

TWICE AHEAD.

LEAGUE CHAMPIONS AT LUTON.

Swindon have, for some years, been a name to conjure with in Southern League football, and the visit of the champions to Luton on Saturday furnished by far the largest crowd and the finest game that has been seen on the Town ground this season. There must have been close upon ten thousand spectators, and some of them witnessed part of the match from inside the playing enclosure, for, as was the case in one notable game last season, the pressure on the sixpenny side was so great that the barrier broke through in two or three places. When the first breakage occurred the referee, police, and several of the club officials spent some minutes trying to get the crowd to move up, and so relieve the pressure, and many of the soldiers immediately dived into the threepenny stand "on the cheap," but some of the khaki boys were quite content to sit inside the arena, and others set themselves to guard the weakened barriers. The gathering of khaki was the largest seen at a Luton football match, the number of soldiers present being estimated at four thousand, and once more denied the experience of seeing the home team win. Still, it was a ding-dong game all through, and was splendid value for money. Strenuously fought at a great pace all through, the play was altogether of a more dashing order than in any of Luton's previous home games, and a particularly noteworthy feature was the brilliant shooting on both sides. Both teams played far too well to lose, and a draw of two goals apiece was not an unfair result. Luton played brilliantly enough in the first half to go ahead, and were unlucky with many fine efforts, but on the other hand Swindon twice got the lead, and as things turned out, Luton owed a division of the points to Dunn's action in knocking out with his hands what would have been a certain goal.

It is at least six years since the redoubtable Harold Fleming played at Luton, and there was general disappointment that he was once more out of the playing list, but with this exception Swindon had all their well-known old hands performing, the constitution of the eleven being:—Skiller; Kay, Milton; Tout, Silto, Handley; Jefferson, Batty, Denyer, Bown, Bolland. Luton relied upon the same team as the previous Saturday:—Mitchell; Elvey, Dunn; Fred Hawkes, Frith, Bob Hawkes; Macfarlane, Wileman, Simms, Rollinson, Roberts.

Swindon opened as if they would overwhelm, for breaking away from Luton's first attack, they scored from a brilliant movement in the first minute. Skiller's clearance, after saving a promising effort by Roberts, led to the ball being swung out to the right. Jefferson easily out-distanced Dunn for pace, and his centre came nicely for Denyer, who, quite unmarked, gave Mitchell no possible chance with a header from only four yards away. Jefferson was responsible for an exactly similar movement immediately after, and Mitchell alone prevented it having the same result, for Bown shot in great style, and the goalkeeper had to leap across the goal to get the ball on the wrong side of the post. Luton, however, played up under this reverse, as they have never before done at home this season, and their forward work was really great. For a quarter of an hour the pressure on the Swindon defence was terrific, and Simms ought to have equalised when Frith sent him through, but he rather over-reached himself in using his left at the earliest opportunity, and although the ball was accurately directed for the far corner of the goal, there was so little powder behind it that Skiller easily got to it in time. The Swindon defence frequently showed signs of shakiness, and Skiller had a rare handful in a terrific drive, into which Simms seemed to put his last ounce. It was a magnificent shot, and although from long range, it was distinctly fortunate for Skiller that it was quite straight at him. If only because of this effort Simms deserved to be the equalising medium, and he had his deserts, though the movement from which the point came was poor, compared to the work which had preceded. Both Roberts and Fred Hawkes put across badly directed centres, and Roberts was lucky to be in a position to turn the second one to account. Swinging round, he managed to twirl the ball towards goal, and darting through, Simms just reached it between the backs, and slipped it inside the posts, with Skiller apparently unsighted.

