

LUTON FIGHTING ON FOR VICTORY

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Luton 2
Reading 1

By
Roger Duckworth

LUTON added another two points to their impressive home total when they beat a spirited Reading side 2-1 this afternoon.

The visitors, who had a player sent off, turned round two goals down, but a goal 12 minutes from the end gave them new fight.

Luton's pride was battered by their defeat at Crewe on Wednesday night, but their unbeaten home record remained intact for Reading's visit this afternoon.

Luton's defence was unchanged, but French, out midweek with a pulled muscle, returned on the right wing. This meant that Brian Lewis switched back to inside-forward and Keith Allen led the attack.

Without Bruce Rioch there was a big hole in the Luton attack which had to be filled. And it was Ian Buxton once again who stepped in. He played at inside-right and Lewis at inside-left.

Town have concede only one point at Kenilworth Road all season, and they were hoping to continue this good form today after Wednesday's disappointment.

But football fans are fickle people, and five minutes before the start there were still empty gaps on the open terracing at the Kenilworth Road end, and the corners of the ground were rather bare.

Good win

Reading had a good win midweek when they beat Barnsley, and today they fielded the same side.

At centre-half Alan Hitchcock was playing his second match in Reading's senior side, and although he wore the number five shirt he was expected to operate in a left-full-back position.

Richard Spiers and Rodney Thornhill were to act as dual centre-halves.

Before the start the crowd was entertained by the RAF's guard dogs, who gave a skilled performance to show off their tough training.

The Luton pitch looked in excellent condition. There was still quite a lot of grass and the surface looked firm as the team ran out.

The first attack came from Reading after Slough had lost possession, but it was a feeble affair that ended with a long



Brown, the Reading 'keeper lies stranded as Alan Slough's third minute goal bulges the net to put Luton ahead

cross from the left going high over the top.

Town came back and Harrison shrugged off a tough tackle and cut inside at speed. But he shot wide from well out and the ball bobbed about as he hit it, and his effort too went wide.

A foul on Lewis gave Town a free kick just outside the box. It was taken by Bannister but headed back by a defender to goalkeeper Brown, who cleared.

Slough put Luton ahead with a splendid goal in the third minute. French floated an accurate free kick into the goalmouth and as Allen challenged it ran loose to SLOUGH, who was waiting intelligently at the back of the action.

He drove the ball hard towards the goal and it cannoned back to him off a defender. He took the rebound in his stride and hammered a second attempt hard past Brown into the net.

Working hard

In these early stages Lewis was working hard and combining well with Allen and Harrison.

Reading fought back and Slough nipped in smartly to give away a corner as Allen raced in to a shooting position.

Allen took the corner and gave the Town an anxious moment before Davie pushed it over the bar and landed awkwardly in the netting. He was unhurt, and Allen's second corner was well headed away.

As far as Reading were concerned numbers meant little, and their back line consisted of Bacuzzi, Thornhill, Spiers and Hitchcock.

Another good centre from French caused Brown an anxious moment, but he did well to catch the ball cleanly at full stretch. Lewis was penalised for an over-enthusiastic attack on the goalkeeper.

Limping

Another well-placed free kick from Bannister was well met by Lewis who was in an awkward position and his back header was caught on the line by Brown.

After ten minutes Harrison

started limping on his right leg, he walked over towards the trainer's box and shook his head. Referee Mr Thomas asked if he was all right, but he had to leave the field for attention.

Silvester was given too much room by the Luton defence and was allowed to get into a good position and head at goal following a Bacuzzi centre. But his effort lacked both power, and Davie was able to save with one hand.

Within four minutes of leaving the field Harrison limped to the dressing room and was replaced by Billy McDermott, who was given advice by the manager, Alec Stock, before he took the field.

It looked as if McDermott was to take a midfield position with Slough leaving Allen free to join the attack.

Brief chance

In the 18th minute Sainty had a brief chance following a good ball from Yard, but he hurried into his shot and hit it high and wide.

There was some scrappy midfield play but when they were attacking Luton played some delightful football.

And Lewis might have had a penalty when he was brought down by Bacuzzi well inside the box, but rather surprisingly the referee dismissed Lewis's appeal and waved play on.

French was having a good match, usually managing to beat his man to cross the ball. He struck up a firm understanding with Lewis, and after the latter had been fouled by Hitchcock the Luton right-winger pushed the ball to Lewis, who put a low drive inches wide of the Oak Road end goal.

