

GOAL BURST AS ROCCHDALE

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Luton 2
Rochdale 0

By ROGER DUCKWORTH

TWO late goals by Collins and Allen put Luton clear at the top of Division Three.

But they really were fortunate. Lackadaisical Luton struggled for most of the match, and the lively Rochdale side must be heartbroken at the result.

Before the match both teams were on level points, with Luton leading the league on goal average.

BBC cameras were at the ground to record the match for tonight's Match of the Day programme, although it wasn't expected to be the main feature.

Terry Branston was retained at centre half for Luton, with Mike Harrison, off the injured list, as substitute.

The sun was obviously going to be a handicap to both sets of players and this became obvious in the first minute when Macdonald chased a long ball from Keen into the penalty area. Both he and a couple of defenders had to shield their eyes but Macdonald was penalised for a foul.

Luton began where they left off the other night with some good cross-field play and again Collins looked in good form in the middle of the field.

It was he and Keen who started a splendid crossfield move which sent full back Ryan away and his good centre was only a fraction in front of the onrushing Tees. French managed to keep the ball in play on the far side but Rochdale cleared the situation.

First corner

It was again Collins who sent Macdonald away but, all on his own, the Luton inside forward could only win a corner which came to nothing.

A long cross from French was energetically chased by Keen who could not get round his defender, but he won a corner and from this still floated from Collins on the right Allen very nearly got his head to it.

It took a good catch by goalkeeper Harker who put the ball right off the forehead of the high jumping Allen.

In trying to bealm Ryan showed rather too much casualness and with an intended short clearance he missed the ball against the legs of Butler, but the ball rebounded too hard for Rochdale to make anything of it and went out of play to give Luton a goal kick.

In the 7th minute Rochdale nearly stole a sneak lead. A free kick from the centre circle by Ashworth was nodded on by Buck and, with the help of a neat Whitehead pass out of Davies' reach, Jenkins towered in to finish the move off. But he reckoned without the solidarity of Branston who saved Luton with a hefty clearance right under Jenkins' nose.

The visitors were showing a certain sharpness in their running and tenacity in their tackling. This seemed to throw Luton for a while and they still looked more dangerous when moving across the field via Collis and Keen rather than through the middle.

Misdirected

Luton had a chance to go ahead after 13 minutes but it was spoilt by some misdirection. Allen pushed a free Branston free kick out to Harker who beat his full back and crossed.

Tees found himself all alone and instead of heading hard at goal he tried to lay the ball off with his head for Macdonald. This was misdirected and Luton's hopes were dashed.

Tees won another corner for the Town and this was again fought for hard by Luton but the openings did not seem to be presenting themselves as well as usual.

The pattern continued when French slung over a free kick from the left following a foul on himself by Smith. Macdonald nudged it on with his head but again there was nobody in the right place to finish the move off.

The best shot so far came in the 17th minute from Rochdale full-back Ryder. He brought some sporting applause from the Luton crowd when he overlapped well for a pass from Rudd and got in a good left footer which Davie had to dive to gather.

And there was further threat from Rochdale when Whitehead jinked through the Luton penalty area and got in a fair shot which was deflected over the top off a Luton leg for a corner.

This brought another one and Jenkins might easily have scored after Davie had misfired in the crowded goalmouth. But his shot was not well directed and Allen scrambled the ball away.

Luton had yet another let-off when Branston was slow in



Macdonald storms in to beat Rochdale keeper Harker with Tees on hand

going in for a long lob from Ashworth. This left Jenkins with an opening but he looked at the ball as if mesmerised by finding such an easy chance and Branston was given chance to tackle and get the ball away for a corner.

There was bags of running from this Rochdale side and they caught Luton on the hop

TEAMS

LUTON TOWN: Davie; Ryan, Bannister; Keen, Branston, Slough; Collins, Macdonald, Tees, Allen, French. Sub: Harrison.

ROCHDALE: Harker, Smith, Ryder; Leech, Parry, Ashworth; Whitehead, Rudd, Buck, Jenkins, Butler. Sub: Clarke.

Referee: Mr C. Thomas (Treorchy).

GOALS

COLLINS (Luton) 76 minutes.

ALLEN (Luton) 86 mins

Attendance: 15,876

more than once. Slough had to intervene on one occasion and it became apparent how the Lancastrians had scored so many goals this season.

After 23 minutes Luton got the ball into the net. French put in a staggering run on the left and crossed the ball right to the feet of Macdonald who swept the ball into the net. But the linesman's flag was up and the goal was disallowed.

Obviously angry at the decision Macdonald had another attempt at goal a minute later when he got his head to a French cross but this time Harker was in a position to save.

In the 26th minute Rochdale had an effort, which brought the crowd to its feet, and unfortunately deserved a goal. Unfortunately for him, Butler's terrific dive from the edge of the penalty box was smart against the crossbar and bounced down on to the line and was headed over the crossbar by Branston.

Bad passing

The Rochdale defence was quick to cover and Luton's plight was not helped by some bad passing from Keen just as Luton were beginning to look a bit more promising.

In the 36th minute another run and a cross from French brought an admirable attempt from Tees, who put in a diving header. But Harker caught the ball and, anyway, Tees was given offside.

