

ANOTHER BITE OFF BRISTOL.

LUTON TOWN'S PLUCKY GAME.

Bristol is not a place for visionaries. One needs to be practical there, but they have a dream of one day getting a new football ground for the Rovers. When that hope is fulfilled there will be more gratitude outside the Western city than inside, however much the people of Eastville rejoice. And if at the same time they can get a new crowd, so much the better. There is almost as much difference between the Rovers' supporters and Bristol City supporters as between Bedlam and a Quakers' meeting. On the City ground we heard never an outcry that was not merited, and Luton players were applauded almost as impartially as the City's, keen as were the latter on winning. The Rovers' partisans, however, keep up a constant racket that is more of declamation against the visiting team than encouragement for their own, and if the referee has a will of his own they give him more than enough abuse. The general opinion of the Town players was that the Rovers' crowd is just about as bad as the worst.

Although for the whole of the second half on Saturday, the Town players were labouring under the disadvantage of "a man down," and that no other than the goal-keeper, they got nothing for their gallant resistance except abuse. Afterwards, the abuse was heaped upon the home team for not being able to beat ten men. It was a good thing for the Town that we had a strong-willed referee. He did not seem particularly sharp in some of his decisions, and he was perhaps more lenient than he should have been, but he had the all-important faculty of exercising his will, and refused to be either hustled or cajoled into changing it. Had it been otherwise the Town would have lost, for, in the second half especially, the Rovers clamoured round him and wanted a goal instead of the penalty kick when Tirrell fisted out. They claimed that the ball was through before the Town captain got his punch in, but it was not. Then when the whistle had gone for a foul against Morgan and the latter had shot into the net, they clamoured round the referee and wanted a goal. But he stuck to his decision. And, to be quite frank, he refused to change his decision when the Town players claimed a penalty after Butcher's legs had been kicked from under him when he appeared to be a certain scorer just before the end. I thought the referee was right in giving a free kick outside the line, although Butcher fell well inside, but the Town player says that he was just inside. Altogether, however, Mr. Bryan was one of the three best referees we have had this season.

As one would expect under the severe handicap the Town laboured, the Rovers had more of the game, and the crowd regarded a win as "a snip" when Gibbon did not resume after the interval. They were mistaken, and but for three occasions when deliberate fouls were committed, twice on Butcher, the Town would have won. If either Luton back had fouled an opposing forward at Luton in the same way as Haydon and Currie fouled Reid and Butcher, half the Luton crowd would have been shouting "Send him off." On each of the three occasions the victim was well through and had only Whatley to beat, and the offences were deliberate and not harmless trips. Reid, indeed, got such a crack that it was thought a limb was broken.

From all of which it will be gathered that the game was not as clean as was the meeting at Luton. Seeing that the Rovers had not won a League game at home for four months, or not scored a goal on their ground since Christmas Day, one expected a desperate struggle, but even then there is no need for the unscrupulous. The Rovers blamed the referee for their defeat, but the primary cause was the ineffective forward play and the gallant resistance the Town made when odds were against them.

In the first half the Rovers had slightly the better of the game; in the second they did much more work without getting nearly so dangerous, for Hoar had much less work to do than Gibbon had before his injury, which, by the way, was also the result of a foul. REID'S goal twelve minutes from the start was the finishing touch to a great dribble by Butcher, who beat the defence, including Whatley, only to see a carefully-placed shot run along the muddy goal-line, hit the inner side of the upright, and rebound for his partner to get the title of scorer. MORGAN'S equaliser ten minutes before the interval was a smart high shot from eight or ten yards' range, and Gibbon had no chance to save.

One expectation, that the second half

Our expectation that the second half would be a long, drawn-out fight by the Town to keep down the score, seemed likely to be fulfilled by the way the Rovers restarted, but Hoar had very little to do as Gibbon's deputy. Rutherford saved him the trouble of saving a penalty kick by sending the ball yards wide, this being in consequence of Tirrell flinging out a shot that Hoar could not reach. Later another shot beat Hoar and found the net, but the whistle had gone for an infringement, and as the Town were out of luck in the closing stages, the game ended in a draw.

One might well say that the draw was a triumph of tactics, for the Town, without adopting the one-back game, countered practically every move of the Rovers' forward line with almost ridiculous ease, and they were just as difficult to circumvent on the boggy end of the ground as on the more solid area. Gibbon kept goal as well as usual while he was so engaged, and made one or two smart saves. Lennon has returned to his best, judging by his displays at Swansea and in this game, and his play was clean and energetic throughout. Tirrell, who is always comfortable on grounds in this condition, kicked with the power of a horse, and some of his volleying with a ball that was soaked and must have been twice as heavy as it was in new condition, evoked the admiration even of the Philistines. Both backs were safe and covered each other smartly. The halves again did wonder-work. Jennings' awkwardness as an obstacle reduced Howarth to petulance, and consequently to inefficiency, and his speedy tackles and stewardship of his forwards was a great factor in the capture of a point. Molyneux and Roe had to meet two fast wingers, but their tenacity and promptness made them difficult foemen, and accounted for many movements coming undone and many centres falling wide. The whole line is doing fine work now.

Of the forwards, Butcher deserves first mention, for he was the worker and the wit of the attack. He was full of electricity, going all the time, and it was not his fault that we did not win. His ill-luck in front of goal was Reid's good fortune, but he was the indispensable if anyone were. His dribbling on the sticky ground was varied by long, sweeping passes, and whenever the ball was obtainable by him, he was in search of it. Higginbotham played a quiet sort of game, with a lot of thought about it, for he shook up the opposition when it was inclined to get unruly, and he did much "fetching and carrying." In the second half he caused the crowd a lot of suffering, judging by their unseemly remarks, for he played for safety in the last five minutes in such a way that there seemed to be dozens of throws-in without the necessity of sending the ball very far over the touch-line. Hoar was a troublesome winger before he went in goal, and nearly got a couple of goals, while Clarkson was as good on the other flank, and dribbled and centred better than he did the previous week. Reid was dashing and trying as usual, and he shot well when he had the chance. A little better knowledge of feeding his wings and he will make good.

For the Rovers Whatley was safe in goal. Haydon was the better back, and is "a find." The halves all did well, with Rutherford again the pick. Of the forwards, Morgan was the pick of the inside men, and both the wingers did good work.

There were fewer than 5,000 spectators present.

BRISTOL ROVERS ... 1 goal
LUTON TOWN 1 goal

BRISTOL ROVERS—Whatley; Armitage, Haydon; Furness, Rutherford, Currie; Chance, Morgan, Howarth, Lunn, Lea.

LUTON TOWN. — Gibbon; Lennon, Tirrell; Molyneux, Jennings, Roe; Hoar, Higginbotham, Reid, Butcher, Clarkson.

Referee: Mr. T. G. Bryan, Wolverhampton.