

LEONARD IN GREAT DEBUT

79/80

DUNCAN HAMILTON at Meadow Lane

A SUCCESSION of superb saves from debut boy Mick Leonard were the highlight of Notts County's top-of-the-table clash with Luton Town here this afternoon.

As both sides struggled to break the deadlock, Leonard produced a brilliant performance. Showing coolness and assurance, he never seemed in any real trouble. County had chances themselves and struck the woodwork three times.

Attendance: 9,582

Moments later, with Luton again looking dangerous, he then had to race quickly off his line to stop another Luton burst through the middle.

County had begun well, stringing together good passes and winning the ball in the middle of the field. But as both sides tested each other out, Luton remained confident, composed and looked lively on the break.

Notts won a free-kick about 15 yards inside the area, which almost caused Luton problems.

The ball was played square to Richards, whose shot flew hard and low into the danger zone. Christie only just failed to collect the ball cleanly.

Tidy work by McCulloch, helping out at the back, prevented another Luton attack from taking shape and Masson, picking up the loose ball, rapidly sent Notts forward again.

TUSSLE

McCulloch's duel with Stephens was already shaping into an interesting tussle. McCulloch, trying to use his speed, was thwarted by a perfectly timed tackle from the Luton, full back as Luton regained their poise.

They also stayed remarkably unruffled when Masson nipped into a gap and had the chance of a shot whipped away at the last moment when West went back to help out his back four.

Luton had the ball in the net but Stein was clearly off-side. But the Luton striker always looked capable of creating considerable problems and this was illustrated again only a moment later.

He broke well down the right and although Hatton could only head the ball wide of the post, Stein saved it from going back over the goal-line and tried to send a first-time cross back into the box.

But in the end, with County pushing everyone back, the ball was calmly cleared and County began, once again, to counter-attack.

Notts won their first corner and it took a powerful header from Saxby to clear Masson's effort.

Luton were almost caught following a great piece of work by Christie.

County's young forward found time and space in the area and shot against the crossbar with Findlay beaten.

Leonard yet again showed his capabilities, leaving his line to smother a looping through-ball.

County were still working hard as they worried Luton, especially down the left where Mair was particularly impressive.

Leonard was settling in well, showing no sign of nerves on his debut. County, who had almost been caught once by playing the off-side trap, must have breathed a sigh of relief when Hatton timed his run just a fraction too soon and the flag went up with the Luton striker left with just Leonard to beat.

Luton continued to come forward with some purpose as they started to take control. Both Grealish and Moss had chances to shoot. But good covering by the County defence allowed them little time, and Moss was rushed into making a rather bad pass which broke down a well-constructed move.

After Saxby had failed to clear a Mair cross, it was Christie who pounced on the mistake.

Carefully shielding the ball, he pushed it back into Hooks' path.

Hooks had a shooting opportunity, but his low drive skidded through two Luton defenders and then drifted past the outside of the post.

Stephens became the first player to receive the yellow card when he fouled Mair.

Leonard was still displaying some good handling and he did well to gather a difficult cross from West.

Leonard produced a fine save in the dying minutes of the first half to prevent Luton from going in front. Grealish collected the ball about 35 yards out and his shot, which dipped late, was finger-tipped over by Leonard.



NOTTS COUNTY'S new goalkeeper Mike Leonard sprawls to save from Luton striker Bob Hatton with full back Ray O'Brien helping to clear the danger at Meadow Lane this afternoon.

Grealish had another chance moments later. Faced with the choice of either trying a shot or going forward, he unwisely tried to plough his way through a number of black and white shirts.

Not surprisingly, Blockley gobbled up the ball and had little trouble in setting County away.

HALF TIME:
NOTTS CO..... 0
LUTON..... 0

Both sides looked desperately for the vital breakthrough but the game had lost its early pace and the football had become slightly patchy.

Grealish continued to play some neat touches in the middle of the field, but the two teams struggled to find their rhythm and timing.

Richards should have done better with a through ball which he hoped would reach either Hooks or Christie. But his effort was simply collected at the back by Price, who distributed it to Grealish.

