

Gallant Struggle Against Odds

PAYNE STILL SCORING

Middle Line Lacking in Resourcefulness

(By CRUSADER)

LUTON TOWN 3
Payne (2), Stephenson

BLACKPOOL 3
Finan, Middleton Watmough

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

BLACKPOOL.—Wallace; Blair, Witham; Farrow, Cardwell, Hall; Watmough, Middleton, Finan, Jones (T), Hill. Referee.—C. P. West, Brighton.

So that it may not be charged against me that I did not appreciate the brilliance of the Blackpool team let me say at once that they provided one or two periods of football that eclipsed anything we have seen on the Town ground since the war. Not even the Arsenal exhibited better technique, real constructive team work, or the advantage that accrues from keeping the ball on the ground; and every player taking correct position in the shortest possible time.

Having paid that tribute, however, I am going to say straightway that the Town were foiled of victory by sheer misfortune. If Hancock had not been injured the Town would have won the game. Of that I am convinced. The whole of the attacking machinery as we have seen it in previous games was thrown out of gear, and the result was lop-sidedness.

HALVES OFF COLOUR

Added to that was the fact that the Town halves were much below their best form, and that two of the goals scored by the visitors were almost of the gift character. The middle line was lacking in resourcefulness, but I think we were a bit hard on Nelson.

Blackpool were kept on the defensive for fully as long periods as the Town, but when they moved to attack it was a team move, and not merely a departmental effort.

Organised methods, obviously the outcome of very careful coaching, found the weak spots in the Town's defensive forces, but there were flaws in Blackpool's defence, too, and the Town could find these in spite of the crippled attack.

INFRINGEMENTS MISSED

Blackpool had the more chances, and therefore should have scored more goals, but the Town had the ill luck, and furthermore, much though I admired the manner in which Mr. West handled the game, he failed to deal with flagrant offences. Roberts was clearly inside the penalty area when brought down twice; the first time by a trip which was punished by a free kick that brought a goal; the second time by a sandwich and a trip, three opponents being involved, but this infringement was ignored.

Blair twice handled very plainly in the penalty area, and once half-caught the ball, so there was intent.

I should write down Mr. West as an admirable referee in theory, but a magistrate that would overwork a probation act.

One or two of the visitors, and especially Hill, the former Arsenal player and now the Blackpool captain, were not merely unfair, but dangerous, and if Martin had been caught in the closing stages when Hill "went over the ball," there would have been a Luton player in hospital.

DANGEROUS TACKLES

There was one inexcusable foul by the Town, and that was when Nelson tripped Finan badly just outside the penalty area in the first half, but there were far too many infringements in the shape of dangerous tackles that merited firmer handling. Moreover, several of the visitors were "following through with the boot" after clearing.

I am not suggesting that the Town should copy these tactics, but perhaps it would have been more to the advantage of the side had the Town halves adopted the methods of the Blackpool defenders, which were to get the man or the ball, or both, every time.

Nelson's work in general was too casual, Finlayson lacked pace, and Fellowes did not touch his best until the second half, was well advanced.

SHINING LIGHT

The shining light of the Town team was Mackey, and had all the defenders played as he did we should already have been in the fourth round.

Quicker and more resolute tackling was necessary against a forward line that showed the determination and forcefulness of the visitors.

Several times I saw Martin gesticulating to the defenders to advance instead of to retreat, and now and then some foolish spectator shouted derisively at Martin, whose advice was perfectly sound. Again and again the Town defenders failed to follow up their clearances, with the result that there were virtually no offside decisions against the visitors.

Martin wanted team work such as we were getting from the opposition.

INSPIRATION OF A GOAL

The inspiration of the first goal meant a great deal to Blackpool, and their very best came in the second half when the Town defenders seemed to be struggling spiritlessly, and anything might have happened, but for the heroic Mackey, and,

in slightly less degree, Smith. Smith never lost his courage, but Mackey neither lost his courage nor his head.

The only fault I would find with Smith was the old failing of leaving too big an acreage for the opposing winger, and this was where Watmough was made to look far better than he was, and how he came to have so many chances.

Smith must keep closer up to the winger if he is to improve, and it is about all he needs to do to become one of the best in the south.

Dolman was responsible for a number of clever saves, but there were times when his goal escaped, and he hardly knew how. Probably, he should have shown a little more celerity when the second goal was scored, and he seemed to lack coolness at times.

