

LUTON'S LEAGUE LUCK.

Another Home Defeat and another Player Injured.

DOES IT MEAN RELEGATION?

Description and Comments on Millwall's Visit

By "Vigilant."

Luton Town dropped another brace of Southern League points, and had another player placed on the injured list, on Saturday, and the question of whether they can escape relegation now becomes a very crucial one. Everything went wrong for them on Saturday. Their ill luck was not confined to the fact of being beaten by a penalty kick after more than holding their own with ten players for eighty-five out of the ninety minutes, but was accompanied by a series of other results which go to make Luton's position a very anxious one, for three of the five teams with whom the light Blues are competing to avoid the bottom places of the League put up surprising performances away from home. For instance, New Brompton, the wooden spoonists, went to Northampton and won 2-1, Brentford went to Bristol and beat the Rovers 3-1, and Exeter actually repeated their feat of last season in defeating the champions by 1-0 at Swindon. It was only that Leyton were enabled by a penalty kick to emerge successfully from Southampton's visit that keeps Luton out of the last three, and that the position is really serious will be seen by a glance at the following table:—

					Goals		
	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Ps.
Swindon	27	9	6	2	70	33	40
Queen's Park Rangers	28	17	5	6	47	26	40
Plymouth Argyle	28	16	7	5	45	23	37
Northampton	26	14	6	6	55	30	34
Millwall	28	11	7	10	48	36	32
Coventry City	27	14	10	3	51	39	31
Brighton and Hove ...	26	12	9	5	55	28	29
Crystal Palace	26	10	9	7	51	30	27
Reading	26	9	8	9	28	34	27
Norwich City	28	9	11	8	29	42	26
West Ham United ...	25	10	10	5	45	42	25
Watford	25	8	8	9	35	45	25
Bristol Rovers	27	7	11	9	27	38	23
Stoke	27	8	12	7	29	49	23
Exeter City	28	8	13	7	38	50	23
Brentford	27	8	13	6	41	51	22
LUTON	27	5	12	10	30	41	20
Southampton	27	6	14	7	32	48	19
Leyton	26	5	14	7	19	48	17
New Brompton	27	5	16	6	20	62	16

Saturday's defeat represents a loss of two points to Luton, as compared with last season, when they twice defeated Millwall, and the fact has to be faced that Luton have a pretty big task on hand in their remaining matches, in that eight of their eleven outstanding games are with teams in the top half of the table. At home they have to meet West Ham, Bristol Rovers, Brighton, Swindon and Reading, and away fixtures are with the Crystal Palace, Stoke, Southampton, Plymouth, Brighton and Northampton.

Millwall and Luton are, of course, very old rivals, and Saturday's game at Luton carried one's mind back to the meetings of years ago, when there was invariably more force and fouls than football brought into play. The Dark Blues have never had the reputation with the Luton people of being a particularly scrupulous team, and on this occasion they certainly did not improve. The feeling between the two clubs seemed to have been heightened by the exchange of players carried out last season, and early in the game there were incidents, in the injuring of Stephenson and the temporary laying out of Walker, which greatly incensed the crowd. Rightly or wrongly, they were strongly of the opinion that the conduct of one of the visiting players warranted his retirement from the game, and they lost no opportunity of making matters unpleasant for the referee, Mr. A. Green, of West Bromwich. Feeling of this kind is at all times infectious in football, and it spread among the players to such an extent that the game became a mere scramble, in which attentions were as often paid to the man as to the ball.

Although Luton were playing their full strength at home for the first time for some weeks, the crowd was only a moderate one, of about five thousand. As a matter of fact, it was only on the morning of the match that a full side was determined upon, because it had been feared that Wightman's injury at Norwich would compel him to give way to Smith, the burly right back of the Reserves. Millwall were, of course, playing against an old colleague in Bobbie Walker, and Luton were doing ditto in the person of Tommy Quinn, but Jack Smith was missing from the visitors' side. The Lions are happily placed in having a number of forwards to choose from, and besides Smith they had missing from the attack Lipsham, the team manager, Carvossa and Morris. The side relied upon will be seen from the following list of players:—

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

Millwall.—Joel; Kirkwood and Jeffrey; Martin, Wilson and Liddell; Wayment, Quinn, Davis, Vincent and Elliott.

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That is how the teams turned out, but it was only for five minutes, or less, that they were so constituted, thanks to Luton's dogged ill luck. When Millwall won the advantage of the strong wind blowing towards the Dunstable end, it was generally recognised that the homesters would, in all probability, be up against a very warm proposition in the first half, for the pitch was just sufficient on the soft side to afford favourable going for the players. There was, however, no real opportunity afforded of judging the effective merits of the two full sets of contestants, as the Dark Blues in the first three minutes gave Bob Hawkes and Potts, especially Potts, ample opportunity of displaying their prowess in defence, they were, in none of their attacks, so dangerous as the one which placed Luton under a severe handicap for the rest of the game.

