

BIRMINGHAM BOGEY CROPPED UP AGAIN

Town Had Their Chances Of Gaining Both Points

By Chiltern

LUTON TOWN 0, BIRMINGHAM CITY 1

RECENT Town successes over this opposition suggested that they had ceased to be the bogey team they were in the past, but Birmingham managed to add to their already good record on the Kenilworth-road ground.

That they should not have been allowed to do so is certain because the Town could not complain on the score of lack of chances and they had sufficient in the first half to have made certain of beginning the New Year with a handsome victory.

Best opportunity of all came in the eleventh minute when Turner shot wide from the penalty spot after Brown had been pulled down by Smith.

Time was when this sort of award meant a goal automatically, but not now and this was the fourth consecutive miss from the spot, three of them by Turner.

On this occasion, he hit the ball hard enough, but it flew wide of Merrick's left hand post.

A goal at that stage would have been a tonic indeed, especially as the Town were already a goal down as the result of a speculative shot by NEAL made from the edge of the penalty area in the fourth minute.

It is curious how many times the Town concede goals in the opening stages of a half, but there was a considerable slice of good fortune about this particular affair.

Other than that, Birmingham were rarely dangerous before half-time and the only real approach to a goal came when Kelly scrambled away a shot by Gordon.

On the other hand, several clear-cut chances came the way of the Town forwards, particularly Brown, but they showed the same lack of drive and punch in their finishing that has been so marked so many times this season.

TOO CLOSE IN THE MUD

Conditions were never other than difficult and the Town tried to play too close a brand of football in the thick mud. Even so, it was effective enough to create openings that should have been accepted.

By the time the second half began, the pitch had churned up into a thick morass of mud in which it was difficult to move the ball any distance.

Time and again, it stuck in the mud when it pitched and football became a hit and miss affair with the big kick having altogether more value than any attempt to drag the ball through the mud.

With the worsening of the conditions, tempers became frayed, free kick after free kick was awarded mostly for petty niggling fouls and, at one time, things threatened to get out of hand.

More than one personal vendetta was being carried on and the general nastiness was not stamped out until the referee had taken the name of Larkin who was perhaps unlucky because there were several more persistent offenders than he.

One or two more chances cropped up for the Town but, in the main, they did not really promise to salvage a point, though I thought justice would have been served had they been awarded at least one more penalty.

Some of the tackling by the Birmingham defenders was robust to say the least, but though they were hard pressed at times, they held on to their two points fairly comfortably.

Once again, the Town shortcomings were in the forward line, where Brown again failed to reveal his true form and Turner, perhaps with his confidence sapped through yet another missed penalty, only rarely look-

ing the dangerous player he can be.

There was plenty of clever play from Cummins, some of it overdone in view of the conditions but, at least, chances did accrue from it even if he did keep the ball too close at times.

Man who could have created havoc in the Birmingham defence was Adam in the first half when, with a reasonable piece of ground on which to operate, he showed that he had the beating of Farmer, but constantly failed to make use of his opportunities.

Had Bingham, who was very lively until he was shaken up in a couple of heavy tackles, had the same chances, then the result might have been altogether different.

Even without Dunne and Owen, the defence did a very adequate job that allowed the Birmingham front line little scope and Kelly again put up a workmanlike performance in the middle.

I often think that Kelly merits more praise from the fans than he sometimes receives when he steps in to do the difficult task of taking over from Owen.

Groves and Pacey were both strong and resourceful. Hawkes was seldom beaten in the tackle and Morton, in the strange position of right-back, did well enough once he had settled down to his surroundings.

Chiefly Baynham's task lay in cutting off through passes and crosses which he did with splendid judgment and no little courage.

LUTON TOWN: Baynham, Morton, Hawkes, Groves, Kelly, Pacey, Bingham, Turner, Brown, Cummins, Adam.

BIRMINGHAM CITY: Merrick, Farmer, Allen, Watts, Smith, Neal, Astall, Gordon, Jackson, Larkin, Orritt.

Referee: F. Collinge, Rochdale. Attendance: 15,538.

WHAT THE OTHER CRITICS SAID

Many newspaper critics opened fire on the Town attack after their display against Birmingham. They were "inept" and "punchless" and rarely had the beating of the strong Birmingham rearguard. All in all, this was another disastrous match for the Town.

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"Only once was any Luton forward allowed a chance to test Gil Merrick at close range. Even then Luton leader Allan Brown was harassed all the way as he flicked a centre over the bar from a couple of yards."—"Sunday Dispatch."

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"On the run of the play, Birmingham were lucky winners. But at least they showed a better appreciation of the conditions than Luton did—who must learn that it is completely disastrous to try to play skilful, close football in thick mud."—"Sunday Express."

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"Pick of a robust Birmingham side was transfer-listed Smith. He was the master of every situation. Rarely did he and his colleagues allow the inept Luton attackers to penetrate enough to take pot shots at Gil Merrick."—"Sunday Pictorial."

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"But Luton's lack of goals was mainly their own doing. Not content with making one opponent look foolish, wingers Bingham and Adam tried to stupefy the whole Birmingham team."—"The People."

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"Luton went like lambs to the slaughter by attempting close passing on the mud — and that was just what the rough, tough Birmingham defenders wanted."—"News of the World."

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"Town never had enough punch to break the Birmingham barrier, but they were unlucky not to equalise in the eleventh minute. Turner, who is right out of form, blazed a spot kick five yards wide."—"Empire News."