

At Merthyr on Saturday:—

MERTHYR TOWN		4 goals.
LUTON TOWN		1 goal.

MERTHYR TOWN.—Jindon; Holmes, Ferrans; Brown, Jennings, Clarke; Williams, Walker, Bezie, Crowe, Edwards.

LUTON TOWN.—Watson; Lennon, Tirrell; Molyneux, Parker, Lamb; Hoar, Higginbotham, Simms, Butcher, Sidney.

Referee.—C. T. Pearson, Stourbridge.

In its infancy the word "martyr" stood merely for "a witness." The passage of time has enriched it, and from its use now we visualise thumb screws, racks, the stake, stained glass windows, and mighty film productions. Now Merthyr Town's football

players are as much entitled to the sobriquet of "Martyrs" as are Luton Town's to the sobriquet "Hatters," but after the experience of Saturday I am bound to confess I never knew a more striking example of irony than the nomination of Merthyr's team as "Martyrs."

It has been suggested on several occasions that I am inclined to write of the Town players as though they never broke a rule of the game. I have no wish to make an absurd claim, but I think some of the critics of the Town players do not give them credit for ordinary common sense. Three players have been suspended this season. In the first case the offence was totally denied, and the opponent who was presumed to have suffered, supported that denial. In the second I frankly admit that an offence was committed, but it was only a matter affecting the referee, and there was no question of danger to an opponent. The third case I did not see, but a dozen observers assured me that the Luton player was entirely blameless.

But note the effect on the Luton players. Has anyone ever seen two full backs lean reliant upon weight or unscrupulous tactics than Lennon and Tirrell? How often, in comparison with other middle men, are Luton's halves checked for dangerous methods? Are the members of the forward line a vicious lot? I think reasonable judgment will admit that we have a side that will compare very favourably with any other for clean football. I hope it will always be so, but I do realize that our lads are now afraid to use what little natural advantage one or two of them possess because of the punishments already inflicted upon their colleagues. This would not be detrimental, perhaps, if opponents played up to the spirit, but, unfortunately, they do not.

Now I am not going to say that Luton deserved to win. I am not going to claim that Merthyr did not deserve the points. I do contend, however, that had the game not developed any more roughness than was seen in the first half, Luton's game would have been different, and the reflection would have been seen in the result. One of the most extraordinary features of the Town's matches this season, however, has been the different spirit exhibited by opponents playing at home and that displayed in the return game at Luton.

Now before the game was very old on Saturday it was quite patent to me that our forwards were to have a pretty rough time. Watching the play closely one could see ankle-rapping and elbow nudging as often as ball-kicking. A hefty centre-half is Jennings, and Clarke is not far short. The former was pressing his elbows into Simms' back every time a goal-kick came down the middle of the field. If Simms got the ball from a pass he had to be very agile to escape a smart rap across the ankles if he got past an opponent. So often did Jennings do this without any rebuke from the referee that Simms, whom we all know to be one of the slowest to anger, was stung to retaliate. He was very badly rapped and in exasperation he swung round at Jennings the defaulter and tried to repay. The referee stepped in and offered Simms the alternative of shaking hands or leaving the field, and he did the wise and proper thing. The ball had not been in motion again more than thirty seconds when, as he was dribbling through, Simms was again whipped off his feet by Jennings, and lay on the ground looking askance at the referee. The official gave a free kick, but he allowed Jennings to go away without rebuke, and Merthyr's scattered defence was unable to collect and meet the attack safely. Butcher had to be carried off for attention to an injured ankle; the game was stopped because Watson was knocked into the goal post; Higginbotham had the sleeve of his jersey torn by a player grabbing at him, and the Luton men became rather soured at the referee's leniency.

Merthyr got a corner, and Watson ran across the goal to meet it. Beale dashed into him and crashed him into the goal-post. Watson never got the ball at all, for Tirrell, first in the line of flight, headed it before Watson was near it, but the goalkeeper was in agony. Beale having trapped Watson's leg against the goal-post. It was a mercy that the keeper did not get a broken leg.

It is a hateful thing to have to write in this fashion about the most popular game in the world, but I am more than ever convinced that there is need for a thorough revision of the referees' list, and for the training of really strong men.

