

FOOTBALL.

LUTON AND THE LEAGUE.

THE "REDS" AT MILLWALL.

UNLOOKED-FOR DEFEAT.

Last season Millwall Athletic and Luton Town met four times and on each occasion the interest in the encounter was very great, the rivalry between the clubs being extremely keen. It has been an open question for some years past as to which of the two is the second best side in the South. The premier position has hitherto been awarded by the consensus of opinion to the Royal Arsenal, though this year some confident Lutonians are to be found ready to subject to this bestowal of the palm. So far as the "reds" have always managed to hold their own, and the reverse of 3-1 which they administered to Millwall about a month ago would appear to dispose of the claims of the Athletics. That, however, is merely by the way. We were referring to last season's meetings of the Millwall and Luton elevens. In the Southern League an unsatisfactory match at Luton ended in a narrow win for the Londoners, while at Millwall the game resulted in a draw. Two friendly matches—one at Luton and the other at Millwall—brought two victories to the Town Club men. With thoughts of these achievements in their minds there were many who regarded last Saturday's meeting at Millwall as a foregone conclusion for Luton. There was little to guide outsiders in the matter of League form. Millwall entertained Southampton St. Mary's on September 14 and defeated them by two to none, while Luton on September 21 had routed Ilford by five to none. The wretched form displayed by Southampton did not tend to enhance the value of the victory at Millwall, whereas the performance at Luton was admittedly excellent. Then there was the question of the relative improvements in the teams. The Millwall forward rank had been reconstituted, but it was conceded that little additional strength had been obtained. The defensive lines had been unchanged, familiar names being used here. On the side of the "reds" enterprise had been afforded full scope, and the air was full of talk as to the wonderful capabilities of the new forwards and the freshly-constituted half-back line. Nicholson's return was hailed with delight by his admirers, and it was agreed that now the team was as formidable as it could well be. There accordingly seemed ample justification for approaching the match on Saturday with feelings of confidence. Few were to be found who fancied the chances of Millwall, and if rumour was not on this occasion the liar which we are accustomed to regard her as being there were some premonitory flutterings in the dovecotes down East Ferry-road way. Yet what is the outcome? The Lutonians make the journey with brass band and a great crowd of sympathisers in their wake and—return defeated by two goals to none! Oh, the pity of it! All the cheerful anticipations of weeks dispelled by a couple of hours of actuality. What terrible disappointment must have been experienced by the Lutonians who went out to witness the victory of their favourites can surely be imagined when they were compelled by adverse fate to hide their diminished heads. Rumour has it that many who had arranged visits to places of amusement in the event of a win abandoned these projects and took the first opportunity of returning to straw-town in order to escape from the hateful London surroundings. One can sympathise very heartily with this section, for the blow which rudely dispelled their fondly cherished hopes must have fallen with crushing force.

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It has been hinted that excitement ran high hereabouts. No better indication could be given of the extent of the interest than to state that on no previous occasion have so many persons departed from Luton for the mere purpose of watching a football match. Early in the week it became apparent that a large crowd would travel through London, and yet the Midland Railway did not offer the facilities which might have been looked for. It was left for private enterprise to cater for the prospective travellers, and an excursion train was duly chartered to leave Luton at 1.25. The demand for tickets was so large that a second train to depart at 12.30 was arranged for, while cheap tickets were to be issued by the Stratford to London express—that which leaves at 12.25. Then the Great Northern had announced a trip at 1.10, and altogether the demands of those desirous of proceeding to Millwall-wards were fairly well met. The trains were freely patronised, and it is estimated that some 1,200 passengers made the journey, this being exclusive of a large number who hold season tickets and who utilised them on this occasion. Those who travelled themselves of the earlier trains were best off. They travelled to London in comfort and were enabled to avoid the customary afternoon crush from Fenchurch-street to Millwall—while some took a leisurely trip down the Thames. This contingent were veritably wise in their generation and they had ample reason for congratulating themselves upon their foresight. They reached the scene of action an hour before the time announced for the start of the game and were enabled to secure comfortable seats upon the grand-stand or to take up excellent coigns of vantage. By and bye came the later excursionists, and these were full of desire for the more fortunate ones to "listen to my tale of woe"—an invitation, by the way, which was not acceded to except by those desirous of extracting some amusement from the experiences. There were stories told of dire discomfort on the railways, and it was asseverated that on the line from Millwall Junction to Millwall Docks passengers were plentiful as leaves in Vallambrosa—anyhow, they were riding 18 in a compartment. It was difficult for those who had journeyed in comparative comfort—when the thermometer stood at upwards of 80 in the shade—to appreciate the woes of the complaining ones, more especially seeing that the former had managed to obtain cool positions. The later arrivals, indeed, found it difficult to obtain seats, and were accordingly correspondingly disconsolate. It was an extraordinary sight, even for a football crowd. Folks had been flocking in steadily until at about 3 o'clock there was not a seat to be had on the grand-stand, while the elevated portions of the ground round the ropes presented quite a sea of faces. Still the newcomers entered in streams, until when the time arrived for a commencement some 9,000 were present. The grand-stand contained a good proportion of Lutonians, and that jocularly which is inseparable from such occasions led to the expression that "Millwall was invaded by Lutonians." There was certainly a goodly sprinkling of residents in straw-town present, and these did not forget to make their presence manifest. The Red Cross Band arrived on the ground in good time, and they admirably filled a time of inaction by playing some selections in first-rate style. The bandsmen took up their position in front of the grand-stand in the glaring sun-rays, and one was prompted to pity their lot. However, they appeared to enjoy the experience, and the applause which was lavished upon them formed the best possible indication that their performance was appreciated. While this period of waiting was passing Luton occupants of the stand were engaged in sorting out friends from the crowd, and it became unmistakable that there was a strong admixture of denizens of the Bedfordshire town.

