Mackey went he had received a knock at Southend that incapacitated him, and it was deemed prudent to call Hubbard from Luton on Monday morning. Stevens, who had been hurt at Southend also, was displaced by Hodge.

Actually on the run of the play, there was little between the teams. Each had its period of superiority, but the County were the more workmanlike side, and their methods always seemed more likely to bring success than those of Luton.

The County made ground quickly, and always had a definite plan, with Gallacher scheming cleverly. On the other hand, much of the Town's play was aimless, and many attacks broke down through a silly

or inaccurate pass. As a line the Town forwards were far from impressive, but individually they had spasms of brilliance.

SOLID DEFENCE

The home defence was solid, and refused to be intimidated by the cleverness of the opposition. First-time, robust tackling brought its reward, and it was only rarely that the Luton forwards caused Blyth undue trouble.

The gap between the forwards and the half-backs was pronounced, and there was no connecting link. It may be that this is the real trouble.

The Town made a flying start, and for the first quarter of an hour they held the stage. A goal during this period, and the County would have collapsed, but unfortunately it did not come, though one or two commendable efforts were made. Gradually the home side assumed the upper hand, and made some desperate assaults on the visiting goal.

COUNTY IN FRONT

The defence played their part manfully, but it was not wholly their fault that the County did not open the score, for several easy opportunities were missed, Mardon and Rickards being offenders in this respect. A goal came five minutes from the interval, CHALMERS beating Dolman with a hard, low drive. It was a simple sort of point, and the danger should have been cleared before.

With an entirely changed forward line, the Town promised better things in the second half, but Notts returned to the attack, and within seven minutes had increased their lead. MARDON, who had changed places with Gallacher, was the scorer, and he ran in when Nelson was attempting to pass back to Dolman, and quickly had the ball in the net.

RICH'S GOAL

For a time Dolman was kept busy, and he made three or four stirring saves. Then, in the later stages of the game, the Town made a great effort to save a point. They exerted pressure, but the County defence stood firm. Luton fought hard all the time, but there was a definite lack of cohesion in the forward line.

However, three minutes from the end they received their just reward when RICH reduced the lead with a header from a centre by Dawes. They fought tooth and nail for an equaliser afterwards, but it was no good.

I think that if the Town had scored earlier on, it might have made a big difference to the result, and would have given them the confidence of which they seemed in need.

It was a hard game throughout, and I could not grudge the County the points. A goal just about represented their superiority. They had the more punch, and their play was always more forceful than the Town's.