

FITTING FINALE.

Champions beaten at Luton.

Promotion Partners' Last Match in Second Division.

The curtain has never been rung down upon a season of the Luton Town Club under happier auspices than obtained on Saturday. It has been a season which will stand out as one of the landmarks in the history of the club by reason of its glorious record of success from both the playing and financial points of view, and this double-barrelled aspect of the season's success was emphasised in marked degree in the closing match. The playing success was reflected in a victory which enabled the Blues' to return to what Lutonians consider to be Luton's rightful place in the world of Southern League football with the unique record among this season's Second Division clubs, and of not having dropped a single point in the fifteen home matches of their League programme, and with the loss of the Second Division championship only by the slightest fraction on goal average. Fully ten thousand supporters enthused over the defeat of Croydon Common, and demonstrated the high-water mark of keenness and enthusiasm—and incidentally financial success—with which the season has been marked for the gate constituted another record, being the largest sixpenny League gate the club has ever taken at a Saturday match. Half an hour before the game was due to commence the crowded state of the grand stand and the open terraces gave promise of the record gate of £321 realised by the Stoke match on Good Friday being approached, but the late comers did not prove so numerous nor was the ninepenny stand so largely patronised. Still it was a remarkable crowd for the end of the season, and the takings were returned at £271 or only £15 short of the record gate achieved in the First Division of the Southern League on the occasion of Watford's Boxing Day visit of five seasons ago.

Altogether it was a glorious wind-up of the season for Luton, and the weather was magnificently in keeping with the occasion. Generally speaking, the Town Club have been very fortunate this season in the matter of weather conditions, and Saturday was perhaps the most brilliant day of all. Indeed, it was remarked that, what with the afternoon's delightful sunshine and the wonderful array of boater hats round the Town ground, the tense interest and enthusiasm aroused by the successful culmination of the promotion campaign, and the energy and keenness which prevailed among the players, it might easily have been imagined that we were in September and not in April, but for the bare patches which testified to the well worn condition of the playing pitch. The weather conditions were so pronouncedly summery that with the promotion issue settled beyond all question and signing on prospects probably already determined in the great majority of cases, there was abundant excuse for the players taking things comfortably, but they were all out to a man and there could not have more keenness and resolution displayed if the issue of the encounter had been of the most vital character for both sides. The supporters of the respective clubs were every bit as keen as the players, and the match therefore had in it all the elements that go to make up stirring scenes in the football arena. Light blue favours were as prominent among the crowd as straw hats, and the red and white of Croydon Common was fairly in evidence. One party of enthusiasts arrived at the ground in three taxis profusely decorated with red and white, and in one of the reserved bays of the stand there was a liberal sprinkling of the Robin's colours, displayed not only in rosettes, but in incongruous looking red and white straw hats, and rather more artistic flags of the same hue, on which was emblazoned a cock robin perched on top of a football. The attendance all told, was estimated as being close upon eleven thousand, and some of the Croydon following claimed that they had a thousand supporters present, but it is very doubtful indeed whether the number reached any like that figure. What following the visitors had was certainly not lacking in enthusiasm, but the extent to which they made themselves heard was nothing like the noise made either by the three hundred Lutonians who roused the people up at Swansea or the five hundred or so who demonstrated at Brentford, and from what one saw and heard of them it is unlikely that the Croydon Common contingent numbered more than five hundred.

