

LUTON v. SWANSEA

Played at Swansea on Saturday. Result:—

Luton 1 goal.

Swansea nil.

The teams turned out as under:—

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

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

Referee: Mr. F. Curtis (Bristol).

When Luton visited Swansea last season it was practically their last chance of escaping from the Second Division, and as they went down 0-2 it proved the vital match and effectually kept them from promotion. It was curious that again the game at Vetch Field was considered a test match re promotion, although even if Luton had lost this time they were not absolutely out of the running, as the Swans have still to visit Luton. Still a victory would place Luton above any of their rivals except Croydon, who seem quite certain to retain the first position now. Never in the history of the club have the team enjoyed the moral support of so large a number of their supporters at such a distance from home on any ordinary Saturday, while the excitement at Luton when the news got through that two most valuable points had been recorded was tremendous, as the players knew when they arrived by the 11.8 train at the Midland Station.

On the previous Saturday there were many Lutonians who were fearful as to the prospects at Swansea, but still over 200 ardent supporters set out at four o'clock on Saturday morning with the avowed object of doing their best to encourage the players, and everyone felt well repaid for their trouble when the final whistle left Luton the deserved victors of a terrific struggle against tremendous odds. During the past two seasons the Luton supporters have had dinned into their ears the tremendous handicap the grounds in South Wales entail, and now 200 of them have seen something of what they are like. But let it be said at once that bad as the Vetch Field appeared on Saturday, Luton have been compelled to play several times on pitches in a much worse condition than the one at Swansea, to say nothing of the handicap of the small playing area in some instances. At Swansea the surroundings do make the ground appear something like what a football pitch should be, but it would be a shock to Lutonians if they ever visited Treharrie and Ton Pentre to find what is considered a football ground, and until they actually saw the game in progress they would never think they were on a Southern League ground.

Without doubt Swansea take the biggest average gates in the Second Division, and they were expecting a big attendance on Saturday, but unfortunately the weather turned out very bad right up to the time the crowd were assembling and it rather fell below expectations. Still there would be at least 8,000 present when the teams turned out. Luton were out first, and many were doubtless surprised to see Stevens one of the number, as Hoar had been selected to play. But after seeing the state of the ground it was felt that Stevens would be better able to plough through the mud and water, although not on his usual wing, and as victory crowned the alterations I do not suppose the officials responsible were censured at the Board meeting on Monday, whatever might have been the case if the result had gone the other way.

Swansea way.

Swansea also made a late change, Swarbrick taking the outside-right position, although, curiously enough, he was also on his wrong side of the field, as, it will be remembered, he figured at outside-left at Luton last season. The team included their two latest captures in Bulcock and Brown, and the former was making his first appearance at home. Both players have entailed a three figure transfer fee, and were naturally expected to strengthen the side, although after the match there was evidently a difference of opinion among the supporters of the Swans, judging from the remarks heard as the crowd left the field. An opportunist of the Ball type would have proved very useful in the first half when the Swans had the benefit of the gale and were mostly in the Luton quarters. Ball's shooting has proved the winning factor in many a hard fought game since the Swans have figured in the Southern League. The favourite cry at Vetch Field used to be "Give it to Ballie," and many sighed for his presence on Saturday. As a forward line the Swans were far from impressive, while at half back their trio was not to be compared with the Luton three. Probably Allman was the most effective player on the home side and he played a really fine game and quite outshone Bulcock, who was something of a disappointment, chiefly because so much had been expected of him, for he did by no means badly, although inclined to dribble a trifle too much in the mud.

