

MEDIOCRITY AFTER BRILLIANT OPENING SPELL

Weaknesses Revealed in Defence

(By CHILTERN)

SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY 4
Robinson, Luke, Rimmer,
Thompson

LUTON TOWN 0

SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY.—Goodfellow; Ashley, Catlin; Drury, Millership, Burrows; Luke, Walker, Thompson, Robinson, Rimmer.

LUTON TOWN.—Dolman; King, Smith; Finlayson, Nelson, Fellowes; Ferguson, Dawes, Vinall, Roberts, Parris. Referee: G. W. Jones, Nottingham.

During the opening 15 minutes of their match with Sheffield Wednesday at Hillsbrough, Luton Town had so much of the play that I thought we were in for a repetition of the last two Saturdays, with the Town well on the goal trail.

During this period, the Wednesday did not have a kick at the ball. The Town forwards, ably backed up from behind, revealed weaknesses in the home defence, and it was a silent crowd of 18,000 that watched the Town hammer away.

Corner after corner fell to them, and it seemed merely a case of sitting back and waiting for a goal to come. Only Goodfellow's brilliance stopped a shot from Dawes opening his side's account, and the bunch of Lutonians, who travelled on the same train as the team, yelled themselves hoarse.

PRIMITIVE EFFORTS

The Sheffield supporters were more than half laughing at the primitive efforts of their forwards to get going, and there was plenty of jeering going on. That this atmosphere was turned to one of triumph and cheering at the end, was entirely unforeseen, and weakness in the Luton defence must take the main burden for the defeat.

Every department was to blame in some measure, but the defence needs strengthening, and the poverty of it was revealed for all to see in the second half when the Wednesday forwards played some grand football.

What would have happened had Vinall scored instead of shot just wide when Goodfellow ran out to meet him after about 15 minutes' play, I cannot say with any degree of truth, but I do think that had the centre-forward had the luck that goes with chances of this sort, and scored the Wednesday would not have had the spirit to fight back.

From the way they started, the Wednesday were a beaten side before they went on the field. Their recent lack of success was lying heavily on their shoulders, and an early goal to Luton would probably have broken their backs altogether.

WEDNESDAY IMPROVE

Slowly, but surely, we could see the Wednesday improving. More bite came into their forward play, and the Town began to fade out for some reason which was not apparent, and which no one could successfully explain.

The clever work put in by Robinson and Rimmer on the left wing, seemed to give their colleagues confidence, and the balance of play began to swing in their favour.

For the first half hour Luton could claim to have been the better team, but after that, it was all the Wednesday.

Movements by Rimmer, whom King could never hold, spelt plenty of danger for the Town, and yet the Wednesday's finishing was always poor. Twice, Dolman should have been given no chance to save, but he managed to get down to the ball in brilliant style from shots from point blank range.

TOWN'S ATTACKS BECOME FEWER

Luton's attacks began to get fewer and fewer, and it was no real surprise when the home side went ahead. Yet the manner in which they took the lead was surprising.

Parris had made a run down the left wing, and the ball was cleared by Ashley. It went well out on the right, and Nelson and Thompson chased it. Nelson got there first, and had the ball at his feet. It looked as if the ball ran badly for him, but even so, he must take the main blame for the goal.

Thompson beat him for possession, and centred hard into the goalmouth. ROBINSON was standing unmarked, and he shot into a vacant net as Dolman crashed into him. Dolman may have been a little late in coming out of his goal, but the point was that the whole defence was spreadeagled, and he had more than ten yards to go for the ball.

MANNA FROM HEAVEN

It was a most unsatisfactory affair from the Luton viewpoint, but it was like manna from heaven to the Wednesday crowd. Goals have been few and far between at Hillsbrough this season, and the supporters did not care very much how the ball got into the net as long as it landed there.

At no point after this did I have much faith in the Town's ability to pull the match out of the fire. All their confidence and skill seemed to have left them, and in the later stages of the second half, they were quite plainly a well-beaten side. Teamwork was missing, there were weaknesses in vital places, and the whole team played as if they were thoroughly cowed.

I am not making excuses when I say that the ball never ran well for them after the first 20 minutes. That is strictly true, and they experienced some

of the worst luck that can befall any team.

The second goal, scored by LUKE five minutes after the interval was a severe setback, but it was far and away the best point of the four.

The right winger gained possession after a bright movement. He took the ball on a yard or two, and then let drive from just outside the penalty area. Dolman flung himself at the ball, but he never stood a chance of saving it. It simply flew into the net just inside the near post.

ROBERTS' CRUEL LUCK

Immediately after this, the Town made ground, and Roberts took careful aim from 20 yards. The shot looked a scorer all the way, but his luck was out, and the ball struck the cross bar, and came back into play.

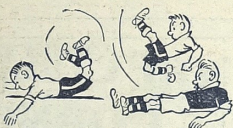
Goodfellow would never have been within a yard of the ball. This misfortune seemed to settle the issue entirely. The Wednesday forwards, keeping the ball on the move, made ground all the time, and Dolman was kept busy.

The third goal, which came 25 minutes from the end, was a curious one, and it certainly looked as if it should not have been allowed.

CURIOUS GOAL

Dolman made a brilliant full length save from Robinson at the expense of a corner. This was accurately placed by Luke, and I thought Dolman made a mistake in following the ball over in an effort to punch clear.