Croydon Common were very keen on winding-up their season with a victory not only to preserve their unbeaten record against their English rivals in the Second Division, and so finish with a championship lead on points, but also to avenge the F.A. cup defeat they sustained at Luton in November, and the feat of the Blues' in also capturing a league point and scoring the only Second Division goal registered against the Robin's at their Nest. They were able to command their full strength and it speaks volumes for the good fortune the Robin's have enjoyed in freedom from serious injuries that this team differed in only one instance from the eleven which was chosen for the opening match of the season. It was exactly the same team that Luton defeated in the cup-tie, and with the solitary exception of Chester, the eleven from which the Blues' scratchiest side of the season captured a league point at Selhurst, and the Blues were very confident of being able to hold their own. "It's five we want" was the maxim of the home supporters, and there are a good many who still think the task, necessary to give Luton the championship, would not have been impossible of accomplishment if only the Blues' could have commanded their unbeaten side. As was generally anticipated, however, the two members of this side who were injured in the

holiday games had to be content with the role of onlookers. Rollinson has had such a dreadful-looking leg since the holidays that there was never any possibility of his turning out, Durrant was very keen, and in the early part of the week very hopeful of being able to play, but it was only too patent that he could not possibly stand the strain. Brewis and Stevens therefore again came in. It was Bob Hawkes first appearance against Croydon Common this season, and there were five of the team who did not play in the Cup-tie last November, while four only of the players occupied the same positions as in the Second Division, meeting at Selhurst. The list of players is appended:—

Luton: Mitchell; Elvey, Robinson; Fred Hawkes; Frith, Bob Hawkes; Stevens, Wileman, Simms, Brewis, Hoar.

Croydon: Williamson; Little, Hutchins; Yenson, Bushell, Nash; Kingaby, Allman, Page, Chester, Barnfather.

Referee, Mr. A. Shallcross, Leek.

The game provided as rousing a finale as anyone could wish for, being brim full of the lively type of incident that makes for excitement, but the standard of football was hardly in the same street. There was too much of the lively cup-tie

spirit in evidence to admit of football of championship level, and added to this the strength of the wind was calculated to upset any attempts to cultivate the picturesque side of the game. The Blues had the wind behind them in attacking their favourite scoring end, against a bright and bothersome sun, and it soon became evident that the assistance it gave in keeping play for the most part in Croydon territory, was counter-balanced by the handicap it afforded to the forwards in preventing a proper control being retained over the ball. This was the more pronounced because of the pitch being in a particularly lively condition, and exciting goal scoring attempts were more the exception than the rule.

Brewis early had two good chances given him by Hoar, but missed the first, and fumbled the other. In the second instance he hooked the ball over to Simms, who tried a first timer, and went very near. It was the left wing who was mostly prominent, and the first time the other pair got going, Stevens was badly sprawled by Hutchins, when he seemed certain to get clear. Hutchins may be a very good back, but his tactics have never been appreciated by Lutonians, and the crowd did not forget to let him know what they thought of him. This sort of thing seemed, how-

ever, to be part of the Robins' defensive policy, for almost every time there appeared a danger of Luton's outside wingers getting clear, they were unfairly brought down, and Luton had to console themselves with a free-kick. Hutchins was not so much an offender as Little, who seemed to get annoyed at the consistency with which Hoar outwitted him, and not only used his weight to the fullest extent, but also stopped the local player by other methods which caused him to be more than once spoken to by the referee. Free-kicks were pretty numerous, and two of them gave Williamson his first anxious moments, Fred Hawkes just going wide, while a long shot from Robinson bounced awkwardly in front of the goal, and rose over the bar.

Frith was playing a great game, and the Croydon men could scarcely ever get going. The first time they got anywhere near the Luton end was from a free-kick near the corner flag, against Elvey, which Chester headed wide, and the break-away was quite a temporary affair. The Luton forwards were working splendidly together up to a certain point, but over-eagerness, together with the force of the wind resulted in a failure to finish well. There was a good deal of muddling, and in one of these muddles the Croydon backs got into a tangle with Williamson, who came out, and the ball was very luckily cleared. Brewis and Simms between them spoiled a great chance. Either left to himself could have scored with ease, but they got in one another's way, and Brewis, who took the shot, was far from effective. The game had been going twenty minutes before Williamson was called upon to do anything brilliant, and then he rose to the occasion in great style. With a lovely pass, Wileman set Stevens on the run, and following up to take the return, drove in a characteristic first time effort. It was from one of those angles in which Wileman seems to revel for shots, and jumping up, Williamson tipped over the bar a great effort.

