

How Luton's Goalkeeper Escaped "Marching Orders."

Unfortunate Incident in Saturday's Match.

If Luton Town's supporters are excited over the prospects of promotion to the Club's old place in the premier division of the Southern League, it is equally the case with the players, upon whom the responsibility rests of realising this ambition. There were abundant evidences of it during the return game with Swansea, on the Town ground, on Saturday afternoon. Some of the players could hardly contain themselves under the pressure. They were as "jumpy" as cats on hot bricks, and their play frequently suffered in consequence, especially at critical moments, requiring cool self-possession. But the most striking demonstration of the tension prevailing amongst the players was an incident some five minutes before the interval, which threatened to have serious consequences for the Blues. Swansea had suddenly broken away after a prolonged period of constant pressure, and forced a corner on the left. The flag kick was splendidly placed, so that the ball dropped quite close to the far upright, and it looked like being nasty for Luton. There was a bit of a melee, and as Mitchell was making an effort to put an end to the threatening danger, Ivor Brown, the inside-right, secured by the Swans from Reading, at a time when they were well in the running for promotion, bundled into him. Exactly what happened was not quite clear, but although Brown fell, the referee appeared to have no doubt in his mind that he had committed a foul on the goalkeeper, for a free-kick was promptly whistled in favour of Luton. No sooner had this been given however, than Mitchell retaliated, and aimed a deliberate kick at Brown, as he lay on the ground. He seemed to have completely lost himself, and from the attitude taken up by the two players, it seemed as though there would have been a "set to" if the referee had not been prompt to intervene. Without an instant's hesitation he pointed Mitchell in the direction of the grandstand, and the crowd looked on dumbfounded. Explanations were offered, and vigorous demonstrations were indulged in by various of the Luton players, but they were of no avail. The referee elbowed them all off—and one he seemed to warn because of his persistent pleading—and the hand was kept pointing as the signal for "marching orders," until the Swansea captain intervened. The referee seemed loth even then to depart from disciplinary measures, but eventually he was induced to take the two players on one side and, apparently, after hearing explanations, he came to the conclusion that Mitchell had been offended against as well as offending, with the result that he gave both players a severe curtain lecture, recalled his second decision, and adhered to his first. This meant Mitchell's return to the Luton goal, and a free-kick for the Blues, and the shouts of relief which went up from the crowd could really be felt. The crowd never afterwards felt in a mood for criticising the referee, and the Luton players, as well as their supporters, were loud in their praises at half-time, of the sporting action of the Swansea captain.

Apart from this unfortunate incident—which was an astounding surprise to everyone present—the game was a most pleasantly contested and thoroughly sporting one, and it was enjoyed to the full by a crowd of over eight thousand. It was contested under conditions which were almost ideal, and if the football was not exactly of the highest class order, it was full of thrills, and kept up at a high pace for the greater part of the game. Though no longer serious rivals for promotion, the artistic display given by the Swans last season, when they simply made rings round the Blues, and inflicted in overwhelming fashion their only home defeat in the Second Division, caused them to constitute a great attraction, and with a rainy morning giving place to a delightful afternoon, the ground was fairly well packed, and the game amounted to about £205. Luton once more relied upon the team that has not yet been defeated, and the Swans played the same team which put on 6-1 against Aberdare during the week. It differed in several instances from the team Luton

met at Swansea, but it was stated to be the full strength of the "All Whites." The teams were in charge of Mr. C. Lutwyche, of Birmingham, and, quite apart from his popular decision in regard to the unfortunate Mitchell incident, his control of the game was admired in a way many referees might well envy. He was smart in his rulings, and always had well in hand the whole of the players, who were:—

Luton: Mitchell; Elvey, Robinson; Fred Hawkes, Frith, Bob Hawkes; Durrant, Wileman, Simms, Rollinson, Hoar.

Swansea: Storey; Allman, Bulcock; Duffy, Bassett, Cubberley; Messer, Brown, Weir, Ball, Swarbrick.

"Jimmy" Bygrave must have taken great pains with the preparation of the playing pitch, because it looked Al, and though on the soft side, afforded ideal going. It lent itself aptly to fast movements, and these were developed so rapidly that excitement ruled high from the very outset. Bob Hawkes met with a considerable amount of criticism in electing to kick into the goal which is known as "playing down the slope," when it was found that the visitors had the benefit of both sun and wind, and the criticisms would probably have been even more pronounced but for a lucky escape which the Blues enjoyed in the first minute or so. There was ample time for either of the backs to have cleared from a fast breakaway by the Swans, but, after showing a hesitancy which led Robinson to dash up, Elvey went to take the ball, and so muddled his colleague. As a result Weir was allowed to get clean through. The chance was one which should certainly have given the visitors a leading advantage, but blazing away hard, the centre-forward skied the ball well over the bar, and the sigh of relief which went up all round the ground was eloquent!

