

LUTON SPOIL THE SWANS' CHANCE OF PROMOTION.

Best Performance of the Season.

The visit to Swansea was looked upon as about the stiffest task set Luton in their struggle for promotion, and, therefore, the two points gained were received with the greater pleasure. The enthusiastic Lutonians who made the five hundred miles' journey felt themselves well repaid, and gave the team and officials a hearty send-off at Swansea station. But the scenes at Luton were even more demonstrative, and when the party arrived back at the Midland station just after eleven o'clock on Saturday night it was with difficulty the players could make their way home. As the train steamed in it was evident something extraordinary was happening, for cheering loud and prolonged greeted the ears of the party and the platform was literally packed from end to end. Everyone was enquiring for Wileman. He slipped out of the station almost unnoticed, but the crowd followed as quickly as they could through the narrow exits, and when Mill-street was reached Wileman was shouldered and carried towards his home. The majority of the players reside in the Dunstable-road neighbourhood, and hundreds of supporters accompanied them, cheering all the way. Certainly there was a very different football atmosphere at Luton than on the previous Saturday evening after the Ton Pentre victory!

As more than two hundred Lutonians were able to see for themselves what one of the best South Wales pitches was like, they will in future better understand the handicap the players have to overcome in that district. There were many expressions of surprise that the idea of playing on the Vetch Field was likely to be entertained, but the writer can give the assurance that Luton have played both this season and last under much worse conditions than prevailed at Swansea on Saturday. The referee paid an early visit to the ground, and he had no hesitation in pronouncing it fit, and, when it is mentioned it was the same official who passed the Newport pitch last season, it will be readily understood there was never the slightest doubt as to the match being played, for that was absolutely "the limit," and Mr. Curtis himself will admit it was his worst experience. As a rule the worst portion of the ground is in the centre, but at Swansea the touch line on the stand side was nothing better than a quagmire, and, right up to the kick-off, the ground staff were engaged in trying to get the water off.

As soon as the team and officials arrived on the

ground consultations took place as to what would be the best eleven to turn out from the twelve players who were taken down. It was intended to play the same team as last week, except that Wileman was to take the place of Brewis, having recovered from his knee injury, but, Stevens being the extra man travelling with the team, it was felt his physique would prove useful under the conditions, and finally it was decided to place him at outside left. It was felt that the ground would not suit Hoar at all, and the ex-Clarence player himself was of the same opinion. Swansea also made an eleventh hour change, Messer being pronounced unfit, and, as Mayo was also on the injured list, Swarbrick was brought over from the left wing to take the other extreme. Still, the home supporters were pretty confident of winning, and therefore it was all the greater blow to have their hopes dashed so effectively as the final result proved.

The teams therefore turned out as follows:—

Luton:—Mitchell; Elvey and Robinson; F. Hawkes, Frith and R. Hawkes; Durrant, Wileman, Simms, Rollinson and Stevens.

Swansea:—Storey; Allman and Bulcock; Williams, Bassett and Cubberley; Swarbrick, Coleman, Brown, Anderson, and Greer.

Referee, Mr. F. Curtis, Bristol.

Cubberley won the toss for the Swans, and with a strong wind blowing right down the field Luton were called upon to face it for the opening half. It was therefore something in the nature of a revelation to find the home defence strongly pressed during the opening stages, and Luton the attacking party. A couple of corners were forced, and Storey did well to clear both these, and later he brought off a fine save when Stevens sent the ball in hard, the goalie just getting down to it by falling down. Rollinson was given a good chance from a centre by Durrant, but he headed the ball behind for a goal kick. A temporary breakaway found Swarbrick in possession, but Stevens fell back and forced him to put the ball behind. This was a fortunate thing for Luton, as otherwise he would have got a clear opening.

Luton were soon attacking again, and then, eight minutes from the start, the all-important incident happened, although, of course, at that early stage its vital effect was not so apparent. The Luton right wing forced the play, and as Coleman, who was only just outside the penalty area, could not clear the danger in the orthodox manner he knocked the ball down with his hands. The referee at once blew his whistle, and for a moment those on the stand thought it was a penalty kick, so near was it to the fatal area, but it was found it was an ordinary free kick. Fred Hawkes took this, the ball eventually bouncing off Bassett, and Wileman promptly seizing upon the chance sent in a cross drive, which completely beat Storey. The Swans' supporters could hardly realise a goal had been scored, but they were soon made to do so by the tremendous shout which went up from the grand stand, and for quite a minute it appeared as though the stand was occupied solely by Lutonians. It was a new experience for the Luton players to get such a shout in Wales when they scored a goal, and must have almost made them think they were playing at home.

