

Southern League.

BATTLE OF THE BLUES.

Luton in Fine Fettle at Millwall.

By "VIGILANT."

It is, of course, always easy to criticise a referee, but it must have become evident to those who attend Southern League matches that the complaints which have been made concerning the unsatisfactory refereeing of many of the games this season have been amply justified. Luton Town, as I have remarked once more, have not had a particularly happy experience in this respect, and they again fared badly on Saturday. The referee was Mr J. Iliffe, of Worksop, an official well-known in the Southern League, whom Lutonians will remember as the one-armed referee who had charge of the game with Plymouth. On that occasion his conduct of the game was commented upon in anything but complimentary terms, and he gave even less satisfaction on the Millwall ground on Saturday. His offside rulings were frequently difficult to understand, he seemed to allow himself to be influenced by the "barracking" of the crowd, and his exhibition of weakness on one occasion calls for severe criticism.

The incident in question, though not exactly of a similar character, bore some resemblance to the incident which cost Luton a point at Southampton. Just when half-time was expected to be signalled, the referee awarded Millwall a penalty. He was wrong, in the opinion of the Luton players and many others, but however that may be, he was well up and the promptness with which the decision was given seemed to point to the fact that he had no doubt in his mind upon the point. Nevertheless he allowed himself to be so influenced by the appealing players as to consult the linesmen, neither of whom were in anything like a position to be able to render him any assistance. One of the linesmen, I am told, felt unable to support the decision, but the other, who was much further away, appeared to be in agreement with the referee, and thus the decision was permitted to stand. But the harm had been done, and it was not to be wondered at that the referee never again regained the confidence of the crowd.

Millwall have enjoyed an uninterrupted membership of the Southern League since its formation, fifteen years' ago, and were the Champions in the first two seasons. This season they have not shown up so prominently as usual, but they came out of their shell the previous week-end, when they vanquished Queen's Park Rangers at Park Royal, and with the same team doing duty they were confident about improving on last year's pointless draw against Luton. The Strawhatters made three changes in three departments. Bob Hawkes returned to captain the team, after being an absentee from seven Southern League games, Jarvis re-appeared in goal, and McCurdy was called upon to make an earlier appearance than had been anticipated. It was thought Hedley's ankle would be strong enough, but a trial on Friday proved how deceptive appearances are. A kick or two caused him to again wrench it, and the last state was worse than the first.

A keen rivalry has existed between Millwall and Luton ever since the Strawhatters have been Southern Leaguers, and on occasions the battles of the Blues have attracted large crowds to the locality of the Docks. On Saturday the weather was of the most wretched description, and the attendance was not more than 3,000. There were a good number of Lutonians, however, who made the trip to the Isle of Dogs, and though it is undoubtedly an interesting experience they will probably not be sorry to learn that it is likely Luton will not again be called upon to play a Southern League match on that dreary swamp at North Greenwich, known as the East Ferry-road ground. The Millwall directors have concluded an agreement to take over a new ground at Christmas, and next season they expect to be playing at New Cross, within a short distance of the Old Kent Road. It is in the midst of a populous district, and will have a holding capacity of 36,000, and the Dockers are looking forward to a new era of prosperity.

The teams on Saturday lined out thus:—

Millwall—Joyce; Stevenson and Jeffrey; Garrett, Wilson and Blythe; Stirling, Martin, Twigg, Brearley and Semple.

Luton—Jarvis; Chapman and McCurdy; F Hawkes, Jones and R. M. Hawkes; Brown, Quinn, Smith, Moody and Stansfield.

Bob Hawkes signalled his re-appearance in the Luton team by demonstrating to his namesake Fred the art of winning the toss, and the Lions kicked off with the rain beating in their faces. The conditions were all against good football, but nevertheless the play ruled very bright at the outset, and generally this standard was maintained, although, of course, there was a good deal of floundering about and miskicking. McCurdy did not open at all well and Millwall's right were early a source of anxiety. Within a couple of minutes Stirling, cleverly eluding Bob Hawkes, tested Jarvis with a beauty which was cleared with splendid judgment. Immediately afterwards Wilson shot in a grounder, which the goalkeeper somewhat daringly kicked away.

The visitors' retaliated with spirited determination, and a pretty run on the right caused the Lions some anxiety. From Brown's pass Quinn shot and Jeffrey turned the ball towards the goalline. Smith and Moody were on it like a flash, but Joyce got in the way of Smith's shot, and conceded a corner, from which Jones gave the goalkeeper some trouble with a dropping shot.

