

SATURDAY'S FOOTBALL.

Luton make a Good Fight at Swindon.

Referee Fails to Satisfy either Side.

Bob Hawkes Fails with Penalty Kick.

It was recognised that Luton were faced with their stiffest task of the season at Swindon on Saturday, but the players expressed themselves determined to make a bold struggle, and although the final result did not fulfil their sanguine hopes much credit is attached to the way the team tried to upset paper form. No change was made from the side which went down before Plymouth Argyle, and the only absentee from Swindon was Jefferson. In his place Bolland, who played in more than half their games last season, was the substitute, so that it could not be urged that they suffered much in this respect, although Bolland usually plays on the opposite wing. The match had been set apart as a benefit for their veteran centre-half, Bannister, who confesses to the age of 38, which is a bit old for a professional player, and he returned to the team after standing out for a fortnight through injury.

The teams turned out as under:—

Luton—Naisby; Wightman and Potts; Fred Hawkes, Bushell and R. Hawkes; Brown, Walker, Johnson, Moody and Stansfield.

Swindon—Skiller; Kay and Walker, Tout, Bannister and Silto; Bolland, Fleming, Wheatcroft, Bown and Lamb.

Referee, Mr. W. Chadwick, Blackburn.

Bob Hawkes won the toss and, of course, took advantage of the wind and sun. At the commencement of the game the latter was in greater evidence than usual at this period of the year, but this did not affect the game for long, although the wind was an important factor to the end of the chapter. The home forwards were quickly off the mark, and some good play on the right ended in Wheatcroft getting the ball and putting it forward to Fleming. There was, however, a little too much powder behind the ball, and the International failed to profit from the opening. For several minutes the home attack were greatly in the picture, but the referee was responsible for much of this, for he failed to pull them up time after time when one or the other got offside. Fleming was a particular sinner in this matter, but for some reason the whistle holder appeared to think the Swindon "star" would not place himself in an illegal position.

Then Luton got away through some right wing work, and the ball was slung over to the opposite wing, where Stansfield so bothered Tout that he kicked the ball over the line for what should have been a corner. But the referee pointed for a goal kick, and from this the home players made a concerted attack on Naisby until Bown finally headed the ball over the bar. It was by this time evident Luton were going to hold their own, and indeed they almost monopolised the exchanges for quite prolonged periods. Walker was the first to give Skiller real anxiety with a fine drive which Skiller managed to tip over the bar. Rather to the surprise of the spectators Skiller was kept fairly busy with shots from Walker and Moody, and Brown also "chipped" in with a couple of dangerous looking centres, one of which practically beat the home goalie, but just failed to find the net, the ball hitting the bar.

Midway through the first half a very bad decision by the referee told against Luton, and probably had a big influence on the result. Stansfield got clear away, and dropped the ball so nicely into the centre that the Swindon Walker could not clear the danger except by a most deliberate punch inside the penalty area. The crowd simply roared with delight when it was observed that no notice was to be taken of this, and to make matters worse, from a Luton point of view, the Swindon players set up a hot attack on Naisby, which happily failed. It would be curious to have the referee's reason for disallowing the patent penalty, for if he did not see the offence he must have been the only individual on the ground who did not. Certainly all the Swindon officials and all the pressmen did, and openly said so.

Within five minutes, however, when Luton were once again attacking, the presiding official did observe a case of elbowing right in the goal mouth, and this time a penalty kick was awarded. As usual Bob Hawkes himself took the kick, and sent in a hot drive with the evident intention of missing Skiller on his left side. Unfortunately the ball rose hand high, and the home custodian just managed to punch it down and finally clear amid rounds of applause. It was a great save, for Bob's attempt was not at all a bad one, although if the ball had not risen quite so high Skiller could never have got down to it before it flashed by into the net. Although naturally the players were greatly disappointed that no result was forthcoming for all their fine midfield work they stuck manfully to their task, and a centre from Stansfield was turned to account by Johnson, who, dashing clean through the backs, landed the ball quite away from Skiller into the net.

Everyone present was willing to admit that Luton's lead was fully deserved, and the players themselves seemed determined to maintain this advantage up to half-time. Just before the interval, however, Fleming broke through and fell inside the penalty area, with Potts in close attendance. The spectators set up a strong appeal for a penalty, although Fleming really appeared to stumble over the ball. Certainly Potts did not trip him. However when the referee came off the ground just after he was roundly hooted by the crowd who did not at all relish finding their pets behind at this stage. Amid the excitement surrounding this incident scarcely anyone noticed that Johnson was badly injured until Naisby, who was last on the ground, was observed to be carrying the Luton centre off the field in a dazed condition. As a matter of fact scarcely any of the Luton players themselves knew anything of the matter until Johnson was carried into the dressing room. At first it was feared Johnson was severely injured, but after examination by a local doctor it was discovered that no bones were broken. His side bore distinct traces of Bannister's boot, and it is quite remarkable that he got off so lightly,

for he had the full force of a kick from the Swindon centre-half in his ribs. Interval score:—

Luton 1, Swindon 0.