TACKLE

Blockley had to get in a good tackle on the left touchline to deny Moss as Luton pressed forward.

McCulloch ran well to take the ball into the Luton half, but his finishing was poor and after jinking his way into space the final shot simply trickled into Findlay's hands.

County were almost caught when Stein burst through. But in trying to get in a drive he tumbled over as Stubbs tried to get in a tackle.

Leonard produced two truly magnificent saves in a minute to deny Luton —

Your TV matches

MATCH OF THE DAY
West Brom v
Manchester City
West Ham v Sunderland

both times from Hatton. The Luton striker burst through, shaking off a challenge before firing a shot which Leonard, diving to his left, pushed aside for a corner.

Hatton, when the ball was only half cleared, seized on another loose ball and struck a screaming volley towards the top corner. Leonard flung himself at the ball, clawing it away to safety.

LIVEN UP

The game began to liven up again, but this time it was County's turn to come forward positively and do the pressing.

First Mair hit the crossbar with a floating cross which swung over Findlay. Then the Luton defence got into a terrible tangle and were lucky to survive the next County raid.

Hooks sent in a cross which Stephens, in trying to head clear, only succeeded in knocking over his own 'keeper.

The Luton defence could only stand and watch as the ball fell agonisingly onto the crossbar and then bounced away for yet another corner.

Hill robbed McCulloch in the middle of the field but he was slightly over-ambitious in trying a shot from some 30 yards out and the ball flew harmlessly over the bar.

Luton, still looking dangerous on the break, were left exposed at the back when County quickly counter-attacked.

VISION

Masson, showing good vision, spotted Christie running free. His neat crossfield ball was perfectly placed for the Notts striker, but closely shadowed by Stephens and Saxby, he was unable to get in a drive.

County decided to pull off Hunt and replaced him with Benjamin. Luton were unconcerned and continued to push the ball around well.

Luton's build-up towards goal looked promising. But they seemed eager to shoot, which usually resulted in a wild, mishit drive which flew yards wide.

This was illustrated near the end when Hatton and Moss combined well until Moss — in his over-eagerness — decided to try his luck from well outside the box and the ball torpedoed past the post.

County were keeping their heads and it took a good piece of interception from Hill to prevent Mair from picking up a floated ball from Hooks.

McCulloch was unfortunate when he got into the area and fired a shot which ricocheted off Donaghy, beat Findlay but trickled wide.

McCulloch was booked for a foul on Moss as Luton began a final surge forward.

RESULT:
NOTTS COUNTY 0
LUTON 0

NOTTS COUNTY
Leonard
Richards (P)
O'Brien
Hunt
Stubbs
Blockley
McCulloch
Masson
Christie
Hooks
Mair
Sub: Benjamin.

LUTON
Findlay
Stephens
Donaghy
Grealish
Saxby
Price
Hill
West
Stein
Hatton
Moss
Sub: Aizlewood.

Referee: A.Challinor, Rotherham.
Linesmen: K. C. Ferguson, red;
M. G. Pulley, yellow.

County, because of the injury to regular goalkeeper Raddy Avramovic, brought in new signing Mick Leonard from Halifax. Apart from that enforced change, manager Jimmy Sirrel decided to keep the same side which lost narrowly to Leicester City last Saturday.

Luton, looking to consolidate their position at the top of the Second Division, included former Mansfield central defender Mick Saxby in their line-up.

County were the first to show and neat work by Masson and O'Brien gave Mair an early opportunity to test the Luton defence with a floating cross into the box.

But McCulloch had made a smart run into the area and Mair wisely picked out the Scotsman and aimed his well-struck cross for the waiting County forward, who was completely free at the back.

McCulloch took the ball down well on his chest, but it later bobbed free and was hacked clear by Stephens.

CORNER

Leonard was almost immediately brought into the game when Luton, in their first attack, won their first corner of the match after only two minutes.

Moss's corner was hit hard and straight. As it headed towards the near post Leonard needed to be alert and on his toes to punch the ball clear.