

DRAINING THE CUP, LUTON TOWN TASTE THE DREGS OF DEFEAT.

ABERDARE'S LUCKY WIN.

(By "CRUSADER.")

ABERDARE ATHLETIC 1
LUTON TOWN 0
ABERDARE.—Brown; Walsh, Brophy; Russell, Harwood, Irving; James, Miller, Smith, Burnham, Taylor.

LUTON.—Purdy; Anderson, Till; Richards, Millar, Graham; Moffat, Shankly, Reid, Dennis, Thompson.

Referee.—Mr. A. F. Davis, Bristol.

Of all the football reports it has been my duty to write I do not recollect one that has been more difficult than this of the game at Aberdare on Saturday, when Luton Town were put out of the F.A. Cup Competition for this season. Not that the game was lacking incident, not merely because the Town lost; rather because none realises better how near they were to winning, and how they should have won. Two incidents do not make a game, and cannot be held, therefore, to sum up in themselves the cause of defeat; yet two remain conspicuous in my mind as the reason for Luton's exit from the Competition—the scoring of the only goal of the match by Aberdare, and the missing of the best chance of the game by Luton.

When sundry friends asked during last week the possible constitution of the side to visit Wales, I was unable to oblige, because it was not definitely decided until Saturday morning in the Queen's Hotel, Cardiff, although, judging by the match card at Aberdare, only one position remained to be settled, and the change there was due to the defection of Thomas Love on Friday, the new player having developed influenza. Friends asked me to name the team I would field, and I am sorry to say that the best reply I could give was that

THE FOOT RULE

should be run over the players and the biggest and strongest men put in the team irrespective of talent: sorry because in these days the game is little more than a test of strength and endurance—a sort of mild form of Rugby football—rather than a trial of skill; the sledge-hammer has superseded the rapier.

When the draw was announced optimists among the Town club followers could hardly have numbered more than about one in ten. For my part, I thought they would win, for, on the principle of "horses for courses," I remembered that the Town had done well at Aberdare's Ynys Field, and a victory by three goals margin on that ground a couple of months ago was a factor not to be ignored, since it was calculated to give the players confidence. Then came the tragic accident to Jennings at Bristol, and my confidence wavered somewhat. Everybody knows that I have persistently declared for Jennings as pivot and captain, for even when on his side there have been disgruntled players, his whole-heartedness and fearlessness in

THE FIERCE FIGHTS

on "foreign soil" have infected his colleagues, and in every game in which he took part one could always feel that if defeat was the portion, the team went down with colours flying.

Still, I felt that if the big-hearts were rightly positioned by the selectors, the Town would draw, and I clung to that hope until 99 minutes of the game had gone on Saturday. Most emphatically now am I certain that the Town would still be in the Competition had he played. I did not like the construction of the team at Aberdare. I never will until football is more like that of pre-war or immediately post-war games. I venture the opinion that the Town's rearguard on Saturday could hold its own in football, the best football, of the pre-war period, when brain was matched against brain, the tackle was a matter of cunning rather than of brute bash and clash, and the back's skimming shots to his forwards were a better means to attack than the huge balloon-kicking of this day.

From the aspect of pure skill, Anderson and Till fill the bill, but neither imparts the vigour that is necessary to counter the violent onslaughts of to-day. Had they done so on Saturday Aberdare would never have scored, for the successful marksmen was

PERMITTED TO SHOOT

without interference. But I am anticipating.

The ground was in quite excellent condition for Ynys Field. There were a few natural ridges, the imprints of a shire horse's hoofs, two large sand-filled patches near one touch-line, and a heaviness in one goal-mouth, but the going generally was good. The winning of the toss gave the home side the advantage of the breeze, but this fell, and the teams could be said to meet on an equality from that point of view. Apart from an occasional whoop from a solitary voice the encouragement all went to Aberdare.

