

LIFELESS LUTON GAIN POINT

'You wouldn't credit they were going all out for promotion'

HALIFAX 0 LUTON TOWN 0

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LUTON never looked like a side fighting for promotion to the Second Division. A poor first half display brought little improvement after the interval and an injury-hit Halifax side had no trouble in containing the punchless Luton attack.

One bright spot was some assured defending but up front only Macdonald showed any fire. Slough and Busby gave good support and Mike Keen was an able general, but this just was not the sort of form that deserves a higher grade of football.

With Graham French not fully fit Mike Harrison continued on the left wing for Luton. Peter Phillips was named as substitute.

The Halifax team was far from settled and manager Alan Ball, father of the England forward, told me before the start: "I just don't know how we got a team out. I only have 15 professionals and almost half of those are injured. Some of the injured have just had to turn out today."

He was forced to make seven changes in the Halifax team.

And Alec Stock told me: "Today we have got to go forward. We have to win. It's a matter of going all out for both points and I have instructed the team to this effect."

A first minute free kick by Shawcross gave Halifax an early advantage and with the ball bobbing about in the box they immediately looked dangerous until Chadwick ran the ball too far and it went out of play to give Luton the relief of a goal kick.

Untidy

The opening session produced some untidy play as both sides struggled to get the feel of each other and there was a deal of mis-passing around the centre circle as both teams tried to settle.

This match had sentimental memories for Luton; for it was here at the Shay that they clinched promotion from the Fourth Division at this time of the season two years ago.

Halifax went forward again, then Branton gave away a free-kick for holding Bill Atkins as he jumped to head clear.

ROGER DUCKWORTH

REPORTING FROM THE SHAY



Chadwick floated a good kick and McCarthy out-jumped the Luton defence. With apparent ease to head down, but Starling was up to the occasion and he made a splendid full-length save to hold the ball right on the goal line.

Half-chance

A short free-kick by Bannister inside the Halifax half resulted in Collins lobbing a high one into the danger zone but Shawcross headed clear and Busby worked well to win a throw-in and then a corner. From the flag kick Keen worked to get the ball to Slough but his shot almost hit the corner flag.

Luton began to get the hang of things and in the 11th minute Harrison found Slough who was more on target this time, but his hard long-range effort was easily caught by goalkeeper Smith.

A free-kick by Ryan for a foul on Collins produced a half-chance for Luton but Macdonald was unable to reach the ball which was gathered by Smith at the second attempt. The Halifax goalkeeper was injured in the collision but was soon fit again.

Luton's first determined attempt at goal came from Macdonald. Busby shoved a

nice ball through and after outstripping the defence, the Luton centre-forward smashed his shot only a couple of inches over the crossbar.

Halifax won a corner off Branton, who was involved in a long chase with Atkins. Chadwick placed the flag-kick well but Keen made a timely clearance. From this Macdonald sent Slough away on the right and Macdonald only just missed his accurate centre which was diverted from his path by the fingertips of goalkeeper Smith.

A period of unproductive football came to an end when Slough sent Macdonald away with a long low pass. Smith raced out to the edge of his box to foil the Luton leader and the Halifax goalkeeper, finding himself some five yards out of the box, had to fly-kick the ball clear to avert the danger.

Lack of fire

In spite of a couple of goal attempts by Macdonald there seemed to be a lack of fire in the belly of the Luton attack. Harrison and Collins were not in the picture as much as they might be and the brunt of the attacking was taken by Macdonald and Busby with occasional help from Slough.

Harrison, who appeared to be nursing some sort of leg injury, came into the picture

after a pass from Macdonald and thumped a good centre across which his colleagues were able to do nothing at all with.

The aimless play continued until Brierley broke clear after a long through ball. He nudged the ball forward with his head but Starling came out quickly to gather.

On this showing you certainly wouldn't credit that Luton were going all out for promotion and Halifax struggling with an unfit team.

Again Starling was in good catching form when he ran out and held a long, high free-kick from Pickering on the half-way line.

One man in the Luton team who did seem to be doing everything expected of him was skipper Mike Keen who came in with timely tackles and clever clearances on several occasions.

Too strong

Macdonald still looked the most dangerous Luton forward and he was unlucky in the 39th minute when he could not quite get hold of his shot from a Busby pass and the ball went tamely straight to Smith.

Then Macdonald sent Harrison away but could not reach the winger's centre which was a bit too strong.

