

Football Notes and News.

By "THE GOALIE."

A CUP SMASH AT NORTHAMPTON.

A MUDDY GROUND AND NO HOPE.

IMPRESSIONS AND COMMENTS.

I went with the crowd to Northampton on Saturday; and, needless to say, we had a most disappointing day of it. All Luton—to say nothing of the whole country as well!—already knows that we sustained a heavy defeat by 5 goals to 1; but it is only fair to the Luton lads to state that the score is not a fair indication of the game.

The usual crowds on the excursion trains were very merry going down, and had many sarcastic shots of wit to launch at the railway company and its men regarding the dangerously excessive speed at which the locomotive was alleged to be travelling. But they were not so merry on the return journey. Well over three thousand people went from Luton to see the match, the gate being over 14,000 and the takings £417. But many of the Luton folk arrived at Northampton with only time enough in hand to sprint to the match and arrive five minutes late. Some of us were a little more fortunate—we caught trams!

But immediately on arriving at the ground, and seeing the state it was in, I remarked to a Luton enthusiast who was with me, "Look at the mud—we're done!" And a shadow fell over his—er—handsome features as he agreed, with doleful mien. And the hour and a-half that followed proved the accuracy of the forecast. We had left Luton with Jack Frost holding sway in his own hard and tyrannical fashion. We looked for a hard and fast ground at Northampton on which the Luton boys would show to advantage and be able to do well. We hoped—what did we not hope for? A draw was the very least that our soaring fancies led to. But we arrived, to find a ground of such thick and treacherous mud that Smith actually fell over twice when no one was near him! And our faces fell. It was a remarkably quiet Luton crowd throughout the match. And this, despite the fact that some of the "young bloods" from the town of Straw Hats had arrived with miniature but perfect "boaters" for buttonholes, and that one had even made a remarkably exaggerated and alarmingly elongated edition of the ancient Welsh "witch" hat in aggressively white straw, in which he paraded the streets of the Boot town to the great amusement of the Cobblers and the "Cobbleresses"—especially the latter!

It was Luton's usual Cup luck. For three matches running—to say nothing of previous seasons!—we have been drawn away; and, when out against the strongest team of the three, we find ourselves on a ground in the worst possible state in which it could be for our lads to do themselves justice upon. It was this fact—one which half Luton failed to realise when they heard briefly on Saturday the result of the game—which explained our apparently complete collapse. And yet it does not wholly explain it; some part of the smashing defeat was certainly due to the play of some of the members of the Luton team.

The score, as I have said, gives little idea of the game itself. Luton had a very fair share of the play,—indeed, at times they kept Northampton on the defensive for ten minutes at a stretch; but Northampton, playing a beautifully open game—and one which fitted in with the existing conditions to a nicety—simply got away with sudden rushes, and in those sudden and dangerous moves scored their goals. Time after time they "did the trick" in this fashion, Luton having a long spell of pressure without result, and the Northampton forwards then suddenly getting away and ending a sharp run with only the backs to beat (an easy matter with the long passing game) by a good shot and a goal. In this method of play the Cobblers were greatly aided by Walden, a little and light but exceedingly fast player, who sprinted down the wing in grand fashion, creating quite a number of excellent openings for the inside men of the home team.

Luton seemed to be quite demoralised by the mud. They simply could not get to work together. They tried in the main the short passing game, and it failed miserably under the conditions prevailing. Of the whole team by far the best displays were given by Bert Moody among the forwards, and "Freddy" Hawkes and Bushell among the half-backs. "Bob" was also playing well, and Stansfield and Brown did some capital work,—when they got a "look in" at all at the play!

Our defence was perhaps the hardest-pressed section on the field, and the score against them gives no idea of their work. Indeed, both Chapman and Wightman played really excellent games, Chapman in particular doing many good things that pleased me well. But they had little chance when a smart line of forwards bore down upon them on thick mud and kept the ball as far as they could out of the reach of the backs. Many times the two stopped these dangerous rushes of the home forwards; and it was hardly their fault that the inevitable happened and that they were beaten some times out of the many they were tried.

The score against Naisby looks bad, too, but again appearances are deceptive. In point of fact, he played a capital game, and stopped a round dozen of dangerous shots by Lessons, the centre, and others of the home forwards. He had the worst of bad luck with the first shot that passed him. It was coming quite gently towards him, and he was "shaping" to save it quite comfortably and easily; but in doing so he stepped a yard or so forward. The moment his foot left the sawdust at his goal-mouth he slid gently down in the mud, reaching his arms up helplessly towards the ball as he fell, and the ball passed in just over his head and out of his reach. It was the softest and luckiest goal scored in all Saturday's Cup games, I should say. The others were much better goals, and were well obtained; but Naisby himself had little chance of stopping them when a line of forwards, having only him to beat, were free to pass from wing to wing and side to side, and shoot the ball into the net well out of his reach.

At one point of the game Quinn received the ball from a good pass from Stansfield. Quinn at the moment was within a yard of the goal mouth, and the goalkeeper was at the other end of the goal to meet an expected shot from Stansfield. The latter's move gave what looked like a certain goal for Luton. Quinn had only to breast or head the ball forward into the open net before him, with the goalkeeper yards away. Instead, however, in some manner he got his head beneath the ball and lifted it clean over the cross-bar.

Even the football dailies admit that there was not the disparity between the two teams that the score would seem to show. So that the defeat must be put down to Luton's usual Cup luck and to the poor display of two or three of our men. It only remains to add that "Bert" Moody—as capable and hard-working as ever—scored Luton's solitary goal, after receiving from a cross shot by Brown, and that the Northampton goals were notched by Lewis, Lessons (2), and Bradshaw (2). The referee was Lieut. Clover, who also officiated at the Luton v. Southend Southern League game the previous Saturday on the Ivy-road ground.
