

GOALS THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN PREVENTED

Forwards Over-Shadowed By Great Defence

By CHILTERN

1937/38

ASTON VILLA 4
Broome (2), Phillips (2)
LUTON TOWN 1
Stephenson

ASTON VILLA. — Biddlestone; Callaghan, Cummings; Massie, Allen, Iverson; Phillips, Haycock, Broome, Starling, Maund.

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

Referee.—A. A. Horwood, Walton-on-Thames.

After ASTON VILLA took the lead in minutes after the start of their match with LUTON TOWN at Villa Park last night, the Town were always a beaten team, and never looked like saving a point.

The goal came as the direct result of a throw-in which was taken quickly, and sent to Starling. The inside left lofted it into the centre. It looked Nelson's ball all the way, but it was not, and Broome was left in possession a few yards from goal.

Even then he should not have scored, but Coen positioned badly, and the centre forward shot through between the near post and Coen.

CHAPTER OF MISFORTUNES

This was the first of a chapter of misfortunes, and it took most of the wind out of the Town's sails. They had opened up brightly, and in the initial stages played as good football as the Villa, but success put the home side on their toes, and there was more snap and punch about their forwards than we saw at Luton.

Added to this was the fact that the Town defence was overworked owing to the inability of the forwards to keep the ball for long, and another goal to the home side was always imminent.

The Town were often in the Villa half, and in a way were having as much of the play as their opponents, but whereas their attacks seldom looked dangerous, the home forwards were always doing something with the ball.

It was 23 minutes before another goal was registered, and in the meantime the Luton defence had been sorely tried. Once more it was Starling who provided the opportunity. He sent in a high centre which Nelson got to, but he merely headed it up into the air.

CLEVER GOAL

The ball went over towards PHILLIPS, who coolly evaded a rush by Smith, changed the ball from his right to his left foot, and squeezed it once more between Coen and the post.

This was a really clever goal. The Villa now pressed hard, and the Town defence lost most of its calmness and was often flurried.

The home forwards kept sweeping down the field, with Starling as prompter of most of their attacks, and time and again they cut through the defence with ease.

Then came a picture goal by BROOME, but this, too, should have been prevented. He received the ball on the edge of the penalty area and, veering to the left, ran round Nelson and King.

Neither defender tried a tackle and Broome was allowed to take the ball

within a few yards of the goal line. Coen did not come out to narrow the angle, and the centre-forward was able to pick his spot in the net. He made no mistake.

STEPHENSON REDUCES

This reverse seemed to sting the Town forwards into activity, and STEPHENSON chased a long ball up the field. Callaghan should have cleared, but miskicked badly to present the winger with a grand chance. He shot hard and low, beating Biddlestone all the way.

Hopes ran higher after this, but a minute from the interval we had another cold douche. This came in the shape of a goal direct from a corner. It was a silly thing altogether, but the ball beat Nelson, Smith and Coen, who all went for it together.

Certainly it was a beautiful corner, placed by PHILLIPS, but how exactly it got into the net no one seemed to know.

That was the last of the goals, but, frankly, I was rather apprehensive of what would happen in the second half. By the way the Villa played before the interval, it looked as if they would further increase their lead, but they fell away afterwards.

Luton did much better, however, in a second half that was unexciting. Football deteriorated, and there was little for the crowd to cheer.

The Town forwards seemed to get a little confidence from somewhere, and began to hold the ball, though they never functioned as a line, and the home defence was seldom in trouble.

DIFFERENT PROPOSITION

Reasons for the defeat? Well, first of all, the Villa are a vastly different proposition on their own ground than they were at Kenilworth-road. They had room to inuigle in their clever football, but, even then, I was rather disappointed.

The ball was far too much in the air, and the villa were quite as big offenders as the Town.

Three of the goals might have been prevented, but I do not feel inclined to blame the defence too much. They were under a big handicap, for the ball was continually coming back, and there were times when they were nearly run off their feet.

BAD POSITIONING

Bad positioning, as much as anything else, was a contributory cause. At times there was a gap between the backs, and, with Nelson not in his best form, the Villa forwards did very much as they liked in the first half.