For a few minutes Luton continued to enjoy the greater share of the attacking work, but gradually the strong wind told its tale, and, as a rule, the closing stages of the first half were fought out in Luton territory, but it was only occasionally that Mitchell was hard pressed. But for two clever saves in quick succession he had nothing above the ordinary to stop under the bar from midfield work. Once or twice Swarbrick planted his flag kicks very nicely, and it was with difficulty these were got clear, but otherwise the halves and backs were quite masters of the situation, and it was evident some minutes before the interval that Luton were likely to retain their lead at half-time. This was so, the score being:—

Luton 1, Swansea 0.

With Luton having the assistance of the wind in the second half their chances were regarded as very favourable, and fortunately these anticipations were realised, although naturally there were a few occasions when Mitchell and Co. were put on the alert. Still, as in the first half, the play was at the town end as a rule, and Luton certainly had more scoring chances than their opponents. By this time, however, the goal mouth was in a terrible state, and it was very difficult to get the ball out of the mud. It is more than probable that further goals would have been added but that in making one of his characteristic bursts Wileman slightly twisted his knee and was compelled to retire to the touch line for attention from Lawson. He was not away many minutes, but it was evident he would not be able to play his usual game, and for the remainder of the time he was more of a half-back than a forward. Of course this somewhat spoilt the effectiveness of the attack, for Durrant left the neighbourhood of the touch line and practically took up the position of inside right. Certainly he used good judgment in this, for it was almost impossible to get along on the water-logged surface on that side of the field.

Near the close Allman, in tackling Stevens, had the worst of it, and was compelled to leave the field for a time. He came back again, but was not nearly so effective, and in giving the ball a kick he hurt himself once more, and the game was stopped for the second time on his account. Altogether about four minutes' overtime was played on account of these stoppages, and during these extra minutes Luton should have been awarded a penalty kick. Bulcock literally pulled Simms down when he had the goal at his mercy, with Storey right away from his post, but the referee evidently did not see the offence. Although Luton claimed strongly he would not agree, and the first goal Luton have netted against Swansea earned two welcome points. Result:—

Luton 1, Swansea 0.

HOW WE WENT TO SWANSEA.

By "One of the Early Birds."

Ting-a-ling-ling—grrrrr!!

Three a.m. and a wet morning! These were the truths that I realised after I had silenced the alarm, for the sake of my neighbours, and commenced to prepare for the journey. I felt very noble and virtuous. On the night before, the trip had appealed to me as a—probably—jolly outing. Now, at 3 a.m., with no breakfast, it assumed the loftier attitude of a crusade. Was I not going bravely forth, at the call of my town, to cheer on our gladiators in the football arena, to encourage them on to victory, and to return perhaps from the field of battle twenty-four hours later with no voice, a sore throat, and a thick head? As I started off to the station, I felt that I deserved well of my town.

In Bute-street, I found the London and North Western Offices in darkness, and no sign of Mr. Crick. The station, too, was closed, and gloomy. Was I too late? Apparently not, for I found a side door open, and got in. But the platform was deserted. Another awful thought! Had someone stolen our train, and should we get a despairing message from Llymnschdrywgllldwog or some other remote spot, saying, "Have been kidnapped by the Beech Hill Bowling Club; send a special to the rescue."

Soon, however, all doubts were set at rest, by the arrival of Mr. Crick, whom I gently chided for being late. He does everything connected with the Supporters' Club so well that it was quite refreshing to find a chink in his armour. In twos and threes the supporters came up, most of them sleepy, and some with their tempers slightly frayed at the edges. We were soon to be tested, for the mercurial individual who had promised to bring the refreshments for our saloon, said he had forgotten them—except his own. Not that I minded. Oh, no, I had "been had" before, so I had brought a few parcels, etc.—in fact, several etceteras!—and had ordered a breakfast-basket to be put in at Cardiff. But I sympathised with the others!

