

Football.

[BY CRUSADER].

LUTON'S WEAK POINT.

No Luton supporter could be really satisfied with the Town's win by a mere goal to nil in the home match with Mardy on Saturday. It was not that the Welsh team were so inferior all round as to warrant several more goals scored against them, for they were not, but the undeniable fact is that Luton by their play worked themselves into fine shooting positions many times—all for nothing. When only the final touch remained to be put, it was not put. The fault lay chiefly with Smith, the centre-forward. The directors should at once advise him that he is not of much use to them unless he drops his method of concentrating his thoughts on knocking men over instead of devoting a little attention to the ball. His chief aim seems to be to demonstrate his abilities in a rough-and-tumble, and that cuts both ways, for the other side are not likely to take all and give nothing, and the retaliation, when it begins, is not confined to one man, and especially is it not confined to a player of Smith's calibre but to the cleverest men of the side. Owing to his one-sided idea of the game, Smith was nowhere in it when it came to shooting. Golden opportunities came to him, but he was exasperatingly slow in making up his mind—and Jenkins and Jones were quick.

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This first home match in the Second Division of the Southern League drew a large crowd, and everyone was looking forward with the keenest anticipation to a good game, to say nothing of two more points. The weather was genial, Luton had won at Mardy, drawn at Southampton (Southern Alliance), and now they were on their favourite turf. True, Bob Hawkes was out of the team through a strained thigh, and that might mean a good deal. Worth, also, that dangerous left-winger, was nursing a damaged leg, but no football follower could be despondent on a day like Saturday (unless he were a Tottenham Hotspurite). Fred Hawkes was back in the fold, temporarily filling Bob's place, while Stephenson had gone to Worth's berth at left wing, E. Rogers, of the Clarence, being at outside-right. All was merry and bright as the cinematograph men waited for the gladiators to trot into the arena. John Goodall, the great International of past days, was in the visitors' dressing room superintending the preparation of his "boys" from Mardy, in whom he has considerable faith. Like a wise man, he would not venture on a prophecy, but was confident that his team would put up a good show. "Johnny," I fancy, was by no means sorry to be back in England again after his period in France, training a French team. English life and customs are more to his taste, but even busy Roubaix can hardly be less inviting than Mardy's bleak and black surroundings.

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A minute or so later, the teams lined up under Mr. G. J. Ross, of Aldershot, as follow :—

Luton Town—Day; Henderson and Potts; Wilson, Thompson and F. Hawkes; E. Rogers, Wileman, Smith, Murphy, and Stephenson.

Mardy—Thomas; Jones and Jenkins; Alden, Griffiths, and J. Tebbett; Howard, R. Tebbett, Coates, Hopgood, and Pinney.

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With the wind behind them, Luton made the pace a humming one, and Jenkins and Jones had a very busy time indeed. Stephenson was a bundle of virility on the left, and the quick way in which he snapped up the ball and made towards goal was a lesson for the forward line. Quite early he had worked close in when one of the backs intervened, and the ball went sideways to Smith, who had a good chance, but was too slow. Mardy endeavoured to work up the field, but they nearly always passed the ball too hard, so that the Luton halves or backs got to it before their own men. The Welshmen were certainly triers. Day cleared rather weakly from one of their attempts, but did better the next time with a long shot from Griffiths. Luton kept the play in the visitors' half. Wileman was ever working vigorously, but appeared to be afraid to trust the ball to Rogers, a fear which proved groundless later. A pass by Fred Hawkes to Thompson, who quickly transferred to Wileman, looked like ending in the defeat of the Welshmen, but Stephenson shot just over the bar.

A capital drive by Rogers showed what he was capable of and prepared the spectators for something better. That "something better" came shortly afterwards, when the youthful amateur passed to Wileman, who quickly centred. Smith shot straight at Thomas, who knocked the ball upwards, and Stephenson, who had rushed up, rose in the air, got his head to the ball, and put it into the net. It was a fine goal, and looked very promising for Luton. There was no doubt that the Welshmen were being harried, a fact which did not help to steady them into improving their control of the ball. They certainly tried very hard, but their advance was swept back by the determined Henderson and the agile Potts, both of whom were giving nothing away. The halves were also very much on the alert. That was the reason, no doubt, why Coates, the speedy centre-forward for Mardy—one of the fastest players in Wales—did a good deal of running about, only to find the ball snapped up and passed forward before he could get to it. Pinney, however, sent in a fine shot which looked dangerous for Luton, but Day cleared. The home team were nearly always at the Mardy end, and the backs and Thomas made a valiant fight for the visitors. Hopgood did test Day just before the whistle blew, but the game was easily Luton's at half-time, when the score was 1—0.

On returning, the game was still pressed by Luton. Smith's shot was a really good one, but Thomas was in fine form and seemed equal to anything. Jones and Jenkins, too, were very resourceful. After Wilson had paid a call on behalf of the halves, and sent his visiting card over the lintel, so to speak, the Mardy men returned the call, and host Day, at the request of Henderson, ran out to meet them, incidentally removing from their pathway a rolling "stone" over which all might have tripped. Presently, at the other end, Smith had a capital chance, but sent the ball over. The Welshman made several vigorous attacks, and it looked a "near thing" once when Day fisted out weakly and the ball rebounded from Henderson's back for a corner. For the most part, however, it was Mardy on the defence—and a very good defence they set up too. Thomas was a brilliant goalkeeper, with plenty of pluck and good judgment, which enabled him to deal with some critical situations. The two men immediately in front of him were also very reliable. In fact, their defence was better than their attack, which, though possessing some good points, did not run together enough. Not hanging together, they were therefore hanged separately, to speak metaphorically.

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As to Luton, well, they must not expect to get into the First Division of the Southern League if they do not improve on last Saturday's play. The weakness was not of the whole team, but of the man who should weld together the front line and smartly turn to advantage the chances received from the wing men. That's where the improvement was needed. Stephenson played very briskly, and so did Wileman, who, however, was inclined to be an individualist. Sometimes, though, he was blamed when he ought not to have been, as, for instance, when many called upon him to pass to Rogers, and he swerved inwards and took the ball to the centre, quite upsetting the calculations of the opponents, who fully expected to have only Rogers to hem in. The amateur centred finely, and though not a very robust player, he was well worth his place on Saturday. Murphy was not a great deal in the picture; he still overdoes the dribbling. The halves were good, particularly Wilson, and the solidity of the backs has already been referred to. Day's display in goal was varied—sometimes good, sometimes weak. Without doubt, Luton should have had more goals to their credit. None can say what the absence of Bob Hawkes meant to them, but I fancy that his generalship would have improved things considerably.