

EX-CHAMPIONS BEATEN

In Spite of One Back Game at Luton.

A plentiful sprinkling of khaki uniform gave quite a unique setting to the opening Southern League match of the season on the Luton Town ground on Saturday afternoon, and incidentally

added materially to the revenue of the Club at a time when most clubs are suffering from diminished "gates," for there must have been fully a thousand Territorials among the crowd of eight thousand. The soldiers were impartial spectators, and those who were making their first acquaintance of Southern League football, must have been the reverse of favourably impressed, because although Luton's opponents were Plymouth Argyle, the champions of two years ago, fifth in the list last season, and a heap better side than Luton met in League football last season, the less said about the football the better. Neither side could make the excuse that they were a new combination, for the Blues had the same team out as at Southampton, and the Argyle had quite a familiar side, except that their old "stagers," Butler and Atterbury, were missing from the back division. The players were:—

Luton.—Mitchell; Elvey and Robinson; Fred Hawkes, Frith, and Needham; Roberts, Wileman, Simms, Rollinson, and Hoar.

Plymouth Argyle.—Horne; Forbes, and Russell; McCormick, Wilcox, and Baker; Kirkpatrick, H. W. Raymond, Burch, Bowler, and Blott.

Right from the start the Argyle gave one the impression of being an extremely clever side, built up on experience, but inside the first five minutes the first promise of a brilliant display of football was marred. During that brief period two of the Argyle men were in the "wars," and a dust up in the goalmouth resulted in Kirkpatrick retiring for good, with broken bone in the nose. The game was never the same afterwards. At one period of the first half the Argyle had only nine players on the field, Blott indulging in a wild leap for the ball, which gave him a nasty shaking up in consequence of Frith setting a back, and causing the Plymouth man to perform an unexpected somersault. Fortunately five minutes retirement set him right, but it was a marvel there were not more casualties, because the Argyle must be about the biggest side in the League, and they did not forget to let it be known to the Luton lightweights, while they were most reckless in the use of their feet, lunging about at bouncing balls in a manner calculated to strike terror in the heart of any opponent. Still the game was completely spoilt, quite apart from this. After losing Kirkpatrick, the Argyle consistently played the one back game. They could hardly be blamed for doing it, and they certainly did it very cleverly, and the Luton forwards never showed the slightest promise of coping with it. The referee, Mr. W. C. Gillett, of Willesden, was as keen as mustard on infractions of the off-side rule, and nine times out of ten that the Blues got into their opponent's half, the whistle brought them to a halt.

It was largely due to this that Luton claimed only a one goal lead at the change of ends, for with all their clever forward work—and some of it was particularly pleasing to the eye—they were handicapped by having only four men in front, that Mitchell was never really tried once. The only goal came about five minutes after the start—just after Kirkpatrick had retired. Wileman went through in his best well-known style and shot hard across the goal. Rollinson blocked the ball, but was unable to get in an effective shot, and amid a profuse waving of straw hats, Sid Hoar dashed in, took the rebound from the back, and landed home just inside the post. Rollinson had just previously missed a glorious opportunity through being bothered by the sun, with the result that in taking a high centre from Roberts, he seemed to be quite oblivious to the fact that he had only the goalkeeper to beat, and instead of shooting, turned the ball out to the wing. He missed another fine opportunity later on. It was the first time for a quarter of an hour the Blues had got near the goal without being pulled up for off-side, and the ball came across so nicely that Rollinson had the goal open to him. Evidently he did not mean taking any risks, but he occupied so much time that when he shot he had what should have been an easy opening blocked. Simms was not in luck's way. After once getting through and scoring from an off-side position, he had a magnificent shot fisted out by Horne in great style, and in the next minute he was robbed of what looked a certain goal by the luckiest of accidents—for Plymouth. He was not more than three yards from goal when a free-kick from Needham dropped at his feet, and his effort might have been wagered on as a goal all the way, but somehow or other Horne got in the way. On another occasion, too, Horne saved from Simms at close quarters amid great excitement, but on this occasion it was due to Simms failing to make full use of a chance cleverly presented to him by Wileman from Hoar's clever centring.

In the second half the Argyle shifted McCormick into the forward line, and relied on Russell to play the one back game pure and simple, and they did much better. Luton were extremely lucky not to lose the lead inside five minutes, as from scrambling play near the corner flag, the ball came across from the left, and McCormick headed on to the under part of the bar, the ball returning into play with Mitchell hopelessly beaten. For the best part of twenty minutes, the Blues were penned in in their own half, being ruled off-side nearly every time they got going. Simms got another unstoppable one in the net from an off-side position, but at last Hoar beat the visitors at their own game. Running down fast he drew the defence, and placed all his colleagues in good position before centring. Russell got his head to the centre, but Rollinson was waiting for the rebound, and sent the ball across the goal. Simms made a bid for goal, and when his shot was beaten down, Wileman took up the running and scored right in the corner. Simms had the hardest of luck a minute later with a brilliant header from Rollinson's centre, which grazed the outside of the post, but with a two goal lead, the homesters seemed inclined to take things too easily, and in the last ten minutes they had a bit of a fright. McCormick, having gone into the centre, ran through from a close passing movement, and after getting on to the line, extricated himself from an awkward position, and shot across the goal. Mitchell intercepted the shot on the ground, and could easily have cleared, but there was a misunderstanding between him and Fred Hawkes, and it left Raymond with an easy goal. There was a narrow escape from an equaliser in the next minute, when Blott hit the outside of the net, and more than once after this the Argyle were dangerous, but Mitchell did not have the anxieties of Horne, who was once actually "floored" by Roberts, and had to throw the ball behind, and also made the save of the game from Rollinson. The inside left took the ball on the half volley, after Roberts had cleared the back, and centred beautifully, and the lightning character of the movement pointed to a certain goal, but Horne got his fist to the shot and effected a brilliant stop. The result was, therefore, Luton 2, Plymouth Argyle 1.

One thing the game clearly demonstrated was that the Luton forwards are not up to defeating the one back tactics, easily falling into the traps laid for them. Hoar was easily the pick of the attack, but none of the others really shone to any extent. Frith was very much in the limelight, and did heaps of good things, but the outstanding man on the side was Elvey, who played a great game, fearing nothing, and getting in every time. Although disorganised by the loss of Kirkpatrick, the Plymouth forwards showed a wonderful capacity for combination, and the Blues defence did well to hold them in check so effectively. Wilcox, at centre half, was, as usual, a tower of

strength, Russell, the Welsh international back, secured from Merthyr, got through a lot of heavy work in good style, and Horne gave a masterly exhibition in goal—as he nearly always has done at Luton.