THE GAME.

Even seemingly endless waits have ends, and so in due time a commencement was made. There had been considerable speculation as to whether the start would be made punctually, the weather being so intensely hot, and it proved that the operations were delayed for a quarter of an hour. At length the Millwall men made their appearance and were received with a rousing cheer. This was faint, though, in comparison with the enthusiastic greeting which was accorded to the Luton lads on emerging from the dressing-room. Next came the referee, who was attired in flannel shirt and trousers and wore a "flop" felt hat, this get-up provoking a ripple of laughter. Prior to giving the signal for starting hostilities the knight of the whistle assembled the combatants and delivered a brief harangue, presumably on the evils of foul play and its penalties. Somewhere about a quarter to 4 the sides faced the central line thus:—

Millwall Athletic: Goal, Law; backs, Graham and Davis; half-backs, King, J. Matthews and H. Matthews; forwards, Jones and McInroy (right), Whelan (centre), Leatherbarrow and Geddes (capt.) (left).

Luton Town: Goal, Jack; backs, Nicholson and McEwen; half-backs, Birch, Stewart, and Docherty (capt.); forwards, Gallacher and Parkinson (right), Galbraith (centre), Coupar and Ekins (left).

Referee: Lieut. Simpson; linesmen, Messrs. J. H. Backett (Luton) and F. B. Kidd (Millwall).

Geddes beat Docherty in the toss and of course gave Luton the disadvantage of facing the sun and the slight wind which prevailed. Barely had the whistle signalled the start when it was heard again—the referee being desirous of punishing H. Matthews for a foul on Gallacher. The Lutonians thus early had found their way into the opposition territory, and in a short time Coupar passed neatly to Stewart, who sent behind. Hands against Millwall was awarded, and then Birch was deservedly penalised for a nasty foul; Leatherbarrow had got away well and Birch brought him down badly from behind. Nicholson followed suit with a like result and with a howl of execration which was unmistakably East End in tone. Lutonians can shout at offending adversaries; but they had never been heard to emit such a terrifying noise as saluted Nicholson on this occasion. The second offence occurred near goal; but fortunately neither brought danger. The "reds" made some progress, though they were soon beaten back, and then "Nick" provoked derisive laughter by jumping up and patting the ball down. J. Matthews took the kick and lodged the ball in the net, whereupon loud applause burst from the excited onlookers. This quickly died away when it was discovered that no second player had touched the ball and that a goal could not be claimed. Geddes showed up well hereabouts; but he was pulled up splendidly, the result being that his shot was misdirected. A long attempt from the same players' foot went wide. The Lutonians swarmed to the attack and some good mid-field combination was shown, though the final effort was so weak as to enable the custodian to clear with ease. "Gally" was punished for jumping, and hands against Birch followed. From this free-kick H. Matthews sent past Jack; but no score was allowed, though the Millwall portion of the crowd once more yelled vociferously. King was deservedly punished for fouling, and Ekins signalled this by striking the side of the net with the ball. A series of throws in enabled Millwall to advance; but Nicholson came through in good style and compelled his foemen to steer wide. Birch gave a sample of determined tackling, and a foul against Galbraith ensued. Hands against Leatherbarrow led to the ball being well sent in by Luton, Graham clearing brilliantly. Hands against Geddes did not long delay the onward march of the Millwall men, for soon Jack was called upon to clear. Subsequently Parkinson transferred cleverly to Galbraith, who enabled Gallacher to send in a long attempt which just failed. Jones fouled badly, and in the next minute or two Luton initiated a strenuous attack which culminated in a hot struggle round Law's charge. The defence was too

