

LUTON FOOTBALL NOTES.

By "The Goalie."

SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

"BATTLE" OF THE BLUES.

A TAME AFFAIR.

UNPLEASANT INCIDENTS.

LUTON'S UNLUCKY DEFEAT WITH TEN MEN.

In spite of the many misfortunes that Luton have encountered this season I have always written my weekly notes in an optimistic strain that was by no means assumed. I knew that Luton had a good team, and on the principle that the longest lane must turn eventually I confidently expected them to rise from their lowly position on the table to a more respectable if not a lofty eminence. Taking this cheery outlook, however, is now becoming a bit of a strain, for on Saturday Luton lost a home match by the hardest luck imaginable. The visitors were Millwall, Luton's old rivals, who have done fairly well this season. The home team was the same which did so well at Norwich, but only two minutes of the game had elapsed when Luton suffered a misfortune which cost them the match. Stephenson was trying to dash through the defence when he was brought down—quite fairly—and was so badly injured that he had to retire for the rest of the game. Afterwards it transpired that his cheek bone had been knocked in, and of course it will be some time before he can play again. At the time of writing it is thought that he will be disfigured probably for life, a fact which all Luton football enthusiasts will deplore, as Jimmie is most popular.

The game itself was one of the poorest that has been played at Luton this season. The only goal of the match was scored as the result of a penalty kick given to Millwall after half an hour's play. The Luton players protested strongly against the decision, and the crowd started booing the referee (Mr. A. Green, of West Bromwich). There was no doubt, however, that his decision was quite correct, for a visiting forward was charged in the back, but the game ought to have stopped a little sooner for an offence which occurred just outside the penalty area. All through the match the referee was greeted with booing from all round the ground, and on one occasion, not long after the goal had been scored, the official had to complain to the police that someone had thrown a piece of clinker which, it appears, struck him on the cheek. The rest of the game was marred by a considerable amount of ill-feeling on the part of the players, and so many free-kicks were given that the match rose little above the level of a farce. Although I certainly do not agree with the many people who attribute the defeat to the weakness of the referee, I think he might have kept a stronger hold on the players, especially in the second half.

As Luton had only ten men playing it would be rather unfair to severely criticise their display, but one cannot overlook the fact that on only two occasions did they seem likely to score. They occurred in close succession, Moody heading over from a brilliant centre from Brown, and Stansfield heading into the goalkeeper's hands when he should have scored easily. Brown was the best forward on the field, and judiciously fed by Walker was able to do some good things. The left wing men were never in the picture, Kirkwood, the Millwall right back holding them up somewhat easily. After the interval, Fred Hawkes went centre-forward and tried hard, as he always does, but Fred never did claim to be a good shot. The Luton defence were shaky at times, but it was not severely tried. Millwall's best forward was Davis, the centre, but the Lions' defence was their strongest point. An old Lutonian appeared in Quinn, at inside right but he was not particularly successful, and by no means as effective as his successor, Walker.

When the game started the weather was fine, and there was an attendance of about six thousand. Millwall won the toss, and naturally decided to take advantage of a fairly strong wind. The game started rather tamely, until a none-too-forceful burst by the Lions was followed by a similar move on the part of the home team, and although offside caused a momentary repulse, the ball was soon in front of Joel again. Stephenson tried to burst through in his old sweet way, but he was brought down and sustained a serious injury, which caused him to retire for the rest of the game. In spite of this disadvantage, Luton were the more dangerous, the Millwall goal having a narrow escape when Moody headed a flying centre from Brown over the bar. A minute later Walker presented Stansfield with a golden opportunity, but he tamely headed straight at the goalkeeper. Bushell tried a long drive but it was too high. The visiting forwards were now playing but a patchy game, though the Luton defence seemed none too steady. On the other hand, Luton combined delightfully, but both teams were equally ineffective in front of goal.

As the game went on Luton's attack became stronger and stronger. Brown was in fine form at this point, and sent in some good dropping centres. The Millwall halves had several free kicks given against them for their doubtful tactics, but nothing tangible accrued from these, and a rush to the other end saw Davis scrape the bar with a great shot. A moment later the same player broke clean through the defence with a splendid individual run, beating man after man. A score seemed certain, but Naisby ran out of his goal, and so disconcerted the forward that he shot wide. The ball only just scraped past the timber, and many people at first thought the shot had been successful. The Lions soon returned to the attack, however, and with Potts charging Quinn in the back a penalty was awarded. Wilson took the kick, and though with a great effort Naisby beat down the shot, Wilson followed up and scored easily before the goalkeeper could recover. This occurred about thirty minutes from the start, and as neither team looked like scoring again, the interval found Millwall undeservedly leading by 1-0.

On resuming, Fred Hawkes took the centre-forward position for Luton, who thus played only two half-backs. The new centre started very promisingly in his new position, and very early after the re-start he sent in a shot which caused Joel some anxiety. The game was now marred by the doubtful tactics introduced by both sets of players. Millwall were the principal offenders, however, and the resultant free kicks, which were given with a frequency that became almost ludicrous, helped Luton to keep up a somewhat sustained attack. Millwall could not get going for a long time, being often pulled up for offside. Bob Hawkes made one or two attempts at long shots, but these were the only serious shots that Joel had to save, the Millwall backs covering him in fine style. Vincent should have scored for the visitors from a breakaway, and Wilson nearly succeeded with a free kick which just grazed the post. The Dockers were now having most of the game, but their attack soon fizzled out, and the game became extremely tame and uninteresting. Luton at times made promising attempts to score, and as time drew near these became desperately frequent, but they all failed, and Millwall ran out lucky winners. Score:—

LUTON 0, MILLWALL 1.
