

THE LEAGUE—DIV. III.

MASTERS OF CIRCUMSTANCE

Luton Town's Splendid Win.

(By CRUSADER).

LUTON TOWN		1
PORTSMOUTH		0

LUTON: — Bailey; Lennon, Tirrell; Foster, Walker, Roe; Bassett, Butcher, Walsh, Higginbotham, Hoar.

PORTSMOUTH: — Robson, Probert, Abbott; Wilson, Martin, Turner; Bishop, Stringfellow, Cherrett, Hoten, Beedie.

Referee:—F. P. Farrow, Bristol.

It is a long time since a team gave such a pettish display as did Portsmouth in the second half, and, allowing for the weakness of the referee, the Portsmouth team generally forfeited all respect by their tactics in this moiety. One could only arrive at the conclusion that they had come to Luton with the conviction that the absence of three of the Town's forward line would make easy their task of maintaining an unbeaten record. They seemed to hold to this view until the goal was scored, and from that point they reduced the game to a farce. In the first twenty minutes of the second half Portsmouth's halves committed foul after foul, and judging from the effective manner in which they dealt with the free kicks, this lamentable exhibition is not an unusual feature of their game. Tripping, pushing, handling, anything that would serve to obstruct an opponent or retard an advance was brought into use. The only thing that could be said in favour of this policy was that there was nothing very vicious. Nevertheless, the game was utterly spoiled. All things considered, the Town team deserve commendation for the patience they showed, although there were occasions when it would have been more than human to have endured the irritating offences without reprisal. Spectators who seldom visit the Town games were struck by the contrast between the teams in this respect, and remarked upon it afterwards, and some of the supporters of Portsmouth, from the Air Service, struck their colours in consequence.

Mr. Farrow was very much to blame for allowing this sort of thing, and he came in for a lot of criticism for his lack of firmness. For a referee to speak to one player three times for offences is a sign of weakness, and that is what Mr. Farrow did with Hoten.

In the first half the game was quite interesting, and there was no superabundance of fouls. The Town team played hard, enthusiastic football, and cut no time to waste in getting goalwards. The defence was steady and the halves strong, and the forwards were full of enterprise and grit. Portsmouth showed up well at times, and twice in one attack they were very unfortunate, for Stringfellow fired in a beauty that Bailey tipped on to the bar, whence it went over, and on another occasion he struck the cross-piece with a lovely drive that beat Bailey, but the Town goalkeeper smartly caught the rebound and got the ball away. These were the best efforts that "Pompey" made, and so well were they playing at this juncture that anything might have happened. Had they been able to maintain that standard of skill and vivacity they would have done better, and left Luton with a better name if not with the booty. But that effort corresponded with a lively improvement in the home halves, and they proved conclusively that playing on the ball is more profitable than unrestricted attention to the man.

Taking the game as a whole the Town were full value for their triumph, they had much more of the game, and had they been as thorough in finish as they were in constructing attack, they would have had more goals. One more goal they certainly deserved, for Hoar got clean away in the second half, and dashed right through to finish up with a shot from a most acute angle striking the upright and glancing into the net, but the whistle had gone for offside—which was a blunder, as everyone in the neighbourhood of the Press-box agreed. The goal that carried the honours deservedly fell to Walsh. Bassett and Butcher had combined brilliantly, and Turner and Abbott were undecided how to deal with them when Bassett passed to Butcher and then got in position for a return. Instead, Butcher slipped the ball into the centre and Walsh shot hard. Robson saved finely, knocking the ball on to the post and then recovering just in time to prevent Bassett heading through, but the ball could not be got away properly, and when it came to WALSH again, the centre-forward spun round and crashed the ball into the net, Robson making a gallant but vain attempt to save. It was a fine goal, and pleased everybody, but especially Walsh.

The second half has been dealt with already. Each side came near scoring, but the Town were oftenest dangerous, and we saw little of Portsmouth forwards until the closing stages, when they made a determined effort to get on even terms, and dropped irregular tactics, but they were kept at bay, and the Town won well.

The Town defence played a solid and judicious game. Bailey did well, and took no risks at all. Lennon and Tirrell were in fine fettle, and the Scot was never at fault. Tirrell, although not looking as well as one could have wished, made only one error, and that was retrieved. Most pleasing of all, however, was the manner in which both backs played up to the half-backs, and there was an excellent understanding between the two lines. Foster's inclusion was criticised in some quarters. He did not settle down immediately, but before the change of ends he was doing splendid work, and was level with his colleagues. Walker was not quite so conspicuous as usual, perhaps, but there was the hall-mark of excellence in his defensive and offensive work alike, while the reason for Roe's rapid advance in popular favour was again amply demonstrated by his clean and clever display. The forwards looked an odd lot when they lined up, but if they never rose to the superlative in combination,

their enthusiasm and unselfishness was full compensation, and they harassed and hampered the visiting backs ceaselessly. Bassett and Butcher combined with admirable judgment and celerity, and were the best wing on the field. On the other flank Higginbotham and Hoar were little below the standard of their game as a right wing, and the former imparted a lot of energy, and clean energy, too, into frontal attack, while Hoar's speed and trickiness had Probert and Wilson in difficulties all the time. Walsh was not an ideal leader, but no one expected that he would be. He deserved equal commendation with the others, for he tried to open out the game and he shot at every opportunity. He deserved his goal, too, and neither Simms nor any other player could have got a better. One could imagine Walsh doing better at centre-forward than at half-back if he had a little more speed and adroitness.

Portsmouth have a fine goalkeeper in Robson, who is quick and resourceful. The backs were strong and resolute, with Abbott the steadier. Martin, a hefty centre-half, was the best of the middle line, but all were sturdy, and did solid work. With the exception of Stringfellow, the forwards were disappointing. Stringfellow showed all his old tricks, and his dribbling and feinting were of the highest-class, but he got few chances of shooting after his two excellent efforts in the first half. Cherrett quite failed to live up to his reputation as a goal-scorer, and Hoten's tricks frustrated his undoubted skill. The wingers could make no headway against Roe and Foster, but got few opportunities.