

Luton's Holiday Matches.

A point lost in last minutes on Christmas Day.

By "Vigilant."

From a footballing standpoint, Christmas was something like old times with Luton and Northampton matched in holiday Southern League fixtures, but there was not the old-time rivalry displayed in the meetings by the supporters of the two clubs. For the Christmas Day match on the Town Club ground at Luton the weather conditions were quite ideal from the point of view of a good gate. It was a fine, bright, clean and crisp afternoon, but the Northampton club had no excursion loads of supporters to "buck" them up, and the crowd all told was not much more than six thousand, the takings of £136 being much below Luton's average Christmas gates. There was not a lot of excitement either, about the most lively section of the crowd being a party of members of the drum, fife and bugle bands of the 23rd County of London Territorials. Whenever the play was inclined to be uninteresting they came to the rescue with a tune on the bugles and drums, and at half-time they stole a march on the Luton Red Cross Band by parading the playing pitch with the drums and fifes, setting a lively air which the crowd seemed to greatly appreciate—as a diversion, if nothing else.

The game itself was not a great one. It was pretty keenly contested, and the scarcity of goals invested it with a certain amount of interest, because of the uncertainty there always was as to what might happen, but it was far from being a typical Luton—Northampton game, because there were times when one might easily have gone to sleep and missed nothing. The frost-bound surface doubtless had a good deal to do with this, because both teams could be regarded as at full strength. Luton relied upon what may be described as their cup-tie team, and the Cobblers had the side of their choice, including Bellamy at inside left in preference to Lockett. Mr. H. Thompson, of West Norwood, who refereed the cup-tie with Bromley, was again in charge—and also on Boxing Day—and the players were:—

Luton:—Mitchell; Elvey, Dunn; Fred Hawkes, Frith, Bob Hawkes; Roberts, Wileman, Simms, Rollinson, and Hoar.

Northampton:—Thorpe; Clipstone, Davies; Tull, Manning, Tomkins; Hughes, Smith, Lessons, Bellamy, and Freeman.

Luton had every encouragement for shaping well, because they went ahead in the first five minutes. Simms got to the ball from the left just inside the penalty area, and going on for a few yards while some of the opposition were appealing for offside, he let drive. Thorpe just touched the ball, but could not properly negotiate it, and although it was not quite clear whether it went off Wileman's head or the post, the ball, at any rate, found its way into the net. Immediately afterwards Thorpe had two other teasers from Bob Hawkes and Hoar, from which he gave corners, but this state of affairs did not long continue. The visitors showed very smart and clever forward work, and would have been far more dangerous in their incursions had Lessons shown the slightest inclination to keep onside. As it was they very soon got worried by Dunn's spasmodical offside tactics, and were reduced to long range shooting, with the result that the greater part of the first half had slipped by before Mitchell was seriously tested. Then the Northampton forwards broke clean through with only Fred Hawkes to keep them at bay, and Smith drove in a lightning low one, which brought Mitchell down in fisting out against the post.

For some time the Luton defence were hard pressed, the forwards completely falling away from their early effectiveness, and it was pitiable to see the way in which chances were frittered away. Hoar, who had started in brilliant fashion, could not keep a ball in front of the goal, and poor Roberts rarely got even a sporting chance. In the last quarter of an hour of the half, however, there was a marked revival, and Northampton owed it purely to Thorpe, and a lot of luck, that they were not well behind at the interval. Thorpe took tremendous risks and came off trumps every time—and when he did not take risks as well. One of the things he did was to save what would have been one of the best individual goals seen on the Luton ground if it had been successful. Roberts came across from the wing to the centre of the field, and in his own half successfully tackled a Northampton forward. Then he pushed the ball across to Rolinson, and when Simms was robbed followed up and took the ball along the left wing, and shot from inside left position. It was a very resourceful piece of work, but Thorpe was equal to the effort. It was sheer luck on his part, however, when darting between the two backs, Simms let drive a regular twelve-pounder, and Thorpe managed to get to something which it seemed impossible for anybody to stop. He just reached it, and it rebounded off him like a shot for a corner. Right up to the interval things continued to be very exciting round the Northampton goal, Thorpe making two more stirring saves, while Tull was the luckiest of individuals to stop one from Wileman. Half-time:

Luton 1, Northampton 0.

Thorpe's charm seemed to have worn off in the first few minutes of the second half when he came out to contest with Simms the possession of a centre from Roberts and clean missed the ball. But it was only a momentary surmise, for Simms also missed the ball, and one of the backs was handy to clear. There was hardly another incident of interest for nearly half-an-hour. The Luton forwards struck a bad patch, and the visitors played pretty football without rendering it effective, Dunn's brilliant work dominating the situation time after time. Tull was the nearest scoring for Northampton with a shot which Mitchell only just got over the bar, and in the last quarter of an hour or so the visitors adopted the policy of a change of places between Tull and Lessons. The black man secured from the Spurs had all through been Northampton's outstanding player, and his fearless, slap-dash methods very quickly had the Blues in difficulties. But he lacked Lessons' coolness, and twice in as many minutes he burst clean through, only to lose control of the ball when having only Mitchell to beat and let it go behind. Still it was his aggressive work, coupled with an error on the part of the referee, that cost Luton a point. Three minutes from time he again muddled through somehow and put the defence at sixes and sevens. There was ample opportunity for the ball to have been cleared, but it was not, and after it had been bobbing about in front of goal Hughes hooked in from an obviously offside position on the goal line, Smith deflected it in, and Mitchell was beaten. Frith made a big effort to keep the ball out, but only made it worse, and so the result was made—

Luton 1, Northampton 1.

It was not a result that Northampton deserved, for although they were unquestionably on top in the last quarter of an hour it was the only time

they were really seen to advantage for five minutes together during the game. Thorpe was without a doubt their saviour, but they were also splendidly served by Tull, who was quick, accurate and resourceful in all that he did at half, and a regular terror in the forward line. Of the regular forwards, the pick were the wingers, but Hughes' value was considerably minimised by Dunn, who had one of his best days, and was quite the outstanding player on the field. He got through an immense amount of work, and with all his rush and bustle he seldom blundered. The halves played extremely good football, and there was little to choose between them, but the forwards were very uneven. Occasionally they were quite brilliant, and at other times quite the reverse, and none of them showed up to better advantage than the others.