

GILLINGHAM'S GALLANT STRUGGLE.

LUTON FAIL TO SCORE IN FIRST MATCH.

CLEVER DEFENDERS.

LUTON TOWN 0
GILLINGHAM 0

LUTON.—Brookes; Anderson, Johnson; Walker, Jennings, Mills; Hoar, Shankly, Reid, Hoten, Brown.

GILLINGHAM.—Fox; Robertson, Butler; Marshall, Davies, Hook; Chance, Brown, Wilkinson, Hall, Berry.

Referee.—Capt. A. Prince-Cox, Barnes.

It is well to defer counting the chickens until they are hatched, but, apparently, some hundreds of the supporters of the Town had done so, consequently many of them left the field long before the end of this, the first League game of the season. In reporting the practice games, it was made perfectly clear in these columns that it would be unwise to make a more definite commitment than that the second team matches promised to be more attractive than heretofore, and, judging by the result at Portsmouth, there is likelihood of that promise being fulfilled. That by the way. Diffidence in expressing an opinion as to the advisability of wholesale changes in the first team was due to the fact that the Town team last season was better than most of the followers recognised, and therefore more difficult to improve than was generally believed. Proof of this was forthcoming on Saturday, for the Town failed to defeat a side that had

ALL THE MISFORTUNE

going. So, too hastily, many spectators blamed the directors in no measured terms for not choosing the best team.

Well, I do not think all of us would agree with the selection made by any ten supporters, because it would be impossible to find unity of thought and judgment concerning the merits of the players individually or collectively. I am writing this long before the team to meet Millwall is chosen, but I hope the directors will not be led into panic changes simply because the result was not to the liking of themselves or the followers. That changes must be made is patent, but not to the extent that many suggest. The torrential rain of the first half militated against the quality of the play. It equalised matters a little. Of course, it may be that Gillingham would have played a great deal better had the weather remained fine; on the other hand control was brought to a minimum by the effect of the rain.

On the run of the play the Town should have won handsomely, especially in the second half, but the absence of intelligent forward play discounted all the midfield superiority, and, truth to tell, heavy as was the pressure, goals were always farther away than appeared to spectators. Gillingham fielded a team that was

PRACTICALLY UNKNOWN.

They seem to have realised that the richest fruit grows under the leaf, for they introduced unknown quantities, and were rewarded happily for their enterprise. Their defence earned the point they took away, and had their forward line remained unimpaired it is possible that the shock to the Town might have been much more severe. Wilkinson was rather badly hurt early on after a dashing start, and for eighty minutes he could do little save kick the ball when it came to him. Berry, endeavouring to cover the deficiency, was damaged in the second half, and Brown also suffered a little. The rest, however, redoubled their efforts, and concentrated on defence—a policy of which none could complain under the circumstances.

The visitors went off with rare dash, and seemed to get into their stride at once, but a considerable portion of the first half had gone ere the Town settled down. During this period we saw enough of the Town defence to feel few qualms in that direction, for Brookes and his backs were safe, and although the halves

were slower, they eventually did well enough to relieve anxiety. The onus thus fell upon the forwards, and neither individually nor as a line did they justify themselves. Combination was practically nil, the inside men seemed to get in each other's way, were slow of initiation, and

LACKING THRUSTFULNESS

in front of goal.

In the closing stages the Town almost overwhelmed the visitors, but the inability to drive home the attacks was painful. Hoar and Brown put across many centres, but the shooting was poor, and usually smothered by the backs. Now and then the visitors made raids, and Hall and Brown were very dangerous anywhere near goal, for they hustled well, and worked with nice understanding. So the end came without score.

Gillingham were a very big lot of fellows, and if the side could be kept together they would finish higher in the League than any side of the Kent club for many seasons. Fox is a goalkeeper good enough for any club, and, as last year, had much to do with the success of his side. Robertson and Butler were strenuous backs, and Marshall was just about the best of the six middle men engaged, although the lengthy Hook played a splendid game, and Davies has great possibilities. Marshall and Davies are youngsters, and the former is from a junior club. Hall was the pick of the forwards, but Berry was very smart before he got hurt, and not one of them but showed skill and dash.

Of the Town Brookes left no question of doubt in the minds of the supporters. Two of his saves alone stamped him as a cool, judicious keeper, and only a man of agility and long reach could have prevented a score. Anderson was

THE MOST POLISHED PLAYER

on the field. Even when the ball was greasy and the grass worse, he rarely made the slightest error. His kicking was true, and his tackling clean and sure. Johnson was safe enough as a rule, and apart from a tendency to balloon the ball, he did well. The attitude of some of the spectators to Jennings indicates that they have never forgiven him for having played against Luton once upon a time, but the Town captain, who only once transgressed the laws by tripping an opponent, won over the sensible on-lookers by his heroic endeavour to force a definite result. He was the potent force in midfield. Walker played with his customary coolness and was not lacking in enterprise. With Jennings he worked several openings, and ultimately made big efforts in attack. Mills was not the success at left-half that he has been at right-half, and I did not see how he could improve on his play in the practice games. Nevertheless he improved as the game wore on, and little fault could be found with his display. He kept the ball down well, and the only disquieting factor was the apparent lack of understanding on the left flank, but that was not his fault.

In giving Sid Reid

THE LEADERSHIP

of the attack the directors must have been moved by two reasons—that it was a popular choice, and that the little Welshman deserved it on his form in the trial. Last year he was slow in getting into form, and this year was the same. Against the six-footer Davies he was overshadowed, and his customary dash and enterprise were absent. He will do better than this. Neither did the inside men help him a lot. Shankly was pretty good in the first half, the most dangerous in front of goal, and in opening out. Hoten was thrustful, and got in the best shot of the game, but did not combine well, so Brown got none too many chances. As a wing, however, they had the more opportunities, for Hook laid himself out to dog Hoar, and the Town right-winger, under the circumstances, did well to get the ball across as often as he did.

One should not expect too much from the first game, and the 2,500 spectators will see better form before the end of this month. I am certain.

Capt. Prince-Cox officiated very, very much better than we have known him to do so previously, but his "easy" attitude towards jumping was not conducive to perfect football.