

FOOTBALL NOTES

(By CRUSADER.)

LUTON'S SENSATIONAL OPENING.

Crushing Defeat at Swindon: Point from Champions.

GOALKEEPER DISABLED.

At Swindon on Saturday:

SWINDON TOWN 9 goals
LUTON TOWN 1 goal

Teams:—

Swindon: Nash; Kay, Macconachie; Langford, Hawley, Wareing; Jefferson, Fleming, Rogers, Batty, Davies.

Luton Town: Watson; Lennon, Semple; Roe, Lamb, Parker; Pett, Bradley, Simms, Mathieson, Bookman.

Referee: F. W. Cooper, London.

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At Luton on Monday:

LUTON TOWN 2 Goals.
PORTSMOUTH 2 ..

Teams:—

Luton Town.—Watson; Lennon, Tirrell; Molyneaux, Lamb, Parker; Hear, Higginbotham, Simms, Mathieson, Bookman.

Portsmouth. — Robson; Probert, Potts; Abbott, Harwood, Turner; Thompson, Stringfellow, Reid, James, Beedie.

Referee: D. W. F. Cooper.

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Not a flattering start, is it? I doubt if I have ever known a town so upset over sport as was Luton on Saturday night when the "Saturday Telegraph" reluctantly printed the result of the first match of the season. It must be confessed, however, that outside the directorate there were few who really believed that Luton Town's players this season contained a champion side, and, while hopes were bolstered high, the spectators generally felt that too much trust had been placed in reputation, and, after all, that is a fickle thing in which to have confidence. Few people agreed with the departure of Dick Elvey. The crowd would have retained him at his own price, but when all is said and done the men who have put down the money have a perfect right to call the tune, and, apart from the question of interest attaching, and the desire that the premier side in Luton should be a local side as far as possible, I personally cannot see that any section of the supporters have a right to say that this or that shall or shall not be done.

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Apart altogether from the set-back at Swindon, it was obvious on Monday night that the defence is not comparable with that of last year, and the great need, it must be admitted, is for efficiency in the middle line. That is the place to be considered, but not that alone. We cannot hope to struggle through as we did last season, and, lest there should be any misunderstanding on the matter, I may say that the officials have already recognised this and are now after new half-backs. I should not be surprised if an interesting announcement is made in another column in this issue, and even less, if we see drastic alterations on Saturday, as compared with last Saturday. On Monday evening there was one change each at full back and half-back, and two changes in the forward line, and I think we all agreed that the men did all that was humanly possible to wipe out the nasty taste of Saturday's defeat. But for the unfortunate accident to Watson I am sure we should have won with ease, for the Town were playing a winning game, and Portsmouth looked as little like a championship side as I shall expect Gillingham to look. Please do not imagine that I think the Town raised any hopes of championship. I do not think that for a moment, because Portsmouth were much cleverer individually, but they were up against a desperate side, and Luton played a hard, cup-tie sort of game. There was ample evidence that the Portsmouth defence was on the point of breaking up in face of the continued assaults, and then Watson's departure gave them a new lease of life and they managed to take away a point.

The details of the game, as far as were necessary, have appeared in the "Tuesday Telegraph," and so if I say that it was even rougher than last year when Portsmouth were defeated by two clear goals, that may be enough on the character of the struggle. The referee was much too lenient, and should have come down very heavily on the rough players at the beginning.

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The fact that two penalties were awarded against Portsmouth, and that at least a couple more should have been given, is sufficient indication of the lengths to which the visitors were prepared to go to save the game. The Portsmouth defence struck me as being very much rattled early in the game, thanks to the persistency with which Simms hung on to them, and although the mischief did not start with the backs—it began in the middle line as a matter of fact—they were exceedingly unhappy for the greater part of the game.

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I had come to regard Mathieson as likely to be the best shot in the side, but after his attempt with the penalty I shall have to revise a little. It was an execrable attempt, the ball going well over the top. The offence for which the punishment was exacted was a foul on Sid Hoar, but it was not such a long time afterwards that Higginbotham was laid out very badly, and Hoar took the penalty and scored with a fast low shot. There was plenty of excitement, and in addition to good saves by Robson, Simms, Hoar and Higginbotham several times came very near to scoring, Simms once sending over from under the bar in a gallant effort to convert a centre by Hoar.