Luton quite deserved their win taking the game through, for they attacked longer than the home players. Even in the first half, when they were faced by a very strong wind, for the first quarter of an hour they were more often in the home area than not, and after turning round it was only occasionally the Swans forwards broke away. Certainly they never kept up such a sustained attack against the wind as Luton did in the opening stages. This was admitted in the local press comments after the match, as the following extract shows:—"Farewell the Swans' chance of promotion! They were beaten deservedly because their opponents adapted themselves better to the conditions that prevailed. The Straw Plaiters played the right game in going all out before the ground cut up so badly as to become impossible to play with any degree of accuracy. Luton's form in the first quarter of an hour was a revelation to the crowd. In the second half Luton played a fine defensive game and kept the Swans at bay." The concluding sentence scarcely gives a proper idea of the game in the second half, as Luton were more often than not attacking on changing round, but still the defence played finely when they were called upon and quite deserved the pat on the back. The above extract is from a Swansea journal, but the special correspondent from a Cardiff paper expressed himself somewhat differently, and while of the opinion that Luton quite deserved the victory, gave it as his opinion the chief credit was due to the fine work of F. Hawkes, Frith and R. Hawkes, who dominated the game. After Aberdare and Swansea experience the presumed weakness of Bob Hawkes on heavy grounds is somewhat exploded, it must be confessed.

Mitchell did his part valiantly when he kept a couple of pile drivers out midway in the first half, but otherwise he had comparatively little to do. Still, he could scarcely have been blamed if the second of these had scored, and in that event it is more than probable the points would not have gone to the credit of Luton. Elvey and Robinson both played finely, the critics being divided as to which of the pair was superior. Anyway, the Swansea forwards never shook off their attentions. Simms had hard lines with several good attempts, and would undoubtedly have scored in the closing stages if he had not been pulled down within three yards of the goal by Bulcock, and it was fortunate for Swansea the referee failed to notice the incident. Wileman's goal was a magnificent effort. In quite his best style he seized upon the chance and drove the ball home before the goalkeeper could realise the danger. It was a trifle unfortunate he should fall lame when Luton had the wind in their favour or the goal average might have been materially improved, as Luton really played without a right wing

afterwards, Durant playing much nearer the centre than usual, with his partner lying mid-day between Fred Hawkes and Frith. Stevens hustled the defence pretty effectively and was rather a handful for Allman at times. Indeed, it was in tackling the Luton outside-left the home right back was injured, and although he returned to the field he was of very little use in the closing stages. Robinson fed his partner in his usual clever fashion, but did not get many opportunities to have a pot at goal.

Bob Hawkes was unsuccessful in naming the coin, and the home spectators cheered when they knew Luton would have to face the wind, and it was almost a gale. Indeed, during the game Storey in making a drop kick within a yard of his own goal line actually sent the ball over the line at the other end of the field for a goal kick without the ball touching a second player, an incident which is certainly not a frequent occurrence under normal conditions.

Luton settled down straight away, and, to the delight of their supporters, were playing grand football under the conditions. They came within an ace of scoring once or twice, and were worrying the defence no end when Coleman was observed to handle in trying to get the ball under control. At first it appeared the referee had awarded a penalty, so near was Coleman to the fatal area, and the official pointed towards the centre of the penalty area, but it was just outside he actually indicated. This turned out just as satisfactory from a Luton point of view, for the ball was not cleared, and Wileman, getting a sight of the ball, pounced upon it and drove it home almost before anyone had thought of a goal coming. The delight of the Lutonians on the stand knew no bounds, and a stranger would almost have thought the home team had scored, so much row did they kick up. But it was soon found the game was far from won, for the wind helped the Swans pretty effectively and kept the ball at the Luton end of the field. But the Lutonians were delighted to find their defence as steady as a rock under pressure and Mitchell was not often troubled. As the interval approached and the Luton goal was still intact hopes of maintaining the lead caused the excursionists to cheer every time either Elvey or Robinson cleared the ball, and when the half-time whistle went they let themselves go most enthusiastically, for hopes of victory were pretty confident, seeing Luton would have the benefit of the wind.

In the second half Luton never appeared likely to lose, for they were more often dangerous than Swansea and but for Wileman's lameness would undoubtedly have added to their score. As the Luton halves seemed quite capable of holding the opposing forwards, the Lutonians on the stand seemed pretty confident that the two points were safe, and were in jubilant spirits. Two stoppages lengthened the game, and it was quite four minutes over the net time before Mr. Curtis whistled the players off, but some minutes before this the Swans supporters had given up all hopes and were leaving the ground by hundreds. The Lutonians made their way towards the dressing room and the players had almost to push their way through the light blue decorated crowd into the dressing room. One of the first to congratulate Bob Hawkes on the grand performance was his old Sunday School teacher, the Rev. H. Mander, who now occupies the pulpit of the principal Nonconformist Church in Swansea. By the way, Wileman's goal is the first Luton have scored against the Swans and certainly the most valuable of the present season.

