

LUTON TOWN'S IMPROVEMENT

GIVES THEM DESERVED VICTORY AT PORTSMOUTH.

(By "CRUSADER.")

It is unquestionable that there was more surprise in Luton than in Portsmouth when the result of the game at Fratton Park was recorded. Luton Town's home performances during the last month have been so disappointing that there was little confidence in their ability to achieve success in the formidable task that faced them on Saturday. But the two or three who accompany the team on their journeys from home have come to look for better things away than at home, yet even these felt that to look for any part of the spoils from Portsmouth was expecting too much in view of the fact that Portsmouth failed to win one of the four games played last season. Pompey would be bound to make a tremendous effort, and the Town would do exceedingly well to equal their performance at Bristol the Saturday before. Some of the friends we have made at Portsmouth, and they are exceedingly nice to us down there, confirmed this view before the game. They gave us to understand that it was Portsmouth's turn to win, and that they meant so to do. After the game they were quite frank, and, differing from some others, paid full

CREDIT AND COMPLIMENT

to the Town for the success. Mr. McCartney, of whom Lutonians speak with kindly memories, was not the least among the sportsmen.

The compliments were deserved. In a keenly, and at times skilfully, borne struggle, the Town achieved the mastery. Not by a big margin at all, but just a general superiority. It made itself felt in the first half, for there was no period of the game when energy or confidence sagged, and even when Pompey were putting forth their best in the second half, and keeping the ball in Luton's territory for rather long spells, one felt that one of the swift, vigorous raids of the Town would bring success. And so it proved. There was more method in the work than there has been for weeks past, and that because the understanding and the co-operation of the players was more pronounced than usual; and it was steadily but surely borne in upon Pompey's supporters, if not upon the players, that the Town defence was altogether too wise for the opposing attack, while the Town forwards, with speed and craft, were an irritating menace to Pompey's defence. While I am by no means convinced that our side as a whole is playing better than last season, I believe that with a little more experience it would do so; of Pompey's side, I doubt if it is quite so good as last season. Improved in some respects it certainly is, but there was

NOT THAT FORCEFUL SPIRIT

about the side that we ran up against last year. Cleverer the forward line is, I am sure, and their only mistake was in maintaining one method—that of short passing and dribbling—when they so regularly found that it could not outwit the Town defenders.

With the one or two exceptions one must always expect, apparently, in these days, the game was clean and pleasant to watch, and the players certainly found it exhilarating. Not the least important factor was speed, and in this respect our forwards had the advantage. They were quick on the ball, kept it on the floor, and if passes were not always accurate or well-timed among the inside trio, the dribbling was very smart until it was overdone. It is no unusual thing for any one of our inside forwards to sidestep two or three of the opposition, and then turn the ball over to another to do likewise. What I liked even better, however, were the long, slanting passes to the extreme wingers, whose sprinting powers were a constant source of trouble. And the best thing of all was the way they let drive at goal. Indeed, but

for some truly wonderful, if occasionally lucky, work by Newton, and the packing of the Pompey goal in the first half, we might have crossed over with a lead of four or five goals. When the odds seemed dead against him, Pompey's goalkeeper got down to fast ground shots and managed to divert them as they were crossing the line, just when another inch would have made all the difference. Thompson was the leading spirit in this target work, and he had

THE HARDEST LUCK

in not registering at least a hat-trick. Irvine and Butcher copied him, and theirs were the low shots that gave such trouble. Had there been as much powder behind those drives as behind Thompson's nothing could have saved Pompey from a crushing defeat.

Reader played his best game of the season, and Hoar was at his best on the other extreme. Irvine more than justified his inclusion, and it is difficult to see how he can be dropped while he plays so well. Butcher was his artful and energetic self, and Thompson played far better than at Bristol, and is getting the best out of the men on either side. The middle men were simply great. Not only in breaking up did they outclass the home forwards, but they showed very great improvement in their co-operation with the forwards. Molyneux's work in this respect vitalised the right wing play, and the three went through time after time to shake Pompey's defence to the marrow. Jennings' robust and driving tactics were not always to the liking of the crowd, but he was a potent factor in attack and defence. Walker was the master of Strange, and many neat passages of the home inside trio were broken up by the Town centre-half, who was also

A BIGGER ASSET

to the attack than usual, and his goal was a gem.

The backs were not unduly worked in the first half, but they had quite enough to do afterwards, and both played valiantly, and gave nothing away. Stephenson has turned out trumps, and there need never be any hesitation about putting him in the side. He was facing a powerful wing, and he came out with flying colours. He has not the speed of Lennon, but he has quite as much dash and is harder to knock off. His appearance was a distinct success. Portsmouth people said last year and repeated this, that Tirrell is one of the finest backs in the South. They think a tremendous lot of him there, and they gave him the palm as the best back on the field. It was all a question of judgment, and he was never in the wrong place and he never put a foot awry. Sid Bird had only one real shot to stop apart from the scoring shot in the first half. He had no chance to prevent the goal, and although his first save did not inspire confidence, after the interval he was more frequently tested, but never in difficulty, and he picked up and cleared coolly and neatly.

Pompey owed their

ESCAPE FROM HEAVY DEFEAT

to Newton's keeping, especially in the first half, when he was frequently applauded for the way he dealt with very difficult shots, like the fine guardian we know him to be. Cooper and Abbott put up a sturdy defence, and the latter especially saved his

charge finely when Newton was hopelessly out of position. Only Martin of the middle men seemed capable of holding his own. He played a great game all through. The forwards were clever, both individually and as a line, but not thrustful enough. Meikle and Beedie were fast and enterprising wingers, and at times they were well fed, especially by Strange and by the halves. The inside forwards showed understanding and skill in footwork, but usually held the ball too close. They are young, and are a credit to Manager McCartney's judgment. They were chosen on the strength of their display in a friendly against Portsmouth, and against a less experienced defence they would have been a very dangerous trio. Mr. Greenland controlled the game very well indeed.

The Town scored after Portsmouth's goal had undergone a lot of pressure, WALKER shooting through from twenty yards' range before the defence could recover after a harassing siege. MACKIE equalised ten minutes later, getting away on his own and beating Bird as the latter ran out. The winning goal came midway through the second half, Reader centring across goal after a fine run, and THOMPSON tapping the ball into the net.