

LUTON WIND UP BADLY AT TON PENTRE.

Kick-off delayed half-an-hour for a ball.

On the face of things Saturday's loss at Ton Pentre is the worst performance of the season, for which, however, there were several reasons. Probably the most potent was the fact that the result would have no bearing upon promotion unless a series of miracles happened, one of which would be the scoring of something over a score of goals. and no team has been able to approach anything like this figure at Ton Pentre for one very sufficient reason—namely, the truly awful conditions of the playing area which prevail at this ground. It will be seen from the names set out below that three changes were made from the team which scored five goals for Luton against Newport County, and in each case it was a compulsory one. Neither of the Clarence players were available, while, just at the last minute, Fred Hawkes was allowed to remain at home on account of the sudden illness of his wife. It is curious to note that the only games Fred has missed since he came into the team have been against Ton Pentre, and each time it has been a last minute alteration.

The journey was made on the morning of the match, and this may or may not have affected the result, but it was felt that, under the circum-

stances, it was a needless expense to travel overnight. The party did not leave Luton until a quarter to ten, and actually arrived at Ystrad station at 4.10. There is no such station as Ton Pentre, although as a matter of fact the station actually abuts on the club ground, and quite a fair proportion of the spectators take a free view by walking a few yards off the platform and watching the game from the railway bank.

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The kick-off had been advertised for 4.45, and, as there is no dressing-room on the ground, the stripping is done at the club headquarters, some three or four hundred yards away. There appeared to be no particular hurry needed, and the players of both teams very leisurely strolled down to Yns Park—for that is the high-sounding title of the playing pitch—but, as it proved, they were half-an-hour too early, for on asking for the ball no such article could be discovered, and, as a Southern League game cannot yet be played without one, there was no help for it, but to wait for a ball to be procured. The local officials said it would only be a matter of a few minutes, and the Luton players remained shivering on the playing pitch for some quarter of an hour. That certainly was not calculated to do them any good, but they were assured the ball was just coming, and they waited as patiently as they could. At last they retired to a seat on the stand, which, by the way, was not very large, but there was plenty of room. The referee was pacing impatiently up and down the field, and it was 5.15 before a ball was thrown in from the railway bank and the game was actually commenced.

The teams turned out as follows: —

Luton:—H. Bateman; Henderson and Jarvie; Thompson, Wilson and R. Hawkes; Stephenson, Wileman, Smith, Murphy and Worth.

Ton Pentre:—Green; J. Jones and Cannon; Hathaway, Simpson and A. Evans; Selig, Clarke, A. Williams, J. Williams, and R. Jones.

Referee, Mr. E. Small, Bristol.

Luton had the better end of the field for attacking in the first half, as it was comparatively free from mud—that is, for South Wales—but the backs and halves were greatly handicapped by the unevenness and general conditions of the pitch. It was difficult to judge the ball, while, it may be mentioned, in one place there was quite a fair-sized pond. As a rule the players gave this a wide berth, as it meant a drenching if the ball dropped in the water. Of course, the ball landed there once or twice, and the spectators thoroughly enjoyed the incidents of this character.

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The game opened very quietly, but on the whole it seemed Luton were not likely to be troubled much to win, and this possibly had some bearing on the final result, for a little extra energy at this stage might have given them such a lead that it would have been too big a leeway for the home players to make up. Within a few minutes the ball was put through by Smith, after a centre from Worth, and the referee without hesitation gave the goal, and both teams lined up for the restart. Then, for the first time during the match, the spectators made themselves heard, and shouted offside, and just as the ball was about to be kicked off the referee went over to one of the linesmen, and then gave a goal kick to Ton Pentre. It was a remarkable ruling, for Worth's run through was quite open, and the whistle-holder had a clear view of the movement right from the start, and certainly was convinced it was a goal. However, even now not much apprehension was felt, and the Luton players took the reverse quite calmly.

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But the home players were inclined to get away occasionally, mainly through mistakes of the Luton defenders who were naturally a bit deceived by the pranks played by the ball in the mud. One such incident almost brought disaster, for "Dicky" Jones, the home outside left, got in a centre which only just missed scoring, and, if either or his comrades had been up, it must have been a goal. But the more likely openings were at the home goal, Murphy and Smith both testing Green with sharp drives, though from too long a range to be effective.

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However, eight minutes from the interval, Luton took the lead, Smith taking a pass from the left wing and sending the ball into the far corner of the net, pretty high up. This lead was not held for more than two or three minutes, however. R. Jones managed to slip by Henderson and worked right into the mouth of goal before shooting. He was closely attended by Thompson, but the latter could not quite get up, and, with no one but Bateman to beat he simply turned the ball through. This was rather in the nature of a surprise, and it became evident Luton would have to work hard on the change of ends if they were to come off victorious, seeing that they would be operating at the worst end of the field in the second half.

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The first corner of the second half was forced by Smith, the goalkeeper being hustled, but succeeding in getting the ball into touch. A minute later a centre from Stephenson almost brought about a goal, for Green fell down without clearing the ball, but it rolled to Cannon, who luckily cleared. It was a very near thing indeed. Then again Luton got the ball in the net. Stephenson, after losing the ball once, recovered himself and finally put through, but the referee apparently gave Smith offside, for certainly Stephenson could not have been, as he brought the ball through, and the only other player who touched it was a Ton Pentre back. Thus Luton got the ball into the net three times, but only one counted!

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Stephenson was badly kicked soon afterwards, and was practically useless, as he could not run for the ball at all. He remained on the field until ten minutes from time, and just here the home club took the lead. It was R. Jones's work again which led up to the score, for, although Bateman did get the original attack away, he had to throw himself full length to stop the ball, and before he could get up J. Williams returned it into the empty goal. For a time Luton tried to redress matters, but, with only ten men, it was practically hopeless. Worth crossed over to outside right, and Bob Hawkes joined the left wing with a view to forcing the play, and once or twice he attempted to break through on his own, but the home defence were now desperate, and went all out to maintain their advantage, and they were successful in this, and Luton were unexpectedly beaten.

Ton Pentre 2, Luton 1.

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It was a most inglorious wind-up, but it was not the Ton Pentre players who beat Luton. It was the ground. On any reasonable playing pitch Luton would win every time, but it is really impossible to play football, as it is understood in First Division circles, on such pitches as Yns Park. It was quite impossible to pass the ball along the ground in one half of the field, and it had to be lifted in the air to get it away at all. Of course, these conditions affect a player like Bob Hawkes, who depends upon his cleverness in manipulating the ball.

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Bateman could not be blamed at all, and while Jarvie was easily the better back, Henderson did much better than when he last figured in the team. All the halves worked hard, Wilson perhaps most of all. Indeed, after the match he almost collapsed in the dressing-room, but was brought round in a few minutes.

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The forwards were not at all happy under the conditions, and neither could they be said to have done anything wonderful.

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So far as the Ton Pentre team were concerned, the only one to stand out was their outside left, and his work was chiefly of an individual character. The backs certainly kicked well at times, and, even when playing on the mud patch, were able to time the ball better than the Luton players. Green had very little difficult work to do in goal, as might be judged from the report on the Luton forward work.