

MUD SCRAMBLE AT BRISTOL.

LUTON LOSE, ALTHOUGH CLEVERER SIDE.

Player Ordered Off.

(By CRUSADER.)

BRISTOL ROVERS 2 goals
LUTON TOWN Nil

BRISTOL ROVERS. — Barnes; Panes, Haydon; Boxley, Sims, Steele; Norton, Morgan, Ball, Liddell, Harvey.

LUTON TOWN.—Bailey; Lennon, Tirrell; Foster, Roe, Millar; Hoar, Higginbotham, Simms, Butcher, Bookman.

Referee.—Mr. E. J. Tolfree, Southampton.

Our hopes of promotion suffered another severe blow at Bristol, and now it will either mean an almost phenomenal recovery of the miserable failure of our rivals that will land us in Division II. The story of the game at Bristol reads very much like a "fairy story" perhaps, but the game itself was by no means pretty. The most remarkable thing was the result. It is not the slightest exaggeration to say that the Town had practically as much the better of the game as they had when they defeated Gillingham by 7-0. For five to ten minutes at a stretch the ball could not be got out of the Bristol half of the field, and Bailey was for the most part a spectator. Now and again there was a dangerous raid by the Rovers, and two of these were attended by success. Yet so severe was Luton's pressure that Tirrell was often found well inside the Bristol half, and had one of his shots been three or four inches lower a goal would have been scored, for the ball hit the bar and went over, when the goalkeeper was beaten. Our team could do

EVERYTHING EXCEPT SCORE,

and the Rovers were the luckiest side I have seen in any game this season. Not once, but quite half-a-dozen times, one or other of the Luton forwards was clean past all opposition except Barnes, and yet the ball could not be forced over the line, except on one occasion near the finish, when Tirrell gave Butcher a pass for the inside man to shoot into the net. The referee thought he was offside, but, in my opinion, he was "onside" when the ball was passed by Tirrell, who was only a few yards away, and inside the Rovers' penalty area. The game was quite one-sided on the run of the play, and we only lost because of the inability of the forwards to shoot accurately.

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I have said it was not a pretty game, and there can be no doubt that Mr. Tolfree allowed the Rovers to get out of hand. Having got the lead they meant to stick to it at all hazards, and the dismissal in disgrace of Panes was only the culmination of three or four incidents in one tussle in the Rovers' goalmouth. Simms had got the home defence in a tangle about six yards from goal, when he was stopped by two or three defenders flinging themselves at him. Higginbotham swept in and almost got the ball, when three or four opponents joined in a tackle. Barnes came out of his goal and was knocked over, and as Higginbotham was striving to get the ball into the empty goal he was rushed by four or five players. He was floored, but before the ball was got away Higginbotham again went into the thick of the fray, which was almost on the goal-line. He upset Panes, and then Barnes went for him and also went down, but Steele, Sims, Haydon and Panes closed on him again. Panes went down like a nine-pin, but weight of numbers again brought the Luton man down, and while he was on the floor Panes sprang up, rushed at him, struck him and tried to kick him. Panes was collared by his colleagues and pulled away as Higginbotham rose in a hurry, but the referee, who was close on the spot, had no option but to give Panes

MARCHING ORDERS

the misconduct was so gross and palpable.

This occurred when the second half was twenty minutes old, and the crowd immediately commenced a barracking of the referee and Higginbotham, and for the official especially. A spectator from the stand came to the rails and challenged the Luton player, and was invited to call at the dressing room after the game. So unruly did the crowd become that Mr. Tolfree had to stop the game, and the Rovers' players joined with him in appealing for order.

The Rovers' directors were in a state of nerves, and sent round a board warning the spectators that such behaviour was calculated to result in the closing of the ground, a lesson that would, perhaps, do good. The Bristol crowd have nothing to learn in the way of disorderliness, which was not confined to any section, but was maintained all round the ground. When the teams left the field, females in the stand were expectorating on the Luton players. And I think that is about the limit.