THE HALVES

Finlayson's lack of pace was at times pitiful, although his efforts to compensate for the defection of Hancock probably had much to do with his comparative weakness against the Blackpool left wing. Nelson had a poor game, but things just would not go right for him. He could have helped himself out of the trouble considerably had he been more prompt in his clearances, and taken no liberties with the mercurial Finan, but he has been such a consistently fine player, that a lapse makes him look much worse than is really the case.

Some of the spectators were inclined to barrack the Town captain—a most unworthy as well as undesirable action.

Fellowes generally did very good work in breaking up, but it was a long time before we saw much of the fine co-operation with Roberts and Stephenson that has been a feature of the Town's successes. In the second half he did excellent work, and compared with any other half-back on the field.

FORWARDS

It was a thousand pities that Hancock was injured, and I am not so sure that the hurt did not come through a dangerous tackle. Two or three times, even when hopping about, he outwitted opponents, but, generally, he was a hopeless passenger, and it was well he went off in the second half. Martin played very well in the circumstances, and Payne also moved about to do his bit to fill the vacancy.

Martin would never let the side down anywhere, and those who criticised somewhat strongly during the game should know what it is to play a dual part.

Payne was good as ever, and if the International Selection Committee have thoughts that Cardwell is a likely pivot, they might as well take Payne into consideration as the leader of the forwards. True, the centre-forward missed one splendid chance, but, as usual, he was opportunist enough to find a way through Blackpool's defence.



Roberts again played magnificently, assisting the halves, initiating movements with Stephenson, and, taken all round, he was about the most useful of the forwards. Stephenson showed that he could master even Blair, the Scottish International when he took the ball up to him, and there might have been better results had the winger been given more to do, especially in the early stages of the second half.

BLACKPOOL'S BEST

Wallace made one or two thrilling saves, notably from Stephenson in the first half, but he was lucky on several occasions. Blair was a grand little back, kicking with rare ease and certainty, and marshalling the defence cleverly. Witham was not in the same class, and that is one of the reasons why I am so confident the Town would have won had they been at full strength. I think the right-wing pair would have been too good for him.

Cardwell was no better than half a dozen pivots we have seen in Third Division teams, and not so good as many, although a rare grafter. Hall was fairly good, but the best half-back on the field was Farrow, the former Bournemouth player, who not only achieved great things, but infused much spirit into the side.

Finan was a very dangerous leader, and benefited by the misfortunes of Nelson, just as Watmough benefited by the space he was allowed by Smith. Middleton was as good as any forward in the line, and Hill was clever, but his name should have been taken. It will never surprise me to see that a game has cost him something.

THE PLAY

The going was very heavy in the middle, and on the railway side. The Town forwards quickly tested the Blackpool defence, and Hancock should have done better with an opportunity provided by Payne; he shot into the goalkeeper's hands.

Blackpool's raids were not so frequent as the Town's, but there was menace in every move.

Mackey was early prominent with forceful work. Finan had an even better chance than Hancock, but he also shot badly. Then Wallace brought off a brilliant save at full length from Stephenson, and again from Finlayson.

THE FIRST

With Hancock crippled, Blackpool's defence had an easier time, and more was

seen of their attack. Middleton had a fine opening, but failed, as also did Hill. Then came a determined onslaught by Blackpool, in which two or three shots were driven in, and after Dolman had pushed out one drive FINAN crashed the ball into the net. I thought Dolman should have done better with the first shot.

The Town fought back gallantly. Payne doing tremendous work, and had Hancock been sound a goal must have come, but the winger just could not move to the chance.

Roberts then worked over to the right, and was clearly inside the penalty line when brought down badly.

The referee placed the ball on the line. Martin shot the ball across goal, and PAYNE slammed it home.

A SILLY GOAL

Blackpool's second goal came as the result of a harmless-looking free kick. The ball was lobbed into the goal-mouth, and Dolman called for it. Nelson was close on top of him, and the ball would



have gone safely into Dolman's hands had Nelson kept his eyes on the opposition and left the ball to the goalkeeper, but he just touched it, and before Dolman could gather it MIDDLETON had nipped in and netted.

It was a silly goal.

