

THE KICK-OFF: LUTON TOWN'S FIRST MATCHES.

TWO DRAWS AT HOME.

(By "CRUSADER").

At Luton on Saturday:

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.

At Luton on Monday evening:

LUTON TOWN 1
MILLWALL ATHLETIC 1
LUTON.—Brookes; Anderson, Johnson; Walker, Jennings, Mills; Hoar, Cockle, Keen, Hoten, Dennis.
MILLWALL.—Crawford; Fort, Hill; Pembleton, Gomm, Graham; Kingsley, Morris, Moule, Dillimore, Gore.
Referee.—Mr. H. J. Weber, London.

THE GILLINGHAM GAME.

Begins again the wintry tale, and the opening chapters are by no means as bright as most of us would like. It is easy to write nice things of everybody when things are going well; it is distasteful when one has to admit disappointment; it is hardest, I think, when one does not feel quite sure what is going to happen in the future. When the crowd began to leave the Town football ground on Saturday afternoon before the end of the match with Gillingham there were hard things said, but fortunately, they were rash things, for hundreds of the spectators who grumbled about that game must have declared once more that it was their last visit. Indeed, a good many people told me personally that they would not be seen on the ground again for a long time. Forty-eight hours afterwards they were all out to get to the match with Millwall. And I am sure that when they heard the whistle sound the finish of the game they felt that things were

NOT SO BLACK

as was the outlook on Saturday night, and that the game had been well worth the visit. So it had, and if there is as big an improvement at Boscombe next Saturday as there was on Monday compared with the first match, then there will be two points brought away from the Hampshire town.

Saturday game did leave room for much improvement, and I have no doubt whatever that the players will admit it. There were few of them that wholly satisfied the spectators, and there were weaknesses in places that we had thought might be very strong. But few reckoned on Gillingham being an improved side. During the week Mr. Charles Green, the Town secretary, received a letter from a Lutonian resident in the Gillingham district, in which he said that the Town would have

THEIR WORK OUT OUT

to win, and he was so sure about it that he came to see the match. He had seen the Gillingham trials, and he evidently knew what he was talking about. The visitors fully deserved their point, although it was certainly only won by the sterling work of the defence.

The fates were unkind to Gillingham, however, for they had to struggle for the greater part of the game with their centre-forward a cripple, and then midway through the second half they had Berry likewise suffering, and Brown also got an injury, and later in the game the Town exerted such severe pressure that they appeared certain to win comfortably. But the attack failed, and there were a few occasions when the Gillingham forwards got away and came very near scoring, Hall being especially dangerous.

It was

VERY DISAPPOINTING

to the home crowd. There was about the team a sort of newness and unsettled state that gave many anxious moments, whereas Gillingham, who had only three of last season's regular players as compared with Luton's six, might have played together for months. Wise people will not condemn the Town's new players for the failure to win. They cannot be expected to get right into the run of each other's play, and in this respect Gillingham's play suggested to me that they had been at ball practice much more than the Town players. There was no question about the fitness of the Town team, for there was not a man in distress,

severe as were the conditions under which the game was played, but it was the blend that was lacking, and it is in this direction that great improvement is necessary. Brookes was

A FINE GOALKEEPER.

and two of his saves were magnificent. Anderson had no equal on the field, giving a masterly display, both in defence and in the part he took in attack. Johnson was fairly safe, and apart from a tendency to balloon the ball deserved his place. Jennings was right on top of his form, and made tremendous efforts to pull the team together. Walker was not nearly at his best in the first half, but showed a considerable improvement in the second half. Mills was not as good as we had hoped, but that might be accounted for by the fact that he was taken from right-half to left-half. It has been given out that he is a left-half, but until picked to play everybody was under the impression that he was a right-half. I am not denying it, but it is strange, if he is a left-half, that he should have been placed at right-half in both trial games, and,

STRANGER STILL,

that in the official records of the Notts Forest club, as given in the "Athletic News," he should be named as a right-half-back. Still, I see no reason to alter my opinion that he is a really clever player, and that he will settle down all right.

The forwards were ragged and uninspiring. Sid Hoar was never left alone by his six-foot-opponent, Hook, but centred well when he got the chance, and much the same may be said of Brown. Neither winger was fed well, because the inside men were unable to get going properly. Shankly was the best of the three, and his turn will come again. Reid had an off day, and Hoten has to make a big improvement before he is the player that won such high praise when he came eighteen months ago.

