

THE ENGLISH CUP.

LUTON TOWN v. WEST BROMWICH ALBION.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—
West Bromwich Albion 1 goal.
Luton Town nil.

The teams were as follow:—

Rover.		LUTON TOWN		Lanc.	
Williams (goal).					
McCarthy			McEwen.		
Davies.		Stewart.		Ducherty.	
Goldcher.	Carpas.	Gallenth.	McLennan.	Birch.	
O					
Waters.	Richards.	Cannor.	Field.	McLeod.	
Binks.		Buggins.		Perry.	
Williams.			Horton.		
Header (goal).					
Lanc.		WEST BROMWICH		Rover.	

Referee, Mr. A. G. Kingscott; Lineamen, Messrs. A. Davis (Marlow), and J. Carpenter (Leicester).

So near and yet so far. Almost to feel our fingers tightening around that precious pot, and then to have it snatched from our grasp in the flakiest possible manner. It really was too bad, and Luton are thoroughly justified in thinking they have a grievance against West Bromwich Albion, which nothing but the scalps of the Throstles, taken at the first opportunity, will atone for. I am not a great believer in moral victories, and there is very little consolation to be derived from them at the best of times, but if ever a team could with propriety lay the flattering unction to their souls, I should say Luton were the team, and the occasion was Saturday's Cup tie.

Although Luton have not yet quite attained to the dignity of a first-class team, taking the clubs which constitute the premier Division of the League as a criterion, they have worked their way into the competition proper for the English Cup no less than four times, but have never then succeeded in getting beyond the first round. The last time they vanquished their divisional opponents they were defeated to entertain Preston North End, who proved too big a handful for them, and this year they were set the still more formidable task of showing these renowned cup-fighters, West Bromwich Albion, the way about.

In the Press generally, it was acknowledged that of the three southern clubs left in the competition, Luton had the hardest nut to crack, and after the brilliant display of the local men against Tottenham Hotspur and the subsequent entertainment of Ekins' Blues, I don't suppose there was a single sensible man in Luton who honestly expected his favourites to win. We hoped they would, and our hopes gave us courage, but never confidence. Now, however, we are bound to admit that we did not fully appreciate the excellent qualities of our own team. It is true they have often been pitted against First and Second League teams before, and have invariably acquitted themselves well, but then we were told by the whippers that the matches were only trial ones, and afforded no clue to the real form of the visiting players.

But Saturday's match conclusively proved that Luton at their best can hold their own with the very cream of League clubs. It might have been argued—it was in fact argued in some quarters—that the eleven which could beat North Forest by four goals to nil in a League match and Aston Villa by two to one in a cup tie, could knock Luton into a cocked hat? Yet what did we see? Why, simply this, that in everything but a solitary and exceedingly fluky goal, the Southerners were more than a match for their dauntless opponents. If I were to say that Luton had two-thirds of the play, I should be under rather than over the mark, and not only did they have by far the better of the game, but they played

No one can say the players lacking in vigour, for both sides went at it for all they were worth, but in that particular form of vigour which is not mentioned by the laws of the game, the visitors altogether eclipsed the home team, feeling most abominably from start to finish. But at no time did the Throstles show such smart and pretty combination as was frequently exhibited by the homesters.

The conditions under which the match was played were not conducive to good football. When the snow was cleared from the ground on Friday, the soil was found to be literally as hard as iron, and the thaw which afterwards set in made matters a great deal worse, the surface becoming soft and slippery, and the water not being able to get away. For twenty yards round the goal at the pavilion end, it was practically a sheet of ice, and when this began to melt, the water settled in pools, making the approach to the goal about as bad as it could be. A cup tie seemed out of the question, but both clubs were anxious to go through with the fixture, and the referee's decision was favourable to their wishes. In view of that fact, I should say nothing short of an Irish hog will ever prevent a cup-match being brought off.

The interest felt in the event was evinced by the crowded ground. On the stand, the committee had arranged 100 reserved seats at half-a-crown each, and these were all taken, while the seats on the other part of the stand at a shilling were snapped up very quickly. Some high stacks of timber afforded an irresistible attraction to large numbers of venturesome people, who viewed the proceedings from above, and the people lining the ropes were packed together as closely as possible. I should think there were fully 7,000 people present. The gate was a record one, amounting to close upon £100.

The Luton men, looking all the better for their course of training at N-Mac's Land, turned out about five minutes to three, and were followed a little later by West Bromwich, both teams being accorded a hearty reception. Stewart winning the toss, elected to play downhill, and the referee getting the men in position, set them going punctually at three o'clock. Every movement of the players was watched with almost breathless interest, and doubtless not a few persons flattered themselves as to their prognostications when they saw the visitors make tracks for the Luton goal and take a shot thereat. But if they thought the ball was going to remain at that end they were mistaken, for it was trundled back again very expeditiously, and Gallacher sending across, Birch was afforded a good opening, and he sent in a shot which Reader disposed of.

Stewart next had a try, and then Cooper distinguished himself by running clean through and hitting the post with a grand shot. That was a piece of hard luck to start with. McIlwain placed in the net from a free kick, and then Gallacher had a tussle with and beat Williams, but that player fooled him very badly as he was going for goal, and the free kick was not turned to account. Luton continued to prevail, Cooper again testing Reader with a good shot, and then from a free kick the Albion forced matters and obtained a couple of corners, from which nothing tangible accrued. Luton responded, and Gallacher got in a centre which Birch nullified, but in replying to another attack from the Throstles, Luton became much more dangerous, and indeed had exceedingly hard lines in not scoring.

