

TOWN STRUGGLE FOR A POINT

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By Roger Duckworth

ROTHERHAM 1
LUTON TOWN 1

HIT-OR-MISS Luton looked set for defeat after Rotherham took the lead with a penalty, converted by Leigh, just before half time.

But an out-of-the-blue equaliser from Keith Allen, who gave away the penalty, was enough to ensure a share of the spoils.

Bright sunshine welcomed the crowd to Millmoor as Luton set out to continue their sunny away run which has brought six wins and a draw from eight away matches.

Luton were unchanged. Manager Alec Stock told me before the start: "They are all hard to beat, mate. Even if you are playing children, you still have to get the ball into the net."

A guest of the Luton players this afternoon was Laurie Sheffield, who signed for Doncaster during the week for £7,000. He played for the Rovers last night and scored a goal in their 3-1 win at Walsall.

He said: "It was great to get a goal in my first match. But I didn't find it hard to fit in with the Doncaster lads. I have been training with them because I lived up here while I was a Luton player."

The prolonged summer has left the Rotherham pitch in beautiful condition. It was very green, with lush grass, rather unusual for this ground, covering the whole of the playing area except the goalmouth.

First raid

The Luton team got a good reception from their fans, most of whom had travelled North on the Hatters' Special.

An interesting point before this afternoon's kick-off was that the Town have dropped their only three away points of the season in Yorkshire—two at Doncaster and one at Bradford City.

The first raid came from Luton. Macdonald grafted in midfield and got a good pass out to French, who half passed Mealand before flashing a left-footer over the crossbar.

Then Rotherham got a chance. Collins fouled Warnock inside the Town half, and the winger's free kick, well floated, was caught by Davie.

After only three minutes, Rotherham were presented with the chance of a lifetime. Nicholl chased Downes along the Rotherham right-hand touchline, but tripped up. He was unable to recover and the Rotherham centre-forward got in a low cross which Fantham only had to side-foot to score.

But by this time Nicholl had amazingly recovered and was on hand to nudge the ball round for a corner.

This caused Luton some trouble and Davie collected the ball at the second attempt.

The first five minutes were so fast and furious that it was difficult to discover any particular policy laid down by either side. The ball was bouncing high off the hard ground and both Tees and Collins had brief chances for Luton but wasted them with hurried shots.

Alert

Ryan appeared to be in good form and broke up a move between Bentley and Warnock. But Slough was a bit slow in backing up and let in the Rotherham winger who put across a centre for Downes. An alert piece of goalkeeping from Davie plugged the danger.

A foul by Nicholl in the ninth minute brought a Rotherham free kick just outside the box. A carefully pre-arranged move saw the ball across to the unmarked Lill who put in a terrific drive, which Davie, again looking at the top of his form, did well to turn over the crossbar.

When Luton got the chan-

ces, Tees and Macdonald looked sharp. Macdonald's distribution, especially across to French, was impeccable, and the pair showed a lot of promise.

French sent the whole Rotherham defence the wrong way after a Bannister free kick. Furnell fumbled and only fell on French's centre just before Tees could connect.

Injured

Rotherham looked fast and slick but they never really got anywhere.

Luton's best chance of the early stages came in the 19th minute following a corner by French. Tees headed it on, and with Furnell again fumbling, the ball ran out to Allen who fired in a short-range shot. But the Rotherham goalkeeper, who was injured in the incident, blocked the effort.

As expected, Fantham was leading the Rotherham attack but he was being well buttoned-up by Nicholl and Slough. Luton's danger man was French. Several times he slipped Mealand but his centres were often lofted and wasted.

Rotherham got another chance in the 22nd minute when Downes headed on a long ball to Fantham. But again he was being well looked after by Keen.

A corner taken by French ended up with a diving header by Allen. The ball looked destined for the back of the net, but was blocked in the six-yard box and eventually cleared.

The referee had a word with John Ryan after a foul on Bentley.

Hague had a brief chance for Rotherham but after he

teams. What the match needed was a goal. It was what the fans needed too.

Penalty

There were a few well-chosen comments from the crowd about the way the match was going. And there were a few more when Allen fouled Fantham. From Hudson's free kick, four minutes before the interval, Allen handled in the area.

