

**LUTON CAME OUT second best in a Christmas spectacular at Brisbane Road yesterday.**

But there was nothing second best about the match, which produced some outstanding performances and left a 17,000 crowd offering a prolonged standing ovation at the end to 24 exhausted, mud-splattered players and a referee who had all done their part in adding to the joy and goodwill of the festivities.

It was a match nobody really minded losing; a match nobody deserved to lose. It was one of those games you feel privileged to have watched.

It will take Luton fans a long time to forget the way their team heaved their way back through the mud in a second-half revival that made them look just what they are — Division Three leaders.

There was no disgrace in this defeat, and Luton can rightly claim they were worth a share of the spoils. Orient collected a somewhat fortunate goal in the seventh minute, and hung on to it.

But in the second half, as the mud sapped the strength from the most willing legs, Town's superior fitness began to tell, and they hammered away at the Londoners' goal without any luck at all.

### Commiserations

Malcolm Macdonald had an outstanding match, and his big-hearted running, strength and youthful zest might well have earned him a hat-trick after the interval. Instead he had to make do with commiserations and memories of near-misses.

I suppose it was justice in a way. Orient are still claiming they were cheated of the points when they came to Kenilworth Road in August. Yesterday they got their own back.

Two lesser teams would have hacked out a 90-minute maul on this mud. It is to their credit that both Luton and Orient attempted to play constructive football — and got away with it. They had to battle against surface "goo" which held back legs, and muscles and affected the run of the ball.

Afterwards Town chairman Mr Tony Hunt said: "That was one of the best games I have seen. I would like to see it all

over again — even knowing that the result was going to be the same."

Finesse was cut to a minimum by the conditions, but this was more than compensated by the swash-buckling style in which it was played. It was kick and chase — with guts and class.

### Variation

The Londoners pinned Luton's ears back in the first half hour with some fast, furious football. Luton took time to find their feet.

Orient were showing more variation and imagination in the set pieces, and I could see Luton getting a bit of a thrashing. In this early period Orient were showing more ambition, skill and adaptation to the conditions. And for one horrible moment, I thought they were going to have the edge in bravery.

But Luton pulled everything out after the interval to turn the match into the cracker we had anticipated. Only trouble was their failure to pull back Peter Allen's goal.

And what a strange one it was. Mark Lazarus put over a bad corner from the left, and Slough seemed to have it mastered. But he was unable to clear properly and the ball shot into the middle of the action on the edge of the penalty area.

Keith Allen and Peter Allen, both struck out at it together. Keith got there a fraction first and cannoned the ball onto the

swinging boot of his namesake. It hurtled into the net, way out of the reach of the startled Davie. It was one of those efforts that could have gone anywhere. It was Orient's revenge.

### Saviours

Davie had a satisfactory match, in fact both goalkeepers did extremely well considering the conditions. But Luton's first-half saviours, those who took the honours when the pressure was on, were backs Ryan and Bannister, and centre half Nicholl, who had a splendid match.

Bannister kept a tight grip on Lazarus, while Slough came to the rescue more than once.

Keen had some trouble with his distribution on the gluey surface, but John Collins, after a shaky start, got through an enormous amount of work in Luton's fighting finish.

The forwards came more into their own after the breather, and Peter Phillips began to impress with some incisive running. He was playing his first match for the Town, in place of Matt Tees who had a throat infection. Phillips looks as if he is going to be a very useful member of the first team squad.

He was substituted by Brian Lewis in the 66th minute, but not for any detrimental reason. Manager Alec Stock explained: "We desperately needed a goal then. It was just a hunch. We put Lewis on to try to sneak one. It didn't work."

French got through some hard work, but the conditions did not suit him. And, uncharacteristically, he wasted several corners.

As usual, Keith Allen revelled in it all, but not even he could overcome the odds set up by an ultra-determined Orient, resolute on getting their own back.

Throughout, the match was superbly controlled by Mr Gordon Hill, and it is easy to see why he is rated as England's number one referee. Conditions demanded that he let a lot of things go unchecked. But he used his discretion, and that's what referees are supposed to do. It is a pleasure to see a match handled in such a sensible manner.

The match was always played in a sporting spirit. An example of this came when Orient's Harper was hurt just before the interval. Both the crowd and the ref acknowledged Sandy Davie's gesture of kicking the ball out of play so that Harper could be treated.

He was carried off with a knee injury, and took no further part in the match.

### MATCH DETAILS

**LUTON TOWN:** Davie; Ryan, Bannister; Keen, Nicholl, Slough; Macdonald, Collins, Phillips (Lewis), Allen, French.

**ORIENT:** Goddard; Jones, Rofe; Taylor, Mancini, Harper (Fairbrother); Lazarus, Bullock, P. Allen, Dyson, Brabrook.

**Goal:** Allen, P. (Orient) 7min.

**ATTENDANCE** — 17,619.

**REFEREE** — Mr G. W. Hill (Leicester).

# What a pity one side had to lose

**ORIENT 1 LUTON TOWN 0**

**By ROGER DUCKWORTH**

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