

TWO OUT OF SIX.

LUTON TOWN'S UNHAPPY CHRISTMAS.

At Luton on Saturday:—

PORTSMOUTH	2
LUTON TOWN	0

LUTON.—Gibbon; Lennon, Tirrell; Molyneux, Walker, Jennings; Reader, Butcher, Thompson, Irvine, Hoar.

PORTSMOUTH.—Newton; Probert, Abbott; Robinson, Wilson, Martin; Meikle, Mackie, Strange, Watson, Beedie.

Referee.—Mr. W. E. Greenland.

At Shepherd's Bush on Christmas Day:—

QUEEN'S PARK RANGERS ...	4
LUTON TOWN	0

QUEEN'S PARK RANGERS.—Hill; Marsden, Bain; John, Rance, Vigrass; Butler, Birch, Parker, Chandler, Gregory.

LUTON.—Gibbon; Lennon, Tirrell; Molyneux, Walker, Jennings; Reid, Butcher, Thompson, Irvine, Hoar.

Referee.—Mr. A. L. Grinstead, London.

At Luton on Boxing Day:—

LUTON TOWN	1
QUEEN'S PARK RANGERS ...	0

LUTON.—Gibbon; Lennon, Tirrell; Molyneux, Walker, Jennings; Hoar, Higginbotham, Thompson, Reid, Clarkson.

QUEEN'S PARK RANGERS.—Hill; Lane, Bain; Vigrass, Rance, Gregory; Butler, Birch, Davis, Chandler, Edgley.

Referee.—Mr. A. L. Grinstead, London.

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We have concluded a most disappointing first half of the season. Whatever hopes there might have remained for promotion were shattered by the results of the games this Christmastide, and with the exception of the Cup-tie interest all that remains to be done is to start building up for next season, for there is nothing more than a bare framework of a championship side at command just now. When we started out we felt certain that we could select a side capable of getting to the top, but it is useless to harp on that string any longer, and the only consolation that remains for us now is to hope that we may succeed in the Cup competition.

The victory at Portsmouth last Saturday week led us to hope for a very happy Christmas, but the team quite failed in the return game at Luton, and went from bad to worse, for on Monday morning they lost at Shepherd's Bush by four goals to nil. On Tuesday they just managed to get the better of Queen's Park Rangers at Luton by the only goal of the game, but the old inefficiency in front of goal was as pronounced as ever.

In Saturday's game the defeat was due chiefly to the inaptitude of the forwards. On the run of the game we ought to have been secure by half-time, but the old, old fault of indecision in front of goal was once more painfully apparent, and the forwards quite failed to reproduce their form of the previous week. Could they have done so they would have won before crossing over.

Portsmouth "bided" their time, and while their defence resisted manfully the forwards were always on the look-out for an opening. Their first goal was as fine an example of confidence and opportunism as one could wish to see. WATSON it was who scored it. He received the ball from Meikle about 30 yards out, and beating two or three opponents he never lost control and finished with a beautiful shot that gave Gibbon no earthly chance of saving. There were many who blamed Tirrell and Jennings for the second goal because they were out of place, but I am not going to do so. In certain games that have been snatched out of the fire in the closing stages Tirrell has played an important part, and no one heard any blame then. On Saturday he and Jennings were striving to make good the impotence of the forwards, and neither was able to get at Meikle when the ball went to him. Tirrell tried to get an off-side decision, but the ball had been passed before the Town back stepped forward, and Meikle was not offside. And when the ball came plumb in front of goal from the winger STRANGE neatly headed into the net.

Portsmouth deserved their victory because they were more methodical and attacked with better understanding. Their goal had some wonderful escapes, but the backs and halves played stubbornly and heroically, and when they had got the lead they always looked the more likely team because they never got rattled, whereas the Town lost their bearings, and were little better than a rabble in the closing stages. Neither in combination nor in shooting did the forwards approach the winning style they showed at Portsmouth, and the tendency to hold the ball too close was a common affliction among the inside forwards. Reader did not maintain the standard of the two previous weeks, and Irvine, while his passing was good, was no better than Butcher in front of goal. Sid Hoar alone played up to his reputation.