And now let me say that the Town were well beaten in the second half. Up to the change of ends the Merthyr people were afraid that the "Martyrs" were doomed to defeat, for the Town had shown more polish in attack, and steadiness in defence. The opening goal to Merthyr never daunted the Town at all. In some respects it was accidental, although I readily admit that WALKER deserved it because of his enterprise. He trapped the ball and hit it hard, but was probably more surprised than anybody when it just flashed under the bar at lightning speed, right away from Watson, who had no chance.

Play had been in progress only six minutes when that happened, and then the Town's speed and combination got the home defenders in Queer-street more than once before SIMMS got an equaliser that was as skilful an effort as could be imagined, and the crowd was moved to cheer loudly. It came thus: TIRREL dispossessed Beale very smartly and pushed into the middle; Parker cleverly lifted the ball over to Higginbotham, and that worthy poked it forward to Simms. The latter went ahead and slipped through to Hoar, who forged through at full speed. Ferrans got in the way, and Sid blocked the ball in the hope that Ferrans would over-run, but the back jerked up with equal smartness and confronted the winger. There seemed to be no prospect of a goal then, but Ferrans, unfortunately for himself, had his legs wide open. Hoar accurately pushed the ball between the open legs, and Simms snapped it up and shooting with remarkable celerity he had Linden beaten all ends up with a beautiful shot.

From now until the change of ends Luton were much cleverer, in passing, and once Sidney dashed through and put the ball right into the goal mouth. A goal appeared certain when Butcher got the ball and tapped it to Simms, but Holmes' outstretched leg deflected it ever so slightly, but all sufficiently to prevent Simms taking it in his stride, and it was scrambled away. Several times after this the Town forwards, particularly Simms and the right wing, beat the halves and backs, but were either brought down or just missed.

The "Martyrs" were all alive on resuming, and Edwards did some smart work on the left. None expected they would get the lead so easily, however. The Welsh amateur international was too quick for Molyneux, and Lennon mistimed his rush as BEALE took the pass. The centre-forward ran in, never having the ball completely under control, but he managed somehow to scramble past both Lennon and Watson and to knee rather than kick the ball into the net.

The Town had a short spell, but were repulsed by vigorous measures, and when the "Martyrs" got a corner JENNINGS rushed up and headed in, Watson getting his hand to the ball, but it spun off into the net.

Watson made several fine saves in the next quarter of an hour, for Merthyr rushed the defence unmercifully, and when Williams slipped the ball through from the right BEALE hit it hard first time and Watson had no earthly chance of stopping it. So was the game won, for the Town's efforts, although more frequent after this, lacked sting.

Watson, might, perhaps, have prevented the second goal, but certainly had little chance with the other goals. Lennon was not so sound as usual but he had a tremendous amount of work to do, for Molyneux could not hold Edwards at all. TIRREL showed more anxiety than usual, but the opposing right wing, supposed to be about the best in Wales outside Cardiff, did not do a lot of mischief. Neither did Beale for that matter, and practically all the danger came from the other flank. The Town halves were a long way below their best form, and particularly in the way of feeding their forwards. Molyneux has found the strain of the last month too much for him. Always a trier and a worker, he kept going but, obviously, he is stale and in sore need of a rest. Lamb did very well in stopping the Welsh International winger, Williams, and Parker usually had the measure of Beale, but his presence was too often re-

quined to deal with Edwards on the touch-line. The great lack, however, was in the feeding of the forwards. The ball was too often in the air, and against men like Jennings and Clarke that policy did not pay. The forwards did splendidly up to the interval. Simms opened out the game in his best style when he was allowed to keep on his feet, and Higginbottom and Butcher were always working hard, and making tracks for goal. How got in many smart runs, and with the few chances he had Sidney did better than I had expected. He was a bit slow in getting off the mark, and, of course, he has not the speed of Bookman, but after he had gained confidence he did quite well. He seldom saw the ball within reach in the second half.

Merthyr's virtue lay in their dash at half and in their quick shooting forward, but I shall be very much surprised if the Town do not run up that score on Saturday, and disappointed if they do not beat it. Not since the defeat at Norwich on November 25th have the Town sustained such a shock as last Saturday, and they will be eager to make amends.

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