

Southern League.

LUTON TOWN ROUTED AT NORTHAMPTON.

Breakdown of the Defence.

"COBBLERS" IN SCORING MOOD,

By "VIGILANT."

A merry, if disappointed, section of Luton Town's supporters were most demonstrative in affirming that they were not downhearted when they arrived home in the fog from Northampton on Saturday night, but their cheerfulness was not shared by the players and officials of the Club. The Southern League champions have made a reputation for the big scores they have piled up from time to time on the County Ground at Northampton this season, and the Blues shared the fate of Croydon and New Brompton in catching them in a scoring mood, being beaten by 6-1. In their four previous matches the "Cobblers" had failed to snatch a single victory, and a defeat on their own ground at the hands of Watford in the Southern Charity Cup on Thursday had put them thoroughly on their mettle.

Several changes were made in the home team, and they all turned out "trumps." McCartney, the captain, was rested, and Lloyd Davies, who is a left-back, took the centre-half position. Bonthron returned to the team after his suspension arising out of the Millwall match, but played left back, Wykes being brought in from the Reserves to play his first Southern League game. Another debutant in Southern League football was Walden, a youngster from Wellingborough, who is in his first season with the Cobblers. Lessons, the crack centre-forward, is still on the injured list. The Blues were also without their popular centre-forward, Smith, and Moody shifted from inside left, letting in Moore. Hedley was again an absentee and thus the defence was unchanged.

Until last season the meetings of the Straw-hatters and the Cobblers were regular Bank Holiday attractions, and although the fixtures have now been altered to Saturdays they are keenly looked forward to by the supporters of both teams. Quite 300 Lutonians travelled to Northampton by the Midland Railway excursion, and the attendance on the County ground was about the best of the season, the crowd numbering 9,000. It was like old times to see a number of Luton's supporters sporting blue favours, but they were not greatly in evidence after the game.

The teams lined out as follow:—

Northampton—Thorpe; Wykes and Bonthron; Manning, Davies and McDiarmid; Walker, Walden, Whittaker, Lewis and Freeman.

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

Referee, Mr J H Smith, Doncaster.

As a result of the recent rains the ground was on the heavy side, but right from the start the play was of a thrilling character. The homesters gained no advantage by winning the toss, for there was practically no breeze in evidence, and the sun did not make its appearance. Both sets of forwards were quick to show to advantage with short passing tactics. Fred Hawkes, Quinn and Brown were responsible for a particularly effective run, which was ended by Bonthron running across, and landing the ball into the grandstand, and then Walden delighted the crowd by the cleverness with which he worked through the visiting defence. Whittaker, to whom he transferred, was ruled offside, and the position seemed identical a moment later, when Walden repeated the movement. The referee did not think so, and the centre sent out to Walker, who, beating Bob Hawkes, transferred to Walden. The Wellingborough lad was by no means well placed but, steadying himself, he scored with a beauty, which found a resting place in the opposite corner of the net. Luton's appeals were of no avail, and they thus had to face a goal deficit with only three minutes gone.

It was a discouraging start, but the Blues seemed in no way disheartened, and resolutely taking up the running gave Thorpe two nasty things to deal with. One was a centre by Brown, and the other was a similar effort by Stansfield, the goalkeeper on each occasion kicking out from amongst a group of players. It was a risky procedure, but it came off. Then a lovely overhead pass by Moody sent Stansfield off, and Harold's centre came right across, but Brown did not meet it with his accustomed accuracy, and the ball was sent by. Play was eventually carried to the other end by a sparkling run on the part of Lewis. Chapman got to him as he was shooting, and a grand shot passed just the wrong side of the post.

'Abe Jones' headwork was a notable feature of the play and the centre-half was instrumental in getting Stansfield away. Moore took up the running, and going outside dropped in a fine shot which Thorpe just as finely saved full length against the post. Tackled by Moody, he was compelled to carry the ball behind, and from Stansfield's corner kick he again had to be at his best. For some time after this the Blues' defence had little rest, and Bob Hawkes had to come across to the centre to effect a couple of fine saves from Freeman and Walker. The home forwards and halves were playing together in very attractive style, Walden in particular making himself a great favourite with the crowd. A fine run to the other end by Brown and Quinn saw Bonthron effect a very useful clearance, and then Freeman got clean away on his own. He left the defence well behind, but was too far out to score himself, and his centre was too far back to be effectually dealt with, Walden making a poor attempt which Jarvis easily frustrated.