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Probably the surprise packet up to now, however, had been the play of Higginbotham, and although his feet did not always do what his head intended, he played with great judgment and skill, and the result was that Ernest Simms reached his very best form. At the other end Tirrell was doing excellent work in defence, and with the exception of one failure in an attempt to volley, his kicking was clean and well timed, while he remained cool in many tight situations. Watson brought down the house with a glorious save from Reid, who was very active, and dead on the target, and then came the accident. Watson saved a corner kick in first class style and threw the ball away, but he went down, and either against the upright or in the scuffle of players, he sustained a dislocation of the shoulder. At first it was stated that his collar bone was broken, but at the Bute Hospital the actual mischief was located, and before the end of the game Watson had been under chloroform and his shoulder had been restored by Dr. Archibald and Dr. Bell.

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It was a great blow and meant all the difference between one and two points, for Parker had to go into goal and Mathieson went into the middle line, and so the team was weakened in all departments. At the interval the Town led by Hoar's goal, and when a determined rush by Sid Hoar and his inside men enabled Simms to give the Town a two-goals lead, we began to look forward to a win. This was six or seven minutes after the change of ends, and for the next twenty minutes the Town side had quite as much of the play, although it was not up to the standard of the visitors' combination. Then, however, Stringfellow got a chance to fire in a shot from 18 yards, and the ball hit the foot of the post and glanced through. Parker had made one or two good saves, and with the exception of appearing a little over-anxious he

handled the ball well, and certainly deserved the cheers he received. I am positive he would never have been beaten a second time had the Town had two decent balls in play. The new ball with which the game was started was out of play much more than it was in, and recourse was had to a ball which was between a Soccer and a Rugby ball. The result was that when Reid put in a simple looking shot, Parker put himself right in the way and waited for it. The ball was going directly to him when it suddenly turned and dropped and bounced into the net well away from him. It was rough luck for Parker and the team. Still, they kept their point, and that was a very fine performance considering the heavy handicap under which they laboured.

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For the visitors, Robson, who last year had the fine record of not a goal against him in away matches for a period of five months, did very well, and could not be blamed for either goal. His backs were all right when they had plenty of room, but when pressed they were always in trouble, and Simms made the most of this fact. The halves were altogether too unsportsmanlike, their tackling being more frequently foul than clean, and they had no compunction about tripping or charging from behind. Some of the forwards, James in particular, followed their bad example, and so there were many unpleasant incidents. Reid, who got damaged rather badly, had only himself to thank, for it was his attack on Higginbotham which caused the hurt. There was better understanding among the visiting forwards than among Luton's, however, and Thompson was about the pick.

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Watson I have referred to, and Tirrell was certainly the equal of Lennon, who showed up very well at times, and will, I think, quickly get into the English style of football. Molyneux, promoted from the Reserves on the strength of his display on Saturday, fully justified his inclusion. He will keep his place on this form, without a doubt. Cockerill would have been playing also had he been fit, and it speaks well for the ex-Arsenal man, that although he realised that this was his chance, he declined to take risks, his action being just as much in the interests of the club as of himself. Molyneux struck me as being even better as a wing half than a centre-half, and in my opinion it would be wise to let Bayliss go back to his position at centre-half and see how he frames there, for he was quite as good as Molyneux and Cockerill on Saturday, although it was only his third game as a wing half. Lamb was disappointing. He won quite as much applause as his colleagues at times, for he was frequently in the van when there was an attack, but occasionally he missed the ball in mysterious fashion. I hardly care to say that this or that man was the best of the forwards. Simms played a magnificent game, and there cannot be the slightest doubt about his claim to the position, or, indeed, to an equality with any pivot in the south on this display. He was persistently boring between the backs, snapping up the ball and darting away with it, and was as hard to knock off as in pre-war days. He won back his old place in the affections of the supporters, and I think he has got over that bad time which every player has at some stage of his career, and his was last year.

