

FOOTBALL.

HOW LUTON TOWN "GOT LEFT?"

(By CRUSADER).

While I was trying to find a telephone at Shepherd's Bush last Saturday afternoon two very nice lads put me in the way of finding both 'phone and ground in the quickest possible way. Then they chatted with me about Luton, and one remarked: "We shall win, of course, but somehow I don't think the Rangers will give Luton such a hiding as they gave Brentford."

"Why?" I asked.

"Well," he replied naively, "Luton seem to be in a very low way just now, and the clubs are good friends."

"But why should the Rangers be more kind to Luton than to Brentford?"

"Well, you see, Brentford were very 'cocky,' and their supporters were quite certain of a win, so the Rangers put it across them by six nil."

"My boy," I said sadly, "you will see the Rangers grab all they can with both hands. There is not much sentiment in football on the pitch, whatever there may be in the stand and on the terraces."

I saw them again after the match, and they grinned broadly, for the Rangers had taken all they could, and really much more than they deserved on the run of the play. The boys were anxious to know the sort of team the Town were fielding, and they showed no sign of regret when I explained that Dunn had a bad leg and would not be playing, and that the Luton back division would consist of Fred Barker and Elvey, both out of joint—otherwise in wrong positions; that Innes had got a half-Nelson on Rutherford; and the middle line would be re-constituted; that the forward line would be something like a "miserere" band without a dunce. As if to make up for all this they told me that Blackman, the Rangers' right back, was unable to play, but took the jam off the pill by saying that Wingrove was pretty nearly as good a back as Blackman.

I was a bit surprised to find quite a decent lot of followers for the Town, and glad also, for it shows that there are still a few sportsmen left in Luton, and that not all their followers are "fine weather friends." For another reason I am glad, too, and that is that they may be able to nullify the unfairness of the reports of the match as given by the Sunday papers. Here I may perhaps let you into a secret. If you will read those reports you will find that they are almost unanimous in stating that Luton were overplayed, and one gentleman has already pointed out this unanimity to me as a proof of accuracy. The truth of the matter is that there were, I believe, only two reporters there, and pretty well all the Sunday paper reports came from their pens. So far as I am concerned, I endeavour to give both sides full credit for their merits, and I do not think I have yet flattered the Town. I do not intend to do so, either, but to give a reasoned and fair comment on the match.

placed.

The "Saturday Telegraph" report of the game to the interval was written as the match proceeded, and so there was no possibility of manufacturing incidents. That the "Blues" did most of the pressing in the first half will be admitted by every spectator with a fair mind; they had the ball more of the time, and were often hovering round and threatening the Rangers' goal, but that does not count very much unless goals are won. The Town forwards lacked the sparkle and method of the Rangers; given equality in these respects they must have scored many more goals than the Rangers. The sole reasons of the Town forwards' failure are these: lack of combination and lack of shooting. Although they kept the ball in the Rangers' territory for long periods it was not by the understanding forward, but rather by individual doggedness and resolute half-back play. One would see Roe waltz through in a manner reminiscent of the Corinthian style, or Williams scramble through in a way which was as mysterious as it was undainty; or Simms, with shoulders hunched, and the ball cuddled on his insteps, literally force his way until within a few yards of goal; time after time this happened with nary an attempt to shoot, and it was really exasperating. And on the two occasions when decent shots were put in—Simms' effort was struck aside by Pullen's hand, within a few feet of the net, but the referee ignored the appeal for a penalty—a bad decision, for it was a most palpable case of "hands;" and Williams' shot from a most awkward angle was caught by Merrick, but dropped, and he had to scramble it away quickly before Roe and Simms were on him.

In the first minute of the second half Simms had the most atrocious luck, although he should have shot sooner. The Town had the Rangers' defence tied in a knot, but shilly-shallying and dribbling enabled Merrick to get in position, and when the keeper made "the glorious save," of which the Sunday papers make so much, he was actually a lucky buffer, for Simms' shot struck him. He may have known where it came from, but he did not know for a moment where the ball went. Then again, Roe and Neale worked down very nicely, and the inside left took a neat pass from the outside man, and had only the keeper to beat when he shot outside, but I was close enough to see that the ball, which was very likely, bounced a shade as he got his foot to it.

Some clever short passing was occasionally witnessed between Grimes and Simms in this second half, but always did the Town men want more room in which to shoot, and to walk the ball through instead of taking pot-luck, as the Rangers' forwards, the Merthyr forwards, Cardiff forwards, Gillingham forwards, and all forwards appear to do except ours. May they wake up to this deficiency.

The strength of the Rangers was in this very speedy combination and opportunism of the forwards. They slammed the ball about from wing to wing, not blindly, but intelligently, and when once they got on the move they seldom failed to get within range. The outside men seldom tried to nurse a ball past the Luton halves, and I hope that Neale noticed that they did not put all their strength behind the ball when centreing, but just gave it enough boot to put it in front of goal. That was how they got three of their goals—all headed in from gentle centres, and the fourth was a pot-shot from a centre.

The Rangers were the better team only because of superior forward play, and for my part I have no fear of Luton's position at the end of the season if they can remedy the weakness in this direction, but I hope the re-shuffling will not go on for ever. If first-class men cannot be procured—and you would be surprised to know the exorbitant price being asked even for reserve players—then give one a chance to get into something like harmony. It is the only hope of success.

The defence was weakened by the absence of Dunn, and Bowler was not able to hold the speedy Thompson. Urwin proved quite as excellent at centre-half as in the wing positions, and Parker was in good form, while Elvey was in his customary fine fettle, except for one mistake.

The Rangers have brilliant wingers, and Gregory was good at inside left, but the halves and backs were stolid, and solid rather than brilliant. I liked Wingrove better than Pullen, but Merrick did not inspire confidence. Some referees whistle too much, and others too little, but Mr. Tolfree seemed to strike the happy medium for solos, except that he sometimes gave them in the wrong place. Ask Ernest Simms.

The teams were:—
Luton Town: Summers; F. Hawkes and Elvey; Bowler, Urwin, and Parker; Grimes, Simms, Williams, Roe, and Neale.
Queen's Park Rangers: Merrick; Wingrove and Pullen; Broster, Mitchell, and Baldock; Thompson, Birch, Smith, Gregory, and Donald.

Referee: Mr. R. Tolfree, Southampton.