

# FOILED BY FATE

## Sunderland Luckiest of Cup Fighters

### ADMISSIONS THAT THEY WERE FORTUNE'S FAVOURITES

(BY CRUSADER)

LUTON TOWN ..... 2  
Roberts 2

SUNDERLAND ..... 2  
Connor, Duns

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

SUNDERLAND.—Mapson; Gorman, Hall; Thomson, Johnson, McNab; Duns, Carter, Gurney, Gallacher, Connor.

Referee.—J. H. Whittle, Worcester.

Yes, Luton were the unluckiest team in the F.A. Cup Competition on Saturday.

Sunderland, the League champions, mighty of name and fame, came to fulfil a fixture. According to ninety per cent. of the critics, and a hundred per cent. of the Sunderland supporters, that was all they had to do to pass into the next round.

Never were players, officials and supporters of a club more greedy to hear the final tune of the referee's whistle than were those of Sunderland. They admitted it frankly on all sides, and that does credit to their sense of sportsmanship.

Why did they survive?

It was simply because of the mistakes of Luton Town—one or two of the few errors made by Luton were fatal.

In the heat of the moment we are apt to blame an individual for the loss of a game, but if we consider the game as it should be considered, in full perspective, it is impossible ever to blame one individual for a defeat, and so I am not going to say that the whole of the blame rested on Dolman or Hodge, or any other individual player.

#### A TRAGIC BLUNDER

That Dolman did make a tragic blunder is certain, but his failure to clear in anything like efficient manner the simple centre from which accrued Sunderland's equalising goal in the second half was no worse than the failure of Hodge to score from the simplest of openings in the first half.

There were other openings missed, if not quite so obviously, nevertheless they were really good chances, and had they been accepted Sunderland would have been a beaten side before the interval.

Sunderland certainly looked it when they left the field then, astounded by the fashion in which the third grade side had overcome them.

Fortuitous incidents helped them to regain the ground they had lost; nothing else, for it was not until they discovered that fate was playing a scurvy trick on their hosts that we saw anything like the Sunderland that we had been told to expect.

#### PLAYED AS A TEAM

Luton Town played as a team; they played as though for their lives and mastered the opposition everywhere for an hour, but they could not prevail against that intangible something which impels a goalkeeper's hands to slip here when it should be there, or a forward's boot to slip there when it should be here.

Any suggestion that Sunderland were the equal of Luton in this match is ridiculous. They had one spell inspired by their good fortune in which they harassed the Luton defence badly, but for eighty of the ninety minutes they were fighting with their backs to the wall.

#### SHAKEN TO THE CORE

That wonderful inside forward play of which we have heard so much was never noticed, because it was not allowed by the Luton defenders; their defence, supposed to be rock-like because reinforced by a £6,000 acquisition a fortnight previously was shaken to the very core, not once or twice, but with a consistency that was unbelievable to the majority of the Sunderland supporters.

Luton should have had their passport into the fifth round endorsed before half-time. They deserved it; they were always the better side, in every department except goal, and that they should have to battle again for a prize that they seemed to have tightly in their grasp is just one of those wicked buffets of misfortune that the human mind cannot encompass.

For Luton Town Club and the supporters it was an epic struggle, and Sunderland, if they are able to remain on the crest of their good fortune during the renewal of the struggle on Wednesday, will probably underscore very heavily in their progress to Wembley this milestone at Luton when they record it in the annals of their Club.

#### WHOLESOME ON THE WHOLE

On the whole it was a wholesome game, but with a less vigilant official in charge there would probably have been a few more infringements. Such a game is bound to include certain incidents that are contrary to the book, but the one or two vicious passages were the blots on the more famous men.

There were only three to which serious objection could be raised, with one exception they might be excused even to the great men, because of the shock under which they laboured.

Disillusioned people are apt to become irritable, and so it was with Duns in one instance, McNab in another, and, I believe, it was Johnson in the third. This last-named player once threw himself at Roberts in the second half with a violence that must have resulted in a serious injury had the collision occurred.

As it was a beautiful body swerve by Roberts evaded the tackle, and the offender went crashing to earth. Half the supporters gasped at this incident, and some of them probably wished that he had broken his head if not his neck, but so swiftly moved the change of scene that the incident was quickly forgotten by the crowd, if it were not entirely overlooked by the referee.

I hope Mr. Whittle, who handled the game magnificently, made at least a mental note of this, and one or two other incidents, too, so that on Wednesday the

men of Roker will know they have to play the game—and Roker has none too envious a reputation in important contests.

