

1st-minute goal earns points

By **BOB HARRIS**
Oldham 0 Luton Town 1

AN OWN GOAL in the first minute gave Luton two valuable points at Oldham this afternoon.

A strong wind played havoc with the ball, but Luton's superior play was enough to hold on to the slender lead.

Alec Stock brought in former Oldham favourite Laurie Sheffield to lead the attack with Keith Allen. Brian Lewis was named as substitute.

Bottom-of-the-table Oldham, also in search of points, although for opposite reasons to the Town, kept the same side that has given them a glimmer of hope for safety by taking six points out of a possible eight in their last four matches.

Luton's Oak Road enders were prominent and noisy in the sparse crowd.

The pitch looked extremely wet with the corners green, and traces of snow were still evident in one corner. The ground was lashed by a bitterly cold wind.

Five minutes before the start there was still only about 2,000 fans inside the ground, a disappointment to the club after their recent run of success, but understandable in view of the two Manchester Cup-ties and a Rugby League match just a few miles away.

Sensational

The match began in sensational style with Luton taking the lead from an own goal after only 30 seconds. It began with goalkeeper Sandy Davie booting a long clearance straight up the middle after halting Oldham's initial raid.

Sheffield jumped with Hunter for the ball, both missed, and centre half Alan LAWSON headed the ball back towards his own 'keeper.

Gordine, however, had advanced too far off his line, and in trying to take the ball over his head rolled back into the net.

This early surprise goal quickly had the Luton fans singing, but it was Oldham who came back via two free kicks.

With the encouragement of this early lead the Luton back line easily beat off Oldham's counter attacks, while Sheffield was soon giving his former club-mates a lot to think about with his bustling challenges.

Struggled

Poor distribution on both sides confined the ball to mid-field as the teams struggled to find their rhythm on the heavy pitch.

Another mistake by goalkeeper Gordine, this time in the form of a weak goal-kick, put the Oldham goal in danger again when the ball went straight to Graham French's feet.

French pushed the ball back in the middle towards Sheffield, but the centre forward was beaten by Lawson and the ball returned to French, who promptly put it wide.

At the other end a mix-up in the Luton goalmouth almost allowed three Oldham forwards through, but a brave save by Davie, who took the ball at the second attempt and also a bang on the head, thwarted leading scorer Spence.

A tremendous cross-field ball from Allen at the feet of French set Luton in motion. French cut inside, fed Keen, who crossed the ball to the waiting Sheffield.

Sheffield tamely nodded the ball into Gordine's arms from

what looked to be an offside position.

Mix-up

To everyone's surprise referee Turner waved play on.

A mix-up between Bannister and Moore created some difficulty in the Luton goalmouth when Bebbington dipped in between the two defenders and gave a good cross-field ball to Chapman.

The winger dallied and his final cross was nodded away by Branston for a fruitless corner.

With the strong wind at their backs Luton continued to be the more direct of the two sides, and from a short free kick by Keen, Alan Slough had a powerful drive blocked by the massed wall of tangerine shirts.

Terry Branston saved another nasty situation at the expense of a corner when he neatly intercepted a through ball from Colquhoun. Branston was then on hand to head away the corner.

Clever work

The Luton skipper was having a sterling game, marshalling his defence well and constantly catching the Oldham forwards offside.

Clever work down the right flank by left winger Chapman caused Luton a moment of panic. His cross went accurately to Bebbington, who hooked a shot on the turn just over the angle.

Minutes later Luton had another fortunate escape when Spence, Chapman and Bebbington again combined well. Spence rose high to head Bebbington's cross goalwards, but it was blocked by a crowd of shirts.

Luton's reply was a swift and almost conclusive when Allen laid the ball on well to Slough, whose great drive was equally well saved by Gordine.

TEAMS

OLDHAM: Gordine; Blair, Wood; Hunter, Lawson, Joyce; Colquhoun, Spence, Blore, Bebbington, Chapman. Sub: Bowie.

LUTON: Davie; Dougan, Bannister; Slough, Branston, Moore; French, Keen, Sheffield, Allen, Jardine. Sub: Lewis.