Accidents barred, Simms will get goal this season. Higginbotham and Hoar had the better chances to make good, and both played finely. The outside right was not a certain starter until Monday noon, but he realised his best, and in Higginbotham there was almost an ideal link for players like Simms and Hoar. The Scot opened out the game well, was consistently drawing the defence and then parting with the ball to advantage, and his physique enabled him to give and take hard knocks with equanimity. I think he was fouled more than any man on the field, yet he was the least perturbed. Mathieson was also doing well until he was called upon to take Parker's place, and even there he did good defensive work. Bookman's drawback was that he had no partner for half the game, but he did good work when he was single handed, and in the first half he put over several neat centres. The line is good enough when it gets adequate support from the rear and a few more matches together will enable the players to combine better than at present.

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The Swindon game I did not see, but the comments of our special correspondent there may suffice to show what happened, but in addition to Lamb, Semple got a nasty kick in the groin before the second goal was scored.

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"The only enlightenment I can give is that the Luton defence crumpled up badly. Last season Elvey gave a great display at Swindon, and it was obvious very early on that Luton had nothing like the defence they had last season. Even that defence, however, could not have coped with the brilliant attack of Swindon. Fleming reached his very best form, and he was quite as good on Saturday as he has ever been in his long and magnificent career. The Luton defenders strove desperately hard to check the home vanguard, but they were either swept aside or circumvented by sheer skill.

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"We in Swindon had heard much of this vaunted Scottish defence, but, always excepting Watson, it was too slow. Of the halves and backs, Parker was the only man who seemed capable of giving and taking hard knocks with equanimity. The others were not vigorous enough because they were not strong enough, and both Lennon and Semple appeared to be all at sea with the electric rushes of the home forwards. They were too deliberative, if I may use the word, and seldom appeared to grasp the intentions of the opponent. It seemed to me that they moved and worked along lines too orthodox, and anyone who knows Fleming knows that his success in football is due to the fact that he has never been an orthodox player. There was altogether too much fire in the Swindon attack for the slow Scots, and I have never seen, long as my experience has been, men so utterly and hopelessly non-plussed as were Lennon and Semple. For Watson one cannot have anything but the highest praise, and there was for him at the finish something approaching an ovation from the crowd. Many a time he had the hopeless task of facing single-handed a line of forwards who had left his colleagues outpaced and out-generalled, and he had no chance to save one of the shots that scored. A more unenviable task no goalkeeper has ever had on Swindon's ground since professionalism was adopted.

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"It is more than possible that Luton people may be inclined to deride the Luton team, but they need not. Luton could not adapt themselves to the Swindon style of play, and that was why the damage was so extensive. Of Luton's halves I would say a good word. Lamb appeared to be quite a class player until he got injured, and Roe gave many pretty touches, while Parker was unsparing of himself. After the first two goals, however, they seemed undecided whether to concentrate on defence, so their forwards suffered. Parker was the most powerful of the trio, even if he had not the cleverness of the other two. Of the forwards, Simms was the one who took the eye most, and that was probably because his style of play is beloved of Swindon football followers as a whole. He was not so clever as either Mathieson or Bradley, and the latter struck one as being particularly skilful in ball manipulation. Simms was always trying hard, and his success was deserved. His goal was a really fine effort, for he gave the home keeper no chance whatever. Mathieson and Bookman were the cleverer wing, and the big man and his little colleague won applause for several tricky bits of play before half-time. Pett was not capable of taking advantage of his colleagues' skill, and there was a lack of understanding along the line generally.

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"Batty opened the score after six minutes after a clever pass by Rogers. Then Macconachie, by brainy work, gave Davies a chance to run through and score. Fleming then got the first of his four goals after cleverly outwitting Semple, and put on the fourth when Lamb had retired for repairs. Simms then got a good goal for Luton, pick-

ing up a pass from Parker and giving Nash no chance. Hawley missed a penalty, shooting past. At half-time, Swindon led by 5-1. In the second half Batty, Jefferson and Fleming scored for Swindon, and to complete the humiliation, Mathieson sent the ball past Watson from 25 yards range."