

FAST, DECISIVE TOWN WERE WELL ON TOP

Only Merrick's Brilliance Kept The Score Down

By Chiltern

LUTON TOWN 3, BIRMINGHAM CITY 0

A FEW more displays of this calibre and the Town club will have no further cause for anxiety about the support they are receiving.

From the Town, this was the football the fans want to see—fast, decisive stuff, with plenty of shooting and the attacking spirit from the start.

Had they approached this match in a cautious frame of mind, the Town could have been forgiven because they have always found Birmingham just about the most difficult team in their fixture list to overcome.

Not so on this occasion because Birmingham were never allowed to slip into their stride and the Town never relaxed the grip they took early on.

That it took them as long as 39 minutes to go ahead, was due almost completely to the brilliance of Merrick, who saved shot after shot, mainly from Turner, who never had any hesitation about banging away at goal.

Fittingly, it was TURNER who finally beat Merrick with a brilliantly-taken goal after he had beaten two defenders inside the penalty area.

Only a minute of the second half was required for the Town to emphasise their superiority, again through TURNER, who fastened on to the ball after a mistake by Watts and promptly banged it past Merrick.

HUMAN ELEMENT

That everybody, even England goalkeepers, are human, was shown five minutes later when Merrick made a weak sort of punch at a lobbed free kick by McNally and sent the ball to McLeod who promptly drove it low into the net.

Although the Town frequently promised more goals, they found that Merrick was not in the mood to make further errors and it was the goalkeeper whom Birmingham could thank for the fact that they were not on the receiving end of a real thrashing.

For the Town, this was their best performance against this opposition who not only had weaknesses in defence, but lacked ideas and constructive skill in attack.

Once again, the Town's middle line played a major part in bringing about success because Morton and Pearce simply took a grip of the inside-forwards and that was that so far as Birmingham's attack as a mobile line was concerned.

So completely did Morton snuff out Neal that the ex-Lincoln player must have yearned for a chance to return to his own position of left-half.

From Pearce, there was a remarkable display because it seemed that no sooner had he done some work in defence than he popped up in the opponents' penalty area.

Completing this cast-iron middle line was Owen, giving Eddie Brown not the slightest encouragement that he could

bring life to this lack-lustre Birmingham attack.

Both McNally and Jones were well on top of their jobs and were seldom in serious trouble. Nor really was Baynham, apart from feeling the after-effects of a bruised back after colliding with a goal-post early on.

Forward, there was the drive and directness that was shown at Manchester and shooting power that bodes well for the future.

Wisely, they did not try to keep the ball close in the mud, and there was intelligent taking up of the open space and accurate distribution.

Turner was again the danger man, but the value of Cummins in this match should not be under-estimated. He was the fetcher and carrier, the man who provided much material, and he was parting with the ball just right.

Although Allan Brown was not among the scorers, he led the line thrustfully, was very difficult to move off the ball and took a lot of the weight in the middle.

More directness and better finishing from the wingers, too, helped to bring power to this front line and both Adam and McLeod managed to harass the visiting defence and to make use of the ball.

A Town team without a weak link this, with all departments showing fine understanding and giving further evidence of the splendid spirit that exists.

LUTON TOWN: Baynham; McNally, Jones; Morton, Owen, Pearce; Adam, Turner, Brown, Cummins, McLeod.

BIRMINGHAM CITY: Merrick; Farmer, Green; Larkin, Smith, Watts; Astall, Orritt, Brown (E), Neal, Murphy.

Referee: K. Dagnall, Bolton.
Attendance: 17,292.

WHAT THE OTHER CRITICS SAID

"Luton always adapted themselves to the treacherous surface better than did Birmingham. For a long spell only the lonely defiance of Merrick stemmed the flood."—"Sunday Express."

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"This was Luton's best win of the season, and they thoroughly deserved it. Their defensive record speaks for itself, for they have conceded fewer goals than any other First Division side."—"Empire News and Sunday Chronicle."

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"This was Luton's best display of the season, and there was no suggestion of a weak link anywhere in the side. But for the brilliant display of goalkeeping by Gil Merrick, Birmingham would have taken the drubbing of a lifetime."—"News of the World."

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"Merrick saves Birmingham is getting a wearisome bleat—but it's certainly true he saved them from a heavier defeat in this game."—"The People."

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"Had it not been for Birmingham's former England goalkeeper, Gil Merrick, the Luton score would have been much higher."—"Sunday Dispatch."

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"Merrick's brilliant work in goal saved Birmingham from a crushing defeat."—"Reynolds News."

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"Had it not been for Merrick, Luton might have got six."—"Sunday Pictorial."

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"At least Luton did have some zest for the game."—"Sunday Graphic."