King and Smith were constantly being forced back on their own goal, which is always a mistake. In the second half, they played well up the field, and got on top of the home forwards instead of letting the home forwards get on top of them. The result was that the Villa's second half attacks were frequently held up by offside.

Had the backs done this in the first half, then the Town might have got somewhere. Then again, we get back to the forwards; it was their ineptitude that allowed the Villa to keep driving the Town back, and I think that this is the department that needs attention.

I do not wish to be over-critical, but on last night's showing, the Town had no forward who could really be called dangerous.

PAYNE WELL HELD

Payne was a long way from being Payne. He never got the better of Allen, who played another storming game, and the Town leader seems to have lost most of that dash that made him a menace to goalkeepers last season.

He was rarely in the picture, and had fewer shots at goal than I have ever seen him have. I thought he might have made better use of a couple of chances that came his way in the second half, but he did not seem to be able to get to the ball quickly enough.

Still this Villa defence is as solid as the Rock of Gibraltar. The positioning was an object lesson, with Callaghan, Allen and Cummings forming an almost insurmountable barrier.

No weaknesses and no mistakes here, and the Town forwards were not clever enough to force them to make mistakes.

STEPHENSON'S IMPROVEMENT

Stephenson was perhaps the best of the front line, and he played much better than in any game this season. Even then, he did not show his best form. However, he was the one from whom most danger came, and he snatched at the one slip made by Callaghan.

The left wing was better than the right, but Roberts, though working hard, did not reach any great heights, and never seemed to get anywhere. The same applied to Dawes, who would not have been recognised as the same player who scintillated against Manchester United.

I recall only one shot from him, and that went over the top. Hancock was completely overshadowed by Cummings, and was usually pulled up before he could do any damage.

He has an irritating habit of bringing the ball back, and by doing this he played into the left-back's hands.

I wondered in the first half if the Town forwards had an inferiority complex, for they seemed afraid to attempt any constructive work.

OVER-AWED?

It may have been that they were over-awed by the occasion, but, to give them their due, they pulled out useful football in the second half. Yet it got them nowhere, and they could never pass that brickwall defence.

The work of Finlayson and Fellowes was the bright spot of the Town team. I thought Fellowes was a shade the better, but Finlayson was facing the best forward on the field in Starling.

Nevertheless, the right-half was an effective counter to Starling's guile, and played tremendously hard. He and

stern tackling, and gave their forwards grand passes.

Finlayson was rather the more accurate in constructive work, but Fellowes sent out good passes, too.

Nelson was often in trouble against the dashing Broome, and never attained the mastery he did at Luton. In the air he was well on top, but with the ball on the ground Broome generally had the better of the argument.

KING STUCK TO MAUND

I liked the way King marked Maund. He stuck to him like a leech, and the winger had few chances of doing any damage. Smith, too, again did well against Phillips, and had some of the positioning in the first half been better, there would have been little fault to find with this pair.

Coen was not as confident as he been in the last three matches, and thought he might have saved the first and third goals. In both cases he should have advanced to narrow the angle, but stayed in goal instead. He made one or two sparkling saves, but the early reverse rather unsettled him.

Luton were perhaps feeling the effects of the hard matches they have had to play since the season opened. Each game in which they have played has been a stern struggle from start to finish.

There will be consolation in the fact that few teams will gain any profit from their visits to Villa Park. The Villa are shaking down into a team, and it was, perhaps, their added quickness in thinking that was the main difference between the teams.

NO WAITING

This was most apparent where the Town forwards were concerned, for they kept waiting for the ball to come to them. There was no waiting where Allen and his men were concerned, and they were up to the ball every time.

The way some of the goals came was unfortunate, and this undoubtedly took a lot of the fight out of Luton. They fought back courageously in the second half, but there was not sufficient snap in the front line to gain a goal that would have given them confidence, and acted as a tonic.

We must expect set-backs in this class of football. It will perhaps take time for the team to settle down to the faster pace, and the more clever execution of their opponents and my opinion is that they will do better when the heavy grounds arrive.

A word for the referee. If there were more like Mr. Horwood, we should have much less to grumble about.

He was firm and fair, and there were few decisions which evoked argument among the crowd.