the danger was averted. Geddes and McEwen exhibited fine form in turn, and a little later on Luton managed to get near Law again by means of good passing, though Parkinson eventually headed out. Birch placed well and Coupar sent just over, while at the other end McEwen cleared a clever attempt by Geddes. Jack was called upon by the Millwall left winger and behaved well, and the next noteworthy point was that Ekins beat Graham in pace and unfortunately sent into touch near the goal-line. Docherty, who was the only Luton half-back who had shown anything approaching good form, sent in splendidly from the left and a corner fell to the "reds." Graham headed out cleverly. Following another foul a second corner fell to the visitors off H. Matthews. Birch placed the ball well, and Stewart sent over, while immediately after Birch headed over the line. It will be judged from all this that Luton were having far the best of the play. Soon after, however, the homesters got down capably and sent over the Luton goal-line. A nasty foul on Ekins was duly noticed by the referee, and a bad exhibition by the home keeper was similarly taken cognisance of; Galbraith was seized by Law after the ball had passed the goal-line and thrown down. The free-kick was followed by a tough struggle in goal, this proving resultless so far as a score for Luton was concerned. Birch failed with a long effort, and the spectators were subsequently treated to good defensive combination by the strangers, Jack eventually clearing. Hands against the homesters was equalised by a foul against "Gally" for jumping. Thereafter some splendid mid-field play by both elevens was witnessed, generous applause being bestowed upon the players. Docherty again distinguished himself. Jones was adjudged off-side and later on McEwen was forced to send into touch. Ekins narrowly missed and Coupar dispatched a well-meant one at Law. After some muddling in the corner the Luton defence was broken through and Whelan managed to notch the first goal. It was a splendid effort and fully merited the loud cheering which it evoked. This was when upwards of half-an-hour's play had been witnessed. From this time to the interval the exchanges were fairly even, the leaders having a trifle the best of it. No further scoring took place, however, and the score at the change of ends was:

Millwall, one; Luton, none.

It was considered by competent judges that with the score in this state Luton stood a good chance of drawing level. They had had the best of the first half, despite the luck being against them. Almost immediately after the resumption an error of judgment on the part of Nicholson was nearly fatal. Imagining that the ball would cross the goal-line he did not trouble himself to take it; Geddes pounced upon it and sent in, Jack cleared it and then Jones failed miserably with the goal at his mercy. Subsequently Birch sent in and the ball appeared to go through; the referee, however, took no notice and, though three or four Luton forwards were handy, they failed to send past Law. A corner accrued and this was cleverly centred; but nothing resulted. Ekins was penalised for fouling and Jones for lying off-side, while Coupar sent a trifle wide. Nicholson conceded a corner, and shortly after more disaster fell to the Lutonians. Nicholson blundered and McEwen mis-kicked, the outcome being that Leatherbarrow beat Jack with a shot which gave him no chance whatever. It now became patent to the Lutonians present that their chances of victory were a vanishing quantity, for in proportion as the Millwallians improved the "reds" seemed to fall off. Jack lost his head when endeavouring to get rid of a shot and it was by the merest chance that another goal was not scored, McEwen getting up just in time. A corner resulted, and from this it was headed over. Some foul play by two or three men, who persistently kicked at one another for a minute, caused the referee to throw the ball up. The "reds" came with a rush, but the forwards were evidently off colour, for the custodian managed to beat two or three of them. In 10 minutes or so half a dozen fouls were awarded against the homesters, some of them being very bad. In spite of all this, though, the visitors failed to make much headway. They seemed never to have thoroughly settled down since the re-start, and their play was loose accordingly. Later on they gave Law an anxious time. More fouls by Millwall led to Lieutenant Simpson lecturing the whole of the players once more. Coupar, who had been injured just previously, retired hereabouts and thus the "reds" had only 10 men. So time went on and, though Coupar resumed ere the close, the visitors failed to make any impression upon the Millwallians, who seemed to be taking matters very nonchalantly. The best indication that can be given of the last quarter of an hour's play is that Lutonians were observed leaving the grand-stand a quarter of an hour before the finish, and that in a few minutes this exodus became general. Try as they would the Luton men were always foiled and finally they lost the game and two League points. The winners were splendidly received at the close, while some of the Lutonians were hooted. Final scores:

Millwall, two; Luton, none.