He never looked like getting his hands to it, and RIMMER headed back into the goal. The ball was sailing into



the empty net when Smith jumped up, and punched away.

It did not look as if the ball crossed the line, and Smith told me it could not have done so when I asked him after the match.

Everybody was expecting a penalty, and the Wednesday players were appealing for it, when the referee pointed to the middle of the field, and awarded a goal. Despite Luton's protests, he would not alter his decision.

REFEREE MIGHT HAVE BEEN WRONG

If the ball did not cross the line, the referee made a mistake, for until it has done so, a goal cannot be awarded. Still, Luton can have few grumbles on this account, for the point was deserved. Still it is curious to see a team appealing for a penalty against itself.

The Town still had some fight left, and Goodfellow was lucky to save from Dawes, and then Vinall headed against the post with the goalkeeper out of position. Yet another slice of bad luck came when Ferguson and Goodfellow went up for a high ball together, and the winger got his head to it, only to see it sailing just over the top.

However, the homesters had this game well in their pockets, and goals were always likely to come. Another was registered, eleven minutes from the end. This was a scrambling sort of affair.

THOMPSON SETTLES IT

Nelson was easily beaten by Robinson, and the ball came across to Luke, who struck the post. The ball rolled along the goal line, and THOMPSON rushed it over the line from close range.

That was the end of a perfect day as far as the Wednesday were concerned. Once again we had seen the spectacle of a team playing much better after the resignation of its manager.

It always seems a bit thick on the manager concerned, but it happens so often. Whether it is a case of coincidence or whether it is merely something to do with psychology, I do not know, but Luton have had the same experience as the Wednesday.

Now we come to the reasons for the defeat. Well, in the first case, the Wednesday's second half display stamped them as a team that should not be at the bottom of the League for long.

They played fast, progressive football, holding the ball just long enough to draw the man, and then slipping it through. I was assured that it was their best display of the season, so it would seem that the Town were a week late in their visit to Sheffield.

TOWN NEEDED A GOAL

Due allowance must be made for the bad luck experienced by the Town forwards in their finishing. A goal would have made a world of difference to the team, but you always have to be prepared for this sort of thing in football.

The main reason was that the whole team was below par after the first twenty minutes. During the opening period they played something like the football they have shown in the last few matches.

After that, they seemed to slip back several weeks and back to the days which we had hoped had past. It was a surprising fade out. Just as if something that was vitally important to a

machine had gone wrong, with the result that the engine was running sluggishly.

ALL ROUND DEGENERATION

It did not affect one department or one individual player. It was simply an all round degeneration. The forwards lost their cohesion, and holes in defence became apparent.

Smith was perhaps the best of the defence. He played consistently throughout, and for the most part had the measure of Luke, though occasionally, he was too far away from the winger.

There was a weakness on the other flank, where King never really managed to hold Rimmer. The outside-left is still a dangerous raider, and he and Robinson led King and Finlayson a rare dance in the first half. In the second half, Robinson changed places with Walker.

King was never near enough to Rimmer, and though he did fairly well early on, he was beaten more often in the later stages of the game.

Finlayson was not at his best, and this did not help King, with whom one could sympathise, for he struck Rimmer on one of his best days.

NELSON FADED OUT

Finlayson showed slowness in recovery, but for all that, he put in some grand work, and could not be said to have had a bad match. Let us say that he did not have a good match, and leave it there.

He did not bring the ball through in his usual clever style, and several times was content to balloon it into the air.

Nelson began well, but faded right out afterwards, and there was often a big gap in the middle. The fact that he often had to go "hareing" over to help King did not help matters, but generally, he was far from his best.

He was slow in getting back, once beaten, and there was a lack of lustre about his play. Part of the Town's defection could be traced to Nelson falling away, but there was a general lack of confidence about the defence in the second half.

DOLMAN IN FORM

It was well that Dolman was in form, or the score might have been more. He made some grand saves, and was as good as I have ever seen him with ground shots.

Time and again, he went full length to save scoring drives, and little blame can attach to him, though he seemed to make an error of judgment when the third goal was scored.

Fellowes was the best of the half-back line, and he worked hard throughout. Sometimes, he was inclined to hold the ball too long before passing, but his work in defence was invaluable.

The right wing was strangely ineffective. Dawes was less prominent than in any previous match this season, and he never seemed in touch with the game. When he tried to make ground, he was quickly smothered, and although he was unlucky with a couple of drives, he was never really a danger after that first period.

FERGUSON CROWDED OUT

Ferguson got few good passes, and when he did receive the ball, he was crowded out by Catlin, who showed that he was a believer in playing well on top of the winger. Ferguson will be able to testify to this, and although he tried hard enough, he could never quite elude the International back.

Vinall was a trier throughout, but he had to face a strong centre-half in Millership. He was never given any room, but he made some fine efforts to keep the line together when things were going badly.

Roberts gave his usual hundred per cent. working display, and he was on the go all the time. His shooting was as effective as any of his colleagues, and if the fates had been kinder, he would have scored a smashing goal.

Parris was given more scope than Ferguson, and was more dangerous, though he was inclined to dally at times. Still, his footwork was a bright feature, and his centres were always well made.

The chief need of the forwards seemed to be some one who could hold the ball, not too long, but just long enough. The Wednesday had these men, and this was one of the reasons why they won so handsomely and