

THE SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

Fred Hawkes' Benefit Match a "Soaker."

"Vigilant's" Impressions.

Luton Town's directors were forcibly reminded in a double sense on Saturday of the old saw that it never rains but it pours. Suffering as they are from a disappointing home record and a depletion of their playing strength the Blues can very well do with a little luck, but Dame Fortune seems this season to be in quite a contrary mood. Under ordinary circumstances Southampton's visit was confidently expected to produce a more than average "gate," for the Saints, as they used to be known, have never lost at Luton the popularity they enjoyed in the palmy days of the club. But the circumstances were just the reverse of ordinary. It was quite the worst Saturday experienced so far this season, and what with the soaking rain and biting wind one could only marvel at the fact that the attendance was as large as 3,000.

Fred Hawkes was a sufferer with the Club from the inclement weather conditions experienced on Saturday, for the match was the one set apart by the Directors for his benefit—the second deserved recognition he has had from the Club during his meritorious playing career with the Blues. The player's share of the match was half the gate takings, and the only consolation there was for him was that his loss was not so great as the Club's, because of the fact that he was guaranteed a minimum of £60. For all that the wretched day must have involved a substantial loss for Fred, as the falling off in attendance reacted not only on the gate receipts, but also on the collection which the Red Cross Band generously handed over to the player's benefit.

The match itself was not at all a bad one in spite of the fact that the swampy condition of the playing pitch was better suited to mud-larking—and in some places, even paddling—than to football. Naturally the play was not of a particularly high order, but the keenness with which the players entered into the combat prevented the game ever becoming really uninteresting, and, notwithstanding the discomfort the spectators had to put up with in return for their afternoon's support they seemed better pleased with the display than some others that have been witnessed on the Town ground this season. It is the more gratifying to record this because of the fact that the Blues were still three short of what, at the beginning of the season at any rate, would have been regarded as full strength. With Potts back the defence resumed its normal appearance, but the forward line was a strange combination with Walker and Stansfield on the injured list, and neither of the centre-forwards included.

Exactly how the team was made up will be seen from the appended list of players, who were under the capable charge of Mr. W. J. Heath, of Burslem:—

Luton:—Naisby; Wightman and Potts; Fred Hawkes, Bushell and R. M. Hawkes; Brown, Streeton, Moody, Lashbrooke, and Johnson.

Southampton:—W. Knight; Eastham and Robertson; Kimpton, Denby and McAlpine; Wilcox, Brown, Hamilton, Gibson and Handley.

DESCRIPTION OF THE GAME.

In fine weather there is no football ground in the South which provides such an admirable vantage point for Pressmen to view and record the incidents of the play from as the "crow's-nest" on the Luton Town ground affords, but it is quite another question when the rain is beating in with hurricane force. This was what happened on Saturday, and if the details of the play recorded are somewhat meagre I must urge in extenuation the circumstances which prevented every member of the scribing fraternity from following the game closely with any degree of comfort or even safety to his health.

As a matter of fact, there was not a great deal to record in the first half—at any rate, from the occasional glimpses I obtained of the play. Bob Hawkes' failure to win the toss placed the Blues under a severe handicap in having to battle through the first half against both wind and rain, as was proved by the persistency with which the visitors controlled the game after the first quarter of an hour. The Blues were only prominent in attack during the opening stages when a fine centre from Johnson passed clear across the goal untouched. Wightman sent over the bar a smashing effort from long range, and only a bit of real bad luck prevented Lashbrooke converting from a fast combined run between himself and Moody.

The Blues' front line made the mistake of trying to play correct football, tactics which were hopeless under such conditions, and the first half was nearly spent before the Southampton goalkeeper was tested for the first time. It was Moody who set the example of shooting first time, and that it was the paying game was evidenced by the fact that the goalkeeper fumbled the shot and almost let it through. At any rate, it was the game favoured by the visitors. They let drive every time they got anywhere near, and if Naisby did not have a great deal to do it was not because the Southampton men were not shooting often. Hamilton, in particular, did a lot of potting, but the only two testers Naisby had came from Brown in the first minute and McAlpine about twenty minutes later.

While giving every credit to the Southampton men for the superiority they exhibited in attack through their forceful combination and fast movements, allowance must be made for the difficulties under which the Blues were labouring nearly the whole of the half. Wightman had to go off in the first quarter of an hour, and though he was soon back Bushell retired ten minutes later with a kick on the ankle, and for the rest of the half either Moody or Johnson were operating at centre-half. In spite of this the home defence behaved splendidly under the heavy pressure to which they were subjected. A particularly brilliant piece of work was a save by Fred Hawkes from Hamilton within a few yards of the goal mouth. It was a

wonderful stop, and was illustrative of the value of the Luton right half in defensive work. And mention must also be made of the vigilance exercised by the whole defence when Southampton gained a sequence of five corners. All of them were perfectly placed, and a goal might have resulted from any, but, nevertheless, the citadel was kept intact.

The defence, in fact, held out until within five minutes or so before the interval, and even then it was a rather unlucky failure. Wightman failed to correctly anticipate the bounce of a long kick and let in Hamilton, who immediately took aim with the left and found the opposite corner of the goal low down. Just before this Johnson had forced through in fine style, and was unlucky to have a hot shot turned aside for a corner, and Southampton had a narrow escape of losing their lead within a couple of minutes. Streeton failed to hold a pass from Lashbrooke, which would have left him in a good position, but Brown negotiated it splendidly. It came right across just out of the goalkeeper's reach, but slid off the ground too quick to allow of conversion, and so the half-time score stood—

Luton 0, Southampton 1.