The next exciting incident was at the other end. Twigg burst through on his own, and with some forty yards to go had completely outdistanced the opposition. Things looked very nasty for Luton, but Jarvis came out to meet the centre forward, and before Twigg could steady himself he allowed the ball to leave his toe, and Dick nipped in and kicked away. For some minutes the Millwall forwards had it all their own way, but after Semple and Twigg had sent by Luton broke away in dashing style. A miskick by Stevenson let Smith through, and Joyce came out in the nick of time. Unable to clear the burly custodian rolled over with the ball, and with Quinn unceremoniously bundled away by Jeffrey, Joyce managed to get the ball away after an anxious moment or two.

The sun had now appeared, and the rain ceased, but the greasy ground caused the players to slip about terribly. Most of them bore the hall marks of Millwall mud, and Chapman had his face decorated in anything but artistic fashion. The treacherous conditions had a good deal to do with the opening goal which fell to Millwall twelve minutes from the kick-off. From a centre of the right there was a scramble in the goalmouth and miskickings galore. Martin had a good chance, but the ball glided off his foot. Still it hovered about the goal, first one and then another of the Lutonians making a frantic effort to clear, and just as the danger looked to be at an end Stirling bore in from the wing and dashed the ball into the net from a difficult angle, scoring a fine goal which Jarvis had no chance of preventing.

Two minutes' play brought Luton on level terms again. Brown and Quinn bore away on the right, and outmanœuvring Jeffrey, Ernie sent into the centre with the left foot, Smith heading by Joyce with the utmost ease. After this Millwall were the more prominent, and Jarvis had all his work cut out to prevent them regaining the lead. Semple outwitted Chapman, and getting close in shot with terrific power. Jarvis saved the shot, but he was nearly doubled up in the process, and being rushed it was all he could do to hand out for Jones to clear. Dick was evidently badly shaken up as a result of the incident, and a short stoppage occurred. He had the ball shot by him immediately afterwards, but the whistle had gone for offside before Twigg made his shot, and it was obviously only done for effect.

Luton now played up very gamely, and thanks especially to the clever work of their right wing they were frequently causing trouble. Stansfield on the other wing made good use of the first chance which came his way, and from his centre Smith tried hard to break through, but found the forces against him too great. When his next opportunity came he tried his hand at long range shooting and Joyce easily disposed of the effort. Then the centre forward was associated with Moody in a sparkling piece of combination, and Quinn's dalliance caused a fine opening to be lost. Brown made amends for his partner's fail-

ing by a capital centre, and this led to some exciting play in the goalmouth. Moody was unlucky to be robbed when about to shoot, and although Stansfield followed up with a fine attempt he was unable to do more than force a corner.

Try as they would Millwall could not break away, and they were acting on the defensive for fully a quarter of an hour, during which Joyce saved from Stansfield and Moody with very great difficulty. Ten minutes before the change of ends the homesters raised the siege, and three offside decisions in as many minutes set the crowd "barracking" the referee. The demonstration had its effect, for twice Twigg was allowed to go on when in a rank offside position. Fortunately for Luton his shots were wide of the mark.

The visitors' continued to be the more prominent until just before the interval, when the Millwall right, who were always the most dangerous of the home forwards, set up a threatening attack. Twice appeals were set up for "hands" when McCurdy intercepted shots from Stirling. On the second occasion Martin got in close and struck the side of the net with a crashing shot, and on the other wing Chapman had to concede a corner to prevent Semple from becoming dangerous. Luton never managed to get really clear, and the outcome of the pressure was that they retired for refreshments a goal in arrears.

With arms flourishing, as is his wont, Jones dashed across to cover a shot from Martin, and was successful, whereupon the referee instantly answered an appeal for "hands" by awarding a penalty. The Luton players were thunderstruck and swarmed round the referee. So insistent were their appeals that he was persuaded to consult his linesmen. Groans at once went up from the crowd, but a loud outburst of cheering broke forth when it was seen that he had determined to adhere to his decision. "Capt" Stevenson came up to take the kick, and with the utmost ease landed the ball in the top left-hand corner of the net well out of the reach of Jarvis.

The Luton Secretary told me it was a minute beyond half-time when the incident occurred, but it is only right to point out that there had been a stoppage in the game on account of Jarvis being hurt, and the referee may have allowed time for this. At any rate extra time had to be allowed for the penalty kick to be taken, and as soon as the goal was scored the referee signalled for half-time. In any case it was a piece of really bad fortune for the visitors. The ball undoubtedly struck Jones on the arm, and there is no doubt it took place in the penalty area, but there was not the slightest justification for regarding the affair as intentional handling. However, the incident enabled Millwall to cross over with the lead, the official score being:—

Millwall, 2; Luton, 1.

