

WHY PLYMOUTH SAVED A POINT

Carte's Inclusion A Success

(By CRUSADER)

LUTON TOWN 1
Ferguson

PLYMOUTH ARGYLE 1
Mitcheson

LUTON. — Coen; Carte, Smith; Finlayson, Nelson, Fellowes; Ferguson, Connelly, Vinall, Roberts, Stephenson.

PLYMOUTH.—Cann; Kirkwood, Rae; Gorman, McNeil, Ryan; Dougan, Mitcheson, Fletcher, Brown, Lane. Referee: G. Dutton, Warwick.

Plymouth Argyle lived up to the tradition of being Luton Town's most difficult proposition.

One could have thought after the Town's success at Plymouth that the bogey had been laid once and for all, but if ever a team as a team struggled against an inferiority complex on Saturday Luton Town did so.

Curious thing was that they were doing nearly all the attacking for long periods, yet were never comfortable, and one seemed to sense the possibility of defeat even when the Argyle defence was being pressed most severely.

Reason was that the Town forwards never shaped like goal-getters, and one could rack one's brain to the limit to find excuses for the failure and then fail. Apart from the very firm ground and the difficulty of controlling the ball one could see no excuse, though the solution of their failures was obvious.

Business of forwards is to get goals, and goals can only come by efficient shooting or the misfortunes of the opposing defenders. There was no such misfortune, but there was just about the worst marksmanship we have seen for two or three seasons. It was simply deplorable, and I am not voicing a solitary opinion, but the view of thousands of spectators when I say that there will have to be radical changes in the attack if the Town are to escape the indignity of relegation.

FORWARDS AT FAULT

While we have been blaming the defence, and rightly so, week in and week out, there has been in recent games plenty of reason to castigate the forwards, and never more so than in this game.

Not one was free from heaps of errors, and everyone failed with chances to score except, perhaps, Connelly, and he did not have any simply because he was lagging about in midfield when he should have been up to snap up the chances that came more or less frequently.

Giving full marks to the Argyle defence for their stubborn and cool resistance, they will not meet another attack so lacking in the essential quality of opportunism. I admired the skill of Kirkwood and Rae, and especially the latter, who was always reliable, and baffled Ferguson almost by looking at him. The kicking of each of the Argyle backs was well nigh impeccable, and their tackling was sound and clean withal.

Cann had not a very difficult task, although he had as much of the ball as any player, but he must have smiled more than once when he saw the Town forwards trying to carry the ball a yard and yet another yard when a quick drive would have been at least troublesome, and probably successful.

A GOOD MIDDLE LINE

I liked also the middle line of the visitors. McNeil just waited for Vinall to do the wrong thing, and the flank halves played a vigorous but very fair game, keeping the ball down and using it to the best advantage. That they were able to do so consistently was due to the finicky play of Connelly and Roberts.

The Argyle forwards had fewer chances, much fewer, but they were much better on the mark than the Town, and although Coen had much less to do his task on several occasions would not have brought him into disgrace had he been beaten. Mitcheson was very clever, and Brown was not far behind, but apart from brilliance in the first half, when he had too much scope, Dougan did not do a great deal, and Lane was seldom in the picture.

Argyle's immunity from defeat was due in the first place to the poverty of ideas in the Town attack.

DEFENCE IMPROVED

If there was a crumb of comfort for the Town supporters it was that the Town defence as a whole showed great improvement. I attribute a good deal of this improvement to the manner in which Nelson improved his defensive tactics. Never did he dally in clearances, and again and again he gave the forwards plenty of opportunity to attack, swinging the ball up the field before the opposition had recovered defensive position, and occasionally himself taking a part in the onslaughts. Even more than the improvement

here, however, was the success of Carte.

I do not think there was a better back on the field, and he could be bracketed with Kirkwood in every respect. Just a trifle shaky in the early stages, subsequently he was right on top of Lane, and his kicking and tackling were as good as anything we have seen from a Town defender this season. That he has earned his place and will keep it seems certain.

Smith had a poor match, being uncertain in his kicking, and unsteady in tackling. There was no sense of security in his play, and that should be the first virtue to expect from a full back.