Although now faced by the wind Luton went off on the restart as if they intended to increase their lead, both Stansfield and Walker testing Skiller. It was a fine shot which Walker put in and quite beat Skiller, only to miss going inside the far upright by inches. If this shot had come off probably the next few minutes' series of disasters would not have happened. But it is idle speculating on this point. Within seven minutes of the restart the game underwent such an unexpected change that the home side were actually three goals up, and Luton were never able to recover themselves from this stunning series of blows.

Following a corner kick the ball came over to Lamb, who was standing well out, and he sent the ball back into the goal mouth. Naisby attempted to tip it over the bar, but did not quite manage to do so, the ball hitting underneath the cross bar and coming down. Wightman promptly kicked it clear, but at once the referee gave the goal. He was quickly surrounded by the whole Luton team, who protested most vigorously against the decision, but he would pay no heed, and with extreme difficulty made his way to the centre of the field. There will always remain the impression in the minds of the Luton players that this decision robbed them of their chance of victory in this most important match, and they were very sore for the remainder of the game, while at the finish some very pointed remarks were made. After the match certainly at least one member of the Swindon team, who was in a good position to judge, stated that the ball never went over the line, and it should not have been a goal.

This equalising goal was bad enough, but even worse was to follow, for within a couple of minutes Wheatcroft and Fleming were observed coming through the centre, and Naisby, seeing his charge in danger, dashed out to intercept the ball. Wheatcroft, who at the moment had command of the ball, neatly tipped it to Fleming, who was running in front, and the last mentioned player easily placed it in the open net. As no one but Naisby was between him and the goal it is difficult to see how he could be other than offside, but again the referee ruled against Luton, who were thus behind for the first time during the game. Two most unsatisfactory goals they were, too, and before the Lutonians could recover from their natural indignation Bown increased the lead with a cross shot from a pass by the opposite wing.

It took some time for Luton to recover their former superiority, but with the defence once more settling down the game became more even towards the middle of the second half. The Blues, however, could make no impression on the home goal, and a sudden burst through by Wheatcroft ended up with the latter letting drive from long range with a sharp shot, which found its way to the net via the upright and Naisby's outstretched arm. It seemed hopeless now to expect Luton to retrieve their position, but they did not give up trying, and a sudden attack from Fred Hawkes led up to their second goal. Fred worked right across the ground, and then tried to find the net from an inside-left position. His aim was faulty, and the ball appeared likely to pass out nearer the corner flag than the goal when Brown just managed to save it, and centring the ball Johnson tipped it over to Walker, for the latter to score a good goal. Just on time Luton made a desperate attempt to notch another, and the last incidents of note were a couple of corner kicks taken by Stansfield, which were with difficulty cleared. Result:

Swindon 4, Luton 2.

COMMENTS ON THE PLAY AND PLAYERS.

No team could have worked harder than Luton did at Swindon, and therefore the unsatisfactory manner with which the game was handled was a burning question of debate after the match. Everyone present at the match must have been surprised at the lowly position Luton occupy on the table. Indeed, the home officials expressed themselves as quite nonplussed to account for it. One of the occupants of the directors' box was the Chairman of the Southern League (Mr. W. R. Lawson), and he would not have it that Luton were in any danger of being one of the bottom two on their display at Swindon.

The Luton forwards gave a really fine display in the first half, and even in the second, except for that fatal ten minutes at the commencement, they had a fair share of the game. Bob Hawkes was the most effective member of the middle line, while both backs did finely, although Potts was not quite fast enough for Bolland in a straight run. Still the whole team can look back with credit on their performance, the defeat notwithstanding, for they made the champions go all the way, and the result was only decided by the home side getting the benefit of the majority of the doubtful decisions.

Swindon are a fine team, although judging from Saturday's display Walker is not quite so effective as last season. Kay is probably better than before, so that equalises matters. Skiller did wonderfully well in goal, and he had some work to do. Lamb and Bown were the better wing, but Bolland's pace is very effective at times, and he must be the fastest winger in the League. Fleming is a clever artiste, but he has played more finished games than Saturday's.