Luton were the first to get going after the restart, and in the first two minutes the home goal had a very narrow escape. Quinn led a rush and got to close quarters, but Jeffrey prevented him shooting. Brown followed up and secured the ball, and with admirable judgment centred across the goalmouth. The centre left Stansfield splendidly placed, but he took the ball on the wrong side of his head, and although Moody made a fine effort to recover his shot from a difficult angle was wide and the opportunity was lost.

A Millwall breakaway saw Twigg dispatch the ball into the net after he had been whistled up for offside, and then following a scrimmage near goal the same player tested Jarvis with a shot, the quality of which was only excelled by the quality of Dick's save. The ball made a pretty prolonged stay round the visitors' goal, but the only incident of note was a corner conceded by McCurdy. Then Quinn worked to the other end with a really brilliant piece of work. He sent across to Stansfield, and from Harold's centre Smith shot and had it luckily diverted by Jeffrey.

Millwall now pressed for a considerable time, and Martin and Jarvis figured in an exciting incident. Martin got clean through, but Dick literally took the ball off his toe. Another close shave was when Stirling missed by inches after the Luton defence had been completely hung up. Then there was a similarly narrow escape at the other end. Smith broke through and Joyce left his goal and touched away an oblique shot just as Quinn was endeavouring to convert. With the goal undefended there seemed a likelihood of a score, but Brearley came back and kicked away before Brown could gather the ball.

After Stevenson had struck the cross-bar with a grand free kick from about 30 yards out, the visitors again took up the running, and for a long time monopolised the play. The homesters' had fallen off a good deal, and it was pretty evident that they would be lucky to retain their lead. Brown and Quinn were associated in a fine movement on the right, and Wilson headed away a centre from Brown which appeared likely to prove Joyce's undoing. Then Moody just missed the mark with a sterling long shot, and a few minutes later Brown was again to the fore with a clever run and shot which tested Joyce to the utmost.

Luton were all out for an equaliser, and with the exception of a couple of threatening rushes, from one of which Jarvis splendidly saved against the upright from Stirling, it was the visiting forwards who were doing all the shining. Their reward came six minutes from time, when Smith seized upon a huge punt by Fred Hawkes, and tenaciously hanging on to the ball in spite of the attentions of both backs let fly from an awkward angle and scored a real beauty from the left. It was a grand goal, and was thoroughly deserved.

The last few minutes were very exciting. First a mistake by Bob Hawkes let Twigg through, but McCurdy hustled him so successfully that his shot soared yards over. Then Luton had another piece of cruel luck. A fine centre by Brown passed across to Stansfield and Joyce left his goal to deal with Harold's middle. He failed to gather the ball, and while he was out Smith shot in. It seemed odds on the centre forward accomplishing the "hat trick," but the ball struck the upright and rebounded into the centre of the goal, Joyce clearing from among a host of players amid the greatest excitement. It was a most remarkable escape, and though both teams tried very hard up to the final sound of the whistle the score remained:

Millwall, 2; Luton, 2.

COMMENTS ON THE PLAY AND PLAYERS.

The form shown by the Luton team was in striking contrast to the lackadaisical methods exhibited against Croydon the previous week, and Millwall could not have complained if they had retired without a point.

The visitors' forwards were in fine fettle, and though it is true the homesters' defence was the more sound, they never looked like deserving of victory after Luton's prompt response to the first goal.

Millwall were more than lucky to have a goal lead at the change of ends, especially bearing in mind the way in which it came about, and the surprise to most of us was that they kept it so long. The equaliser was a long time coming, but it was inevitable that the Lutonians' thrustful attack should succeed sooner or later, and the Millwall goal had quite a charmed existence in the last few minutes.

Smith was the hero of the Luton side. He passed with splendid judgment throughout, and was the thrustful sort of leader so desirable in a forward line. He was going home to Birmingham for the week-end after the match, and on the way up was told he was expected to score twice. It seems that on each occasion Haycock went home last season he scored twice in out matches, and Smith was not to be outdone. Both of them were beauties, though part of the credit for the first must be given to Brown. Jack has now scored seven goals, and is among the leading scorers in the Southern League.

All the other forwards did well, with Brown and Stansfield as the best. Ernie excelled in cleverness, and the right wing performed a great deal of really fine work. The halves were but moderate, and a good deal of work devolved upon the backs. Abe Jones was inclined to overdo it in his endeavours to be tricky. Jarvis in goal was as safe as a church, and of the backs Chapman showed up conspicuously beside his older colleague. He was evidently on his mettle, and some of his tackling was really superb. Mac did as well as could be expected under trying circumstances. It was no easy task to open with three days training on such a wretched day, but his long experience stood him in good stead. It is a stay-at-home back we want as a partner for Hedley, and when he has a little kicking and sprinting practice McCurdy will undoubtedly strengthen the defence.

Walter Dimmock, who was one of McCurdy's colleagues at back in the Luton team last year,