

FOOTBALL NOTES AND NEWS.

A BOLT FROM THE BLUE.

Luton's unexpected performance at Gillingham.

Luton Town have two home Southern League games this week, and supporters may reasonably expect something better than they have seen hitherto this season, after the "bolt from the blue" for which the Town team were responsible at Gillingham on Saturday. In the light of the form displayed in home matches the spectators on the Town ground could scarcely believe the news when the half-time score was announced as 3-0 in the Blues' favour, and their victory by 4-2 would seem to indicate that the recent team changes have had the desired effect. The Blues have now compensated for the three points dropped at home, and stand fourth on the table, with a record of: Played 7, won 3, lost 2, drawn 2, goals for 15, against 18, points 8.

As was generally expected, the exclusion of Wileman and Rollinson did not last for long, and they again took their places at Gillingham. As a matter of fact, with the exception of Lindley for Hoar at outside left, the side which turned out at Gillingham was identical with the team which made such an inglorious show in the last away match at Boleyn Castle. But, thank goodness, no one would have recognised them as the same set in playing ability. The home programme contained a special welcome to Luton, stating that no team was more popular on Southern League grounds than Bob Hawkes and Co. At the same time there was another note asking their supporters to give their own team a "rouser," and by their encouragement help Gillingham to gather two valuable points and then feel sorry for Luton afterwards. As the result below shows, things did not quite happen as per programme.

Gillingham are one of the clubs very hard hit by the war, a big proportion of the regular followers being somewhere in the vicinity of the North Sea, and during the week the news of the sinking of the three cruisers must have cast a gloom over the district, as it was stated that quite 500 of the victims are permanent residents of Chatham and Gillingham when on shore. The crowd on Saturday would be just over 4,000, but the khaki element was not nearly so pronounced as at the Luton matches, as the 12,000 recruits who are gathered in that district have not yet got into uniform.

The Gillingham team did not contain many of the old faces, and has been almost entirely remodelled since Luton's last visit. The forward line is quite a new set, numbering in its ranks such well-known players as Gilligan, of Bristol City, and Hooper, of Notts Forest, while Pinkney has turned out for Everton on several occasions. Until last Saturday at Exeter they had never failed to find the net, and the home officials openly expressed themselves as very hopeful of increasing the bag of both points and goals.

The players turned out as follows:—

Luton:—Mitchell; Elvey, Robinson; F. Hawkes, Johnson, R. Hawkes; Roberts, Wileman, Simms, Rollinson, and Lindley.

Gillingham:—Bailey; Mosley, Leslie; Mahon, Lee, Johnson, Hooper, Pinkney, Glen, Gilligan, and Tatton.

Referee, Mr. C. W. Gillett, Willesden.

The pitch was, of course, pretty rough, as most pitches are at present, and as the ball was quite a new one it was several minutes before either team settled down to accurate work. The ball beat the man time after time in a most tantalising manner, but when the game had been in progress only a few minutes it was evident that Luton were not going to shape so indifferently as in some recent matches, and the improvement which manifested itself to some extent against Norwich City was continued and bettered. Still the first attack was made by Gillingham. Tatton getting nicely through and sending well across, Hooper had a chance through Robinson failing to secure the centre, but Mitchell easily dropped on to the shot sent in by the old Notts Forest winger. At the opposite end Lindley copied his outside left rival by dropping the ball across, but Leslie intercepted, and danger was thus averted.

Offside spoilt Luton's chances two or three times, but Roberts was giving a bit of trouble on the extreme right, and from one of his centres Rollinson shot in. Bailey punched this away, but he did not shape too confidently, and gave evidence that if sufficiently hustled he would not be at all sure. When Luton came down again Wileman received a clever pass from Simms when nicely placed, and it only needed one of Wileman's "expresses" to open the score, but Arthur got his toe too far under the ball, and it sailed harmlessly over. It appeared likely a moment later that Luton might have to pay rather dearly for not taking advantage of such a promising opening, for straight away the ball was transferred, and but for Bob Hawkes coming to the rescue after Robinson was beaten, Mitchell would probably have been compelled to pick the ball out of the net. Even then the danger was not all over, for Elvey let in Tatton rather badly, and both Gilligan and Pinkney had a chance to have a pop at goal. Eventually the last named took a shot, but the aim was very faulty, and it travelled wide.

Fifteen minutes after the start Roberts managed to clear all opposition, and dropped his centre nicely to Simms, who promptly let drive, only to see the ball rebound off the upright when Bailey appeared well beaten. Rollinson, however, was on the ball in an instant, and with a cool drive along the ground sent it right away from Bailey into the net. It all looked so nice and simple that the spectators scarcely realised that a goal had been scored, but Luton had taken the lead and were now out for points in real earnest. For a time they completely monopolised the play, and seven minutes later Roberts increased the lead on his own with a long dropping shot, which might have been intended for a centre, but which Bailey allowed to roll behind him into the far corner of the net.