The referee had no hesitation in awarding a penalty from which LEIGH scored.

Allen complained bitterly that he had inadvertently handled the ball and that he was being pushed in the back. It made no difference. The referee gave the penalty and Rotherham went ahead.

HT: Rotherham 1, Luton 0

Luton were now playing with the sun behind them, and Furnell had to play with a cap. From the restart Luton went forward, and French won a corner. He took it himself, and from it the Rotherham goal had a near escape.

Macdonald found space in the box and fired in a powerful overhead scissors kick which was cleared off the line by Mealand.

In spite of this chance, there still seemed little method in what the Town were doing. There was far too much long ball down the middle, which the Rotherham defenders kept winning. It seemed that the Town's policy was hit or miss.

Things went from bad to worse when Collins was reduced to tripping Downes from behind—at the second attempt.

Equaliser

Eight minutes after the interval Mealand had to limp off struggling with an ankle injury following his clearance off the line.

Then, right out of the blue, Luton equalised. From a short corner on the right, French centred to Allen. His head rose high above everyone and he headed in a splendid equaliser.

It was just that Allen should score this goal. He had conceded the penalty and even that was a bit if-and-but-ish. He had worked harder than anybody else, and no one was surprised at his expressions of delight when the ball went into the net.

Luton had another let off a couple of minutes later. Warnock slung across a free kick from the right and, with everybody dashing in all directions and Davie not getting the ball, it wafted across the face of the goal with

no Rotherham forwards in sight to nudge the ball in.

There was still alarming gaps in the Luton defence, and a free kick from Hudson went through unheeded to Davie, who had to move smartly at the last second.

In the 61st minute Warnock made one of the best efforts of the match when he volleyed a cross from Bentley just wide of a post.

This was far from Luton's best away performance, and the attack never really seemed to click.

There was one moment when something looked as if it was building up, and a long centre from Keen was followed up by Tees and Macdonald. But Furnell caught the ball, and Macdonald was penalised for charging the goalkeeper.

Brief chance

Again Luton had a brief chance when Bannister, who had been playing a solid sort of game, chipped the ball across from the left. Macdonald went up, but headed over the top.

Then Rotherham's chance came again. Warnock put through a low pass, and a substitute, Womble had a glorious opportunity but could not shoot quick enough and his effort rolled softly to Davie.

Bannister and Fantham collided and both received lengthy treatment. Bannister seemed to come off worse with what looked like a shoulder injury. But he played on.

There was no doubt that Allen was Luton's best player. After a solid run, from which French won a throw in, he had a go from long range and hit the side netting. It was more enthusiastic than hopeful, but we could have done with more enthusiasm and hope from the rest of the Luton team.

Booking

There was a lot of niggling going on from both teams, with elbows, shirt-pulling and sly kicking going on all over the place. It was not surprising when a booking came in the 76th minute. Hague's name was taken for a foul on French.

The battle between Tees and Watson looked close to the boil on several occasions and something could have come of it six minutes from the end when the Luton centre-forward was fouled for the umpteenth time. But tempers cooled and play went on.

Luton very nearly went ahead in injury time. Collins sent French away, controlled the winger's cross and saw his first-time shot deflected over the crossbar for a corner. French's kick was headed down by Macdonald but the ball was scrambled off the line.

TEAMS	
ROTHERHAM:	Furnell; Mealand, Leigh; Hague, Watson, Hudson; Lill, Fantham, Downes, Bentley, Warnock. Sub: Womble.
LUTON:	Davie; Ryan, Bannister, Keen, Nicholl, Slough; Collins, Macdonald, Tees, Allen, French. Sub: Phillips.
Referee:	Mr A. Bone (Sunderland).
GOALS	
LEIGH (Rotherham), penalty, 42min	
ALLEN (Luton) 54 min	
Attendance: 8,727	

had collected Downes's header he gave Slough a chance to tackle and his close-range shot was deflected wide.

From this move Rotherham got a free kick just outside the penalty box. Hague put in a good header but it went too high.

Both sides appeared to lack finishing power. There was a lot of struggling in midfield but nothing was coming of it.

Hague was shaping well for Rotherham but there was still no real distinction between the