When play opened with Luton defending the Kenilworth-road end the ground was hard as concrete, and mist on the Bobbers' Stand side veiled from those opposite the identity of the players taking part.

There were almost gentle exchanges as a beginning, but within three or four minutes Luton were establishing a decisive superiority, proving that they were not unduly impressed by the reputation of their guests.

#### MAPSON'S TEST

A swoop by the Town left wing, with Stephenson assisted by Payne, left Roberts with an opening, and promptly he darted in and fired for the farther corner of the goal. With admirable judgment Mapson anticipated the direction of the ball, flung himself across, and managed to divert the ball beyond the post.

Sloan tested him with another grand shot, and once more the goalkeeper brought off a wonderful save, leaping high to the corner of the goal and turning the ball over the bar.

Little was seen of the vaunted Sunderland attack; the defenders fought grimly, and again and again their goal was in jeopardy, and escaped only by the desperate resistance of the backs and Johnson.

#### TOWN'S GOALS

The pressure was bound to tell, and so after twenty-five minutes there came a sally on the Town right wing; Johnson had chased Payne that way, and left a gap in front of goal; when the ball was squared ROBERTS was there, and quickly he got the ball under control, went on and then carefully steered it past the goalkeeper.

The shout must have been heard far beyond the limits of the borough boundary.

For a few moments Sunderland threatened great things, but were thwarted after getting a couple of corner kicks, and Luton came again on the right wing.

There there was a cry for foul against one of the Sunderland players, but the ball had passed on, and the referee ignored the appeal because to have allowed it would have benefited the offenders; ROBERTS was again on the spot, and served up as neat a goal as his first.

Again the ears of placid people in the rural district must have been pricked by the human roar.

#### ESCAPES

Luton revelled in the going, and the Sunderland players hardly knew which way to turn; if they got the ball it was

Why cannot employees of each firm club together and elect one or more to represent them at the replay at Sunderland so that the team would be assured of good support? An allowance of £1 per man would be sufficient.

W. H. LEETE,

taken from them, and fervently must they have thanked their lucky stars many times in the next few minutes.

First Payne galloped away and drove in a fine shot which Mapson saved, then Roberts sent in a lightning shot which passed just wide, and then followed the failure of Hodge, for whom Payne had made the simplest possible chance; the right winger from close range had only to kick the ball past the goalkeeper; he failed to do so; the ball struck Mapson and the chance of the match was lost.

Had this been accepted I believe Sunderland would have been beaten by a hatful.

The only real test that Dolman had in this half followed. Duns got clear and shot hard and low, and the goalkeeper turned the ball round the post for a fruitless corner.

So we reached the half-way house.

LUTON ..... 2  
SUNDERLAND ..... 0

During the interval Sunderland apparently discussed a change of tactics, and they restarted the second half as though they would speedily overcome the disadvantage.

The Town defenders did not immediately recognise the difference, and for the first time there was a tendency to hold the ball when it should have been given plenty of boot. However, stern tackling in the penalty area, in which Nelson, Finlayson, Mackey and Smith were all concerned, dispelled the danger, and the forwards came into the open again.

#### SLIPPED THE DEFENCE

Payne slipped right through the defence, and should have gone on and on before he had shot, for he was clear of opposition, but he preferred to shoot from twenty yards, and Mapson saved without fuss.

Johnson nudged Payne off again when the centre-forward was close in, and there was a hot tussle right under the Sunderland bar, but the ball was scrambled away.

Sunderland were pegged back to their own lines again, and the Town held the upper hand as much as in the first half, only resolute defensive play preventing a goal.

During one onslaught a shot was fired in, apparently by Sloan, and the ball struck the goalkeeper; how it failed to find a place in the net during the ensuing scramble cannot be described, but it did.

#### ONE AGAINST LUTON

Then came the first blow against Luton.

Sunderland's right wing made headway, and Gurney for the first time lured Nelson right out of position, the

centre-half chasing him to near the corner flag; before he could recover the ball was sent over to the centre; Connor had closed in, and although Mackey and Finlayson made a great attempt to block the way, the ball left the winger's foot, and somehow squeezed through a narrow gap between Dolman and the post.

I think Dolman would have saved had he not been unsighted.

This came thirteen minutes after the resumption, and with it also the rain, beating into the faces of the Luton team.

## HITTING BACK

Nevertheless, the Town forwards hit back with great vigour, and Payne looked a certain scorer as he ploughed through the defence, and was within a yard of goal when he lost control of the ball.

