

PAYNE'S ABSENCE DISJOINTED THE FORWARD LINE

Defence's Great Display Against Sustained Pressure

OFFSIDE TACTICS PLAYED PART IN COUNTY'S WIN

BY CHILTERN

STOCKPORT COUNTY 2

Smalles, Oxley.

LUTON TOWN 1

Dawes.

STOCKPORT.—McDonough; Jenkinson, Jones (G.); Titterington, Jones (L.), Still; Oxley, Rice, Mantle, Kennedy, Smalles.

LUTON.—Coen; King, Smith; Finlayson, Nelson, Fellowes; Parris, Hancock, Dawes, Roberts, Stephenson.

Referee.—Dr. A. W. Barton, Repton.

LUTON TOWN suffered their biggest blow before their match at STOCKPORT began, for Joe Payne, taken ill on the journey, was unable to play. The result was a disjointed forward line, and one that never really moved as a line.

Payne was badly missed—there is no doubt about that, and there was no one who could cut through the defence on his own. As I anticipated, the County relied mainly on offside tactics as a means of stopping the Town forwards. I believe they were one of the pioneers of the offside game, and Bocking, who is still on their books, was one of the most expert exponents of this type of game.

OFFSIDE TACTICS SUCCEEDED

Well, their tactics succeeded probably more than was anticipated, and the Town simply had no forward who was able to take the ball through, which, after all, is the only way to defeat an offside trap. Had Payne been playing the effect, probably, would have been much different.

I have nothing to say against Dawes. He was a whole-hearted trier for 90 minutes, but he had not sufficient weight and trust to achieve his object. Also, he lacked support from his colleagues, and the ball too often came to him in the air.

Dawes played pluckily, though continually hampered by Jones (L.), who is a strong, forceful pivot. The only goal to Luton came from Dawes, and this was obtained through sheer tenacity, and his willingness to take half a chance.

Now, having looked at Luton's crowning misfortune, let us deal with the other side. In my view—and I think all the Luton supporters present will subscribe to it, the Town were lucky not to be in arrears at the interval.

STUBBORN DEFENSIVE WORK

It was only stubborn, solid defensive work, some brilliant goalkeeping by Coen, and some palpably weak finishing by the home forwards that kept the score sheet clean.

In the first half the County had quite three-quarters of the play, and it was only rarely that the Luton forwards got within shooting distance. When they did, they were all too frequently pulled up for offside.

Coen was superb in this opening half, and I have seldom seen him play better.

Two of his saves, which came in a matter of seconds, bordered on the miraculous, and there were few in the crowd who did not think that a goal was certain. He made no mistake, and in view of the pressure exerted, he could not afford to.

The opening half saw the Stockport forwards in great form. They were fast and accurate, but what is more to the point, they generally contrived to keep the light ball low. It is no easy task to try not to sky a bouncing ball on a bone hard pitch, and Luton did not always succeed.

GREAT BUFFETING

One or two of the players waited to get it under control, but others were rather hurried in their efforts to get it up the field.

The defence received a great buffeting before the interval, and it is to their credit that they left the field at half-time on equal terms.

However, had the County's finishing been equal to their approach work, I am very much inclined to the view that

they would have been two goals up at the interval.

The Town took a long time to settle down, and it was evident that the absence of Payne had sapped some of their confidence. Stockport got on top in the early stages, and they stayed there. I did not think they could keep up the pace, but they did, and neither side eased up before the end.

It was a ninety minutes thriller. Not excessively clever football, but hard graft, with the ball kept continually on the move. It was anyone's game in a second half that was as fast and furious as the first.

LUTON LEAD

When Luton took the lead after 57 minutes, it was against the run of the play. This may sound treasonable, but there it is. Stockport had undoubtedly had the bulk of the play and been the more impressive team.

However, goals count in football, and if the County could not take their chances—well, Dawes showed that he could do a thing or two in this line.

It came, as often goals do, in most unexpected fashion. Kennedy was penalised for a foul just inside his own half.

Finlayson took the kick, and lifted it well into the goalmouth. Even then, it looked innocent enough, but DAWES slipped round Jones (L.), who appeared to have the ball covered, and shot as McDonough advanced. The goalkeeper half saved, but Dawes regained possession and netted from close range.

The crowd was aghast. Rather a loud voiced crowd this, and it possesses something approaching the "Tottenham roar." I was told before the match that the crowd was worth two goals to the home side, and I can well believe it.

LUTON'S SUPREMACY

After this goal, Luton had a period of supremacy. Stephenson made one of his characteristic runs, and sent in a drive that winded McDonough. Then came the one unpleasant incident of the match that was very clean considering the pace at which it was played.

There were words, and more than words, between Stephenson and Still. They were separated, and then the referee had to run across to a linesman before he could make a decision and restart the game. The upshot was that he gave a free kick for offside.

For a time, the Town pressed, and the forwards showed up in a more favourable light.

Shephenson should have done better than shoot straight at McDonough when he broke clean through, and then Parris got the ball mixed up with his feet when a centre might have brought a goal.

Then when it looked as if Luton had at last found their true form, there came a Stockport breakaway, and a goal.

Mantle made the goal possible, for he made a grand run on the right wing.

THE EQUALISER

He was allowed to take the ball right up to the goal. Coen covered up, anticipating a shot, but he squared the ball across the goal. This caught the Town defence running the wrong way, and SMAILES, who had slipped into the centre, slammed the ball into the back of the net. King made an unavailing effort to tackle, but was a split second too late.

This goal came after 68 minutes, and then we heard a roar that must have reached Manchester, six miles away.

The County were spurred on to even greater efforts, but Luton fought back and should have regained the lead in the next minute Dawes worried Jenkinson into giving away a corner. This was well placed by Stephenson, and the ball went to Parris, who was standing well inside the penalty area.

