

FOOTBALL.

This Way to the Second Division!

[BY CRUSADER.]

We have no wish to renew acquaintance with the minor Welsh clubs and their grounds and all the other troubles of the Second Division of the Southern League, but we are getting perilously near it. At any rate Luton is well on that road, and it is time that a cut was made, though it is not easy, to get back to the straight but narrow way. Something pretty definite will have to be done soon to improve things. These notes are being written before Wednesday's match, and the position is that out of 11 matches 6 have been lost. Of these 6 lost, 4 have been at home. Altogether we have 8 points from 11 matches, 7 of which were at home, and 16 goals scored against 24. Mark Tapley would lose his smile at that if he were a supporter of professional football in Luton.

The progress of the war had a second place on Saturday night in the conversation of a good many of those who gathered together in their favourite meeting places. Everyone wants something to be done, and most football followers—in fact all of them—have their opinions as to what should be done. But I am afraid it will be the old question of money. The critic, who was very, very drastic, might suggest in Kaiser-like manner that there should be almost a clean sweep; that only two or three men were worth positions in the first team. But that would be ridiculous, although the fact remains that only two players showed really good form on Saturday, and they stood out clearly from the rest of the Luton side. Those players were Elvey (at right back) and Roberts (at outside-left)—the two men who have so far this season made their mark in the team. Had Elvey not played such a fine game on Saturday, Exeter would have won by more than two goals to nil. He timed his rushes to a nicety, and cleared without any hesitation. More than once he covered Robinson very well, too. In fact Elvey induced the feeling of thorough confidence in him.

That is just the feeling that Robinson fails to give. He will clear with fine vigour and show a capital energy in striving to stifle a lively winger, but all the time when there is a duel between Robinson and an opponent, you have an unsettled sort of feeling, a fear that Robinson will make a big slip that will take a lot of retrieving. Robinson has shown vast improvement since he came to Luton, and has played some capital games quite recently, but he has yet to improve his judgment so as not to let opponents in through an ill-timed rush or a blinding lunge which misses the ball completely. These are Robinson's weak points. He has good ones and he is not to be blamed for the defeat on Saturday. The trouble was chiefly in the forward line. There were instances of hard luck, such as when Roe got through and his shot hit the inside of the upright, only to rebound into play instead of into the net, but the forwards ought really to have scored on other occasions. It's the same old story of not putting the last touch properly.

The only really good play from the forwards was by Roberts who, once more at outside-left, showed capital command of the ball. If only the whole line were like him Luton would soon make a name. He rarely wasted an instant. He would take a pass and sometimes in the same movement transfer it accurately to another forward. Thus before the Exeter defence had time to alter their covering movement they found the ball was in another place. Roberts also put in towards goal some very good shots. As a line, the Luton forwards were much inferior to the Exeter five. W. Goodwin, at centre-forward for the Devonshire team, displayed a directness in his method and a first-time style of kicking that was much better than the attempts of Simms, who shows a great expenditure of energy for not much achievement. Simms ought to pick up a horse shoe! He never seems to get that little bit of luck which would turn some of his hard work into success. I heard the inside forwards described as inept. Counting by results they were. Rollinson has certainly not yet found his best form, though he gave Pym one or two exciting moments on Saturday.

Roe had a great chance to equalise after Exeter had scored in the opening of the second half. Receiving a pass from Simms he beat one opponent and seemed certain to score, but I fancy he failed through trying to make too sure. Seeing Pym preparing he tried to place the ball across Pym and completely out of his reach. In consequence it was a bit too far, and instead of going into the net it hit the inside of the post. The rebound was outwards instead of inwards—Exeter were in luck's way. Durrant put in some capital centres and showed old-time instances of skill, but there is no doubt that his damaged knee does make him cautious, very cautious, of a tackle, with the result that the right wing has not that force in pressing through which is sometimes needed. But while Roberts is required on the left Durrant is doing useful work for Luton. The statement made earlier that the defeat of Luton was not because of a defective defence, but through the forwards, may seem rather peculiar. The explanation is that had the Luton forwards scored only one goal as the result of their opportunities in the first half, it is more than probable that the moral effect would have been sufficient to keep Exeter out. Even if Exeter had also scored one, Luton had sufficient chances to out-number them in goals.

The complaint for some time has been about the half-back line. Although that was not conspicuously good on Saturday, yet it was not bad. In fact it was just about mediocre. Frith was back again after a rest, but he was not at his best. Bob Hawkes played a moderately good game, while Fred put in any amount of work. Marshall was the better of the Exeter backs. Strettle being liable to get worried when pressed. In the early part of the match he nearly put the ball into his own goal in an attempt to clear a shot by Rollinson. It was not long after that, that Robinson made things look serious through taking the matter too coolly in disposing of the ball in the penalty area. He was so slow that

the Exeter forwards got the ball, and it was an anxious time till Frith cleared. Pym fisted away a nice shot from Roberts, who made a quick run on the wing, and soon afterwards the Exeter defence had a great difficulty in clearing the ball which was dropped in from the right by Durrant. Green, the Exeter inside-right, had a nasty twist as the result of jumping for the ball and falling over Elvey, but he soon recovered and drawing Robinson, placed the ball in front of Holt, who darted inwards, but Elvey crossed over and stopped him.

The Exeter right wing was quite a good one. Their outside-left was also good, but Elvey watched him well. A swift ground shot from Holt was well saved by Mitchell. Rollinson had a great, but perhaps unexpected, chance as he was standing in front of the goal, but he put straight at Pym. The next minute, however, he made a really fine shot, and the ball was only just a little too high. Exeter were being pressed. Simms put in a fine shot and Pym saved splendidly. In the next minute or so Durrant passed in to Simms who was only a few yards out and Pym must have been beaten, but Simms slipped and sat on the ball! Just before half-time F. Goodwin hit the post. The first goal came soon after the interval, when Holt lifted the ball over Robinson's head and running up passed to W. Goodwin, who with a first-timer, shot the ball into the net. For a time after that the Exeter forwards were very active. Then followed Luton's turn, and Roe hit the inside of the post. Roberts, with a capital shot, forced Pym to give a corner, and the Luton men pressed hard but without effect. A return to the other end saw Holt send a smashing shot against the post. Then Green was too good for Robinson, and placed the ball swiftly towards goal. It would have passed across to the other forwards, so Mitchell leaped out to stop it, but the ball was going at such a pace that he could not hold it. He partially stopped it, but fell in the attempt, and W. Goodwin scored the second. Mitchell afterwards saved a shot from Green at about three yards' range. Luton had a great chance to score a few minutes from time, when Roberts sent the ball across the front of goal, but none of the other forwards got hold of it properly.

Teams:—

Luton: Mitchell; Elvey and Robinson; Fred Hawkes, Frith and Bob Hawkes; Durrant, Roe, Simms, Rollinson, and Roberts.

Exeter: Pym; Marshall and Strettle; Rigby, Lagan and Smith; Holt, Green, Goodwin (W.), Lovett and Goodwin (F.)

Referee: Mr. T. G. Bryan (Willenhall).

Gate receipts, £128. Attendance about 6,000, including nearly 2,000 Territorials.