

LUTON STILL WINNING.

"Lions" Lose by Penalty Goal at Luton.

LUTON TOWN 1 goal
MILLWALL ATHLETIC ... Nil

LUTON TOWN.—Bailey; Lennon, Tirrell; Foster, Walker, Roe; Bassett, Butcher, Sinms, Higginbotham, Bookman.

MILLWALL ATHLETIC. — Lansdale; Fort, Hill; Voisey, Riddell, Stanton; Taylor, Richardson, Thompson, Sutherland, Dorsett.

Referee: Mr. E. E. Small, Bristol.

"Everybody is talking or writing about the 'spirit of Christmas,'" said a lady to me the other day, "but I think very few people have the Christmas spirit."

As I am convinced that she will read this report I hope she will give me credit for possession. For the spirit of Christmas is composite, involving not merely merriment and rejoicing, but the spirit of peace and goodwill to men. Peace and goodwill are impossible without the virtues of patience and forbearance. And one needs an exceptional dose of these to be able to write calmly of the match at Luton on Saturday.

We won, thanks to all except the forwards, and it must have been borne home to the directors on Saturday that the forward line is not good enough to win promotion. Not by many chalks. And the only chalk we got on Saturday was from a penalty kick. More than once I have heard forwards say, "If we get a goal away from home we do well, and the defence should take all responsibility afterwards." As things are at present, the defence has to work jolly hard not only on foreign soil, but at home, and that they have performed their allotted task very well indeed is shown by the fact that only once has the goal been penetrated in a home game, and that by Norwich City—of all teams!—on the first Saturday of the season. They have kept a clean sheet in no fewer than eleven matches out of nineteen, and only two goals have been registered against them in the last seven League games. Eloquent figures, constituting a testimonial that would get any one of the six players concerned with defence a new job if he were out of work.

Someone may point out that the Town have scored in sixteen of nineteen games, and argue that the forwards deserve credit for that. So they do, but, in view of the splendid body of support behind the forwards, are they getting as many goals as they should? The answer is in the negative, emphatically so. The weakness in front of goal is lamentable, and on Saturday it was as pronounced as ever it has been during the last three seasons. From midfield they could baffle and elude the opposition with comparative ease, but in front of goal they seemed quite incapable of hitting a ball hard or of shooting quickly. This is the fault to be remedied, and as far as I can judge there is necessity for a coach to instruct the inside men in the art of hitting true a moving ball.

We had enough of the game to have won in decisive fashion, and Millwall must have returned to town confident of success next Saturday unless the Town can produce vastly improved shooting power. Of the defence they had high opinion, and they are judges of defensive work at New Cross. A more resolute and better balanced defence the Town have not met this season than Millwall's, and are not likely so to do, and it is tribute to the high standard the Town forwards can achieve when one says that they were far below their best, and yet capable of outwitting the visitors and making openings that should have brought about half-a-dozen goals. If prompt, accurate shooting were added to the other accomplishments of the Town forwards, promotion would be a certainty, and a long run in the Cup probable.

When the goal came it left the visitors with a grievance. For the moment I thought that Butcher fell over without any reason except to deceive the referee, but he was actually tripped, although the ball had left his toe before the offence. The position of the ball, however, is of little account in such a case, and Mr. Small, who was close to the spot, had no doubt whatever that Butcher had been fouled, and he was very prompt in his decision. It seemed as though no one wanted to take the shot, and so TIRRELL performed the office himself, and if he can do it like that every time he need never ask any other player to do it. Lansdale had not the slightest chance of saving a ball that left Tirrell's toe instead of his instep.

A feature of the game was the failure of Simms in shooting, otherwise his leadership was good enough for anything. He made openings for others as well as himself, and when he did manage to get the ball in front in the second half and actually got it through, Butcher was given offside, the ball having struck him as he lay in the goal mouth. The right wing was the better, and as a combination the best on the field, although Bassett was not at his best. Butcher was again the best forward, a glutton for work, and skilful withal. Oh, if he could only shoot. Bassett got over some good centres, and led Stanton a dance, but shared the general fault of asking to be knocked off. The left wing got going properly not more than three times in the game, and it was right off song.

The value of a strong middle line was once more exemplified. Herein lay our strength, and although Walker seemed rather a long time in getting down to his

job, he gradually reached tip-top form, and in the second half was master of the middle field in spite of frequent fouls committed upon him, chiefly by his countryman from Ayr United—Richardson. Porter was in great form again, his speed and robust tackling, and his helping of the forwards being exceptionally fine, while Roe returned to his best, and in his skilful way robbed his opponents and fed his own men smartly.

In the back division there was little to choose. Lennon maintained his form, and his length kicking was the most accurate of the bunch. Tirrell has never played better, and on two or three occasions he covered the goal when all seemed lost, while nearly always when he rushed the visitors for possession he came out with the ball at his toe. Bailey kept goal with full confidence again, and although he made one mistake in the second half, when he failed to respond to Tirrell's call, he retrieved the error and kept his goal intact. Whether it is the fact that Gibbon is waiting for a chance to show what he can do in the first team or not I don't know, but Bailey seems determined to stay there.

Considering their resources Millwall cannot be written down a great side. As usual, they have a grand defence, but the forward line, while playing good football at times, seemed quite incapable of scoring goals. The introduction of Thompson was thought to have solved the problem, but he was never happy, for he seldom managed to leave Walker far away, and when he did he found Lennon and Tirrell a masterful pair. Richardson showed pretty touches and bad temper, and Sutherland was seldom in the picture. Dorsett and Taylor were the best of the quintette. Voisey played a great game at half, and Stanton was of unceremonious turn of mind, while Riddell did fairly well. Fort and Hill were splendid backs. The old Exeter man was inclined to error in length and direction of volleying, but Hill, a big fellow secured as a half-back, was splendid. Lansdale is a goal-keeper of more than average merit, and saved the "Lions" from a severe defeat.

The attendance was well over 9,000.