In the 37th minute the Reading goalkeeper received a nasty knock after saving at the feet of Lewis. Lewis was chasing up a neatly headed ball from Slough, and his outstretched foot caught the goalkeeper as he swooped bravely to take the ball.

But Brown soon continued and looked none the worse for his injury.

Support

The ball did not appear to be running kindly to McDermott, and Buxton, too, seemed a bit out of place after having to take up a left-wing position which is somewhat out of character.

But in defence full-backs Dougan and Bannister were doing well. They were given a lot of solid support from Branton, who was keeping to his task.

The loss of Harrison gave the Luton attack a disjointed look, although Lewis and French continued to fight hard for possession. Allen lent his weight and was impressive in both defence and attack.

In the 41st minute Luton were awarded a penalty after Allen had been brought down by Yard. The move was started by a gritty piece of football by McDermott, who did well to keep the ball in play and sent Allen away down the left touch line.

In the absence of Harrison LEWIS took the penalty, and with all the composure in the world he strolled up and slipped a right-footed spot kick well out of reach of the diving Brown.

Luton continued to fight. French evaded Hitchcock and put across a beautiful cross which was half cleared. McDermott shot and the ball came back to him, and from 30 yards he hit a fine shot which Brown fingertipped over the bar.

A minute later further Luton pressure brought another right wing corner from which Allen headed over the top. But for some reason the referee gave Luton another corner, and Branton flashed a header at the goal which was headed off the line by Bacuzzi.

HT: Luton 2 Reading 0

Although there were moments of scrappiness and indecision during the first half, Luton fully deserved their two-goal interval lead.

There was more all-round effort than we have seen for

some weeks and towards the end of the first half they put in a series of raids on the Reading goal that could well have brought them further rewards.

And they began the second half in much the same vein, with a clever centre from French being caught under the bar.

Reading showed they had not given up the ghost, and a long one from Collins was only just over the top.

Sainty burst through the middle and put a good shot out of Davie's reach, but it flashed outside a post.

Panic

A foul by Spiers on Buxton on the half-way line sparked off another series of splendid Luton attacks that excited the crowd and all but brought a third goal.

Bannister hit the free kick into the penalty box and Buxton shot hard across the face of the goal.

The ball kept in play, and French worked well to get it back. From his centre both Lewis and Allen had headers kicked off the line as the Reading defence was reduced to panic stations.

Reading always had the will to fight back, and a cross from Sainty was headed for a corner by Bannister. This was cleared by French, which gives some indication of the improvements in the Town's work rate.

Following a good run Buxton was badly fouled by Bacuzzi and the referee put the Reading player's name in his book.

Eighteen minutes from the end Spiers was sent off by the referee for a bad trip foul on Lewis, who was bursting clear of the defence.

Perhaps Mr Thomas's decision was a little hard as Spiers had not been so guilty of earlier misdemeanours as his fellow full back Bacuzzi.

Fierce shot

But Lewis had been given some harsh treatment during the afternoon and this must have been the last straw for the referee, who had no hesitation in pointing to the dressing room after Spiers had taken Lewis from behind.

Spiers has been a Reading player since 1955, and throughout his career has never been sent off.

In the 78th minute ten-men Reading did well to pull a goal back. A mid-field foul by Branton resulted in the free kick being headed across the penalty box by Harris, and half-back Yard cut in from the right and fired a fierce shot past Davie from a difficult angle.

A minute later Luton had the luckiest of escapes when their defence was reduced to a shambles and a Harris header struck the unsuspecting Davie, who was lying on the line.

Luton had another let off when an error by Davie gave Sainty the ball, but he shot hastily and wide. French came back for Luton and he pulled back a centre, but there was nobody there.

Attendance: 11,871

TEAMS

LUTON: Davie; Dougan, Bannister; Slough, Branton, Moore; French, Buxton, Allen, Lewis, Harrison. Sub: McDermott.

READING: Brown; Bacuzzi, Spiers; Thornhill, Hitchcock, Yard, Allen, Collins, Sainty, Silverster, Harris. Sub: Meldrum.

Referee: Mr C. Thomas (Treorchy).

GOALS

SLOUGH (Luton) 3 min.
LEWIS (Luton, Pen) 41 min
YARD (Reading) 78 min



Reading goalkeeper Brown outstrips Brian Lewis this time — but Lewis took his revenge from the spot