

LUTON LOSE AT PLYMOUTH.

Confidence goes a long way towards success, perhaps, but it does not actually bring victory. The Luton Town players went to Plymouth full of confidence that they would win. They had a special incentive, for the Town have never yet won a game at Plymouth.

Their optimism came unstuck, but any impartial judge would admit that they should have brought away two points. They had the better of the game, as far as scoring chances were concerned, and would readily agree that they have met and vanquished far stiffer opposition than the Argyle mustered on Saturday. It was by no means plain sailing for the Town, for

they found the Argyle of this season quite living up to the standard and style of the Argyle of years and years ago—plenty of vigour and dash, and a stick-at-nought defence. Although the Argyle got the lead at the end of twelve minutes, I never expected they would keep it, and an experienced critic sitting next me remarked at the interval, "Well, your chaps have only themselves to blame if they lose; they have had enough chances to win two or three times over. They will find it harder now."

He was referring to the fact that the Argyle would have the benefit of the stiff breeze in the second half. He was surprised to see that the Town had more of the play in the second half than in the first, and this in spite of an injury to Higginbotham, who was limping badly and could not get up a trot. Other players got in the wars, but Higginbotham was rendered almost helpless. Play was fast and even in the first half, with the Argyle doing slightly more pressing, but they got fewer chances of scoring than the Town. The Town forwards manœuvred better in midfield than the Argyle, but they could not get in a shot to beat Craig. Toms' shot after twelve minutes' play was about the best of the game. It did not score because Bailey made a brilliant save, but he was helpless to get the ball away, and BOWLER completed the good intentions of his colleague—a very simple job.

One cannot go into all the subsequent occasions when the Town might have drawn level, but Bailey had only one really busy time and that was early in the second half. He then made four or five saves in quick succession, and punched out a couple of corner kicks. Craig had no period so busy, but his worry was more constant and for longer periods. He made several good saves. His first save of note was in the first half, when Hoar centred and Simms tried to tap in from close quarters, but by fortuitous circumstance Craig happened to be near enough to divert the ball over the bar. In the second half he went down full length and cuddled a shot from Bookman just as Simms dashed in. There was a rare struggle on the line, but Craig emerged with the ball and cleared. He was tested half-a-dozen times in the closing five minutes, but he always managed to get the ball away. Still, I do not remember one really hard shot at goal by a Luton forward. There was no enterprise in shooting, although they gave the spectators a lot of thrills by the frequency of their raids, and it only required a few more shots to have rounded off what was often really clever footwork.

The ball was not lifted about enough, however, and there was a general tendency to keep it too close. This was in contra-distinction to the tactics of the Argyle, who gave the ball any amount of boot.

The Argyle are a vigorous, hard-fighting side, but by no means impressive, and if the Town can find their best form next Saturday the game should go hard for Plymouth. Craig was a good goalkeeper, but the backs were rather slow. Both had rare judgment, however, and Russell was magnificent under pressure. Atterbury is a wonderful player considering his age. The wing halves also showed traces of wear and tear, and Eastwood, deputising for Hill at centre-half, was the pick. The best forward was Toms; he worked with tremendous energy, and brought out the best in Heeps, the reserve left winger, who is a fast and clever lad. Kirkpatrick and Raymond did not do a great deal, but they certainly kept the ball moving, and Raymond showed rare judgment in passing.

The Town had a bad day—a very bad day. There were only about a couple of players who played up to their best form, and they were Bailey and Tirrell. Both did well, and Bailey had no chance to stop the shot that scored—he was on the ground. Tirrell kicked and tackled well all through, and although he is not very speedy and his powers of recovery are not brilliant, he was a very difficult customer to pass, and he played with superb judgment. In the second half he several times worked the “offside theory” very skilfully, and on one or two occasions he made me feel that there was something in the suggestion that he would make a good centre-half. The game was well on in the second half before Lennon appeared comfortable, and he then made several clearances in his best style. I think he would benefit by a little holiday. So with Molyneux. This flank was repeatedly beaten in the first half by Heeps and Toms, and I am still of opinion that Molyneux should have been rested until the Easter programme if we want to see him finish the season well. He played desperately hard in the closing stages, and joined the forwards in trying to get a goal. Roe was some little time in finding his feet, but he did splendid work at times, his head doing a lot of spoiling work, but he would have been better on the wing, and so would Parker have been more effective in the centre. He was out of position, and was itching to get into the hurly-burly of the middle field. The forwards played indifferently. Sometimes they were yards too fast for the opposition, but they did not shoot at all well. Higginbotham was a great worker until he got hurt, and the line was worse out of gear than before. Simms was a thrustful leader, but he did not shoot as often as he should have done. Butcher was always in the thick of the fray, and his trickiness gave the home defenders a lot of anxiety. Hoar and Bookman were smart in the open, but did not centre as nicely as usual, and many chances were lost through this failing. Sid Hoar threatened to win the game in the closing stages, but, as on a previous occasion, a defender’s hands robbed him, and the referee would not heed the appeal for a penalty.

In spite of their failure, I think the Town were the better team, and I shall look forward to a comfortable victory on Saturday, when I hope to see the goal average greatly improved. It will be done if the ball is swung about more. The Argyle defenders were almost at the last gasp on Saturday, and if such was the case in a close game, it is obvious that the proper course is to make them do a lot of travelling at the start.

In view of the heavy Easter programme, involving four matches in five days, I think the directors would be well advised to husband their resources. Roe certainly did well enough to justify a further run at half, but it should be on the flank. If Mathieson is fit there will be some difficulty in choosing a forward line, and it may be possible for Mathieson, Shankland, and Percy Hill to get a game in the first eleven within the next fortnight. Experiments will certainly be needed in the closing matches of the season, for it is perfectly clear that the Town Club cannot face an expenditure of £2,000 in summer wages. The difficulty will be to choose who shall remain, and as the retaining figure has gone up to £312, the directors have a serious problem to face. It is not, as some people appear to think, a question of drawing money and banking it, and if the Town can clear themselves of debt this season and start with a clean sheet next, they will do exceptionally well.

It is early as yet to talk about what

should or what should not be done, but it is obvious that the middle line needs strengthening. I am not going to labour this subject, or to say anything to embarrass the directors, for they may be trusted to do the best with the funds at their disposal. We have seen a great advance on last season, and I am convinced that we shall do even better next.