Finlayson had a moderate first half and, indeed, it was not until the Town had the lead that we saw him at his best. Then he took a big hand in the numerous attacks, and it was not his fault or that of Fellowes that there was not more success in the drives that were engineered. Fellowes did better than in recent games, and the main reason for the comparative failure was the wretched display of the forwards.

VINALL LOSES HIS SHOT

Vinall has gone right off colour. When he first came he was in the habit of shooting hard and often. He has changed his ideas if not his boots since those days, and Saturday's game was his worst since joining the club. He could not hold the line together, and he had not a single shot worth calling a shot.

Connelly was trying to do tricks when he should have been infusing some punch into the line, and Roberts seemed to have been bitten by the same bug. Why on earth Roberts would keep on trying to position the ball better and better when he should have tried his luck first time was beyond understanding. One does not expect a forward to score with every shot, but he is expected to shoot, and not to fritter and fiddle about, and both inside forwards were doing this.

The wing forwards were little better. True Stephenson tried very hard to find the target, and I believe he must have had three shots to every one of the other forwards in the first half. Although he never mastered Kirkwood as he might have done had he swept inside more often, he did try to get goals. Ferguson had better chances but failed to take them, and he would not have been accounted lucky if he had placed his name on the score sheet three or four times. As it was he was marked as wanting in this important respect.

DID THE RIGHT THING

But having so criticised I am not suggesting wholesale changes in the side. I do not regard this as the best the Town attack can do, and although expecting more changes than were made last week, I think the selectors did right when they decided to give the attack another run. The one change they made was a real success, and gives more confidence in the defence. I do not know what other change can be made there, although others have been suggested to me, but something will have to be done about the attack.

This team is good enough to elude relegation if it can be made to pull together properly, but there was among half the team a lack of fighting spirit such as prompted the Argyle in every department, and most of all is needed some of that courage which has been withdrawn by the removal of Payne.

CLEAN GAME

If there was not a tremendous lot of first class football, the game was clean and interesting all through. Many thought it was a scrappy struggle, but I found a good deal of pleasure in some of the movements and the manoeuvring and nothing struck me more than the positioning of the Argyle defenders, notably the half-backs.

Play was fairly even, with the Argyle showing the more individual cleverness and better understanding, though the Town were the more aggressive. Vinall tried his luck once with a drive which went very close, but there was a tendency among the Town forwards and halves to hang on to the ball, and the best shots came from Stephenson, and Cann was rather fortunate once to turn the ball behind. Dougan missed a good chance by shooting too hurriedly, and Coen brought off a grand save from a surprise shot by Ryan, and there were two occasions when the goal escaped in very lucky fashion.

LACK OF THRUST

Nevertheless the Town had better chances of scoring, but there was no

forcefulness at close quarters, and Ferguson especially failed with a very fine opening. So the half-way arrived without a goal.

Argyle's defence was severely tested continuously when play was resumed, and their forwards were held up better than had been the case in the first half. Then Lane got clean through and a goal seemed certain, especially as Coen delayed his rush out almost too late; when he did make it he threw himself at the feet of Lane as that player was on the point of shooting, and deflected the ball.

Stephenson made the first goal. He took a long pass and tricked Kirkwood, came down the goal line and then lifted the ball over Cann's head as the goal-keeper came out; FERGUSON was in wait, and headed the ball in, and the referee pointed to the centre even as Cann and Rae went for the ball together; I thought Rae headed it, but was told that Cann pulled it out, but the referee was right on the spot and awarded the goal.

It seemed then that goals would come with a rush, for there was a series of sharp shock attacks during which the Town forwards gave of their best, swinging the ball about to good purpose, and Connelly fed Stephenson more than he did Ferguson, getting the ball right over to the other wing and enabling the winger to race in. Never did the Argyle defence falter, however, and with the Town inside forwards striving to beat too many men in the goal area instead of shooting the goal survived.

With less than a minute to go the Argyle forwards, who had been out of the picture for some time, opened up a left wing movement, and the ball went right across to the right. The covering up of the Town defence was faulty, and there were muddled attempts to get the ball, but actually the Argyle goal was a streak of sheer luck for them. Dougan missed the ball completely as he ran to meet it, but it did not miss him, rebounding from his leg, and the result was that MITCHESON was left with an easy chance, and Coen had no possible opportunity of averting a goal, and so the game ended with a point for each team.

Attendance: 11,363; receipts: £597 16s. 6d.