The first half did not quite live up to its sensational opening. The wind suddenly sprang up to such an extent that the loss of the toss gave Swansea a material advantage, and they had quite a fair share of the exchanges. Their share was, however, mostly in mid-field. The Luton halves were right "on song," and never gave them a minute's peace, and the backs kicked and tackled with such resolution that the Swans rarely had a chance of testing Mitchell. The homesters were also up against a resolute and resourceful pair of backs, but they showed up better than their opponents in taking chances, and Storey had to be pretty often on the alert. In the early stages the Luton right loomed large in the exchanges, and Durrant in particular was prominent, while Fred Hawkes only just missed with a lovely volley over the bar. The Swansea defenders were very lucky to divert a ramming shot from Simms, and they had an equally narrow escape from the corner, one of the defenders skying the ball in the goalmouth in such a fashion that the goalkeeper was drawn out of goal, and there was a very exciting time, Bob Hawkes trying hard, but failing, to get a drive home in the goalkeeper's absence. The Blues were finding it difficult to get an uninterrupted aim at the goal, and when at last Wileman managed it, Storey brought off a magnificent save at the second attempt.

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The only goal of the half came as near midway through as matters, and it was a really thrilling point. Getting the ball near the halfway line, Simms planted it out to Hoar, the local centred before the defence could recover, and Simms sped in pursuit for all he was worth. Storey, scenting the danger, darted out, and it looked odds on him, but the wind held the ball up, and getting there first with his head, Simms had the gratification of seeing the ball miss the goalkeeper and slowly career through the open goal. The visitors continued to hold their own, and once or twice got dangerous, but the only time they netted the ball was when Mitchell made no attempt to prevent Weir converting an obvious off-sider. Most of the excitement was crowded into the last five minutes, when the incident already narrated took place, and was almost immediately followed by a deliberate foul by Allman on Hoar in the penalty area, after the outside-left had cleverly outwitted him. A penalty was awarded, and Elvey blazed with all his might against the wind, but shot the ball over the hoardings, with the result that Luton had to be content with a half-time score of

Luton 1, Swansea 0.

The exchanges had been so evenly balanced that the crowd congratulated themselves upon the Blues being able to resume with their regular goalkeeper, and a full team, because after Simms had once got himself into such a tangle that he was not able to shoot effectively, after getting in fine position, there was a regular bombardment of the Luton goal, in which both Frith and Elvey performed heroic service. Weir proved himself a splendid worker, and was foremost in all the Swansea attacks, but he once more missed one of the best scoring opportunities the visitors had. Dashing off at topmost speed, he so effectively raced through the opposition that there was nothing left but for Mitchell to come out. He did, but missed, and even then Weir struck the cross-bar with his shot. There was still a chance for him to retrieve his miss because the rebound gave him possession, but Elvey tackled like a demon, and robbing first one and then another of the forwards, he brought off one of the most brilliant clearances of the day.

The second half, like the first, had almost half run its course, when the Blues struck a scoring patch, though Wileman was very unlucky once to be cut off his feet before he could put paid to one of his characteristic winding dashes. When they did start, however, there was no holding them, and for a space of about ten minutes they were quite irresistible. Durrant, receiving from his colleague on the other wing, cleverly slipped the half and with a backward pass enabled Wileman to put Luton two up with a first time swerver, which was nicely out of Storey's reach, although he tried a full length dive. Durrant followed this up with a left foot shot on his own, which was fisted over the bar, and led to a corner, from which Simms headed on to Rollinson, and the inside-left used his head in turn to put the ball right away from the goalkeeper, and thus make number three. There was an interval of two or three minutes, and then Simms rushed the goalkeeper and drove him over the line with the ball in his possession. The goalkeeper claimed that Simms' affectionate embrace had been the means of his carrying the ball out of play, and some of the visitors were still contesting the corner-kick award, when Durrant took it, and Simms shot through a crowd of feet, the goalkeeper, being unsighted, allowing it to slip between his hands. Immediately afterwards Wileman scored another with the greatest ease, from a forward pass by Rollinson, but few would have complained if the referee had given him off-side. Swansea were a thoroughly beaten team after this brilliant rally, and the Blues always looked the more likely scorers. They met with no further successes, however, and so the final result was:—

Luton 5, Swansea 0.

The score was not an accurate representation of the run of the game, and Luton were unquestionably lucky to win by the heaviest margin that has been registered against Swansea during the two seasons. Luton have figured in Second Division football. The outstanding point of difference between the two teams was that one took the chances that came their way, and the other did not, and the Blues owed a good deal to the work

of their two extreme wingers, and the untiring dash of Simms. The centre was always worrying the Swansea defenders, but apart from this the forward work of the homesters was not of its usually high stamp. The line which shone most of all was the middle line, Frith employing his usual tactics to perfection, while both the Hawkes were simply brilliant. Elvey and Robinson both did many great things, but it was the half-back line that stood the Blues in the greatest stead. Against them the Swansea forwards crumbled up in astounding fashion, and Weir alone showed enterprise, and was a real source of danger. He was unfortunate enough to miss the two best opportunities that came his way, but all the same he gave a fine display. The halves did not compare with Luton's, except perhaps for Bassett, but the backs played a sound game, Allman being simply brilliant all through, while Storey kept a splendid goal—whenever he had a chance.