Again responding with the utmost gameness the Blues forced a corner, from which Quinn weakly steered the ball wide, and then Moody swung out to Brown, who, cleverly deceiving the half, initiated a very pretty bit of combination, which placed Bob Hawkes in shooting position. The shot, from about twenty yards range, was a worthy effort, but Thorpe, who was brought to his knees, was equal to it. The visitors seemed to have quite recovered from their disastrous start, but midway through the half there was an unsettling incident. Chapman fell in stopping Lewis near the goal line, and to the chagrin of the Blues supporters, the referee awarded a penalty for "hands." The decision did not commend itself to many, and it was only a case of poetic justice that the kick failed. Lewis took the kick, and he had a second chance after Jarvis had frustrated his first effort, but he skied yards over.

Following this escape the Luton left broke away, but they found more than their match in Manning and Bonthron, who were playing in great style. The Northampton forwards were quite irresistible, and Jarvis's post was anything but a sinecure. He had to go full length to keep out a grand shot from Walden, and while on the ground had to reach out and fist away to the wing to avert Walden's following up. Walker returned to the centre, but Walden was hampered and his shot passed wide. Whittaker had a fine chance from a centre from the right, but pressed by McCurdy he shot over. Freeman also got away on two occasions, only to shoot poorly, and these were by no means the only opportunities missed. Generally the Blues' defence had been doing well up to this point, but five minutes before half-time the backs broke down badly, and the Cobblers were enabled to increase their lead. Walden led

up to the movement with a neat pass to Walker, whose centre was completely miskicked by Chapman. This let Lewis through, and with McCurdy slipping the inside left ran on and tricking Jarvis, who came out, sent into the net without opposition. It was a very soft goal.

The homesters continued to control the game, the Blues' occasional attacks being met by a sterling defence. There was no more scoring before the interval, but each goal enjoyed a very narrow escape. Luton forced a corner on the left, and Stansfield's kick was a gem. Thorpe rushed out to fist away, and did not get hold of the ball properly, but he made a marvellous recovery, reaching back and fisting out at a time when a goal seemed certain. At the other end Lewis had a ridiculously easy chance to repeat his earlier success, but with only Jarvis to beat he put weakly by. Hence ends were changed with the score:—

Northampton, 2; Luton, 0.

What hopes Luton had of retrieving their fortunes in the second half vanished in the first minute, when another unfortunate goal fell to the Cobblers. Jarvis ran out with a view to intercepting a centre from Freeman, but Whitaker headed over his outstretched hands, and Walden was left with an open goal. His shot was a poor one, and McCurdy covered it, but unable to steady himself kicked clean over the ball, which just rolled into the net. Everything seemed to come off for the homesters, and the Blues could do nothing to stem the tide. Jarvis saved finely from Walden's head, following a corner, and Moody and Stansfield carried the ball to the other goalmouth, only to be driven back by Thorpe. Walden was simply making rings round his opponents, and before the half was a quarter of an hour old he achieved his third success of the match. It came from a corner, which McCurdy had to concede to get away a dangerous centre from Freeman, and Jarvis had no chance with it, the youngster's head steering the ball quite in the corner.

Three minutes later came a sudden change. A welcome piece of combination initiated by Stansfield, in which all the forwards had a part, enabled Brown to force a corner. Ernie's kick was splendidly placed, and the headwork of Jones and Moody baffled the goalkeeper so successfully that Moody reduced the Cobblers' lead. It was not for long, however, for another three minutes brought a fifth goal to Northampton. Walker placed the ball in the centre, and there seemed ample time for it to be cleared, but a complete misunderstanding between the goalkeeper and the backs made it possible for Lewis to score. Jarvis's first impulse was to run out, and then he changed his mind, with the result that he had no chance with the shot.