Six minutes before the interval Rochdale had another splendid effort at goal. Whitehead worked hard for a corner and from it Leech got in a powerful header and Davie caught the occasion with a magnificent flying save which caught the ball under severe pressure.

There really was little to praise Luton for. The inside forwards looked slow and things were often breaking down in midfield. French looked at this stage as being the player most likely to succeed with the Town. One good move by French set up Macdonald but he was far too slow in turning and had the ball taken off him.

Rochdale were showing most of the class and a good move between Rudd, Butler and Ryder won a corner from which Whitehead lobbed a shot over the crossbar.

This was Rochdale's 11th corner. Luton had had four HT: Luton Town 0 Rochdale 0

After the first half performance, I think one or two people were surprised that there wasn't a substitution in the Luton side. Anyhow, Rochdale went quickly into a smooth attack and Whitehead put in some good work before Bannister cleared.

It was only two minutes after the break before Rochdale provided themselves with another real goal chance. Full-back Smith hammered a long ball through the middle and Jenkins was given all the time in the world by a slow-thinking Luton defence to run on to the ball and shoot over the top from an easy scoring position.

Town came back and a long one from Macdonald won a corner which was not even challenged for by the Town attack and goalkeeper Harker caught it easily.

From a long centre by Ryan a half-clearance presented Allen with a half-chance but he lost possession and took a "dive" hoping to get a penalty. Referee Thomas was not fooled.

Branston, who had had a wholehearted tussle with the burly Jenkins all afternoon, received an injury but carried on playing.

Then Luton had a chance. A good pass from Collins brought a fine centre from French and as Allen charged in to get a good header in the ball was deflected inches over Parry by centre half French for a Luton corner. This was cleared.

Fans chant

The frustrated Luton crowd began to chant "Harrison, Harrison" and it was taken up on all four sides of the ground. But there was no appearance of the Luton mob.

A long throw by Keen caused some panic in the Rochdale defence and Macdonald and Tees scrambled to get in a shot before Collins eventually kicked over the top.

For the second time in the match Davie mis-fisted and this time it was to a long cross from Rudd. Davie went out and punched the ball high into the air and back towards his own net. Fortunately for him it landed on the top.

Luton's continual poor passing and loss of possession made the crowd really angry and the call for Luton went up again.

A shot from Allen began a promising move for Luton. It was stopped by the goalkeeper but he made a bad clearance and the ball was pushed through to Macdonald to chase. He hit the ball past the defence with his knee and chased it all alone into an unmissable position. And then he missed!

Only 10 yards from goal, he completely sliced his shot and even Tees who was following up, was so surprised that he missed the ball as it shot past him.

Out of touch

Then Rochdale had another chance and it looked as if they had taken the lead when a fine run and centre from Rudd

TODAY was the first day the referees under the new ruling, visited both teams in their dressing rooms before the match to give them instructions on conduct.

Alec Stock, Luton's manager, said: "I am all for it. They have been doing it for years on the Continent." And Rochdale manager, Len Richley, said: "I am 100 per cent in favour of this idea."

ended with Butler's shot being deflected right off the Luton goal-line for yet another corner for the visitors.

Things just would not run for Luton. Tees and Allen showed some enthusiasm in the middle but when Macdonald, chasing a long ball all on his own into the penalty area, was bowled over, Luton's appeals for a penalty were rightly ignored.

Luton were really out of touch. Whatever they tried seemed to go wrong and as a result, along with the crowd getting at them, they completely lost confidence. There was still some spark in French, and Allen was working as hard as ever. One move between these two ended in a good centre from Allen but Tees was beaten in the air.

Then French got a centre in and centre-half Parry headed off the line.

Harrison on

A great roar went up as Harrison appeared out of the box and began to lamber up on the touchline. There were 18 minutes to go. But before he made an entrance, Whitehead tested the Luton defence with a hard low cross and Ryan did well to concede a corner.

Luton's best effort of the match came in the 73rd minute and it was a hard drive from Collins, from some 25 yards, which was brilliantly pushed over by Harker.

There were 15 minutes to go when Harrison made his appearance and Macdonald was the one to be pulled off.

This decision by manager Alec Stock received a mixed reception and Harrison immediately took up his position on the left wing. But before Harrison had a chance to touch

the ball Luton took a well-taken, if somewhat fortunate, lead.

It stemmed from French on the right. His little centre was well controlled by COLLINS who pushed it forward, dribbled round a defender, and shot home from some 12 yards.

Collins really did take the goal well and atoned for some of his earlier lapses, which were no worse than those made by his colleagues.

There was still bags of fight in Rochdale and Buck and Jenkins both fought hard for the ball before putting shots wide.

Delightful

Then French delighted the crowd with a strong run and a goal well and atoned for some of his earlier lapses, which were no worse than those made by his colleagues.

Six minutes from the end Keith Allen had the devil's own luck when he met a grand cross from French and saw his close range shot luckily saved on the line by Harker.

Since their goal Luton had settled down to play with some consistency and four minutes from the end Allen scored the second.

Again it was instigated by French who led Ryder a merry dance before crossing. Tees flicked the ball on and as it bounced high Allen calmly headed over the top of the advancing goalkeeper into the middle of the net.