

Luton and the Lions.

MILLWALL MASTERED.

Stephenson Shines, but has two goals disallowed.

With anything like decent weather conditions, the visit of the Millwall team, on Wednesday, should have ranked as Luton's outstanding attraction among the mid-week Southern Alliance games. The changes of time have softened down considerably the tense feeling which the meetings of the rival Blues used to excite in the early days of a rivalry, which goes back quite a number of years, but there still remain some sparks of it, and with Luton once more taking their proper place in Southern League football, it is fairly safe to predict that it would take more than Wednesday's rain, drenching and cheerless as it was, to prevent the re-kindling of those remaining sparks into flames. However that may be, the two clubs are not this season rivals in the serious sense, and because of this, and of the close relationship which has existed between them in the matter of the exchange of players during the last year or two, there is perhaps no outside team followed with closer and keener interest by Lutonians than Millwall. Whether that feeling is reciprocated by Millwall's supporters, it is, of course, impossible to say, but it may well be so, seeing that the dark Blues have in the last two seasons acquired forwards who have worn Luton's light blue, while Luton, on the other hand, possess one of Millwall's old players, in the person of Arthur Wileman.

Millwall have, of course, parted with Jack Smith, who was playing a few weeks ago at Luton in Coventry's colours, but they still have Quinn, Moody and Brown. Tommy seems to have lost his place in the first choice forward line this season, in spite of the presence there of his first right wing partner in Southern League football, and he did not play at Luton. Brown and Moody, however, made a welcome appearance before the crowd they have so often delighted—and sometimes disappointed—and another old friend in the team was Sandy Brown, the brawny, muscular back Millwall generously loaned to Luton when the Light Blues lost Sammy Wightman, last season. Except Tor (Brown and J. Jamson, his colleague at back, together with H. Conn, the amateur outside left from Catford Southend, who was making his first appearance in the Millwall first team, the visitors were practically at full strength. They had Spendiff in goal, Frost, Wilson and Voisey at half, and Manager Lipham was the only notable absentee from a forward line, which included Ernie Brown, Vincent, Davis, Moody, and the new amateur.

Bob Hawkes was the only absentee on the Luton side, and this involved a couple of changes in the forward line which did so well at Treharris—and, in fact, on every occasion it has been relied upon. Stephenson, in the centre, and Wileman and Worth on the extreme wings were not interfered with, but Streeton changed over to his proper place at inside right, to give a chance at inside left to H. G. Hawes, the amateur from the Spartan Walthamstow League Club, whose debut for Luton at Brentford was spoken of so highly. With Bob Hawkes resting his old thigh trouble, the defence was unchanged, comprising, as it did: Abbott, in goal; Henderson and Potts, at back; and Fred Hawkes, Wilson and Thompson, at half.

With two such strong sides, the necessary elements for an attractive game were not wanting, and though the state of the playing pitch was calculated to throttle the development of the best of intentions, an attractive game was none the less forthcoming. The pity of it was that, as is so often the case, there was only quite a small crowd to witness it—necessarily, for the greater part of the time, from under the shelter of the covered stands. Right from the start, the football exhibited on both sides was remarkably smart and clever, the tackling was keen, and mistakes were not prominent—in fact, there was every element to make up an enjoyable game, except the wretchedness of the afternoon. With Luton opening against a relentless wind and a downpour, which developed during the half into a regular deluge, there was every opportunity afforded of judging the strength of the opposition in the early stages. The Light Blues played extremely well, but they made little or no headway, and during the first quarter of an hour the defence had a grueling time of it.

Abbott, in particular, emerged from the ordeal with flying colours. With Davis brought to a standstill, after one of the few tricky dribbles he managed to bring off, Voisey let drive with a "first timer," which looked a winner all the way, but Abbott got to it with a dive, and pushed it round the post. Badly placed though the corner was, it resulted in Ernie Brown giving Abbott another chance to distinguish himself, but the best save of the bundle was one in which he was materially assisted by Fred Hawkes. Davis broke through in the centre with a clear field. Fred Hawkes overhauled him about a dozen yards out, and though he was unsuccessful in stopping him, he so put him out of his stride that Abbott was able to get out and shoot the ball off Davis's toe. It was a fine piece of work on Abbott's part in pouncing on his only opportunity so smartly, but in the next minute he would probably not have had a ghost of a chance had not Potts flung himself in the way of a shot which Ernie Brown directed from a clear position given him by a well-judged centre from the amateur left winger.

Eighteen minutes had slipped by before the Luton attack got a look in, and within a minute of this they were decidedly unlucky not to have been in the position of leaders. The first attack came from Hawes and Worth, and was a well-worked movement, and the amateur had every reason to complain of his fate in having a deadly shot barred almost as it left his foot. Stephenson's luck was worse, for he smartly utilised a side-foot pass given by Streeton as he met the ball from Thompson, and without a moment's hesitation drove the ball straight and low just inside the post. The pass appeared to be quite square, and the spectators shared the annoyance of the players when Mr Bullmer, the Northampton referee, whistled Stephenson up for offside. In fairness to the referee, it should be stated that Mr. Bullmer had made up his mind the instant Stephenson prepared to shoot, but, for all that, there was a considerable element of doubt about the decision—to put it quite mildly—and when, a moment later, Worth was also ruled up in a favourable position, the referee had a gentle reminder that the crowd did not like it.

