

Town's Memories Of Easter Not Happy

[By Chiltern]

Since normal League football was resumed, Easter has never been a happy time for the Town so far as the gathering of points has been concerned.

In 1947 and 1948 they avoided drawing a blank by taking a point from the last match of the three, but they even failed to gain that consolation this time, and, with the team pointless, it was the blackest Easter in the club's recent history.

Three defeats made the list of those suffered successively seven, and it is doubtful whether the Town have ever suffered such a depressing spell before.

Apart from the fact that the team has been struggling to regain form and confidence after a series of disappointments, as often happens in these cases, their luck was right out all through the week-end.

Their heaviest defeat was at Craven Cottage on Friday, and here, too, although Fulham were ready and deserving winners, the Town might well have had more than a single goal in reply to the four chalked up by Fulham.

Brennan was distinctly unlucky on two occasions, but in this match, the Town looked sluggish by comparison with the lively fast-moving Fulham side.

By taking too long to develop their moves, and relying too much on the square pass, the Town forwards fell victims to the hard tackling of the Fulham defenders, and although Kiernan sparkled in the first half hour, the inside trio were mostly held by the home halves.

Pick of the forwards were the wingers Burtenshaw and Waugh, and it was significant that the only goal came from left-half, OWEN.

This success came six minutes from the end when Fulham held a lead of 4-0, and served only to make the score sheet look a little more presentable from the Luton point of view.

In point of fact, Fulham took a grip early on, had the encouragement of an early goal from STEVENS, and two more from ROWLEY, one late in the first half, and the other at the start of the second, really clinched matters in Fulham's favour.

THOMAS got the last 10 minutes from the end when he ran in to head through a centre from MacDonald, who had been left unmarked when Beasley took a free kick.

Altogether, it was a sorry day for the Town, whose defence, often faltering, could never cope with the fast-moving, rather unorthodox Fulham forwards.

Hall had a particularly unhappy time against the dangerous Rowley, who made certain that he was not "smothered" in the middle of the field by doing much of his own fetching and carrying. Hall could not cope with him, and Gardiner, too, was below his best.

That left Owen as the most consistent half-back, and he did a tremendous amount of work. Cooke and Lake, though often beaten, stuck to their job grimly, and Duke, who had no chance with any of the goals, played his part finely.

Late Goal Was Winner

The Town came nearest to ending their unhappy spell at Chesterfield on Saturday when they remained on level terms until eight minutes from the end, and gave a much brighter display than on the previous day.

In fact, had they carried a bit more punch in attack, they might well have won the match in the first half when they played some excellent football, and got the Chesterfield defence really worried.

Both Kiernan and Brennan went close, but the goal that might easily have been the forerunner to a good victory, just would not come.

So far, pure football was concerned, there was no comparison between the teams. The Town moved the ball about accurately in the first half, and tried to keep it low, whereas the home side showed themselves to be firm believers in the "big-kick-and-rush" tactics.

There was another good patch from the Town in the early stages after the interval, but gradually, the home side began to get on top and provided hard work for the Town defence, which looked equal to all calls on it.

However, as the minutes flew, Chesterfield piled on the pressure, and during a scramble in the goalmouth, HUDSON secured possession and scored the deciding goal with a low shot that went in just inside the far post.

Although due allowance had to be made for the difference in the calibre of the opposition, the defence looked much more solid and a whole lot happier than it did the previous day.

Gripton made a good first appearance at centre-half, and was flanked by two able wing halves in Gardiner and Owen.

Lake's use of the ball was a feature of his play, and Cooke was as doughty as ever. There was no fault to be found with Duke's work, and he handled the ball cleanly and confidently.

Best of a forward line that was often brilliant in approach work but which failed in finishing was Brennan, and the others were successful until Chesterfield began to take the upper hand, and then the line largely faded out of the picture.

Easter Summary

FRIDAY

FULHAM 4

LUTON TOWN 1

Fulham. — Flack; Lewin, Bacuzzi; Qusted, Taylor, Beasley; Stevens, Thomas (R.), Rowley, Jezzard, MacDonald.

Luton Town. — Duke; Cooke, Lake; Gardiner, Hall, Owen; Burtenshaw (C.), Kiernan, Brennan, Watkins, Waugh.

SATURDAY

CHESTERFIELD 1

LUTON TOWN 0

Chesterfield. — Middleton; Milburn, Bell; Southall, Booker, Robinson; Johnson, Marron, Hudson, Capel, Dale.

Luton Town.—As at Fulham, except Gripton for Hall.

MONDAY

LUTON TOWN 1

FULHAM 3

Fulham.—Unchanged.

Luton Town. — As at Chesterfield.

Fulham Made It A Double

Although the result was a disappointment again, and counted as the third home defeat in a row, the big holiday crowd at Kenilworth-road on Monday could not complain that the game lacked entertainment value.

There were thrills galore, especially in a hotly-fought out first half, and there was a sensational start in which three goals came with the game only 13 minutes old.

In a whirlwind start, the Town hit a post and scored a goal inside three minutes, and BRENNAN'S jubilant leap as he crashed a centre from Burtenshaw high into the net was probably due in large measure to relief that the unlucky spell that has been attending him, had come to an end.

But that was not to be the end of the Town's misfortune, for in the space of two minutes, they saw their lead turned into arrears of 2-1.

ROWLEY, the opportunist, got got the equaliser when such a happening looked only a remote possibility. He chased a loose ball, tricked Lake cleverly, and cracked in a low shot that beat Duke at the near post.

Two minutes later, the large Fulham contingent were roaring again when MACDONALD had a speculative flick at the ball as it came from a corner, and Duke, taken by surprise, could not turn quickly enough to touch the ball over the bar.

For a long time after that, Fulham took a terrific hammering, and their goal was lucky to survive time and again.

The Town got right on top with the wing halves backing up the forwards, and the forwards doing everything but force the ball into the net. This was more like the Town of the Cup-ties, and they did sufficient to deserve two or three goals.

RELIEF FOR FULHAM

Another unexpected goal after 59 minutes brought relief to Fulham and took most of the Town's hopes away.

Stevens made a drive from the wing which Duke seemed to have well covered. The ball definitely swerved late, and all the goal-keeper could do was to beat it down. Before he could recover THOMAS, who was on the spot, whipped the ball into the net.

After that, Fulham played with more assurance, and though the Town were still fighting back at the end, much of the zip had gone out of their attacks.

For Duke, it was a distinctly unhappy and unlucky day. I thought he was unfortunate in the way in which the second and third goals came, but he must bear a measure of blame.

The defence as a whole became rattled in the second half against the lively Fulham forwards, and Gripton, scarcely quick enough in recovery, could not take a grip on Rowley.

Gardiner and Owen were the best of this department, for Cooke, not so assured as usual, found MacDonald a handful, and Stevens discovered ways and means of outwitting Lake in the second half.

For an hour, the forwards did everything expected of them except get the vital goals. If these had come, as they might have so easily, then there would have been grounds for general rejoicing.

Instead, the suspicion, and perhaps it is more than that, is left that more weight and more directness is required in the front line.

Brennan was a hard worker without quite managing to escape the attentions of Taylor, and both inside forwards played clever football, but tended to be caught in possession. Yet some of their first-half play was brilliantly executed.

While the service was being provided, Waugh thrived against Lewin, who was seen in a better light in the second half because Waugh did not see so much of the ball. Burtenshaw confirmed the good impression he had made in the previous holiday games, and was perhaps the most consistently dangerous of the forwards.