

LOOK BACK

by Dennis Turner

FULHAM 2 LUTON TOWN 1

September 7th, 1946

On the day before war broke out, September 2nd 1939, Fulham and Luton drew 1-1 at the Cottage: the 1939-40 season was then abandoned. When the League programme was resumed in 1946, Luton were our first visitors and there were 5 survivors of the earlier encounter: Woodward, Rooke and Shepherd, who made his debut in the pre-war game, for Fulham, and Gager and Billington for Luton. One Fulham player who did not return from the war was skipper Jimmy Tompkins. He rose from private to the rank of major, but was killed in France in 1945.

Luton ended the 1946-7 season in 13th place, with 39 points. Although they scored 71 goals, 73 were conceded and only 3 away matches were won. In the Cup, the Hatters went out to Burnley, eventual finalists, in the Fifth Round. A new Kenilworth Road attendance record was set in November when 26,362 saw the home side beat Spurs 3-2. Just before the end of the season, manager George Martin took over at Newcastle. He was succeeded by a player-manager, Dally Duncan, a Scottish International left-winger who had been signed from Derby earlier in the season.

Duke started the season in goal, but amateur international Streten was signed from Shrewsbury and played in the last dozen matches. Beach, Lake or Gardiner were the backs and the half-back line came from Soo, a wartime international, skipper Gager, Cooke or Brice, a future Fulham player. The forward line included Duncan, Daniel, Connolly, Waugh and top scorers Billington, 23 goals, and Driver, 10 goals.

Fulham finished 2 places below Luton with the same number of points. We got off to a bad start, losing 2-7 at Bury, and were never in the hunt for honours. Only 3 away games were won and a mere 9 points taken from the last 14 games. Attendances boomed however: 40,000 saw the Spurs and Newcastle visits and there were 8 other gates in excess of 30,000: the average was 24,500.

Manager Peart used 29 players, including 12 who had been on the books during the war. Goalkeeper Hinton came to the Cottage in 1946 when his club, Distillery, forgot to re-sign him. Freeman was ever-present at right back whilst Bacuzzi and Lewin shared the other berth. The regular half back line was Wallbanks, a Northumberland miner, Watson, signed from Bury in 1945, and Jim Taylor. The forward line was drawn from Buchanan, Stevens or Shepherd on the wings and inside men Nelson, McGibbon, who scored 8 goals, Rooke, 13 goals, and Beasley, 9 goals. Skipper Beasley was signed from Huddersfield and had previously played for the great Arsenal side of the 1930s.

In December 1946, 35 year old Rooke was sold to Arsenal for £1,000 and two players, Nelson and Grant. He had scored 75 goals in 108 appearances since 1936 and was top scorer in each of his 4 seasons with Fulham. He once scored six in a game, against Bury, twice scored four and hit six other hat-tricks. The following season he was the First Division's leading scorer as he helped Arsenal to the League title.

RONNIE ROOKE ►

FULHAM SET PACE, THEN SLACKEN

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Fulham were fortunate to take both points from Luton in their first home game. Beginning in fine style, at half-time they fully deserved their two goal lead, but were lucky in the second half when Luton improved and pressed for a point. Main credit must go to Hinton who followed up his rather shaky showing at West Ham last week with a grand display in goal. His cat-like agility kept out many shots, including a penalty taken by Soo, for which he had to dive full length.

From the kick-off the Cottagers stormed the Luton goal and after several fine efforts by Rooke, opened the scoring when Shepherd seized on a loose ball following a defensive error, coolly running past the goalkeeper Duke. A few minutes later, another blunder enabled Fulham to score again. Gager completely missed a pass to Rooke who ran on, drew Duke out, and then netted without difficulty. For the rest of the half, it was all Fulham who, but for bad finishing, must have netted at least three more goals. Against a non-stop onslaught — thanks to the constructive work of the wing halves — Luton defenders were often sent running the wrong way. Rooke played in close harmony with his wingmen and Woodward and Beasley too were always well in the picture. Taylor went close with a great 25 yard drive to hit the crossbar, the ball bounced precariously on the goal-line; Rooke rushed in but mis-timed and the ball was cleared.

On resumption, Fulham appeared inclined to rest upon their laurels. The forwards did nothing constructive, often contriving to kick the ball out of the ground. Luton came into their own and from a goalmouth scuttle Daniel passed back as Hinton came out of goal for Billington to score Luton's consolation goal.

The highlight of the game was a grand display of sportsmanship by Beasley who jumped clear of the prostrate Duke in the interests of safety when he might have scored.

Article from The West London and Fulham Gazette, September 13, 1946.