Sunderland now put in all they knew, and their backs and halves took more risks when they came up the field. Still their inside forwards were out-generalled and could not find a shooting opportunity, and it seemed as though the danger had been dispelled again when Dolman made his blunder.

## THE CROWNING ERROR

Sunderland's left wing got through and Connor managed to lob in a centre; Nelson and Dolman were in the goal to cover it, and the ball seemed to be falling directly into the waiting arms of the goalkeeper; that he muffed the simplest of catches is clear, for the next moment he was seen to push the ball out; it went straight to DUNS who kicked it half-heartedly back, clear of the opposition, and it landed in the net.

For a while Sunderland dominated the exchanges, and there seemed prospects of another goal, but Connor shot wide.

Gradually the Town became a fighting force again, and forced back the opposi-



tion. Once Payne raced through on the right and then drove the ball hard across, but too hard for any Luton player to cover the gap and get it; then Hodge was given another chance by Payne, and he went right through before shooting straight to the safe hands of Mapson.

## THE FINAL MISS

Sunderland were now fighting with greater confidence than ever before, yet it was mainly through their wingers and half-backs, for little was seen of the inside forwards—not nearly so much in evidence as the Town attack.

Stephenson made a grand effort to break through and caused a lot of trouble, and the Town pressure compelled the visitors to lie right back in their goal-mouth, fighting for a re-play.

With a minute to go Roberts dashed through on the right wing, beat the defence and passed inside; Payne met the ball first time with a terrific bang, and it shaved the upright and went—outside. Had the ball been six inches to the left of Payne Mapson could not have hoped to save.

And so the struggle ended—a contest which left Sunderland's followers and players and officials sighing with relief that they had escaped; and Luton's supporters and officials repining over what might have been, but prouder than ever of their team; the Luton players, I trust, nerved now to the second engagement, for they have the knowledge that they can produce as good as their opponents.

## THE PLAYERS

Dolman had comparatively little to do, far less than in the match with Exeter. He made a tragic error, and we must leave it at that.

Mackey and Smith played like internationals—both of them. Before the game Tom Smith told me that I should see the Sunderland right wing held; not in a boastful way, but confidently he said it, and he fulfilled his promise to the letter. I have been saying that if he kept closer in touch with the opposing winger he would beat anything, and so he did.

Mackey was masterful as ever; grand in every respect, and they were a glorious pair. Nelson completed the defensive elements, and what a game he played. The Sunderland inside forwards rarely got a shot, indeed, I do not think the three of them had half-a-dozen shots among them.

Finlayson and Fellowes also gave of their best, and their attacking powers had much to do with the manner in which the Town forwards dominated the game. Both tackled and passed accurately.

Hodge failed to show his best. Why I cannot think because he had the better chances of the two wingers. Dalliance was the trouble, I fancy. He did good things now and then. Stephenson was strong and assertive; he has done more perhaps, but he played splendidly.

Roberts was the best forward on the field, with Sloan very little behind him. The styles are different, that is all. Sloan was the craftsman all the time; Roberts was the workman, his speed, courage and punch, as well as his astuteness in opening out the game, being invaluable.

Payne had a certain amount of goal shyness, foreign to him. He again proved that he is becoming more than a puncher; he passed well, and could trick an opponent, but I hope he will continue to hit the ball hard and true first time as has been his wont.

## OF SUNDERLAND

What shall we say of Sunderland?

Mapson was a very fine custodian. That he saved the team from a staggering defeat is certain. Those early saves indicated that every goal the Town obtained would be hard-earned.

Gorman and Hall were good backs; I liked their clever kicking, and their ability to place the ball to advantage. Hall was the more virile, but his task was less severe than that of Gorman.

They were blamed by some of the Northern writers because they could not hold the Town forwards, but the trouble was in the middle line. That was the crux of the matter. The Town inside forwards and halves made too good use of the ball for the opposing middle men, and too big a burden fell on the backs. Johnson had more than he could manage in Payne, and, as in other games, he asked for worse trouble than he got.

The inside forwards were made to look as poor as any we have seen at Luton. They were unable to do much with the ball on the treacherous going. The wingers therefore did not see much of it, and when they did get it to their feet the tenacity of Mackey and Smith reduced them to ordinary units.

Sunderland can do better than this—if they are allowed, but on this showing they would not win the championship of the Third Division, and all they did for us was to prove what we have known a long time, and what northern critics had to learn—that the best in the Third Division South can more than extend the best in the First Division.