Referee: Mr D. Turner (Rugeley, Staffs).

GOAL

LAWSON (Luton, own goal)
1 min
Attendance: 3,946.

The match had suddenly burst into life, and in Oldham's next raid centre-forward Blore forced Davie into a flying save with the Luton goalkeeper gathering the ball at the second attempt.

Excitement

In a five-minute space the two sides had created more goalmouth incidents and excitement than in the previous 20.

Equilibrium was still not restored, and Davie again needed two chances to knock down a long through ball from Joyce while under heavy pressure.

At the other end Sheffield

Luton created one of their few second-half chances when Slough, Allen and Sheffield engineered an opening for Jardine. The converted full-back moved on to the ball well, but the wind ballooned it up and over the bar.

As the match progressed Luton began to look more and more confident of holding on to their lead, but mistakes were always likely under the conditions, and it took a desperate combined effort between Branston and the in-form Dougan to clear Luton's lines from a dangerous Wood free kick.



POST picture wired from Oldham

Unhappiest man at Boundary Park, Gordine the Oldham keeper falls over his line with the ball to put Luton one up

and Allen again tested Gordine with hard-hit shots helped on by the wind.

It was the strong wind, blowing in favour of Luton's attacks, that was the prime cause of the many mistakes, but Luton had the sobering thought of playing against it in the second period.

Striving to increase their slender lead Luton began to apply more pressure, and it was a pleasant change to see their forwards, and Sheffield in particular, shooting goalwards with great accuracy whenever the occasion presented itself.

Protection

Two successive free kicks kept Oldham going forward, but the Luton defence were giving goalkeeper Davie fine protection from the ball swirling in the wind.

The home side were presented with their best chance of the half after 38 minutes when, from a Chapman corner headed on by Spence, the ball ran loose to Bebbington.

But with the Luton defenders rushing towards him the inside-forward hurried his shot and drove it a yard wide.

A snap shot from Slough, like Sheffield ready to shoot on sight, completely beat Gordine. The ball racked the crossbar and bounced in the air, but with Sheffield bearing in the wind blew the ball over for a goalkick.

HT: Oldham 0, Luton Town 1

With the wind at their backs Oldham began the second half strongly, and from a Blair free kick out on the right, Joyce narrowly failed to connect with his head as he ran through the Luton defence.

In these early stages of the second period Luton were showing far more flair than had their opponents in the first period. They were coming out of defence quickly to trap the Oldham forwards offside and keep the ball on the ground when they moved forward.

Although Luton obviously had to defend a lot more strongly this half they showed their willingness to come forward when Jardine slightly

over-ran the ball in trying to convert a left wing cross from Allen, allowing Gordine to gather the ball in comfort.

Luton were working the offside trap with considerable effect, but it almost backfired when referee Turner failed to spot Colquhoun on his blind side.

Although his linesman was frantically waving his flag referee Turner allowed play to continue, and only a desperate clearance on the edge of his box by Davie saved a nasty situation.

Davie hurt his right leg in making the clearance, and after treatment continued, limping heavily.

Naturally enough little was being seen of the Luton forward line, which now consisted almost solely of Allen and Sheffield. When Luton did break their build-ups were slow and controlled, but made little impression.

Despite his lack of support Sheffield was still giving Lawson a tough time, and after winning a free-kick from the centre half Sheffield almost pressured him into a mistake after a good break between Slough and Allen.

Oldham's attempts at goal were limited to two abortive long range attempts by full back Wood, both of which sailed high and harmlessly over the bar.

After 69 minutes Graham French, who had been hobbling after a couple of clashes with Wood was brought off and replaced by Lewis.

Action

Sandy Davie, who had been having little to do in spite of the pressure, was called to action when he clawed out a tremendous Jouce drive from the edge of the box for a corner. Luton quickly regrouped and the flag-kick was easily cleared.

All of Oldham's attempts were now coming from defenders from long-range efforts, and it was full-back Wood who was next to try his luck with a drive that went well wide.