For Gillingham, Fox gave a capital display in goal. The backs were strong and sure, if not particularly clever. The halves also gave an energetic, robust display, especially in defence, Marshall winning golden opinions. Hall, Brown and Chance played well when the forward line was crippled, and Berry, before his hurt, was an elusive winger.

THE "LIONS" GIVE BATTLE.

There was a tremendous difference in the game on Monday night, and it was significant that when the Town were a goal down spectators were saying that even if the Town lost the game was well worth seeing. So it was, and if we could be sure that all the matches would be of that quality, then there would be no need to complain of lack of support.

Millwall, all of whose players did duty for them last season, put up the traditional fight. Perhaps they were stimulated to greater efforts by the fact that they had not defeated Luton since October 4th, 1920. They began like a winning side, and in the first half they had a trifle the better of the general play, but in the second half the Town more than regained equality, and taking the game as a whole they deserved to win. The Town directors staged three good changes, and the result was a great improvement in the attack. Cockle, Keen and Dennis replaced Shankly, Reid and Brown respectively, and there was

MORE ENERGY AND INTELLIGENCE

in the line.

In the first ten minutes the enthusiasm of the crowd was raised to a high pitch, for Brookes had made a fine save in the Luton goal, and at the other end Keen and Cockle had rattled the bar with great shots. There was not a dull moment, and both sets of forwards harried the backs whenever they got moving, and the ball travelled from end to end with great rapidity. Morris and Moule made tremendous efforts to score for Millwall, and Brookes did some wonderful goalkeeping. Then at the other end Crawford was just as good, and he made a gorgeous save from Keen, but was beaten again by a shot from Mills that flicked the crossbar. That indicates the sort of tussle it was. When Millwall scored the play had

DESERVED A GOAL,

but not this, for Morris was offside when

he began the movement. Dillimore got a sweeping forward pass, and then screwed the ball across for MOULE to tap through at close quarters. In another rush by Millwall Moule again netted, but Brookes had been fouled, and a free kick was given against the "Lions." The most promising effort by the Town before the interval was a smart dribble by Cockle for he went right through and was only four or five yards from goal when Fort fouled him in glaring fashion, bringing him to earth with a bump. There was a spontaneous outcry for a penalty, but, to the disgust of the crowd, the referee refused to give it. I am informed that he said he was unsighted. If that is so then he should at least have consulted the linesmen, as requested by the Town captain. Cockle was injured, and that fact alone should have raised doubts in the referee's mind, even if he were unsighted. So at the interval Millwall led by the only goal.

In the second half the "Lions" again

FORCED PLAY,

but the Town responded so gallantly that the visitors were glad to bring Morris into the middle to help the halves and backs. For every attack by the "Lions" the Town put up a couple, but the defensive work was lusty, if not ideal football, and it was not until 17 minutes had passed that the equaliser came. Sid Hoar then wriggled and swerved into position before sending the ball hard into goal, and Pembleton handled. A penalty was awarded at once, and HOAR easily beat Crawford from the spot. Then came a grand struggle for supremacy, Millwall attacking hotly on several occasions, and once Gomm got the ball into the net from a free kick against Brookes for carrying, but the ball had not touched a second player. Luton made

MANY DESPERATE ATTACKS,

and gained a large number of corners, but without managing the winning goal, and the end of a splendid game came with the points equally shared.

Brookes gave another fine exhibition in goal, and Anderson, although he was not so brilliant as on Saturday, was quite the best back on view. Johnson, who played for the greater part of the game with a few inches of sticking plaster on his brow, was fairly safe—better on the whole, I thought, than on Saturday. Jennings had a much heavier task, but acquitted himself grandly, and did much fine work. Walker and Mills were about the same as on Saturday, both taking

TIME TO SETTLE DOWN,

but improving as the game wore on, and doing good work, especially in attack, in the last half-hour.

The forwards, while still much below what we want to see, undoubtedly played much better. Keen was a thrustful leader, and his rushing of the backs was a feature of the forward work. He gave them no peace, and, with Cockle, did a lot of good shooting. The latter was very smart indeed before he was knocked out by Fort, and he fed Hoar as cleverly as any partner the latter has had for a long time. He was not quite so prominent in the second half. Hoten was also about the same as in Saturday's game. Hoar improved on that display, thanks chiefly to the fact that Cockle gave him so many nice passes, and Dennis did

VERY USEFUL WORK,

without proving himself superior to Brown. As a line, however, they did much better than on Saturday, and might well be kept together for the time being.

