

A PRECIOUS POINT FROM PORTSMOUTH.

LUTON TOWN'S FINE PERFORMANCE.

(BY CRUSADERS.)

PORTSMOUTH 1 goal

LUTON TOWN 1 ..

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

LUTON TOWN.—Bailey; Lennon, Tirrell; Foster, Walker, Roe; Hoar, Butcher, Simms, K...eson, Bookman.

Referee.—Mr. F. P. Farrow, Bristol.

Everybody admitted that the performance of the Town in spoiling Portsmouth's unbeaten record was the best achievement of the twelve games they had played. The thirteenth match eclipsed it, and I do not think I shall wrong anyone by saying that very few expected a point from the return game at Portsmouth. The players were included in that few, and those of us who had the good fortune to witness a strong and hard-fought struggle best know how the confidence of the team was justified. Every point won on foreign soil is a handsome achievement, but to bring one away from Portsmouth, and to deserve it fully, puts the stamp of merit on the team.

Few people realise how difficult it is to win games away from home. Theoretically it should not be, of course, but theory comes a cropper in collision with fact on the football field. Strangeness of surroundings, influence of spectators, and frequently the totally different character of the ground, are circumstances that detrimentally affect the player. And in the case of Portsmouth, for some reason of which I cannot define the cause, tradition has it that the game shall certainly be rough, if not something worse. Since the introduction of the bonus system matters have grown worse, and players expect to get full bonus at home, whatever happens away, and will go to almost any length to ensure the addition to their weekly wage packets.

For once in a way tradition was overcome on Saturday. It was one of the cleanest games in which Portsmouth and Luton Town have participated for a long time. There were lapses, of course, but nothing of serious moment, and the game was certainly more thrilling and enjoyable in every way than that at Luton the week previous. If there was one player disposed to try and take advantage of the known weakness of the referee, and to expose himself to obloquy, it was Hoten, and he is clever enough to know better. He seemed to be particularly ill-inclined towards Jack Foster, with whom he played last year in the ranks of Notts County. For the rest the game was fairly free from fouls, and although Mr. Farrow did much better than at Luton, the merit for improvement lay rather with the players than with the official.

The first half, when the conditions favoured them, was in favour of Pompey. They did a lot more pressing, but Robson was fortunate to leave the field at the interval with the score in favour of his side. Simms was right through on one occasion when brought down—pushed over from behind—by Probert and Martin, within six yards of goal. On another occasion Simms put in a splendid shot, the ball going at a great pace all along the ground and appearing to be a certain scorer, when Robson hurled himself through space and just managed to stop its course. Bookman tore up and the ball was only a yard from the goal, but the winger sent it behind. On other occasions there were exciting scenes in front of goal, but the home backs contrived to prevent anything in the nature of a clear shot, and they were usually successful.

At the other end there were narrow escapes, but Bailey had by no means a lot to do, for the home forwards usually fell prey to the Town backs. The goal that was scored by BEEDIE after ten minutes' play originated in the play of Stringfellow, who cunningly shot the ball across the goal-mouth when the defenders were drawn, and Beedie took the ball on the run and banged it into the net at terrific speed. It was a good goal, because if Beedie had hesitated he would have been covered.

Before the equaliser came, a quarter of an hour after changing ends, Luton had monopolised the play, and swift and vigorous thrusts told their tale. HOAR put three corners across within as many minutes. The first was creeping in, when Robson made a dramatic leap and got the ball safely round the upright. The second time the ball dropped right on the bar, and after running almost from end to end it dropped behind. The third came almost like the first, but a trifle higher, and Robson again leaped across goal, and made a great effort to turn it round the post, but the swerve on it beat him, and, in spite of his desperately gallant effort, the ball fell into the net.