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It was the very first attacking movement of the homesters that brought them—and Stephenson—disaster. This is how it happened—at any rate, as I saw it. The whole line of Light Blue forwards were in excellent position, when Brown, getting the better of a sharp tussle with Jeffrey, centred quite square. Stephenson met the ball with his breast, evidently with a view to getting it to his feet, and had so far succeeded, when the lengthy Kirkwood flung his weight at him before he could get into his stride. He appeared to catch Stephenson full in the face, and with such force that the centre went down like a log. The ball rolled on, and Moody followed it up finely to give the goalkeeper a warm time, but only to fail to prevent a clearance. Then attention was centred on the prostrate Stephenson, and it was at once evident that he was badly hurt. Billy Lawson was called on to attend to him, but it was found it was more than a reviver he needed, and eventually he was escorted off with his face buried in a sponge and towel. Dr. Rose was soon in attendance upon him, and it transpired later that the right cheek bone had been damaged—at any rate, further participation in the game was quite out of the question for the player.

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Thus handicapped, the homesters were compelled to return to the defensive, but they have been too accustomed to setbacks this season to be discouraged by the loss of a player, and it was only for a moment that they were in danger. The Lions gained a corner, from which nothing accrued, and then the locals took up the running with a very similar movement to that which had brought them disaster a few minutes earlier. Once more eluding the opposing backs in clever style, Brown despatched another of his really best centres. It was a trifle higher than before, and as it went flashing across the goal Moody's head came into operation, and sent it spinning over the bar. It was just the sort of effort to bring about a goalkeeper's downfall, but it was just an inch or two too high to meet with the success it deserved.

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Millwall were unable, however, to repel the attack and exciting play in the goal mouth really should have resulted in Luton opening the scoring. In a scramble on the right, Walker robbed Jeffrey and landed the ball clean on to the head of Stansfield in the goal mouth. It was quite a glorious chance, for the outside left was only about three yards away, and completely unmarked, but Harold tamely scooped the ball into the goalkeeper's hands, and though he made a desperate effort to atone for his shortcoming, he failed in his intentions. With this exception,

the Light Blues were certainly showing much better form than usual in front of goal, and although they had but four forwards they completely monopolised the game for long periods at a time.

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As a matter of fact, the visitors so seldom had a look in that they lost the few opportunities of utilising the wind for long pots, but even here their efforts compared feebly with a really fine attempt by Bushell, which was only a shade out in elevation. Among the home forwards, Brown was in one of his trickiest moods, and was a constant source of trouble to the cool, calculating Jeffrey, who seldom seemed disturbed. As a result of one of Brown's clever solo efforts, Walker was presented with an excellent chance of giving his colleagues on the left a scoring opportunity, but he made the mistake of having a go himself and sent over the bar. Bobbie's judgment was a wee bit out again a little later. It was a touch from Moody that sent him sailing through this time and he got by Jeffrey all right, but his manœuvre took him across to the other wing, and in attempting to beat the other back and so making his position a certainty he permitted himself to be overtaken by the halves, and was robbed from behind.

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Then Millwall suddenly assumed the aggressive, and there was a succession of incidents at the homesters' end. First, Davis, who had easily been the most prominent of the visiting forwards, sent a sterling shot over the bar, and in the next minute the same player missed the chance of a lifetime. Beating Potts on the bounce of the ball, he worked across and also beat Wightman. Quick to perceive the danger of the situation, Naisby rushed out, and this undoubtedly saved Luton, for Davis was hurried in his shot and it crashed up against the net on the wrong side. Still, it was such a near thing that there were not a few people who thought the visiting centre-forward had scored, as he certainly should have done, and among them were several of the Millwall players. At any rate, when Naisby placed the ball for a goal kick they appealed to the referee for a goal, and the whistle-holder did not appear over sanguine about it, for he consulted both linesmen before ruling against the appeal.

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This gave the crowd the opportunity for a laugh at the expense of the visitors, but the laugh was soon on the other side. Millwall returned with another hot attack on the right, which placed the home defence in difficulties. Potts failed to intercept Wayment, and a shout for hands went up against Quinn when he gathered the ball. It was not entertained, but, instead, a foul was given against Potts, who successfully tackled Quinn from behind just as he was about to shoot. Wilson took the penalty kick, and for once he found a goalkeeper to stop his shot. Naisby could, however, only flap the ball down with his flat hand, and before he could recover Wilson had followed up and put Millwall ahead, after half-an-hour's play.

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This penalty award was greatly resented by the crowd, who had long been out of sympathy with the ruling official because of his lenient treatment of certain of the Millwall defenders, who were anything but particular in the tactics they adopted, and the game was carried on amid a storm of booing. (This had a sequel seven minutes later, for while Millwall were hotly attacking the referee suddenly stopped the game, and after stooping to pick up something, leisurely wended his way across to the principal stand. There he called to a police sergeant, and produced a clinker which, he said, had been thrown by someone on the banking at the Dunstable end of the ground, and had struck him in the face.

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So far from improving matters, this only caused the crowd to indulge in even more jeering, a cry of "penalty" being incessantly kept up. The players also imparted a good deal of feeling into the game, and with rain coming on the play deteriorated considerably towards the end of the half. The chief incident of note occurred just before the stoppage. Quinn was left clear from a pass from the left, and though he was subjected to severe shakings by both Potts and Wightman, he held on to the ball, and it was left to Bushell to bring off a brilliant clearance. Subsequently the Blues took up the running, but the only promising shots, from Bushell and Walker, were well over the bar, and half-time arrived with the score, most undeservedly,

Luton 0, Millwall 1.