The crowd in the next saloon were more fortunate. Their refreshments arrived on a truck, in bulk. There was so much bulk that we asked if they were providing a diving display for the entertainment of their fellow passengers. In a third saloon the catering was of spartan simplicity. One member of this party told me sadly, when we stopped at Cardiff, that he had not had a drink since we left Luton! My readers can decide for themselves in which saloon the officials of the Supporters' Club travelled. No prize is offered for the correct answer.

A good deal of ingenuity had been used by supporters, who meant to show their colours with emphasis. Blue hats and bonnets were numerous, and most of the party wore small blue and white straw hats on their coats. These ornaments were much admired in Swansea, and after the match we had crowds of Welshmen around us begging for the hats as souvenirs.

We left Luton only a minute or two after the scheduled time, and the journey was uneventful. The time passed quickly, with cards, occasional musical outbursts, the throwing of everything available at any member of the party who had the temerity to sleep, and refreshments! my volatile friend saved his reputation by producing a small bag, out of which he brought a succession of edibles in such quantities as would have shamed a conjurer, and under their mellowing

ing of the journey, quickly disappeared.
It was raining hard almost continuously until Swansea was reached. Fields were under water for miles, and caused dismal forebodings as to the state of the ground, which were fully justified. We arrived at Swansea at 10.45, and were met by members of the local Supporters' Committee, who gave us hints and information, which we found very useful. The morning was spent in walking round the town, and visiting the docks and pier. Some of our party had very hazy ideas as to the size of Swansea, and one of us exclaimed in tones of unmeasured surprise, "Why, it's bigger than Luton!" From the remarks that were made to us by strangers, and particularly by men at the docks, it was evident that a very great deal of interest was being taken in the match, and we had to endure a lot of friendly chaff from men who evidently thought we were going to be well beaten.

After a good meal, we made our way to the Vetchfield, for the match, and then we gasped! Although there is an excellent stand—more than twice the size of that at Luton—the ground is hardly any larger, and I was told that the playing space is actually smaller, though it did not appear to be. But the condition of it was terrible. Many parts of it, particularly along the touch-line, were just thick, clayey mud, with pools of water, which groundsmen tried to remove by sinking holes. Someone suggested that we must have made a mistake and come to the 'Varsity boat-race. To add to these drawbacks, a strong wind was blowing from goal to goal. Under such conditions, good football appeared to be almost an impossibility, and the thrilling game which took place was a credit to both teams.

Luton supporters were there to the number of over 200, and, although vocally overweighted by a crowd of about 10,000, they made a splendid demonstration, cheering, singing, and encouraging our players almost ceaselessly throughout the game. The enthusiasm on both sides was tremendous. From the moment when the teams came on the mud patch, and a Lutonian told our men to "kick with the tide," until the final whistle, the crowd were not silent for a minute of the play. Cheers, "boos," and choruses surged across the ground like waves. And the game fully justified it. It was a typical cup-tie, rather than a league match. Thrill followed thrill, and there were many minutes in which both goals had narrow escapes. It is not my purpose to give details of the play, but as a loyal Supporter, I should like to pay a tribute to the dogged determination of our team. A Swansea paper summed up the match as, "Pluck v. Luck," and we certainly had some narrow shaves, but we deserved to win for two reasons. The first was the way in which the Luton forwards took their chances while the ground was not too ploughed up to spoil their game, and the second was the keenness with which our team stuck to their work. Every man played with a stern, dense, unwavering determination that will live long in the minds of all Lutonians, who saw it.

After the match came another meal, and a final walk through the town—then the return journey. This was much like the outward one, except that we were more cheerful. We arrived at Luton at 2.20, tired, but happy.

But the deserted station and streets were a bitter blow. The players had been met and cheered, why not we? Where was the Red Cross Band, the shouting multitude, or even the pibrochs of the Scotch Colony? Had not we played our part in the glorious victory? Had not we done our duty nobly as Supporters, and cheered, the whole 200 of us, as if we and not the Welshmen numbered 10,000? Had not we racked our brains for advice, and given it freely? Still as one enthusiastic supporter said, "We've got the two pints!" (He had had several).

We gave a final cheer at the station. And so to bed.