The Town several times came within an ace of equalising for they were having the better of the exchanges, and Roberts struck the upright with Wallace well beaten, and the latter saved well from Stephenson, who just failed when a plucky Blackpool effort got the ball across.

BLACKPOOL OPEN OUT

This took us up to the interval, and in the first minute after the resumption Payne had hard luck with a header which hit the bar with Wallace helpless to save.

Roberts struck the post, and for a few moments the Town were on top. However, Blackpool opened out the game well, and again and again they made great gains in the Town defence by their cool passing, each player making a little ground and then sending the ball to an unmarked man.

Once Dolman parried a shot very luckily, the ball glancing on to the upright and out. Then Roberts went right through and was within measurable distance of goal when he was brought down

and there was a justifiable clamour for a penalty kick, but this was unheeded.

HIS BEST GAME

Cardwell kept a close rein on Payne, seldom leaving the centre-forward for a second, and after a strong assault had been beaten off by the visiting defenders, their forwards took the game in hand.

Again and again by beautiful passing they swept through the Town defence, and it was at this stage that Mackey gave the best he has ever done.

Time after time he held up the advances, and Smith also did well, but Blackpool should have finished better.

Dolman made fine saves, and then Hancock wrenched his leg again and left the field. He returned after a moment, apparently on instructions. Stephenson made a grand effort, but Blair's handling was again overlooked by the referee, and once more Blackpool attacked vigorously, only to fall at close quarters.

The Town left wing then broke through, and Payne seized a pass and darted through, but with all the goal to shoot at he sent the ball straight to Wallace.

VISITORS TWO UP

Blackpool once more took up the running, and this time WATMOUGH found a gap, and went right through; Dolman saved his first effort, but he regained possession and shot into the net.

Thus Blackpool were two goals ahead and only thirteen minutes remained for play.

Hancock was off for good now, and the Town were feeling the handicap.

All seemed over bar shouting, but the Town staged a remarkable recovery, chiefly through the energies of the left flank.

Roberts and Stephenson had taken the measure of Blair and were giving him more trouble than ever, and the winger kept running inside and then parting with the ball. Once he beat four opponents and was overhauled by a fifth. Then he came again and this time the ball was whipped through a crowd of players; PAYNE, who had moved out to the right, took it in his stride and gave Wallace no chance.

ALL SQUARE AGAIN

Blackpool played for safety, the ball often being out of play, but the Town were going better than ever, and their speedy attacks were getting the visitors' defence in tangles. From a movement by Martin and Finlayson the ball went to the left; STEPHENSON gathered it and beat Blair before shooting right across goal, and the ball struck the upright and glanced into the net to level the scores amidst enthusiastic scenes.

It was touch and go then to the finish, with the Town the more dangerous, and the best shot for a long time was a long

one from Mackey. Wallace just tipping the ball over the bar.

A SPLENDID STRUGGLE

When all is said and done the Town deserved sympathy and great praise. They had been felled more by ill-luck than by the skill of the visitors, great though that was, and given an even break of fortune they may be capable of pulling round in the replay on Wednesday.

At their best the Town would have won, but the lapses in the middle line were the reason why the ten men did not pass the club into the fourth round.

Allowing for all the faults and errors, the Town put up a gallant fight, showing that they have not gone back on the fine form with which they started the New Year.

To both teams we can say that it was a capital game worthy of teams fighting for championships.

TURF GOSSIP



DERBY

ASTON SELLING HANDICAP HURDLE RACE: HAREM GUARD put up a good race and was beaten only a short head by There He Goes. The danger may be Good Show.

LOCKINGTON SELLING HANDICAP STEEPLECHASE: ANGEL PAVEMENT is my fancy to beat Alvarado.

BYRKLEY HANDICAP STEEPLECHASE: SANTIOSE may beat Dinton Lad.

BREADSALL STEEPLECHASE: 1. REYNOLDSTOWN; 2. BELTED HERO; 3. MONTCLAIR.

GRANGEWOOD HURDLE RACE: MANTEAU ROYAL to beat Barnagerra.

ROUND THE WORLD HANDICAP HURDLE RACE: ABBOT'S GLANCE, with Captain's Choice next best.

Nap: REYNOLDSTOWN. Double: REYNOLDSTOWN and HAREM GUARD.

SPECIAL SYSTEM SELECTION

CARMUS to win the 1.30 race at Derby.