The halves did well until Portsmouth scored, and then they seemed to tire, and Jennings allowed the astute Meikle too much rope. Lennon's return found him on form, and with the rearguard as a whole little fault could be found.

Portsmouth showed conclusively that they are a good side, and will improve much more if kept together. Their victory was not due so much to the fact that they played a lot better than the previous week as to the fact that the Town were ever so much worse.

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The Rangers hardly deserved such a pronounced victory as that they got on Christmas Day in a game that was of the "needle" type. As last year, the Rangers, who do not lack physique, hustled and hustled strongly, and there were several bad periods. The Town defence came unstuck against a strong attack, and four goals were registered without response, Parker and Birch each getting a brace.

The only change made in the Town team was Reid for Reader on the extreme right, the latter having been injured more seriously than was expected in the match on Saturday. The change was not as successful as was hoped for, but the team as a whole was just as ineffective as against Portsmouth, according to our special correspondent in Town. He says: "Gibbon could not be held responsible for the defeat in any way. The defenders left too many holes, for the middle men were not capable of holding the bustling forwards of the Rangers, who got good support from the middle men. Lennon found

Chandler too much for him, and Tirrell was sadly troubled by the pace of the Rangers' right winger, Butler. At half Molyneux was the best. Walker could not hold Parker, and Jennings was apt to wander a lot. Of the forwards, Hoar alone showed high class. Thompson put in a few pretty touches, but he was awkward, and he got little support either from the men on either side or the men behind. Butcher and Irvine were clever but lacking in promptness in front of goal."

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On Tuesday the Town had a sort of partial revenge over the Rangers, but it can hardly be regarded as a satisfactory result. There had been rumours of all sorts of changes during the morning, but when the teams turned out it was found that the Town defence was unaltered, but in the forward line only Thompson retained his position. The Rangers also made several changes. The crowd must have been about the biggest seen on the ground this season. Up to a point it was a good game, but the Town had enough of the play to have justified a very much larger margin than the odd goal victory. The impotence of the forwards in front of goal was again most irritating, although one cannot overlook the fact that there were two or three occasions when the Rangers adopted questionable tactics, and at least one penalty should have been awarded, for Higginbotham was brought down in disgraceful fashion just in front of goal. The Rangers' defended well, however, and when their forwards got on the move they showed better method than the Town forwards.

Thompson received a nasty kick as he dribbling through when the game was twenty minutes old, and he had to be assisted off the field. He came on again but after the first kick he had to retire, and in the second half he figured at outside-right, but was too badly crippled to be able to do much.

The only goal came three minutes after the restart. Molyneux placed a free kick well, and following a bustling set-to, the ball was sent in and out again two or three times, coming to HIGGINBOTHAM, who shot hard in. The goalkeeper got his hands to the ball and took off some of the speed, but it crossed the line, and although Lane made a desperate attempt to get the ball out, the referee was well on the spot and had no hesitation in awarding a goal.

The Rangers only got away infrequently, and the Town should have added to their lead, but the end came without further score.

Gibbon did his little well, and both Lennon and Tirrell played strongly at back. The halves were well on top of the opposition, and Walker gave what must have been his best display of the season, in spite of several hard knocks. He quite overshadowed Davis, and his tackling throughout was superb, and his feeding showed improvement. Jennings and Molyneux, the latter playing with a stitch in his lip owing to a blow in the mouth received the previous day at Shepherd's Bush, were also in fine form, and "Molly" is rapidly becoming indispensable. Higginbotham and Clarkson toned up the line considerably, and especially in the first half did the former play well. Hoar was the most active of the line, both on the wing and in the centre, and he gave a lot of trouble to the visitors' defence. Reid seemed slower than usual, but gave Clarkson some nice passes, and although he did not shoot as confidently as is his wont, he came near on two or three occasions. Thompson was very unfortunate, for before his injury it looked as if he were going to get into his best form. Of the Rangers Hill, Lane, Rance, Vigrass, Butler, and Chandler were the pick.