Immediately on resuming Jarvis had to be at his best to get a shot from Walker round the post, but the Blues were not done with, and for some moments they played up with fine determination. There was not that finish about their play which distinguished the Cobblers' attack, but it is due to them to say that the home defence was at its very best. Ernie Brown was doing splendidly, and some of his individual efforts merited a better fate than they were doomed to. Once, from a sterling centre, Bonthron miskicked, and the Luton players contended that he handled the ball in recovering from his slip, but the referee disregarded the appeal. Ernie worked himself into the centre a moment later, only for Davies to luckily smother his shot, and then Stansfield and Fred Hawkes gave Thorpe some work to do. A fleeting visit to the other end saw Freeman show a clean pair of heels, but McCurdy barred the way when Walker shot, and thus put an end to a critical situation. A free kick by Bob Hawkes brought the Blues back, and Thorpe had all he could do to keep out a lofty shot from Brown. A free kick for a foul just outside the penalty area gave Luton a chance, especially as Abe's feinting trick came off, but Bob Hawkes' shot was wide.

Since half-time the ground had been enveloped in a thick mist, and twenty minutes from the end the light became so bad that it seemed doubtful whether the game would be finished. A splendid shot by Bob Hawkes from about 30 yards range took some negotiating, but Thorpe saved in magnificent style. Bob was in the picture again from a corner, which Thorpe successfully intercepted. The goalkeeper had left his charge unprotected, but the Luton captain's aim was a few inches out. In the last few minutes the Cobblers attacked strongly, and there was a general appeal for something in the Blues' penalty area, but what it was it was impossible to see from the stand. Moody eventually broke away, but shot poorly when well placed, and play again settled down round the visitors' goal. Jarvis brought off a remarkably fine save from Freeman, but two minutes from time he was beaten by a splendid shot from Whittaker. It was the finest goal of the match, but few were able to see it. This success brought the final score to:—
Northampton, 6; Luton, 1.

COMMENTS ON THE PLAY AND PLAYERS.

The Blues' crushing defeat came as a great disappointment after their grand display against New Brompton, but it cannot be gainsaid that they were hopelessly outclassed. The Cobblers were at the top of their form, and the score was not an exaggerated indication of their superiority. Two or three of their goals, it is true, were lucky, and ought to have been averted, but on the other hand they had innumerable other chances which were not profited by. There seemed a chance in the first half that the Blues might recover, but the mistakes made by the defence just before and after the interval put paid to the result, and for the remainder of the game there was only one team in it.

The extent of the defeat must be attributed in the main to the breakdown of the defence. Bob Hawkes and Jones worked very hard and with marked cleverness in the half line, but Fred Hawkes and the backs were a long way below their usual form. Chapman was completely off colour and made some glaring mistakes, and his partner's display was by no means faultless. Jarvis could not be blamed for any of the goals, unless it was the fifth, which was the result of an obvious misunderstanding.

Smith was undoubtedly missed in the forward line, but with him the front rank could not have done much, as their opportunities were so few and the opposing defence so sterling. Brown was the only one to show up at all prominently. His cleverness asserted itself in the few chances he had, and he was easily the most dangerous man in the attack. Moody tried hard in the centre, but he is not a Smith, and he had not a Moody at inside left to assist him. Moore was a complete failure, and Stansfield, by himself, was not a match for Bonthron and Manning, who were the pick of the Northampton defence.

Quite the outstanding feature of the game was the display of Walden, the young inside right from Wellingborough Redwells, who is in his first season with Northampton. It was his first Southern League match, and such a signal success was he that the Cobblers did not miss Lessons in the slightest. Built on the small side, he is remarkably slippery, and his exhibition was one of the cleverest I have seen in Southern League football this season. It does not fall to the lot of every debutant in important football to signalise it by the scoring of three goals. Walden not only did this, but was the best forward on the field, and had a great deal to do with the effectiveness of the Cobblers' forward line. Still he was fortunate in having to face such a considerate and gentlemanly pair of opponents as Bob Hawkes and McCurdy.

Followers of the Blues will be sorry to hear that the injury sustained by Smith against New Brompton is of such a serious character that he is not likely to be back in the team on Saturday. We can ill afford to be without such a serviceable player against a team like Queen's Park Rangers. Hedley's re-appearance is also uncertain. His ankle was wrenched again when he went to have a kick one day last week, and it looks like being a long job. The fact that the back played through the match in which he met with the injury has, no doubt, militated against a speedy recovery.