Luton continued to play sterling football, and did everything but score, but even then they were lucky to be on even terms at half-time, because Dunn saved a certain goal by handling, and Tout belied his reputation as a sure penalty goal getter. The home defence was all at sixes and sevens when Denyer broke clean through, and Mitchell had to come out and smother him. It was a miraculous escape, and tremendously lucky too, but the homesters never looked like clearing, and when Jefferson centred into the goalmouth, Dunn had to fall back and knock down from under the bar a shot from Bown. Dunn could hardly restrain his glee when Tout sent the penalty wide, but he himself gave Mitchell rather a handful with a miskick before the change of ends.

After the interval, Luton regained their earlier prominence, and Swindon owed it almost entirely to Skiller that they were on level terms after the first quarter of an hour. He fisted out with great difficulty from a corner, splendidly forced, and taken by Macfarlane, and when Bob Hawkes ran in to the rebound, and let fly, Skiller brought off the most wonderful save imaginable. It was a shot of shots, and would have scored ninety times out of a hundred, but Skiller involuntarily shot up his hand in the right place, and the ball hit it and glanced over. In the next minute, too, Silte found himself unable to control a centre from Macfarlane, and seemed to have presented Luton with the lead, but just as the ball was slipping by the post Skiller got to it with a full length dive, and saved the situation.

After all this, however, it was Swindon who secured the lead, and they got it from a lucky goal, following on a series of scrappy movements, which never ought to have threatened any danger. On both wings, the extreme wingers were allowed to recover the ball from the goal-line, through the Luton defenders anticipating that it would go over, and on the second occasion Bolland corrected square with the line. It should have given Mitchell no trouble, but as the goalkeeper was

shaping for it, Frith slid across, failed to reach it, and apparently unsighted Mitchell. At any rate, the goalkeeper seemed to once get the ball in his hands, and then let it slip out, and he was not quick enough to pick it up from over the line before the referee "spotted" it. There was still nearly half an hour to go, but Luton's chances of retrieving matters did not seem very rosy, when Rollinson, who had been playing in difficulties through an injury sustained to his hip in the first five minutes, found it necessary to retire. He had only been off five minutes, however, when Bob Hawkes, temporarily filling the gap in the forward line, opened up a movement which completely outwitted the Swindon defence, and resulted in an equaliser. Wileman gained possession from a centre by Roberts, and having his pass to Macfarlane returned, shot. Skiller stopped the ball, but for once failed to gather it, and Simms was on it in a flash, and shot into the top of the net. Rollinson returned in the last ten minutes to put Roberts clean through, but the outside-left had his aim spoiled, and sent over, while Simms also shot over, after getting within five yards. Swindon were, however, the more dangerous side in the closing stages, and Luton had to fight hard for a draw, and it was a grand overhead save by Mitchell from Bown that kept the score to the end:—

Luton 2, Swindon, 2.

Luton would soon improve their position in the League table if the forwards could maintain their Saturday's form. Rollinson's early injury, affecting his breathing as it did, was doubtless the explanation of his inability to follow up opportunities and press into goal when openings presented themselves. All the others played well, though Roberts was not so prominent in the second half as in the first, while Simms was rather inclined to spoil possibilities by taking the man instead of the ball. Still, the Swindon line impressed one as the more dangerous collective attacking force and their half line did better than the Blues', Tout's clever work being one of the outstanding features of the game. Frith achieved more success than in any of his previous displays this season, but he also made more bad mistakes than anyone on the field, while Bob Hawkes was hardly so accurate as usual, and gave the speedy Jefferson a very large amount of rope. The responsibility this threw upon Dunn was a little too much for him, and he was rather wild in both his kicking and tackling. Still, he again did very well, and there was not much to choose between the home backs, for Elvey also made one or two awkward slips. Luton were, however, best served in defence by Fred Hawkes and Mitchell.

The Blues are now eleventh in the League table, with 13 points for 15 matches, their record standing at five wins, seven losses, and three draws, with a goal average of 25 against 32. To-day they go into the hat for the first of the three qualifying rounds of the F.A. Cup Competition, in which they have to take part this season. The round is to be decided on Saturday week.