A MISSED CHANCE

It seemed that he had only to shoot to score, but he muffed the chance completely. That was a pity, for a goal to

Luton at that point would have taken a lot of the fight out of the County.

After that, as if in relief at their escape, Stockport crowded on pressure once more. Coen made two more grand clearances, and Smith saved the situation when Mantle was clean through.

Minutes were flying past, and it looked as if Luton would return with a point. The defence was defeating all the County's frantic efforts for another goal, but four minutes from the end, the blow fell.

HOW THE DECIDER CAME

OXLEY, the most dangerous of the home forwards, probably because he was given time to get the ball under control, and room in which to work, began a run on the right.

Smith could not get close enough to him, and the winger took the ball to within a few yards of goal, but almost level with the goal post.

It looked impossible to score from that angle, but somehow he screwed it in between Coen and the post. It was a surprise move, and one that came off.

That was the end as far as the Town were concerned, and although Smith made a long run into the home penalty area, in an effort to score, there was little hope of an equaliser.

So ended Luton's first match in the Second Division. Defeated it is true, but gallant in defeat. Unlucky to lose in that they kept on terms for so long, it was a poor reward to a great defence. However I could not begrudge the County their win. They just deserved it.

Had Luton won a point, it would have been due to the almost superhuman resistance put up by Nelson and his colleagues in the rearguard. It was unfortunate that the goal that won the points for Stockport should have come as the result of some slight slackness on the left flank.

IT MADE THE DIFFERENCE

Not much, but just enough to make all the difference between a win and a draw. Oxley should not have been allowed to bring the ball in, but almost throughout the game, he was given too much room. Smith did not play on top of him, and this was the only blemish on his display.

Apart from that, the left back was as rugged as ever. Fearless in a tackle, kicking well and accurately, but nearly always those few yards too far back. Oxley was nippy enough without being given any extra rope.

King completely subdued Smailes. He stood on no ceremony, and tackled the winger as soon as he got the ball. There was little danger from this source, and Smailes probably wished he were somewhere else before the game ended.

I classed King as the best back on the field. He was fast, recovered well, and kicked accurately except for one period of a few minutes in the second half when he appeared to have a target in the stand on the far side.

He put the ball out of play four or five times in a few minutes, and roused some real Lancashire or Cheshire sarcasm.

Actually both the backs were sound, but I do wish Smith would cover his winger better.

NELSON'S GRIP

Nelson held Mantle in a vice-like grip, and he was continually a barrier to all approach down the centre of the field. Jones (L) is much talked about, but he was overshadowed by Nelson.

Ruthless tackling, canny positioning and brilliant headwork went to make up Nelson's game.

In the early stages of the first half, he was evidently troubled by the light ball which was bouncing very awkwardly.

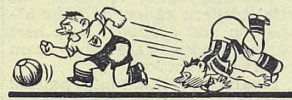
Once or twice he nearly gave me heart failure, but after that he settled down to play at the top of his form. That is praise enough.

Finlayson was one of the outstanding figures on the field in the second half. He worked tirelessly, and with King, put the home left wing almost completely out of action.

As good in defence as I have ever seen him, he recovered much better than he did last season, and he worked like a trojan. In the first half, also, he did well, though both he and Fellowes were badly overworked.

OPPORTUNE TACKLES

Fellowes completed a strong line, and



made some opportune tackles. He succeeded in smothering Rice, who early on, appeared a very dangerous number.

The forward line never worked really smoothly, and we had some opportunity of judging how much Payne does really mean to the attack.

His leadership and punch were missed, and the front line was like a ship without a rudder. Of course, the forwards did not receive the best of support from behind, simply because the halves had their hands full, but even so, shots were few and far between.

HANCOCK THE BEST

I made Hancock the best of the for-

wards, and he was certainly the most dangerous. He worked tirelessly, forged, fetched and carried, and was always in the thick of the fight. He was always ready to mix it, and provided the few openings that were made.

His partner, Parris had a poor match. We saw little of that delicate footwork, and classic centres he showed in the last practice game.

He was not brought into the game for long spells, and this may have accounted for his ineptitude. Jones (G), big and strong, tackled quickly and surely, and Parris had little time to bring the ball under control.

There were long periods when Stephenson saw nothing of the ball, but when he was brought into the game he was a dangerous raider. He had more passes in the second half, and frequently had Jenkinson running the wrong way.

Roberts did not seem to be able to get going. He worked as hard as ever, but to me, he appeared to be in too much of a hurry to part with the ball.

GLIMPSES OF CLEVERNESS

We saw only glimpses of the clever play the left wing can produce. Roberts never really settled down, and his passes were not as accurate as usual.

Dawes I have mentioned. A great trier and I think we are going to see the best of him this season.

The line as a whole was unduly bothered by the offside tactics employed, and this was reflected in their play. Probably they always had the fear of the whistle blowing, and that had an unsettling effect.

Coen deserves a mention all to himself. He was brilliant, and he made some of the finest saves I have seen for many a long day.

He did all that was humanly possible, and had no chance with either of the shots that beat him.

It was a really hard game from beginning to end, and the pace at which it was played was amazing in view of the heat.

STRUGGLED MANFULLY

It was hot watching from the stand, so what it was like running about on the field can easily be judged.

It was a pity that the Town could not have succeeded in their first game, but they struggled manfully. Had Payne been able to play, I think two points would have been won, and that is without detracting from Dawes's display.

There is no need for pessimism, for Stockport are a big, strong eleven, who should do well on their own ground. They were a shade faster on the ball than were Luton, and once obtaining the upper hand, did not allow the Town to play their normal game.