Gallacher springing from Galbraith, got clear and

as in a corner kick, which Reader avoided with a front of him, and Melrose rushing in, had the misfortune to get a trifle too much under the ball, which hit the bar and bounced over. McLeod having been called to account for kicking McKern, Floritt got away, and Luton appealing for offside, neither made any serious attempt to stop him. He thereupon put in his shot, a fairly long one, and managed it to find its way into the net, either being misled by the shouts of offside or thinking that there was a chance of saving. It was an extremely unfortunate affair altogether, and was just one of those minor details which Luton have lost so many important games.

The home-players, however, were not disheartened. In the contrary, they played up more vigorously than ever, and going down the field on the right, the ball was placed in close proximity to Reader. Birch as a consequence, finding himself with only the goalkeeper to beat. But his shot was a heartrending affair, not going within yards of goal. Again Luton showed up with some pretty passing, and Watson having cleared from a shot by Gallacher, the local first had a free kick and then a corner, Gallacher after taking the latter, getting in a tremendous shot which bounced off an Albionist, and McCartney put wide. From a foul against the centre, Dave placed in the net, not over touching, and then there was some smart passing, as a result of which Melrose sent in a shot, which Reader saved.

McCartney, after depriving Watson, dropped the ball nicely in front of the Albion goal, and a corner followed. Gallacher placed, and McCartney got a return which gave Birch another opportunity, in that player had lost his bearings, and jumped over the ball, which passed harmlessly over the bar. Luton had another unproductive corner, after which the three inside men, by some of the prettiest work seen during the afternoon, ran clean through the opposite defence, but offside against Cooper ultimately nullified the effort.

The ball was much more frequently in the netting neighbourhood of the Albion fortress than on Luton territory, but eventually the visitors' left wing made an incursion and Watson looked like scoring, when McKern rushed across in the nick of time and cleared in gallant style. The home-players again assumed an aggressive, and the ball rebounding off a Throst from a well-played kick by McCartney. Brown caught it and missed the upright by one narrow shot. Gallacher afterwards was responsible for a small piece of work, but Birch was again fouled whilst Melrose followed on with a very fine individual performance, but just as he was getting clear he was fouled by Williams. Luton were still attacking when the interval arrived, and the teams crossed over with the visitors leading by a goal to nil.

It might have been supposed that with the green in their favour, West Bromwich Albion would have demonstrated their superiority in the second half. In quite the opposite proved to be the case, for if in actual play in the first forty-five had been in favour of Luton, that in the second portion was much the reverse. Only once or twice during this part of the game did the Throats become really dangerous, as Williams was seldom called upon.

A good bit of play by Cooper and Gallacher in the first feature, but Gallacher, who received, was knocked down just as he was going to shoot. A little later Luton did score, Davies sending across Melrose, and the latter heading on to Gallacher, who beat Reader, but Melrose was declared to have been offside. Cooper was deservedly applauded for brilliant dribble, right through a crowd of players and he eventually passed to Gallacher, who centred but Birch headed the ball behind. Then, taking pass from Melrose, Cooper rushed through again and a score seemed certain, but his shot was just wide of the mark. From a return by McKern, Birch threatened danger, but was deprived when within a few yards of goal, and Watson experienced a similar fate at the other end.

Gallacher now changed places with Birch, and the latter signalled his appearance in the centre with a clipping shot, which Reader saved. The remainder of the play partook of the nature of a series of assaults on the West Bromwich goal, both sides playing with great desperation, and the spectators being worked up to a high pitch of excitement. During this portion of the proceedings, the Throats played about half a dozen tricks, parking their goal to such an extent that all the efforts of Luton to go through were fruitless. Besides that, they resorted to an expedient which may be excusable in a weak team, but which on this occasion was an insult tantamount to Luton as it was humiliating to the persons who indulged in it. The Throats were reduced to the extremity of kicking the ball out of play every opportunity, and as far out as possible.

Thus, although Luton could not win, they demonstrated a fact which I believe Mr. Kingscott asserts when he last visited the town, that they are not only superior to most of the Clubs in the Second Division of the League, but equal to a good many in the First. On Saturday the redoubtable Bassett, who was a spectator, gave it as his opinion that Luton are stronger than any of the Second Division Clubs. The Luton men, indeed, displayed marvellous good form. The three inside forwards played splendid football, Melrose particularly distinguishing himself by his splendid exhibition. Cooper also did some wonderfully smart things, and if Gallacher could but have carried a little more weight, he would have been very near perfection. Gallacher was in first-class form, the one weak spot in the front rank, and in the whole team for the matter of the being Birch, who, though he showed pluck and perseverance, spoiled a good many openings.

As regards the half-backs, it would be difficult to say that one excelled the other. They were in champion form, and worked like Trojans all the way through, while the backs, but their one mistake was pretty well faultless. As far as McCartney was concerned, it was the finest display he has given this season. Williams in goal had very little to do. I cannot refrain from bearing testimony to the excellent way in which Lawton turned the men over. They were a credit to themselves and their trainer. And moreover, they played with the greatest coolness all the way through, never losing their heads a little bit.

The Throats owe their victory entirely to the strength of their defence, for their forwards were not in the same street with the Luton front string. The half-backs are a trifle light, perhaps, but they were exceedingly smart, and I must say very scrupulous. Williams played a great game at his post and Reader performed with much success in goal. The referee was ably assisted by his line-men, as they were in the proceedings. In the last ten minutes