

A DOLEFUL CHRISTMAS.

TOWN'S RUN OF SUCCESS CLOSED.

READING DEFEATED, BUT BRIGHTON GET THREE OF FOUR POINTS.

MANY INJURIES.

(By "CRUSADER.")

WE all expected the Town to find the game at Reading and the Christmas games with Brighton very hard contests. So they proved, and as two of the three games were away from home we may reckon that three of a possible six points is good business.

It was a fine performance to succeed at Reading on Saturday, for the conditions were bad. On Christmas Day the conditions were worse, and Brighton were lucky to get away with a point and a clean sheet.

On Boxing Day the Town were badly beaten, but the report below shows the disadvantages they suffered.

At Reading on Saturday:—

LUTON TOWN 1
READING 0

READING.—Irwin; Eggo, Grant; Wilson, Messer, Cockerill; Smith, Gardiner, Jennings (S.), Davis, Carney.

LUTON.—Orr; Anderson, Till; Walker, Jennings (W.), Millar; Hoar, Green, Kerr, Butcher, Hoten.

Referee.—Mr. H. E. Gray, London.

There were few, perhaps, who, having studied the conditions that were bound to exist at Reading, and the fashion of the game at Luton the previous week, imagined that the Town had any reasonable chance of success. Between Thursday and Saturday morning I was told frequently that the Town's long run of success would come to an end, and that Reading would be sure to rush the Town and defence off their legs. Well, we went and found the conditions just about what we expected. One Pressman said that he had never seen the ground worse, but I think it was worse when we went last season. At times during the game it appeared as if Reading must win by sheer weight and perseverance, but when the besmired teams left the field at the finish the Town had the two points all right.

They were fortunate in some respects, but so far as scientific football was concerned they were

THE MORE POLISHED TEAM.

and I believe that if Reading had played the game as it should be played the Town would have won by a larger margin, but there was not the balance and intelligence about their work as about Luton's, and their robust play carried them through where they would not otherwise have managed it. Unfortunately Mr. Gray was prone to allow more vigour than was necessary or justifiable at times, and there were many incidents that went unpunished when stern measures were desirable. As it was, two Reading players' names were taken—Cockerill and Eggo. They deserved it, and Cockerill was guilty of a dirty trick for which there was no excuse of any kind. It must not be thought, however, that the whole of the Reading team were guilty. Little fault could be found with the others if one makes a distinction between dirty play and robust play, but there were too many fouls, and Reading might have done better if they had played the ball more and the man less.

Reading had strengthened their side by bringing in Davis and Carney on the left wing in place of Green and Springell, and Smith at outside-right instead of Reay.

The Town made the important, and, in some respects,

HAZARDOUS CHANGE

of putting Orr in goal for Gibbon. There was no question about the improvement in the Reading team, but one should be chary of saying that Orr is an improvement upon Gibbon. However, more of him later.

The Town had the better of the opening stages without touching their best. Wind and mud bothered them, and kicks were missed several times. Reading made many strong attacks when they got going, and Sam Jennings used his extreme wingers splendidly. Orr showed resolution and confidence on several occasions, and twice made good saves, timing centres to a nicety as he rushed out to punch away. When the Town got properly at work they stormed the home goal, and Irwin had more difficult shots in five minutes than Orr had all through the game. He saved at full length from Kerr and Hoar, and punched away centres and flag-kicks, while he once caught a header from Kerr by wonderful judgment and agility. It was after several narrow escapes of their goal that Reading got away again, and only clever work by Anderson and Till prevented Sam Jennings and Smith from scoring.

In one attack by Reading Anderson tipped the ball back to Orr, who got it all right, but delayed clearing and he was bowled over by Sam Jennings, and was dazed for a few minutes, but pluckily resumed. Luton put on more pressure before the interval, and they were

EVENTUALLY REWARDED.

Hoten got away on the left and centred carefully into the goal-area. After one or two passes Hoar got in a hot shot which Irwin saved, but the ball came out again to HOAR, and he crashed in a hurricane shot that Irwin never saw. The force was so great that the ball tore through the net, struck the wooden fence, and then rebounded into the arena. As Hoar turned round and the Town players were running towards him to congratulate him, Harry Cockerill deliberately kicked him on the knee. There was an ugly rush at him by several of the Town players, but he skulked away. The referee, unfortunately, had his back to the scene, and so was not in a position to take the proper course. This goal came on the stroke of the interval.

In the second half the Town were hard pressed for long periods, but Orr, while he had many anxious moments, had really very little to do except to take goal-kicks. What with the heavy ball and the fact that he had not recovered from the bump he got in the first half, he could not get it far away, and the Town halves and backs had to play a strenuous game. Whenever they got going the Town forwards were very dangerous, and Irwin saved several good shots, while once Hoar burst right through and was about to shoot from point blank range when Eggo tripped him badly, but no penalty occurred. Hoten also had worked clean through with a beautiful dribble when Eggo served him likewise on the edge of the penalty area, and the referee

CAUTIONED THE CAPTAIN

of the home side. Following many desperate attacks by Reading, the Town made speedy raids. Hoar twice came within an ace of scoring with fast cross shots, and Green was only just wide, while Butcher also failed to carry it past Irwin. In the closing stages Reading made fierce assaults, and Orr saved neatly on two occasions. Once, however, a high kick sent the ball into the Town goal, and it dropped awkwardly just under the bar. He pulled it down, but before he could recover, Smith, who was in an offside position, dashed in and sent the ball skimming straight across the face of the goal. Smith afterwards centred, and Sam Jennings failed to steer through the easiest of chances. The same player made two fine attempts just afterwards, missing by inches only.

