

THE BIGGEST BLOW.

Yes, Saturday's defeat was certainly the biggest blow that the Club has sustained this season. In spite of the defeats at Reading and Bristol we still felt that we had a fair chance of creeping in at the finish for promotion honours. Now it will be pretty nearly a miracle if we get promotion. In the first half of Saturday's game the question was put to me: "Did our chaps play like this at Bristol?" Of course they did not, but their second half work conveys an accurate idea of what the whole of the game was like at Bristol. If, as was generally conceded on Saturday, we ought to have won by half a dozen goals, then I think that score should have been nearly doubled at Bristol. My attention was drawn on Saturday afternoon to crowds leaving the field before the end of the game—before Simms scored. Well, they left for the same reason that I would have left had not business kept me in my place—that they were

UTTERLY DISAPPOINTED

by the failure of the Town in front of goal. This, as at Bristol, was the main cause of defeat, even allowing for defensive errors. It was galling to see the ball worked into the very jaws of goal with almost monotonous regularity, and then to see the smartest movements come unstuck as one or other forward fozzled the



R. MILLAR (my impression), a promising young Scot.

opportunity. Had the forwards been playing against as good a pair of backs as Luton's there might have been some modification of the criticism, but the Rovers' backs were quite a moderate pair in point of skill, and it was sheer lack of sting and promptitude on the part of the Town's inside men that made all the difference in the score. They would clear the backs with comparative ease, and then want to walk the ball through instead of banging it hard at goal. There were openings when a fast shot was all that was needed to beat the goalkeeper, but wretched scraping of the ball gave defenders time to recover and block the path. Practically the only good shot was that by which SIMMS scored Luton's goal, and had he taken other chances with half the celerity that he accepted this, we should not now be

MOURNING A HOME DEFEAT.

Bristol's chances were few and far between, but they got more in the first half than their skill warranted, and this was largely due to the fact that the Town adopted wrong methods. In the "News" last Thursday I suggested that the Rovers would have to go through the mill in the matter of goal-scoring. Some of the Town players were suffering bitter memories of the week previous, and they made the mistake of trying to put the Rovers through the mill of another sort. I am human enough to know that is a natural instinct, but it is not a wise one, as events proved. The result was a liberation from attacks that threatened success, and the ball in the Town half of the field with greater frequency than it should have been.

After the interval came a distinct change, and the ball was in front of the Rovers' goal for forty of the forty-five minutes.

The Rovers were content if they could keep the foe at bay, and they managed it thanks to a lot of courage as well as a lot of luck. They came with

A DEFINITE INTENTION

of maintaining a stout defence, and the constancy with which they put the ball out of play even in the first ten minutes proved this. But when they got the ball anywhere near the Town goal they lost no time in trickery, and it was this promptitude that enabled Chance to open the scoring after five minutes. 'It was the Rovers' first run down, and following a mix-up by the right flank of the Town defence, Bailey left his goal. He stopped a hot shot somewhat luckily, I thought, from Sims, but the ball went to the feet of CHANCE, who at once shot hard and successfully for goal. It was open to question whether Bailey should have left his charge at all, but he acted promptly, and had the Rovers failed to score it is probable that the majority of the onlookers would have said he did the right thing, although I do not think so. In the second case I think he was at fault. Norton got over a fine centre from the corner-flag, and Bailey, trying to fist away from under the bar, only brought the ball down to the feet of CHANCE, who

COULD HARDLY HAVE FAILED

to score. Then came the Town's hardest struggle to recover lost ground, but SIMMS' goal came when only five minutes remained for play, and the Rovers' defence never showed signs of capitulating again.

Bailey had little to do, and he certainly did not inspire confidence. I am as ready as any man to admit that Bailey has done some splendid work, and his display at Reading will long be a pleasant memory, but in the last two matches he has been much less reliable. Lennon and Tirrell remain as good as ever and play with quite remarkable consistency. I do not know two backs that do less shouting to each other and yet cover so splendidly. Both kicked strongly and tackled with judgment. The middle line, without touching the level of the regular line, played well, and the amount of pressure exercised by the Town in the second half proved that the visiting forwards had little chance against the Town's middle men. Foster was the best, for he played up to his customary standard, and what I like about the old Nottingham player is that he

REMAINS UNRUFFLED

and yet enthusiastic whatever the state of affairs. He gives and takes hard knocks with impunity, and plays as fairly as any half-back. None can say that Roe is a poor half in any position, but he has done

such brilliant work at left-half that the policy of moving him was open to question, for he is not nearly so effective in the centre as on the wing. Millar certainly has much to learn, but he played a really good defensive game, and that is what a half-back should first learn. When he can feed his forwards as consistently as he can upset the plans of his opponents, he will be a fine half, and on his two games against Bristol he has shown that he will have to receive consideration when "jobs" are going in April. There were occasions on Saturday when he might have followed the instructions of his captain with more profit, but as his opportunities increase I am sure he will do that, for he is not a lad to suffer from swelled head. The forward work in general I have dealt with. The inclusion of Mathieson did not bring about the desired improvement in shooting, and as I hold that Butcher is

THE CLEVEREST INSIDE FORWARD, so far as work in the open is concerned, on the books, there was no more punch in the line than the previous week. Of Mathieson's cleverness I have always had a very high opinion, but, for some reason or other, we are not getting the best from him. Higginbotham worked as hard as ever, and although at times he would have done well to curb his exuberance, he was the most dangerous forward we had. Simms showed good generalship in mid-field, but would be the first to admit that his shooting form at the present time is just about as poor as it has ever been. For the life of me I cannot understand why a player who has built up such a reputation as Simms has, should be such a slave to the idea that he must dribble the ball into the net. I am absolutely confident that when he begins to hit the ball as he hit it so often last year when within range, that we shall start

WINNING MATCHES AGAIN— and not until then. Sid. Hoar does not seem able to shake off the effects of his long illness, and although now and then we got a glimpse of his old promise, it was obvious that he was not in his old virile mood. The sooner he is, the better for the team. Bookman did well with the chances he got, and he is entitled to his place as much as any man in the line. The great fault of the vanguard is lack of shooting ability, and until that is improved matches will not be won.

The Rovers played the spoiling game with success. They are not a very skilful side, but they are plucky and determined, and those qualities often carry through deep water when craftsmanship fails. Barnes is a good understudy for Whatley, and in Heydon the Rovers have picked up

A USEFUL BACK. He is a youngster who will make good, and Panes played his usual never-say-die game. In the middle line Sims was the pick, and Boxley, who was a centre-forward until a week or two ago, was a curiosity. He was fortunate that he did not receive marching orders for his foul on Bookman. Of the forwards the youngster Chance vied with Norton for honours. They were the danger men of the line.

Mr. Duke had not a very agreeable task, but he did his work well. He is one of the most lenient of officials, and on Saturday he not only showed a good deal of lenity, but he also showed a great improvement in the general administration of the game.

BRISTOL ROVERS 2
LUTON TOWN 1
LUTON TOWN: — Bailey; Lennon, Tirrell; Foster, Roe, Millar, Hoar, Higginbotham, Simms, Mathieson, Bookman.

BRISTOL ROVERS:—Barnes; Panes, Heydon; Boxley, Sims, Steele; Chance, Morgan, Ball, Liddell, Norton.
 Referee:—Mr. T. J. Duke, London.