The first real danger which came from the Robins resulted from some muddling on the part of the defence. First, Robinson trod on the ball in the penalty area, and although Elvey cleared when things looked awkward, the ball was quickly returned to the centre, and Frith missed an opportunity to relieve. Kingaby thereupon dashed in, and for once, beating Robinson, sprung in a lightning shot, which the wind carried clean across the goal. Barnfather returned it into the goalmouth, and Frith had to give a corner. This was the end of the pressure, and a minute later Croydon were congratulating themselves upon a narrow escape. Simms raced through across to the right wing, and sent the ball across the goal, with Brewis unmarked. As the ball was on the ground it seemed an odds on chance for a goal, but just as the player framed for his shot, the ball bounced up almost at right angles, and ran out of his reach. Hoar gathered it up, and got in a shot, but this was saved. A goal looked like coming again, when Simms and Wileman ran through very fast, but the ball was too speedy for them, and Williamson got there first, and warded off the danger.

The Blues continued to be well on top, but it wanted less than a quarter of an hour to half-time, when the strains of "the death of poor Cock Robin" from the crowd greeted the first goal. Hoar, receiving a fine opening from Simms, swung the ball across the field. Wileman helped it on to Stevens, Stevens quickly sent it back, and with one of those dashes Lutonians know so well, Wileman beat an opponent, turned the ball on to his left foot, and like a flash, had Williamson well beaten with a low drive, which was right in the corner. Luton were again dangerous immediately afterwards, for Hoar rushed Little, and caused him to completely miskick, but Williamson rushed out and cleared the danger. After this it was by no means all Luton. On the contrary, the Blues could congratulate themselves that the Robins were not on equal terms at half-time. In clearing a rush by the right wing, Bob Hawkes dropped the ball across his own goal to the Croydon left. Barnfather ran on to the goal line, and centred close in. Page was right on it, and with Mitchell helpless, a goal seemed unavoidable, but Page headed on to the upright, and the ball rebounded very luckily to Frith, for him to head away. Even then the pressure relieved until the Robins had failed to take advantage of a flag-kick, and the visitors again got very threatening, while Bob Hawkes was having an injury to the knee attended to. Robinson also got in the "wars," in more senses than one, after Bob had returned, and as he had to leave for a few minutes for a change of clothing the Blues were well content for half-time to arrive with the score:—

Luton 1, Croydon 0.

A goal lead was nothing to write home about, with such a strong wind to face, and this was soon appreciated, for within ten minutes the Robins were level. They had been doing nearly all the pressing, but they had been well held by the defence until they scored, and ninety-nine out of every hundred spectators are doubtless, still certain in their own minds that the goal ought not to have been allowed to count. Chester was enabled by faulty work in defence to get possession close in. He successfully drew Elvey, and presented Page with a forward pass. Page was quite clear, and although Frith dashed back, the centre managed to slip round and, shooting as Mitchell darted out in a "smothering" attempt, was an easy scorer. He must have been off-side by some three or four yards, but still the referee did not think so, and therefore Luton had to set about putting a better face on things. It was a hard task that lay before them, but they never faltered, and they did heaps better than Croydon had done against the wind. There were times when Luton were having quite the better of the exchanges, and certainly they had the greater number of scoring opportunities. Dashing round Hutchins, Stevens, by brilliant work, in spite of persistent attentions by the back, brought off a centre, which gave Simms a chance, he would have taken nine time out of ten, but this was the tenth. He entirely failed to trap the ball, and it got away from him, for Williamson to effect an easy clearance.

