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Town bow out with a win —but fight spoils muddy match

Rochdale 1 Luton Town 2

LUTON TOWN said farewell to Division Three with a 2-1 win at Rochdale this afternoon — on a pitch that resembled Blackpool beach after the tide had gone out. However, their fans weren't too concerned about the slithering, sluggish soccer, for they raised the stand roofs as their heroes trudged wearily off.

But the game WAS marred — by a fighting incident in the crowd. Several injured people were carried out of the ground, including a girl with a broken leg. Police called in reinforcements to deal with the offenders.

The poor standard of football may have been to blame for the discontent in the 5,830 crowd — but this was the fault of the pitch, not the players.

More than 2,000 Luton supporters made the long trip North this afternoon to acclaim their promotion-winning heroes. Two special trains brought 1,100 of them, and at least another 1,000 came by coach.

But they were greeted by rain — and a heavy covering of water on the pitch.

Rochdale coach Gordon Hurst said: "The rain started at 8 o'clock last night and it's still going. The lads have worked magnificently to get this match played. At noon there was two inches of water covering the pitch and you could not see any grass at all."

By ROGER DUCKWORTH

through the mud, the ball skidded off his foot and BUSBY, following up, put the ball into the net.

Macdonald must have been injured in the incident for when the teams kicked off again, he collapsed in the centre circle and had to be helped off. Luton did not bring on a substitute.

Five minutes later, Rochdale had the ball in the net — but it didn't count.

Riley collided with Read and netted a free kick but Mr Burns ruled that the Luton goalkeeper had been fouled. Immediately afterwards Macdonald returned to a big cheer from the Luton followers.

The game was only some 22 minutes old when fighting broke out in the low stand behind the goal. Police moved in and, helped by fans, carried out three people who had been injured. Three white-helmeted "speed cops" ran into the ground and across the corner of the pitch to help sort out the trouble.

Volley

Play continued, but it was all a bit aimless until Jenkins, Rochdale's leading scorer, got hold of a centre and volleyed it at goal. Read made a diving save to maintain Luton's lead.



KEITH ALLEN... named as sub

Referee Ken Burns, who called this match off in March because of deep snow, said: "It's going on today even if we have to paddle through it."

Luton received a magnificent welcome from the crowd, which contained more Luton than Rochdale supporters. And the home team lined up to applaud Luton as they came out for their last match of the season.

Dropped

Luton dropped inside-forward Keith Allen, who was named as substitute, and Matt Tees came back into the attack for Graham French, who was injured. The forward line was reshuffled, with Viv Busby playing at outside-right, Macdonald at inside-right and Matt Tees at centre-forward.

It was pouring with rain when the teams kicked off and the ball immediately became clogged in the mud in the middle of the field.

The conditions were far worse than anything I have seen all season, and both teams found it impossible to play the ball anywhere near the centre circle.

The players soon realised they had to use the grass on the wings. And it was from the left that Rochdale's first attack came when Jenkins headed east Slough and put a low left-footed shot across the face of the goal, but no one was following up.

The ball was skidding off the water as if it were a water polo match, and neither side found it possible to play any constructive football.

Ambitious

A long clearance sent Macdonald on an ambitious chase through the mud, and Luton appealed for a penalty as he was sent flying by Parry. Macdonald skidded a goal eight yards on his chest before coming to a halt by the six yard line — but the referee waved play on.

Busby beat his man out on the right and Tees, a stranger in the side these days, burst through and almost beat Harker with a low, scudding shot across the water-logged goalmouth.

Luton's first real danger came when Smith ran clear on the right and lobbed the ball into the Luton goalmouth, but Read caught it well.

Farcical

Luton had a fleeting chance when Ryan created an overlap on the right and flashed across a centre, but the spongy ball skidded off the top of Macdonald's head.

After a quarter of an hour of farcical football, Luton took the lead. Slough lobbed a long free kick into the penalty area, and Tees headed it on. As Macdonald splattered his way

TEAMS	
ROCHDALE:	Harker, Smith, Ryder, Riley, Parry, Ashworth, Butler, Rudd, Cross, Jenkins, Downes. Sub: Clarke.
LUTON:	Read, Ryan, Bannister, Slough, Branstoun, Moore, Busby, Macdonald, Tees, Keen, Collins. Sub: Allen.
Referee:	Mr K. Burns (Stourbridge).
GOALS	
BUSBY (Luton)	15 minutes
Macdonald (Luton)	54mins
JENKINS (Rochdale)	62 mins
Attendance:	5,830.

The trouble appeared to have died down but a police chief, complete with pocket radio, appeared in the players' tunnel to summon extra men.

Obviously, good football was very limited, but there was some brief excitement when Butler put across a great centre from the left wing — but there was nobody on hand to turn it into a goal.

The crowd, divided between the match and the trouble spot, sent up a big cheer when half a dozen police reinforcements marched round the edge of the pitch to help their colleagues.

At least on the pitch there was no kick and rush — it was kick and slide.

John Moore came to Luton's rescue when he pushed a handy looking cross from the right round for a corner. Cross won the kick in the air but Read easily caught his header.

Police radios must have been busy for another posse moved into the ground and reports circulated that a girl, one of the three carried out, had sustained a broken leg.

The boredom was relieved when Luton attacked from the left. Collins managed to get across a centre which was gathered by Harker, but when he cleared the ball it landed with a plop in the midfield mud — and stuck there.

But play continued — and if ever there was a waste of time, this was it. With nothing left to fight for, all the 22 players were doing splashing about in the mud like children on a school picnic.

Surprised

On the stroke of half time, Luton almost had a second goal.

Macdonald crossed well from the right towards Busby

but it never reached him. A mud-covered Rochdale defender kicked wildly at the ball and it shot towards his own net. But the surprised Harker brought off a great diving save.

HT: Rochdale 0, Luton 1.

Referee Burns made an early start to the second half — obviously anxious to get this farce over. The players were hoofing the ball about as if they were on Blackpool sands after the tide had just gone out.

Rochdale substituted Clarke for tiny Rudd, who had struggled through the heavy mud.

Luton had a chance when Collins got a good ball out to Tees on the left, but conditions were such that the Luton leader could only hammer the ball straight into the crowd behind the goal.

Return

The players could at least console themselves with the fact that they were being paid for wallowing around in the mud, whereas the supporters had paid to watch.

But they had some return for their money nine minutes after the interval when MACDONALD showed why he is the Third Division's top scorer. He chased a skidding pass from Keen, passed Parry and calmly netted Luton's second goal.

Rochdale fought back and a Riley shot was blocked by Slough. Then Ashworth lobbed over a brilliant centre out of the reach of Read and the Lancashire club's leading scorer, JENKINS, hurled himself forward to make it 2-1.

Tees left the field, obviously in some distress, 21 minutes from the end. He was substituted by Allen, who looked as if he was intent on making an impression in this last match.

Trouble

The mud was so bad that when Rochdale's Riley went down right into the middle of it he had trouble keeping his shorts up when he tried to run afterwards. Eventually he had to take them off and a new pair was handed to him.

There was a scare for Luton when Butler slung across a teasing centre which Ryan back-headed carelessly to the goalkeeper. Read made a daring save at the feet of Jenkins — before saying a few words to his full-back.

Rochdale still strived for a point but Parry was booked after a foul in a muddy scramble.