

Blues checked by

by TOM DUCKWORTH

Birmingham City 1 Luton 0

BLUES, after looking as if they were going to run Luton off their feet in the first 15 minutes at St. Andrew's, met unexpectedly stiff resistance.

Although dominating play for long stretches in the first half and forcing corner after corner, they were unable to break through Luton's resolute defence.

Keith Barber brought off first-class saves from Bob Latchford and Alan Campbell, while Trevor Francis shot wide with a great chance and Bob Hatton hit the post in the dying seconds of the half.

Blues kept up the pressure in the second half, but Luton continued to defend gallantly.

Carroll failed a fitness test and Page took his place at right-back. Smith was introduced for Page at No. 4.

BIRMINGHAM CITY: Latchford (D.); Page, Pendrey; Smith, Hynd, Harland; Campbell, Francis, Latchford (R.), Hatton, Taylor. Sub.: Bowker.

LUTON TOWN: Barber, Ryan (John), Shanks, Keen, Garner, Slough, Ryan (Jim), Court, Anderson, Busby, Givens. Sub.: Moore.

Blues maintained an almost constant attack in the opening minutes and Taylor, operating down the right, caused the Luton defence a great deal of trouble.

Bob Latchford looked to have an opportunity, but he took time to get the bouncing ball under control and John Ryan dispossessed him and passed back for Barber to clear.

Blues saw to it that Taylor got plenty of the ball and, from another well-flighted cross, Pendrey had a possible chance. He got his toe under the ball and ballooned it high over the bar from the edge of the box.

The first real chance of the match fell to Francis who found himself in a splendid shooting position after Garner had taken the ball off Latchford's toe. Francis, a little over-anxious, shot too hurriedly and drove a yard wide.

Taylor was giving Shanks, Luton's teenage left-back, the run-around. From yet another of his centres Latchford almost scored with an overhead kick. Barber diving to his right to bring off a great save.

Luton were penned in their own half for the first 15 minutes and Dave Latchford touched the ball for the first time when he came out to handle a long free-kick from Shanks.

Brilliant

The Luton goalkeeper saved brilliantly when Campbell dribbled through and shot accurately for the far corner.

Blues, going flat out for a goal, maintained an almost constant barrage of shots and centres, but somehow they could not find a way past Luton's massed defence.

Luton rarely passed the half-way line as Blues forced corner after corner.

From one of these Keen headed over his own crossbar as a safety first measure. When Blues forced another corner Luton had every

member of their side behind their 18-yard line.

Luton had their first chance after 32 minutes when a break-away caught Blues' defence out of position.

Anderson's pass left Busby with an excellent chance of opening the score, but Busby delayed a second too long and his shot struck Latchford and was deflected for a corner.

Luton did not seem to mind giving away corners, and Blues, in their failure to break through, began to look a little frustrated. Their passes beginning to go astray.

Luton came to life a few minutes before the interval and they had a possible chance when Court crossed to the far post.

Collision

Anderson and Keen crashed together with a couple of Blues players and both were knocked out. The ball went for a corner. Anderson and Keen were soon able to resume.

Blues had fallen away after their lively start and were failing to find their men with any precision, despite the constant urges of their fans.

Barber dealt well with an awkwardly bouncing ball, punching clear as Hatton ran in in an attempt to gain possession.

With the first-half well into injury time, Hatton shot against the foot of the post following a corner-kick. Seconds later the whistle went for half-time.

Half-time: Blues 0
Luton 0

Luton launched the first attack after the break, forcing a corner on the left. Following the flag-kick,

Harland kicked away when Givens got in a header.

A beautifully-measured pass by Page left Latchford with a possible opening, but the centre-forward was a little slow getting away and, challenged by Garner, put the ball outside.

Barber, who had proved himself a very capable goalkeeper, dealt confidently with an awkward high-cross-shot from Page.

Blues were still unable to find any rhythm in their attacks, and their disjointed moves in the first ten minutes after the interval were easily broken up.

When a corner taken by Taylor was headed clear, Page followed up and tried a long first-time shot. His effort bounced wide of the far post.

Blues stepped up the pressure again and Francis was a foot too high with a powerful 25-yarder.

When a ball bounced awkwardly in the Luton goalmouth, Hatton appeared to have a chance. But his close-range shot struck Barber's legs.

After Taylor had been brought down, Harland placed the free-kick accurately for Latchford to head just over the bar.

89m. Birmingham 1, Luton 0. Hatton