Being faced with a big uphill task the Gillingham forwards did not shape at all likely to bring about an alteration. When they did succeed in getting into the Luton quarters they were not at all confident, and seemed far too excited to take proper aim, and Mitchell in consequence was chiefly engaged in taking goal kicks when he was not watching his own forwards attacking. Eighteen minutes before the interval Wileman, seizing a chance from another centre from Roberts, rushed Luton's third goal through, and the game was not resumed for a minute or so, as during this attack Johnson, the Gillingham left half, got in the wars, and left the field for some little attention from the trainer. The rest of the first half was chiefly remarkable for the poor attempts made by the home forwards to improve upon any midfield advantage by a decent shot at goal. Hooper and Pinkney had more than one such chance to test Mitchell, but almost invariably they sent the ball yards wide, and at half-time the score stood—

Luton 3, Gillingham 0.

On the resumption Tatton was first to get dangerous, but again the final effort was badly directed, and the ball hit the side of the net. Then Luton had quite a spell of the attacking, the ball being sent in time after time, but the fact of Roberts getting offside relieved the situation for the time. During one of these Luton attacks, Leslie got injured, and the game was stopped, but only for a minute, and then Gillingham forced two or three corners in quick succession without actually threatening the goal. For a time the play slackened, with Luton apparently content with their lead. Then midway in the second half a shot from Simms brought Bailey out of goal, and in stopping the ball he fell over. Wileman managed to secure possession as it rolled away and placed in the open space.

With a four-goal lead and only about twenty minutes to play Luton appeared to have matters well in hand, and as a matter of fact seemed quite likely to increase their advantage, when one of the

most extraordinary decisions of the match raised the hopes of the home supporters. When the referee blew his whistle no one in the stand could imagine what had happened. The Gillingham officials could not understand how any of their players were offside. Yet this was the first impression of the stoppage, but when it was discovered all the players were taking up a position outside the penalty area it was seen a penalty kick had been awarded to Gillingham. What had happened could not be decided, and the general opinion was that Johnson must have handled the ball when he headed it away, for he was the last player to come into contact with it. Until after the match this was the accepted version on the stand. On inquiry, however, after the match it was discovered that Wileman was the suspected culprit, but he denied all knowledge of fouling a Gillingham player, and, indeed, not a single Gillingham player appealed—not even the player supposed to have been fouled. Anyway, a penalty was given, and Leslie was entrusted with the task of converting it. He drove the ball all along the ground into the net, Mitchell making no attempt whatever to prevent it scoring, for it was quite hopeless to do so.

This goal did not arouse Luton to any sense of danger. Indeed the home attack was very poor indeed, and it seemed to be merely a case of playing out time. But four minutes from the finish a sudden attack caused Mitchell to make a huge punch to clear a shot as a result of a free kick a moment previously. The Luton goalkeeper had apparently relieved the danger, but the ball was returned into goal. Mitchell, with a crowd of players in front of him, shouted "Right!" but they failed to get out of his way when he rushed out, and he did not properly get at the ball, which dropped behind him, and Lee, who was actually nearer the goal, placed the ball into the net. To get it he had to knock it down with his hand, but the referee could not see through the crowd of players, and the goal stood. It rather spoils Luton's goal record on the table, for it made the result—

Luton 4, Gillingham 2.

In no game this season have Luton been so superior to their opponents as at Gillingham, and it was unfortunate that two goals scored so late in the game should spoil what would have been a fine performance, particularly as both goals were not above suspicion, but it is one of the fortunes of war, and must be endured. Mitchell had really nothing to do, for the majority of the shots would have been stopped by any experienced custodian. The backs on the whole did well, but the chief feature of the game from a Luton point of view was the great improvement at half-back. Bob Hawkes was in something like his old form, and as he gains confidence with his leg will yet prove a big force in Luton's future progress. But all three members of the middle division played more methodical football than before this season, and this is where there has been a falling off. Roberts was the main leader in the dangerous attacks which led up to the goals, and his work was very favourably commented upon by the home spectators. Wileman and Rollinson were again the dangerous couple they proved last season, but Simms was a trifle unlucky with his shooting. Lindley was not so prominent as his comrade on the opposite wing, but he did better than in any previous match this season.

The play of the Gillingham team was very disappointing to their own officials who, by the way, were very generous in their praise of the Luton men. They did not expect such a showing up from what was only a "Second Division" team, for eight of the Luton players were, of course, in the promotion eleven. Probably the most successful Gillingham player was their centre-half, Lee, and his fine physique stood him in good stead. Forward they have two or three clever midfield players, but their efforts at shooting were very poor, and they will have to improve in this particular if they are to earn a safe position on the table.