It is almost inconceivable that the Town can ever play such a game with such a result. It is no exaggeration to say that they had three-fourths of the play, and they were a better side all round. I daresay that many will be particularly interested in what I have to say about the goals. Well, the first came as the result of a breakaway by Morgan, who gave Norton an opportunity to centre squarely, and Ball was fortunate to get his head to the ball before any defender and direct it into the net. Three minutes before this goal was scored I had said to the gentleman sitting next to me, "It is half-time." Luton were pressing then. Two minutes later I said, "He has gone two minutes over the 45." The ball was then in midfield. The goal was scored at 1.59. The game was started at 3.11. The interval was sounded at 4.0. After I had despatched my telegram to the "Saturday Telegraph" (and the "39 minutes" therein mentioned should have been 45) Mr. Oscar Hart, one of the Town directors, who was sitting in another part

of the ground, came to me and said, "The referee played three minutes too long. Mr. Gibbs and I timed the game." Thus was Luton's first misfortune.

For three minutes after the resumption the Rovers' goal was in a desperate

STATE OF SIEGE,

and escaped miraculously. Then came the transformation. The ball was lifted out to the left, and LIDDELL, by brilliant control, carried it through until he was practically on the goal-line about a third of the distance from the post to the corner flag. Expecting a centre, Bailey stepped out, but Liddell cleverly steered the ball from a most acute angle into the net, just wide of Bailey's right hand. Thereafter there was only one team it, and that was not the Rovers. Quite as loud as cheers for the goals were many demonstrations that followed successful defensive spells by the Rovers. And they did defend well, but we ought to have scored on several occasions. Barnes made many fine saves, and Whatley could not have done better. Haydon, a young back signed on a fortnight ago, was very good indeed, while Sims was a strong, if unorthodox, half. Steele is too dirty for the game, but the tactics of the Rovers' defence as a whole were not marked by cleanliness. Of the forwards Morgan and Liddell were smart inside men, and with Norton made the best of their few opportunities.

The Town were immeasurably superior in all except shooting, and about that I am not going to say a lot because of the awful state of the ground. Had we been three or four goals up in the first quarter-of-an-hour, and doubled the number before the finish, there would still have been a host of chances missed. The ball missed the target by inches time and again when a goal seemed certain, and there should have been a record win of the season. In the open they were altogether too fast and clever for the defending Rovers, but goals would not come. Except in shooting every man played remarkably well. Simms led the line magnificently, but would not risk shooting as often as he should. Higginbotham was a potent factor, and stood up to a

ROUGH AND READY

defence in his own hefty way. Butcher was as clever as usual in engineering openings, but his shooting was most unfortunate. On half-a-dozen occasions he was just wide, and had he retired with a "hat-trick" to his credit at half-time he would have earned something like a reward for the work of the line as a whole. While yet below his best, Sid Hoar was ever so much neater it than at Birmingham, and Bookman was as good as any forward we had when he got the chances. In the first half some of his runs were thrilling, and he put the ball into the goal-mouth very neatly on many occasions when goals should have come.

The middle line was less effective than usual, but that was not the fault of Millar. On the whole he played a sound game against a strong pair, and his only drawback was one which he is bound to suffer for a little time—lack of experience. He was smart in tackling and in feeding, and is going to be a great half. Roe's work was as classy as ever, but he was not so powerful as a pivot as on the flank. Foster played a strong game, and kept the ball moving in the direction of goal, and in the second half he was for the most part a sixth forward. Lennon and Tirrell were in stalwart mood, and were much more skilful than the opposition. Both revelled in their work among the mud, and were seldom at fault. Bailey saved capitally in several raids, but had much less to do than Barnes, the goalie in the opposite citadel.

When Mr. Tolfree had charge of our earlier games I thought he was about as good a referee as I had seen in the South, but on Saturday he did not appear to such advantage. He did not keep in touch with the game so well, and certainly allowed the first half to proceed too long. It could not have been on account of stoppages, because there was only one, and in the second half there were five or six, but he did not allow the game to proceed 40 minutes then.

The ground was in a terrible state. On Friday night it was under water, and only the fact that Bristol had no rain on Friday night permitted the game being played. The ground was a bog, and players were ankle deep in mud in almost every position on the field. I shall be surprised if the Rovers do not go through the mill next Saturday—in the matter of goals—and if Luton do not restore their goal average to something like its level of a month ago.