FOOTBALL NOTES.

The Splendid Victory at Swansea.

GREAT HOPES FOR LUTON.

Luton and the South Eastern League.

[By CRUSADER].

We have all been lifted now to great heights of hope about promotion. There is scarcely a man who could say that he had thought Luton would win at Swansea. The most we had expected was a draw. Many of us had argued that that was not improbable, but would take a lot of fighting for; and not a few were perfectly sure that Luton would be beaten. There was a great anxiety to hear the result of the match, and when Mr. Green's wire came through and was posted up outside the Herts Motors there was great jubilation. The news was speedily passed from one to the other, and one was told the result over and over again some time before it was possible to get anywhere near where the telegram was exhibited. The wire from the supporters at Swansea stating that the team would arrive at Luton Midland Station at 11 p.m. resulted in over a thousand people gathering there to welcome the victors. The team were given a very hearty reception, and Wileman, as the man who scored the precious goal, was singled out for special hero-worship. He was shouldered for some distance, but he preferred to use his legs rather than be carried, and he managed to escape from the enthusiasts when they got to New Bedford-road.

"It all depends who scores first," said Mr. Crick when I asked him the previous evening who he thought would win. The vital first goal was Luton's and it was the only goal, but the battle was a fierce one, and the whole of the Luton team deserve credit for the victory. Wileman once more proved his value as a great opportunist. The list of goal scorers which I have compiled shows how well he has done this year. It is very interesting to see how close the three inside forwards keep—Simms, Wileman and Rollinson the list runs, and there is the smallest possible margin between them. Through Wileman scoring on Saturday he ties with Simms in the matter of Southern League goals. Still, there is no need to measure any of the players' value simply and solely by the number he actually scores. A man is sometimes of more value by giving the ball to another player to let him score, and in looking through the reports of all the matches this season one cannot help noticing how on very many occasions the preliminary work was done by the players whose names are not prominent, or do not appear at all, in the list, while just the final tap was given by the men to whose account the goal goes.

But to return to the thing that is uppermost at present—"What about promotion?" Of course, Luton's chances have immensely improved, but the victory at Swansea should not be allowed to produce a feeling of over-confidence. Swansea thought they were going to beat Luton. Shortly Swansea have to come to Luton. Then Luton may suffer a similar fall if they are not careful. The next Southern League match is on Saturday week at Mid-Rhondda. That is going to be a difficult game, for Mid-Rhondda are a tough side. The understanding between the half-backs and the forwards often caused anxiety to the home defence at Brentford last Saturday, and it was not a bad performance of Mid-Rhondda to prevent Brentford winning by more than 3-1. On their own ground Mid-Rhondda are likely to be much more difficult. Stoke, it is true, won there, but that was in September. Since then, Brentford and Croydon could only share points.

Stoke made a useful score (3-1) out of Pontypridd, but at present Luton's danger is from Brentford. Luton must not only win their home matches, but do well away, for if it comes only to a matter of goal average they will stand no chance with Brentford. It is hardly possible to entertain the thought now that Luton will not go up, but there is much yet to be done and no one realises it more than do the players. Croydon are still going along steadily. They did very well to win by 4-0 at Mardy. There was "nothing doing" in the first half, but subsequently Chester got through twice and Hutchins and Allman once.

Luton have canvassed the clubs in the South Eastern League to see if sufficient support can be obtained to ensure their election if they make application for admission. Luton have many things to recommend them and there ought to be no doubt that they would be elected. At any rate, the Directors have decided to make application. That, of course, means getting a reserve team for next season—a course which many football followers will approve. To mention one of the most important advantages of a reserve team, it enables the players who are not in the first eleven getting that practice in matches which keeps them in the best trim should they be called upon to play. At present the Luton men who are not in the first eleven cannot get that practice regularly.

Luton will be playing a "friendly" at St. Albans with the City team next Saturday. The home attack will have something to beat, because in all probability the Luton defence will be Mitchell; Elvey and Jarvie; Fred Hawke, Frith and Bob Hawke. The Luton forwards will include an A.F.A. international.