

LESSONS THAT LUTON TOWN DID NOT TAKE TO ADVANTAGE

Billington Out Of Luck

(By CRUSADER)

LUTON TOWN 1
Stephenson

WEST HAM UNITED 2
Macaulay, Small

LUTON.—Coen; Smith, Dunsmore; Finlayson, Nelson, Loughran; Clark, Redfern, Billington, Connelly, Stephenson.

WEST HAM.—Conway; Bicknell, Walker (C); Corbett, Walker (R), Cockroft; Foxall, Macaulay, Small, Fenton (B), Morton.

Referee: G. Dutton, Warwick.

What Luton Town grabbed with one hand at Tranmere they could not hold with both hands at Luton, and they were beaten on merit.

True, they had more of the play, but I do not think they were comparable with the "Hammers" for balance, for combination, for speed, for the finer points of the game.

They were not so sound in defence, no, not by long chalks, and although they had more of the ball than the "Hammers" forwards, they did not use it so effectively.

I wish I could think otherwise. Trouble was that the "Hammers" played like a side with a policy, and the Town did not.

The successful policy was the compactness of the defence, with the inside forwards doing as much work in their own half as did the half-backs, and reliance on the speed and cleverness of the wingers. I think it could have been countered had the Town adopted some more definite plan of defence.

Of course, I do not expect anyone to take notice of suggestions made in these columns, but I can afford to say that in the "News" on Thursday I mentioned



the one thing I thought likely to beat the Town—West Ham's two wingers. The Town defence simply played as though they were meeting any other wingers—Tranmere, perhaps—when they should have decided that the first care would be to give as little scope as possible to Foxall and Morton.

GAP IN THE MIDDLE

It was much as usual in this game; backs drawn out of position, Nelson racing out to the wingers to cover up, gaps in the middle, and the match won for West Ham.

Until there is more definite covering in the rear we shall not get very far from the place held to-day in the league.

Saturday's defeat was a good chance lost, and all because there was not enough notice taken of the lessons to be drawn from previous meetings with the East London side, for in almost a similar fashion last year the "Hammers" all but snatched both points.

I am not overlooking the fact that Conway made brilliant saves, and had a lot of luck when I say that Coen averted a heavier defeat. The Town goalkeeper played a splendid and courageous game, and in those late stages he prevented two or three more goals by sheer daring and clever judgment of coverage.

I thought Smith was much the better back. I could not understand Dunsmore playing so badly. He had a real "off" day, for neither in kicking nor tackling could he hold his own with the speedy Foxall, and invariably he was too far away from this flying winger when the ball went out to him.

ARE FLANK HALVES AT FAULT?

Smith was up against an even better player, for Morton has better control than Foxall, and I think on the whole Smith did very well, but somehow the understanding was not there; there were too many openings in the defence, and perhaps it was that the flank halves did not fall back with the celerity shown by the best teams. Loughran did it fairly well, but Finlayson, beaten, rarely looked like overtaking an opponent.

While Nelson could remain in the central site there was not much to fear from Small, but all too often the pivot had to race out to the touch line or the corner flag, with the result that there was a wide space for opponents in front of goal, and this was how the winning goal was scored.

Surely there can be devised some means of copying the methods of other teams in this defensive respect. There will be many goals scored against us

by clever forwards if the lesson so obvious in this match is not turned to profit.

BILLINGTON DID NOT RECEIVE SUPPORT

I could find little fault with Billington, except that he did not have very much luck or support, and it is almost a fault to be unlucky these days. He worked very hard against a pivot who rarely left his station, and had he scored with the shot that hit the post in the second half we might have been writing of an unbeaten home record. He didn't, however, and the long and the short of it was that the attack was not good enough to beat a dour, if not very clever defence.

Redfern did not live quite up to his best, and Connelly, after showing a lot of splendid play in the first half, was not quite so good afterwards, but tried very hard. Clark did very well, and showed that he could beat an opponent, both for speed and trick. Stephenson played in spasms, now doing something extraordinary, and then failing, and the line played well only in fits and starts. They had more of the ball than the visitors, but were not so clever at keeping it on the ground, but it can be said on their behalf that they did not find so many avenues in defence, either.

LUCK DESERVED

Reference has been made to Conway's brilliance and his luck. He deserved his good fortune, for he made grand saves, and positioned well. He had more reason for trust in his colleagues than had the Town goalkeeper, for the backs never hung on to the ball; they just booted it, and they tackled hard and recovered well.

At centre-half Walker was a strong player, if he had not the skill of Nelson in interception. He rarely let Billington get far away. Both Corbett and Cockroft were clever, though the latter seemed to think that he was entitled to chatter a lot.

STARS IN ATTACK

Foxall and Morton were the stars forward, though Macaulay showed remarkable skill in dribbling and control generally. Fenton (B) was as much a half-back as a forward, and Small was not often in the picture, though he took the pass and scored the winning goal as neatly as could be wished.

The best crowd for a long time was keenly disappointed, and had cause to be, because they will see the Town win matches after having less of the play than they had in this game.

THE GOALS

The Town made the pace from the start, but the challenge was accepted at once, and the ball travelled from end to end very rapidly. The visitors gave away two or three corners, and Conway made fine saves before a free kick led to the first goal. This was placed well, and Finlayson headed out to his right; Fenton chased the ball and returned it plumb on to MACAULAY'S head, and straight it went into the net.



The Town swarmed round the "Hammers" goal after this, and again and again were within an ace of drawing level, but Conway made thrilling saves before he was beaten. Finlayson had moved up behind his wing, and when he received the ball he swung it right into the goalmouth; Billington headed it on past Conway, who had rushed out, and STEPHENSON turned up just in time to place it in the net.

Redfern had hard lines with a header that shaved the upright, and the Town had much more of the play, yet when the "Hammers" got away they nearly always threatened to score, and Smith and Loughran each saved certain goals by quick recovery.

BILLINGTON UNLUCKY

The second half was much in favour of the Town for a long time, but we had almost reconciled ourselves to a draw when Loughran was hurt. Previously Billington struck the post with a good shot. Loughran returned, but was evidently labouring under a big handicap, and was unable to take any part when a pass went to Foxall, and Nelson had to rush over to the wing; Foxall passed carefully inside, and SMALL was able to take possession, run on, and then shoot right away from Coen, who had no chance.

Subsequently the "Hammers" came very near to adding to their lead, and were prevented only by the courage of Smith and Coen.

Attendance: 18,192; receipts: £1,090 12s.