I notice that one or two writers have said that it was a lucky goal, and have blamed Robson. That is unjust both to Hoar and to the Portsmouth goalie. If Robson was at fault at all it was in trying to stop the ball, as it might have gone into the net without a second player touching it, but he dare not take the risk. The Town forwards were right on the goal-line, and it would have been difficult indeed to prevent a goal. In fact, two of the three corner kicks might have been converted, and there were others that were almost as dangerous. It was freely admitted that Portsmouth have never had such a hot and desperate struggle to avoid defeat than in that fifteen minutes immediately after the interval. They were practically penned in, and were kicking anyhow and anywhere to keep the ball from goal. Simms once got in a gorgeous shot that made the spectators yell with pain, for Robson was beaten all the way, but the ball flashed past the upright at a tremendous pace, and nearly everybody

was shouting "goal." There were other occasions, too, when a few inches made all the difference, and Robson made a marvellous save when Probert headed the ball away from him, and, incidentally, fell against the post with such force that he lost one of his teeth. If only the Town forwards had kept up that pace and pressure after the goal Pompey would have lost by a lot of goals.

A precious point it was, but the best commentary on the game was that of the Portsmouth directors, who acknowledged that they were more than satisfied with a point, for they were lucky to get it. That satisfies my own views as to the merits of the respective sides. Departmentally, Portsmouth were better in goal and on the left wing, and Luton superior at back, half-back, right wing, and centre-forward.

Harry Bailey could not be blamed for the goal registered against him. He saved several times when the goal was in perilous situation, but on two occasions he seemed a bit lost, and once in the second half he missed the ball, and Pompey's left wing would have scored but for the brilliant recovery of Lennon. The right back was in magnificent form again, and his wonderful speed and sure-footedness evoked general admiration. On this form Scotland can hardly have a better back. Tirrell, in his own particular way, was practically as good. His head saved his feet, and playing close up to Roe, his rugged presence proved of immense value. He also made his customary goal-line clearance when Bailey was beaten.

Even so, the best part of the team was the middle line, and for long periods in each half they had the home forwards in a relentless grip. Both as spoilers and feeders they excelled. Walker took Cherrett in hand from the beginning, and the centre-forward did not get three shots at goal. At close quarters he could never outwit Walker, who got the ball from him consistently. Foster played even better than on the previous Saturday, and this time he had the better wing to face, for Hoten and Beedie started well. Foster's tackling was especially fine, and he played cleanly and resolutely against a pair that were less scrupulous than any other pair on the field. Roe was—well, Roe. Never flurried, and always playing the ball, he gradually mastered Stringfellow until the clever little chap was almost lost, while Kennedy, a new winger upon whom Pompey had built great hopes, was seldom in the picture.

The forwards took a long time to get into their stride—too long. Once they did so,

however, they kept the home defenders on tenterhooks. Hear got little to do in the first half, but when he did get it he invariably placed the ball somewhere near Pompey's goal. Only one of his centres failed to come bang in front. Butcher was the industrious and energetic player we know him to be, and his trickiness a sore trial to Turner and Martin. It is hard to see how he can be left out of the line. Sinms worked harder than usual, and had he had any luck with his single-handed efforts he might have scored three or four goals. Thrustful and enterprising against vigorous opposition, he was always dangerous. The left wing was not nearly so good as the right. Mathieson, who had a damaged ankle, gave a few glimpses of his superfine footwork, but he did not pass or shoot well. Bookman was fitful. Some of his runs were good enough for goals, but his centreing was at fault, for he usually held on too long and was bowled over or had his centres blocked, for Probert and Wilson were not disposed to stand on ceremony.

Robson kept goal well, and made four thrilling saves. Probert was rather erratic, and Abbott once more the better back. Indeed, the latter was the mainstay of the defence. Like backs, the halves were rugged in style, good spoilers, but too often lofting the ball. Martin was the best, and it was his strong defensive play that frustrated the Town forwards in several dangerous expeditions. Beedie was the best of the forward bunch, but the chief asset of the line was speed rather than footwork. The inside forwards started well, but in the second half were almost demoralised.

[In the telegraphed report of the match there appeared a rather amusing error, and several readers have drawn my attention to it, and done not a little leg-pulling. The actual reading should have been: "A moment later Portsmouth came down again, Bailey flipping over a hot shot from Stringfellow. The referee was loudly hooted, for he gave a goal kick, and ignored the appeals of the home players that he should consult the linesman. The Town were well out of this!"]