For Millwall, Crawford was a clever and safe goalkeeper. His backs were not so safe as he could wish, but took no risks. Gomm was a great centre-half, a potent force in defence and attack, and his colleagues were worriers all the time. Moule and Morris were the chief danger in a thrustful line, with Dillimore, clever, and the two wingers fast on the run and smart in centring.

It was regrettable that Mr. Weber was not up to his usual standard. He has done well at Luton, but this was a long way below his best.

At Saturday's match the attendance was about 9,000, and at Monday's about 8,000. The two figures, if added together, would give something nearer what Monday's game merited.

COMMENTS BY A VERY CASUAL SPECTATOR.

The comments of a casual spectator—so very casual that his visits to the Town ground rarely exceed an evening's match such as Monday's and the Christmas and Boxing Day fixtures—necessarily cannot be severely critical. They can only centre round the one performance just witnessed, and cannot be saturated with comparisons of individual or team performances on other days or in other places.

But such a very casual spectator, by reason of the very fact that he sees so little of the game, and is therefore not in the way to become a hardened critic, may see things in a way not possible to the regulars; and because of this these lines are written.

The first impression was easily made on Monday. The crossbar where the Millwall goalkeeper was standing should have been an inch or two higher, and then Luton would have won the match in the first five or ten minutes. A two-goal lead in that quick time would have taken some wiping off, and judging by the run of play afterwards it is very questionable whether it could have been done. But for some reasons it would have been a pity. The obvious temptation would have been for the leaders to keep what they had got, and subsequent play might have been less legitimate, less sporting, and not so pleasant. For those whose only desire is to see the home team win—fairly if possible, but certainly to win—this might not have mattered so much as making certain of two points; but there are still some who came to see the game played in a sporting spirit, and as it was these had their money's worth.

Later there was a phase of the game when it seemed hardly necessary to have two sets of posts. The Town players

seemed to be altogether too hospitable, and to go out of their way to let the men in blue enjoy themselves. When a blue player had played enough with the ball for the time being, he passed it to another blue player, who seemed to be just ready, and there was always another blue player equally ready a little further on. Occasionally the ball went astray, and a white-jerseyed player then happened to be nearest. Instead of being selfish, however, he very kindly kept it there until a blue player arrived to go on with the previous game; or, by way of variety, kicked it to another part of the field straight to the feet of some other blue player who seemed not to be getting his proper share of the fun. It was all very nice, from the Millwall point of view. It also had the effect of stimulating the crowd to that free and comprehensive use of the mother tongue which is their main contribution to the game.

Millwall, however, overstepped the bounds of hospitality. Instead of being content to play with the ball in the middle of the field, they suddenly elected to go and put the ball in the net. That altered things, and things stayed altered in that way until the interval. Of course, the poor referee then found his job, always a thankless one, became still more so. It is to be hoped he was not very thin-skinned, for it must be a terrible thing for a referee to go home and ponder over what has been said to him and about him.

However, in the second half the Town showed that they also knew the net was to catch the ball occasionally. The penalty against Millwall for handling was justified, and the simple way in which Hoar put the ball into the net must have made Crawford wonder what use a goalie was

on such an occasion. He might have had still more occasion for sadness if two things had been realised. The first was that under the Association code the ball must be passed under the bar to be effective. Millwall, when they tried, kept the ball low. Luton, on the other hand, nearly always skied it, and that, although it may keep it out of the way of the goalie, does not give the net a chance. The other thing which needed to be realised had relation to flag kicks. There were periods when Sid Hoar's principal purpose in life seemed to be to take corner kicks. Almost invariably he dropped them too far. Sometimes it might have been perfectly good placing, but on Monday it was ineffective. He might then have been more gentle, and the results might have been different; but one never knows.

The essentially good feature of the game was that, after the equaliser, it was anybody's game, with the interest fully maintained to the end. Because of this, and of the individual and team effort displayed, it was a much better entertainment for the casual spectator than has been obtained on some previous occasions, although it would have been still better had the Luton men reached the same stage in team work that was an obvious feature of the Millwall work. In one minor respect Luton were lucky; lifting the ball clean out of the ground does not count as it does in cricket, or Millwall would have been well ahead.

Having seen Monday's match, this casual spectator is tempted to go again; he is also tempted to take every possible precaution, on the ground and off, to keep well clear of Brookes: Brookes' arms are too long, and he gets there much too surely for a casual spectator to have any trifling dispute with him.