So the end came with the Town winners—and, I am going to say, quite deserving winners, because they played more stylish and certainly clean football. Their speed was superior, and their skill in control immeasurably better, and but for the dash and strength of the home team there would not have been

nearly the number of raids on the Luton goal, for sheer muscular force carried them through on many occasions. It is only fair to give them credit for their hard, determined struggle, and they might easily have equalised had they been

STEADIER IN FRONT

of goal. But while I agree that in some respects the Town were a bit fortunate, if the merits of the teams are to be compared on the lines of the skilful initiation and consummation of attack, then the Town deserved to win, for they might quite easily have scored three goals in each half, and none have thought them lucky goals.

Most of the supporters will by now have seen Orr, the new goalkeeper, but the first impressions should be given before anything is written of his second game. He does not look as big as Gibbon, and there is nothing in his appearance to suggest that he is a genius, but the game had not been long in progress when I was impressed by his confidence and courage. On the whole he struck me as being a very promising player, likely, with good fortune, to be of the type of Reg Williams, of Watford. He was lithe and active, and took position well. Three or four times he ran out and fisted the ball away when a fraction of a second would have meant that the ball would have been met by an opponent's head. There were two occasions, however, when he shook confidence. In the first half when he was knocked out he had time to get the ball away before Sam Jennings charged him, but he held on and

TRIED TO DODGE.

and that is never a safe thing when Jennings is about. Some were inclined to blame the Reading player, but I am sure that if a Town player had done the same thing no fault would have been found with him. Orr invited a charge by holding on, and this little experience should do him a lot of good as teaching him to get rid quickly. The other was when he pulled down the ball to an opponent's feet, when it would have been wise to lift the ball over the top. He will shed these deficiencies as he gets older, and I think he will justify the confidence reposed in him. He needs also to cultivate a stronger kick, for his goal-kicks were very short. I am convinced that he will improve rapidly. The backs were as safe as could be expected on such a ground. Their tackling was lion-hearted, their powers of recovery amazed the Reading players and supporters alike, and there were few shots at the Town goal from close range. The kicking was as sure as ever, although the length suffered when the ball became leaden in weight, but they covered each other well. The grandeur of Will Jennings was demonstrated in the second half, when Reading were putting in all they knew. His

COURAGE AND EXAMPLE

inspired the whole team, and he played with unflagging zeal, and was a captain in the full sense of the word. Walker once more played finely against a crafty wing, and although Carney often got clear, the understanding with Anderson was such that if one were beaten the other was in the way. He also worked nicely with the Town right wing. Millar put up a much better game than the previous week, and although he found Smith an elusive customer, he was most difficult to beat, and in the second half he was a prominent factor during Reading's hottest assaults. The Town right wing was the better again. Hoar was the best forward on the field, his centres and shooting being of the best. He owed much to Green, who was not so mercurial as in the previous game, and did a lot of splendid dribbling and passing, and one shot of his deserved a goal. Butcher was handicapped by the heavy going, but his value was seen in the second half, when he frequently brought relief to the Town defence by opening out the game. Hoten put up a strong game and held his own against hefty opposition, while he centred better than usual. Kerr was in a restrained mood, and got few opportunities for shooting, but he has never played cleverer initiative football. His distribution was 50 per cent. better than usual, and he showed nice understanding with his colleagues.

For Reading Irwin kept goal finely; Grant was a clever back, and was seldom at fault; Messer played a splendid game at centre-half, and Wilson was nearly as good. Sam Jennings was the only forward with a shot in his boots, but both Smith and Carney were smart wingers.

There were not 3,000 spectators present when the teams turned out, but the crowd increased, and the official figures showed an attendance of 4,406, and the receipts £240.

* * * * *

At Luton on Christmas Day.

LUTON TOWN Nil
BRIGHTON & HOVE A. Nil

LUTON.—Orr; Anderson, Till; Walker, Jennings, Millar; Hoar, Green, Kerr, Butcher, Hoten.

BRIGHTON.—Hayes; Thompson, Jenkins; McAllister, Coomber, Little; Groves, Nell, Cook, Hopkins, Wilson.

Referee: Mr. A. L. Grinstead.

It was a thousand pities that this game was not won, for the crowd was the largest of the season, and if the Town had been able to produce their best form we might have kept a couple of thousand of the "extras." And I am afraid not half of the spectators are aware of the difficulties under which the teams were operating. The referee told me at half-time that the ground was in a terrible condition, for although it looked excellent from the rails, it was soft on top and very hard underneath. There were frozen lumps of turf that turned the ball unexpectedly, so that control was well nigh impossible.

The Town were the better side on the run of the play. They showed more science, and had the Brighton team engaged in their own half for long periods, but there was an absence of vitality in front of goal. Indeed, the game was dull and uninteresting for stretches at a time, and comparatively few shots were aimed at either goal. It was very unfortunate for the Town that

HOAR WAS CRIPPLED

at the end of ten minutes' play, and I thought Jenkins deserved censure. There was a race for the ball, and the Brighton player went straight at the Town winger without troubling about the ball. The clash resulted in both going down, and Jenkins retired to the dressing room, while Hoar was patched up on the line and returned, but he soon had to leave, when Jenkins returned. Soon after the interval, Hoar resumed, but he was of little use, and the Town attack suffered much more than the Brighton defence. There was a terrible bruise on Hoar's hip after the game, and he was very plucky to turn out in the second half.

Over half-an-hour had gone before Orr