Mitchell went full length to a long range shot from the right, to see it go beyond his reach, just wide of the post, and then came another chance for Simms, who once more failed to get the ball under control. Wileman looked all over a scorer when he nicely set his head to a centre with which Brewis completed a markedly clever piece of work, only for the ball to glance outside while Simms, on another occasion, had the ball nicely placed at his feet, and half volleyed over the bar. It was really exasperating to see the number of near things there were at the Croydon end within the space of ten minutes, but the Blues were playing so forcefully in attack, that with all their failures to utilise opportunities, a leading goal always seemed imminent.

It came in the last ten minutes, and Wileman was again the player favoured with the inspired moment. He would never have had the chance, only that Simms, in his eagerness, clean missed

another lovely opportunity from a centre by Brewis. Wileman was not so favourably situated as the centre, for he had to get right round the back to get at anything like an angle. It was odds against him, but it was just his mark, and refusing to be knocked off the ball, he rounded his man, let fly for the yard of space which was all of the goal that was open to him, and landed a beauty by Williamson. It was one of Wileman's greatest goals, and it sent the crowd exuberant with delight. The waving straw hats on the terraces were a sight for the gods, and mingled with the cheers were enthusiastic shouts of "Good old Arthur." Then we heard something more about "Cock Robin," but the game was by no means over. Within a minute of Luton going ahead, Croydon were lucky not to be beaten again, but Croydon's last spurt caused a good

deal of anxiety, Mitchell saving a sparkling half volley from Page, high up against the post, and dashing out to hand away and clear a centre from Kingaby. Hutchins very smartly returned the ball into goal from the middle line, but Mitchell was back in goal ready for it, and this was the last of Croydon. Luton kept up a steady pressure, and Simms had one more chance. But it was not his day, and so the final score was —

Luton 2, Croydon 1.

Croydon may be the champions of the Second Division, but they are certainly not Luton's superiors on the games between the two this season, especially bearing in mind the fact that they have not once encountered the particular eleven of the Blues which has not once been beaten. With Rollinson and Durrant in the forward line on Saturday, there is quite a probability that Luton would have registered the number of goals sufficient to have given them the championship, and even without them there were abundant opportunities for the Blues to have won by a more substantial margin than the odd goal. The Robins are entitled to take pride in their defence, but the Blues forwards, both with and against the wind, were more than a match for them, and it only required a little coolness and steadying influence near goal to have produced a crop of goals. It is a long time since the Blues have missed so many palpable scoring chances. Simms worked hard, but simply could not get on the target, and it was quite a disappointing finish of the season for him. With Wileman, it was just the other way about, it being quite his best game of the holidays. Stevens was as dashing as ever, and with all his lack of control, was among the most dangerous men in the forward line. Hoar was very clever, and most valuable in the first half, but he had to put up with a lot of buffetings, and the influence of this showed itself only too clearly in his subsequent display. Still Luton were much better served in front than Croydon. Page was a pretty smart opportunist in the centre, but the work of the forwards as a whole was not great, their outstanding player being Barnfather, whose brilliant work was unequalled.

There was little, if anything to choose between the two sides in defence. What there was in it lay in Luton's favour, by reason of the consistently fine work of their halves. Bob Hawkes appeared to be feeling the stress of five matches in eight days, but Fred Hawkes was as untiring and invaluable as ever, and Frith was again an outstanding figure in the role which he plays so well, proving a thorn to almost everyone of the Croydon forwards in turn. His fine form was a striking contrast to that of Luton's old centre half, Bushell, who was very much out of the picture, and a long way below the level of his two colleagues. Williamson had many more opportunities than Mitchell in goal, and fully maintained his reputation, but if the Luton forwards had seized their opportunities, he would have had to have been simply marvellous to have prevented a record score being put up against him. Hutchins was not nearly so prominent as he has usually been against Luton, Stevens being quite unconcerned by his vigour, and Little was Croydon's most serviceable back, though his tactics did not appeal to the crowd. Still, for once, the home backs did quite as well as Croydon's. Elvey found a handful in Barnfather, but was very steady, and Robinson's dashing work proved very disconcerting to the visitors.