

FOOTBALL.

LUTON TOWN v. SMALL HEATH.

MORE POINTS FOR THE "BRUMS."

On February 12 the "stripes" were compelled to admit defeat at Small Heath in a Second League fixture by 4-2; on Saturday last, on their own ground, they again failed against the "Heathens," the margin on this occasion being a single goal in favour of the Birmingham players. The homesters, who were at full strength, played one of the worst games of the season and thoroughly deserved the beating which they sustained. The visitors were without two or three of their regular performers. There was only a moderate attendance, and it may be that the idea which prevailed that Luton were presented with an easy task had something to do with this. The weather was bright and fine, while the ground was in first-rate condition.

The contestants were as follows:—

Luton: Goal, Williams; backs, McCartney and McEwen; half-backs, Davies, Stewart, and Docherty; forwards, Gallacher and Coupar (right), Donaldson (centre), McInnes and Birch (left).

Small Heath: Goal, Webb; backs, Archer and Pratt; half-backs, Dunlop, Leake and Robertson; forwards, Inglis and Good (right), Higgins (centre), Abbott and Oakes (left).

Referee: Mr. A. G. Kingscott (Derby); linesmen, Messrs. W. J. Jones (Leicester) and J. Lowles (Derby).

The home captain won the toss and played from the Farm end. The "Heathens" pressed at the outset, but were soon beaten back and the homesters advanced. Docherty sent wide, and Dunlop gave away a corner, which was well cleared. A lovely centre by Gallacher came to Birch right in front of Webb, but the left-winger was off-side. Hands against Davies was awarded, and when Williams had kept the ball out from the free-kick Robertson dashed up and sent through with a hard, low drive from a long range. The score, which was well-deserved, was obtained some five minutes from the outset, and the spectators looked glum. Gallacher was pulled up for off-side immediately after the re-start and when McInnes had headed behind, a grand centre from the right wing travelled across to Donaldson and McInnes, both of whom failed to secure possession. Had they succeeded in doing so a score would almost certainly have resulted, for the Small Heath goal was not well protected just now. Leake presented a corner to the "stripes;" this was well taken by Gallacher, yet only a throw-in was produced. Archer followed Leake's example, and on this occasion an extremely narrow miss was credited to Stewart. One of the linesmen was loudly laughed at for a mistaken decision as to a throw-in from touch. Birch made up for the disappointment by dispatching a beauty at goal, Webb experiencing a good deal of difficulty in keeping it out. Following a smart centre by Birch Gallacher very narrowly missed and then McEwen steered behind the line. It will be judged from all this that the home lot were having the best of the exchanges, which had ruled fast up to now. Small Heath at length got away and threatened danger, whereupon McEwen relieved. The home left back was again applauded for an exceedingly smart exhibition. A deal of amusement was created by a collision between the referee and one of the "Heathens" which had the effect of making Mr. Kingscott lose his balance. Good failed at the home end and a free-kick to Luton for a foul on McInnes was ineffectual. From a corner to the "stripes" Birch sent behind. Hands against Small Heath brought the customary decision; McCartney placed well, and a corner followed. This was well sent up, and McCartney eventually managed to kick over the goal-line. Excellent play on the Luton left enabled another incursion to be made, and a little later on some determined defence was witnessed from the Small Heath defenders. A further corner accrued to Luton, while at the home end one of the "Heathens" sent over the bar when he had an open goal. The failure did not very much matter, however, as he was standing in an off-side position. A grand shot by Docherty was tipped over by Webb at the expense of a corner and a big attack followed. After the ball had been kept out two or three times it was smartly returned and Coupar scored with a neat header, this bringing the scores level. Some effective play by Donaldson was followed up by Gallacher sending behind, and when a couple of fouls had been awarded against the strangers McInnes hooked the ball over the line. Another beauty from Docherty failed by very little and, following free-kicks against either side, Birch steered just wide of the post. Another bad failure was set down to Birch when right in goal. Towards the interval the visitors looked threatening; but McEwen played a glorious game and so no more scoring took place. The positions at half-time were:

LUTON, 1; SMALL HEATH, 1.

The visitors were first to attack after the resumption and Inglis sent wide of the mark. The homesters retaliated and Donaldson neglected a grand chance of scoring which presented itself. Three minutes from the re-start Inglis lowered the home colours with a low shot, which it seemed to most people present that Williams ought to have succeeded in stopping. A corner to Luton was well taken and McCartney backed up the forwards well; but the ball travelled weakly over the goal-line. A foul on Gallacher brought about another determined onslaught by the Lutonians; but the visitors were now on good terms with themselves and cleared with ease. Yet another flag-kick accrued to the locals, and Docherty sent behind the goal-line in attempting to land the ball in front of goal. From a foul on Donaldson Davies took the free-kick and sent out of play, while Donaldson was off-side immediately afterwards. From a capital centre by Gallacher McInnes headed wide. This was after some distressing failures by the Lutonians, who were exhibiting execrable form. The spectators were disappointed by a display of disjointed efforts such as they have rarely been presented with this season. The "stripes" seemed unable to do anything useful, their attacks being stemmed with ease invariably. An attempt from a distance by Stewart appeared to lead to the custodian touching the ball as it travelled over the line; but Mr. Kingscott disregarded the confident appeals for a corner which arose. A good effort by Gallacher was capably dealt with, and then McInnes headed a bit wide. A foul on McCartney led to Birch shooting erratically, and a further corner to the Luton men was unproductive. The "Heathens" were now playing a hard, determined game and were not above indulging in foul play occasionally. An especially dirty sample on McEwen attracted the notice of the referee. Luton attacked strenuously later on; but Gallacher was stopped for fouling. The outside right was conspicuous for useful work just afterwards, and when Webb had cleared he sent high over the bar. A corner to Small Heath off McCartney was balanced by another to Luton. The locals never shaped like a winning team, and eventually the outcome was as follows:—

SMALL HEATH, 2; LUTON 1.

