

WITHIN A WHISTLE OF WINNING—BUT TOWN DROP POINT

WITH a second-half wind blowing straight off the Irish Sea behind them Luton gave one of their best displays of fighting spirit for a long time at Southport last night. They took a deserved lead and went within a whistle of winning.

No one can accuse Luton of being content with one point. They went all out for the full reward and very nearly made a Swindon win tonight imperative.

But they could not quite make it. As well as the 1-1 draw we saw a grim and stubborn struggle between two teams both of whom only wanted success.

The entire battle was fought at top speed in cold, driving rain with the strong end-to-end wind the dominating factor.

If Luton failed in anything it was with their distribution. Often, after battling hard for possession, the ball was tamely surrendered by a defender banging a hopeful long pass up the middle. These were gratefully cut out by Southport, who made their ground by the more brainy expedient of pushing short passes about.

Too late?

Promotion is hardly a realistic proposition now for Luton. It would have been had they fought like this on away trips earlier in the season. The spoils lost on previous travels made displays of guts like the one last night seem almost pointless.

Southport had the wind advantage in the first half, and play was virtually one way as Luton hung on for half time. With the ball skidding fast on the sodden surface

this was a night that demanded individualism.

The first half was played with only Buxton and Lewis up field to fight for occasional centres slapped over by the hard-working French.

Southport were moving well and Luton were not given much chance to go on to the offensive. But in defence they did not seem over worried, and Branston, who declared himself fit only yesterday morning, seemed to be almost enjoying the conditions as he cut out Southport's advances or went driving through on his own.

Surer

With reserve goalkeeper Tony Read looking more sure of himself than he did on Saturday, Luton rarely looked like losing. And in front of him full-backs Bannister and Dougan had splendid nights. Dougan's tackling was terrier-like and Bannister's covering was superb.

Unfortunately, along with Branston and Moore, both were guilty of aimless clearing, and as a result had more to do as the ball came back almost immediately.

Moore was tackling crisply and looked in good form when he decided to use the short ball.

Alty, Alex Russell and George Andrews, who was once on Luton's staff, led Southport's attack at top speed. Field, too sizzled about dangerously but winger Redrobe, potentially a match winner, spoiled it for himself by always wanting the last kick in some of the more heated exchanges.

Despite their advantage Southport had few real first-half chances. In mid-field Slough and Keen worked well to keep the trouble at

arm's length for much of the time. In the second half they found more time to work in attack — which both did enthusiastically.

All-out

It was a different story after the breather. Luton went all out to win. Rioch worked hard in the middle when he swapped positions with Lewis for a spell, and Buxton gave his customary gritty performance under the attention of Aindow, an amateur who looks set for a bright future.

Luton went ahead in the 55th minute when Brian Lewis calmly picked his spot to head in a perfect cross from French who had dummied cleverly after his first effort was blocked.

It was not late enough in the game for Luton to sit on their lead. But they tried it and ran into trouble. Moore and Bannister showed some cool work before Moore conceded the corner that cost Luton a point.

Near thing

Somehow Alex Russell hit an inswinger against the wind and Read helped it into the net by the near post with a fist.

Rioch went close with a screamer from 20 yards and minutes later had the ball in the net only to be whistled offside.

It was a near thing, and I believe that had Rioch not played the ball, and let Buxton's shot go in unassisted, as it was doing, then Rioch might have escaped the whistle because he was not interfering with play.

But football is a game of ifs.

French, Lewis and Buxton continued to strive for that elusive winner but it was almost Southport who scored it in a storming finish.

The bustling Andrews burst through from the left and let go a terrific shot that Read did well to stop. And Dougan pulled off a perfectly timed tackle on Alex Russell as he headed for goal at top speed in the dying seconds.

After Luton had had the better of the second half this finish might have been devised by Alfred Hitchcock. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief when the final whistle brought the curtain down on an exciting performance.

For my money Bannister and Slough were among the Oscar winners.

SOUTHPORT: Reeves; Curwen, Clarke; Peat, Russell (M), Aindow; Alty, Field, Andrews, Russell (A), Redrobe. Sub: Pearson.

LUTON TOWN: Read; Dougan, Bannister; Slough, Branston, Moore; French, Lewis, Buxton, Keen, Rioch. Sub: McDerment.

Referee: Mr R. Barker (Crewe).

Attendance: 3,392.

**SOUTHPORT 1 (Russell A)
LUTON 1 (Lewis)**

**By
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