A Ryan, Slough, Branton move might well have brought Luton a goal just before half-time but Busby could not seem to get the ball on to his shooting foot and get a clear look at goal. He was robbed in the attempt.

Then Moore put in a good run and gave the ball to

Harrison who again wasted it with a pathetic shot at goal.

Macdonald might have broken clear when he chased a Keen pass but Burgin brought him down in full flight and Halifax had no trouble at all in clearing the Luton free kick.

It was almost a relief when the half-time whistle went and the teams trooped off after a goalless 45 minutes.

HT: Halifax 0, Luton 0

After an extended interval, Luton began to show a bit more determination. Macdonald broke through but his centre was blocked and then a

TEAMS	
HALIFAX:	Smith; Burgin, Lee; Shawcross, Pickering, Wallace; Chadwick, Robertson, Brierley, Atkins. McCarthy, Sub: Verity.
LUTON TOWN:	Starling; Ryan, Bannister; Slough, Branton, Moore; Collins, Busby; Macdonald, Keen, Harrison. Sub: Phillips.
Referee:	Mr W. S. Castle (Sedgley).
Attendance: 3,482	

long ball from Moore was beautifully controlled by Harrison who cut inside and shot just over the crossbar.

For the second time in the match a huge throw-in by McCarthy troubled the Luton defence and on this occasion it took a double attempt by Branton to clear the danger.

The second half was only four minutes old when Luton manager Alec Stock appeared on the touchline and told substitute Phillips to get changed.

Not only did he tell him he took the Luton sub's track suit top off for him and nobody was surprised when Harrison was the one to be pulled off.

No bother

After another long throw by McCarthy had been cleared by Branton, Luton went away and a good centre by Ryan brought a first time effort from Collins. It was half blocked and the Luton forward was injured in the process. He recovered after treatment.

There was not nearly enough fire up front in the Luton set-up and when Macdonald pushed one through for Collins to chase Smith had no bother in running out to take the ball away from the foot of the Luton man.

In the 58th minute Luton were nearly in trouble when, under pressure, Starling fumbled a gem of a centre from Chadwick but he was fouled by Atkins as he fell trying to gather the ball at the second attempt, and Luton were given the free-kick.

There was one intelligent build up from Luton but as on all other occasions in this match something went wrong in the last minute. This time it was Slough who blinded the ball high and wide from outside the penalty box. It was a useless exercise and Luton looked no nearer to scoring at this stage than they had in the first half.

In another vain attack Macdonald, Busby and Keen combined but a header from Slough gave

defence time to gather their wits and clear.

In the 64th minute Wallace made a worthy attempt at goal for Halifax but his low shot went wide at the left hand post.

Dear miss

As Halifax tried to assert some authority on the match McCarthy got a good centre across but Bannister came to Luton's rescue with a timely header.

Two minutes later, Macdonald made the miss of the match — a miss that could cost Luton dearly. Busby hammered a speculative long pass forward; it skidded underneath the foot of Pickering, leaving Macdonald with a clear run at goal.

He hesitated too long as he tried to make sure from close in and ended up by hitting the ball straight at Smith who had run out to narrow the angle.

Busby, Keen and Collins made Luton's next attack but it came up against a stone wall and there looked to be too many people scrambling around in the penalty box to come to any logical conclusion.

Collins brightened the proceedings with a terrific drive from some 25 yards, but it was steered over the top by Smith. Collins put the corner behind.

Just to make matters worse — if that was possible — a heavy drizzle descended sending the meagre crowd scattering for shelter and turning the surface into a greasy mess.

A Chadwick free-kick was challenged between Moore and McCarthy and as the ball bobbled around alarmingly in the Luton goalmouth, Slough came to the rescue with a hefty clearance.

Unlucky

Halifax began to show some ambition and for one long period the ball was banded about the Luton penalty area before Collins eventually helped out with a big clearance. And in two other incidents it was Ryan who was called upon to hammer clear worthy looking centres.

Phillips came into the game with a bang when he put in a nice little dribble and with a bit more luck his low well placed shot might have beaten Smith who, however, was wide awake and picked it up cleanly.

Slough went away for Luton and found Busby whose centre from the left was only a fraction out of the reach of Collins who challenged Smith.

Two minutes from the end Atkins put in perhaps the best shot of the match from some 20 yards. But Starling proved up to it and dived sharply to his right to catch the ball cleanly.