The whistle-holder got into more hot water over a free kick award he gave in the vicinity of the Millwall goal. The spectators considered it was Worth who had been brought down unfairly, and asked for a penalty, but one of the Millwall players, thinking the award was in favour of his side, placed the ball for a free kick inside the penalty area. The referee did not, however, agree with either. He first of all removed the ball outside the penalty area, and then gave Luton a free kick. This only served to satisfy the crowd that their side should have had a penalty, but there was a far more glaring error later on, when Worth got clean in front of goal and bloomed away at a hurricane pace, only to have so much of the power taken off it by the burly

Brown that the ball barely reached the goal-keeper. It was a glaring case of hands, but the referee did not think so.

In spite of these disappointments, Luton never turned back after once getting to grips with their opponents, and the remainder of the half was easily theirs. Stephenson had two very hot drives saved by Spendiff high up, and Worth was also well on the mark once, but on two other occasions Wileman and Worth both attempted to negotiate "first timers," with disastrous results. There were only five minutes to go when the homesters achieved a success which was richly deserved. As the ball came across from the right, Stephenson sent it on to Worth, and giving the signal to Streeton and Stephenson to attend to the opposing players, Thompson looked after Worth's centre, and with a grand drive from twenty yards out, he scored a fine goal, his second for Luton in the Alliance. The last kick of the half resulted in Luton's lead being increased. Worth sped away down the wing, and dropped across one of those centres which always spell danger, and, nipping in before the goalkeeper could get out far enough, Streeton slipped the ball by him.

The teams crossed over without the customary "breather," and Luton were quickly on the aggressive again, Streeton heading inches wide of the post, at lightning rate, a centre from Worth. After this, however, the homesters did not rise to the heights which their first half display promised, and Millwall were almost as conspicuous as Luton had been in battling against the elements. Abbott saved a beauty high up from Vincent, and in the course of a persistent pressure, which lasted until nearly midway through the half, the Luton goal was often in danger. In spite of this the most brilliant individual effort was credited to the Luton centre, who gained possession near the half-way line, and, making a straight road for goal, flashed in at long range, a brilliant shot, which Spendiff handed over the bar with the greatest difficulty.

Millwall were still by no means done with, but all the same they were distinctly fortunate to reduce the lead a quarter of an hour before time. Conn broke through on the left, and, bearing inwards, succeeded in drawing out Abbott. The goalie failed in his purpose, and in his absence a shot was sent in and was stopped by Wilson, who had fallen back in goal. To the astonishment of Wilson, and pretty well everybody else, the referee awarded a penalty. Even then Millwall had their work cut out to score, for Abbott saved the shot of the visiting captain, but was unable to hit it away hard enough to prevent the Millwall Wilson following up and converting. Luton responded so well that from a free kick taken by Wilson, Stephenson had the ball in the net within the space of a couple of minutes, but for the second time in the game the referee's whistle was against him. Everything pointed to Luton increasing their lead in the closing minutes, for the Millwall goal underwent a series of narrow shaves, Wileman in particular being the victim of ill-fortune. Spendiff, however, served his side with great ability, and Luton had to be content with a victory by the odd goal of three.

It was no discredit to the Millwall team to say that they were flattered by the final score. The score which would have accurately reflected the run of the game was the score which, in my view and in the view of many others, should have been the proper official result, 3-0 for Luton. It may be said by some who were not present at the game that this makes out Luton quite a great team, and I can best anticipate that point by saying that they were a great side on Wednesday. All through the team did magnificently, and there could have been no more striking contrast than the way in which Stephenson outshone Davis, the Millwall crack, as a centre. Stephenson's enterprise always seemed to be finding an outlet, and his shooting was really great. The extent to which he excelled over his tricky vis-a-vis was, however, not a little due to the home centre half, for Wilson shadowed and baulked Davis to such a purpose that the latter scarcely had a look in, after the one had made himself acquainted with the other's methods. A few more experiences such as Wilson gave him, Davis would probably climb down a bit from his lofty perch. His swaggering mannerism on the field fairly took the eye, and the crowd enjoyed his discomfiture as much as they have enjoyed anything on the Luton Ground this season.

After this testimony to the masterly work of Wilson, I ought to add that there has, perhaps, not been a game this season when the whole defence has shown itself so thoroughly sound and reliable. Abbott once more was as brilliant as it was possible to be, the backs could hardly have been better, Fred Hawkes was quite in his best form, and I certainly have not seen Thompson do so well. He still does not fall properly into his position as a wing half, but he is coming on even in this respect, and in other respects his work against Millwall was distinctly meritorious. On Wednesday's form, the Luton defence would want some beating, and the forwards also showed themselves a first-rate line. While Stephenson was the shining light, there was not one of the players who could not be said to have displayed more than average form, and the line as a whole worked admirably together.