The game was a disappointing affair. The ineptitude of the homesters was a remarkable foil to the smartness of the visitors. As in the encounter at Small Heath the "Heathens" thoroughly deserved their victory, for the reason that they took advantage of their chances whereas the Luton players persistently declined to follow suit. The players on the Luton side who were in anything like good form were to be counted up on the fingers of one hand, while the "Heathens" were all conspicuous at times. The outcome was very disappointing to the home supporters, as it involves the taking by Luton of a far lower place in the table than appeared likely a week ago. The result forms another illustration of the truth of the statement that no Second League game is to be counted on as a certainty. Still, the locals ought to have won hands down had they been in anything like form, and that is where the disappointment comes in. The result does not form a very good augury for a run of success during the Easter holidays.

FOOTBALL FACTS AND FANCIES.

In referring last week to the forthcoming encounter with Small Heath I said if the Lutonians failed to win I should feel terribly disappointed. Well, they were "let down," to adopt a description by a sporting paper of what happened. Nor is the signatory of these notes the only disappointed one.



To say that I am disappointed is to express my feelings mildly. Here were we all counting upon the team taking a fairly high place in the League, when there comes the unexpected and unwelcome defeat. It was terrible.



Perhaps it is unnecessary to remind readers that this is but the second occasion this season on which defeat has been administered to the "stripes" on their own pitch in League games. The other time was so long ago as October 2, when the Arsenal managed to win by 2—0.



It is ridiculous, to my mind, that the homesters should have suffered Small Heath to achieve that which Burnley, Newcastle, Manchester, and Newton Heath had failed to do. The first three clubs had bitten the dust before the all-conquering straw-workers; yet the latter allow a medium combination to administer defeat to them.



There was but one feeling amongst those present—that the game was literally thrown away by the players. The number of the wearers of the "stripes" who were in anything like good form were to be very easily counted. As for the rest they might almost as well have been absent for all the good they were.



The fact that the ground was hard was not a sufficient excuse. I know that the men have had a hard season and that we must expect some slackness towards the end of the season; but the most liberal-minded would not have accepted Saturday's display as being altogether attributable to that. If there was any other cause, what was it?



We were glad to seize upon any pretext for extracting amusement from the game, for the play itself would have been deemed slow by a funeral mate. The collision between the referee and a "Heathen" and the chasing of a couple of dogs from the pitch afforded some relief to the monotony.

Goodness only knows what would have happened in the way of scoring had not two or three men in the home rearguard been absolutely at their best. It was no fault of some of the men that the score registered by Small Heath at Birmingham was not repeated. Having witnessed both games I can say that there was scarcely a pin to choose between them so far as disappointment to Lutonians was concerned.



Saturday's dismal failure would not have been so bad had the visitors been so markedly superior as to have much the best of the play. It was not so, as the number of corners forced by the homesters will show. The winners were undoubtedly smart; but they never exhibited form which would have beaten the locals had the latter been in anything like their best form.



So far as the home forwards were concerned I have little pleasant to say. Gallacher and McInnes were the only two to do anything very useful, and neither was up to concert pitch. Donaldson and Birch were dead frosts, the former being especially impotent.



The only half-back who was worthy of commendation was Docherty, who was in first-rate form. Stewart was as bad as Donaldson, while Davies was not a great deal better. McEwen played a glorious game; but McCartney was not a success, and Williams ought to have saved the second goal.



On the side of the visitors the forwards played a pretty game, the left wingers being especially dangerous. Robertson was most conspicuous amongst a trio of good halves, while Archer was best of the remainder of the rearguard.



In the second half the "Heathens" played four half-backs after they had secured the lead, and this fact did not seem to please some of the spectators. I consider that it was not only well warranted but was absolutely the best policy that could have been adopted by the visitors. A win meant that they would take a high place in the League table; and I do not blame them for getting there—by sportsmanlike methods.



Of course this disaster—unexpected though it was by us all—has destroyed all chance of the Lutonians finishing even on the same rung of the ladder as the Arsenal. The "reds" are in splendid fettle—witness their draw with Burnley on Saturday—and unless the "stripes" are careful they will even yet lose the United League championship. Another display or two such as that of Saturday would be fatal.



Saturday's League games resulted thus:—Newton Heath beat Grimsby, at Grimsby, 3—1; Blackpool, at home, drew with Walsall, 1—1; Leicester Fosse, at home, drew with Manchester, 0—0; Newcastle United, at Newcastle, beat Gainsboro', 5—2; the Arsenal drew with Burnley, at Woolwich, 1—1.