Bushell came out when the teams resumed, and though the ground had become a veritable mud-pond the play immediately became as fast and exciting as if the conditions had been all that could be desired. First Johnson just missed the post with a header from Brown's centre, and then Wightman let Hamilton through for the visiting centre to miss a glorious opportunity of putting his side tolerably safe from defeat. Hamilton had ample time to go right through, and Naisby evidently thought this was his intention, for he started out to meet him, but the centre shot straight away, and the ball hit the upright and glanced outside.

The Blues were playing much more strongly than in the first half, and only eleven minutes had gone when they got on level terms. I was just jotting down a lucky escape enjoyed by the visitors through one of the backs turning aside a smashing shot from Wightman following a corner when a shout denoted that Luton had scored. Lashbrooke had gone to outside left with the ball in the course of an encounter near the touch line, and from his centre Johnson directed the ball goalwards, and it glanced off Eastham's head into the net.

It was now the turn of the visiting defence to meet a series of formidable attacks, and they had some very anxious moments, too. Brown and Streeton both made magnificent attempts, and nearly broke through, and Johnson on the left forced a corner, which Lashbrooke failed to convert. Still Southampton were frequently dangerous when they broke away. Wilcox once completely beat Potts, and Naisby had to come out to the centre and give a corner, which was finely cleared by Bushell. But the narrowest escape of all was when Naisby shouted to Potts to leave a long shot from Denby, and the back paid no heed, but attempted to clear, and miskicked. Naisby was coming out to meet the harmless shot, and, taken unawares, he had to indulge in a dive which enabled him to prevent the miskick taking effect almost on the line. Rushed by the opposing forwards he could do no more than scramble the ball out, and fortunately it fell at the feet of Potts, whose kick was breasted by Wilcox. There was another near shave when the visitors' front line went down with one of the finest bouts of combination seen during the game. Hamilton was left clear and with a magnificent shot he hit the cross-bar.

There were twenty minutes to go when Luton again netted. Brown followed up the fine work of Fred Hawkes with an accurate centre, from which Lashbrooke easily headed through, only to be given offside. How the Blues failed to land the ball home again was a miracle, for the right wing were in champion fettle, and both Brown and Streeton were within an ace of scoring time after time. Streeton, in particular, had hard luck on three occasions, and Johnson also was a source of trouble to the visiting defence. Excitement reached a high pitch when Streeton and Brown forced a scrimmage in the goal mouth. The ball kept bobbing backwards and forwards, but every time the Blues had their shots obstructed. Eventually the goalkeeper fumbled a shot from Johnson, and had to run nearly to the corner line before he could clear. His kick was a weak one and provided a good chance for Bob Hawkes, but the greasy ground caused him to be slow in shooting, with the result that one of the opposition prevented him carrying out his intentions.

In the failing light of the last ten minutes the visitors again bestirred themselves and carried hostilities into the home territory. Their sharp shooting tactics caused some concern, too, for from the Press box it was quite impossible to follow the ball, and it must have been very trying for Naisby to have shots coming along at long range. A goal scored under such circumstances would have been the reverse of satisfactory, but Tommy had his weather eye open for all comers, and made three good saves. Luton were not able to impose a similar test upon the visiting custodian, and consequently the final result was—

Luton 1, Southampton 1.

COMMENTS ON THE PLAY AND PLAYERS.

Whatever may be said of Luton's previous home achievements, no complaint can be made against them for failing to win on Saturday. Under conditions such as those prevailing any result was possible, for it was obviously impossible for merit to assert itself. As a matter of fact, any result other than a draw could not have been regarded as fair to either side, and considering the experimental character of the Blues front line, and the fact that the homesters were one short for a considerable period of the game it must be confessed that Luton did well.

The visitors were a very different lot to those we have been accustomed to see in the Southampton colours. The rear division comprised Knight, the second-choice goalkeeper, who was with the team last year, and two old hands at back, who are as great a tower of strength as ever, but the rest of the team, with one exception, were new. The Club has paid over a thousand pounds in transfers this year, and they have secured a speedy and dashing lot of forwards who know how to adapt themselves to prevailing conditions.

This was where the Blues failed until after the change of ends, too much clever work being attempted, but one has also to bear in mind that among them there was only one first team man in his regular position. This was Brown, for Moody was at centre-forward, while the other three forwards were reserves. It is only fair to add that the new formation played really brilliantly in the second half. Lashbrooke was not a success, but Johnson and Streeton both shone. Streeton could do nothing to begin with, but before the end he and Brown were a magnificent wing.

The defence was all the better for the return of Potts, who exhibited all his fearlessness and kicking powers, while Wightman's display was a notable advance on recent form. It was quite appropriate that Fred Hawkes should be at his best—his defensive work being remarkably fine. There is no need to mention all individually, for there was not a weakness among them, and the only time they were beaten was when Bushell was off.

Luton are still only third from the bottom of the League table, with 2 wins, 6 losses, 4 draws, 10 goals for, 17 against, 8 points. Southampton are three above them with 10 points for 12 matches.

To-day the Blues are at Coventry, meeting the City team in the second round of the Southern Charity Cup Competition.