Purdy was in action quite early, and unquestionably the home team were the better side in the first half. They played with more speed and understanding than the Town. For every dangerous shot Brown had to save, Purdy had three. The pace was fast and the players never spared themselves in any way. After Purdy had staved off several promising attacks, the Town got going in rare fashion, and for a period of about four minutes shot after shot was rammed in at great speed, but there was something approaching a solid phalanx in the home goal-area, and Brown was seldom troubled to handle, although any one of half a dozen shots would have found the net but for the interposing bodies and limbs of the home team. From this bombardment the home team got away. The ball was swung out to James on the right, and he made good ground, but was forced to the right when he attempted to cut in. Nevertheless he managed to get the ball across. SMITH rushed up as the ball appeared to be going wide of the goal, and although both backs were on the spot, he was allowed to screw the ball into the net past Purdy. It seemed

AN IMPOSSIBLE ANGLE.

and it is probable that he would not accomplish the feat once in a thousand times, but the fact remains that nothing is impossible while the ball is in play, and in my opinion he should have been shouldered before he was given a chance to shoot. This happened after fifteen minutes' play, and was a considerable damper. The home team were encouraged, and they made many raids, the ball being swung out to their wing men consistently, and as they responded well

Purdy had a fair amount of work. Two saves, one by each goalkeeper, brought the crowd to a warm note of appreciation. Brown made a very fine save with arms outstretched when Moffat got in a swinging shot after slipping into the centre, and Purdy dived at the feet of three players and got the ball from the feet of the ever-threatening Smith when a goal appeared there, but for the referee's signal.

I expected a better display from the Town after the interval, and there was some discussion to the advisability of rearranging the team, but it was decided to try again. Unfortunately, perhaps, for the best came after the change. The Town began strongly, and Aberdare soon suffered a bad blow, for Harwood and Richards kicked the ball simultaneously. The bigger man won, for he took the ball and Harwood's feet, too, and the latter went to the ground, his ankle sprained rather badly. Meanwhile the Town had gone to the other end, and Walsh was hustled by Dennis and Reid to good purpose. He lost the ball, but before the Town players could locate and send it into the empty goal, Brown having run out, Walsh managed to get it again and

KICK INTO SAFETY.

After Harwood's departure, however, the Town put on severe pressure, and they should have scored on several occasions if the forwards had finished well. The home side made some menacing advances. As the game wore on there appeared to be no prospect of an equaliser. Thompson came to the centre-forward position, with Reid at inside-left, and Dennis on the extreme wing. From that point the home goal was frequently in jeopardy, and had some sensational escapes. Millar hit the bar with a brilliant long shot that had Brown well beaten. Graham hit the bar with a like shot from a free-kick. Then came a determined raid, and Reid and Thompson rushed the defence. Walsh went down and dropped on the ball, which he cuddled in his arms and refused to allow the Town players to get a kick at it. There was a loud appeal for a penalty, and although the referee and the linesmen were a long way from the scene, we in the Press box could see that the back was hugging the ball. The whistle went, and after a moment's hesitation the referee went across to the linesmen and consulted them, finally throwing the ball down. It was a great piece of misfortune for the Town, for there never was a deserved penalty-kick if this were not.

To make matters worse there was a distinct goal scored. Brown fell and saved at full length, and had the ball in his arms when the Town players swept up and Thompson kicked the ball out of the goalkeeper's arms into the net. The referee

DISALLOWED THE GOAL.

apparently for dangerous play, but whose was the dangerous offence—the goalkeeper for clinging to the ball and refusing to let go, or the players for kicking at as much of it as they could see?

Before the end there were two or three more exciting scuffles, but the chance of the game was missed by Shankly, who had played well up to then. The ball was swung out to Dennis, who returned it right across goal. Shankly got it and went in. Brown advanced to meet him, and the forward took a step too many before shooting the ball, and it touched Brown and was deflected from the target. It was a heartbreaking miss, not less for Shankly than for his colleagues. Nevertheless, the Town came again, and just before the end Brown made a miraculous save from a fierce shot by Millar, for he leaped across goal and turned the ball aside when there appeared to be no chance of saving.

When we were at Pontypool on the return journey, waiting for a connection to bring us to Cardiff, I was at the bookstall when a gentleman came up and engaged the bookstall manager in conversation. Of the game, this is the gist of what he said:—"It was a good game, but Luton should have won. They were all over Aberdare in the second half. Aberdare would have been unlucky to lose, but Luton got one goal and should have had a penalty-kick. Brown saved the match for us, and Smith won it for us with a goal that surprised Luton's backs."

A FAIR SUMMARY

that was. Considering the accident to Harwood, Aberdare would have been unlucky to lose, but they had only Brown to thank for their escape in the second half. He had more to do than Purdy, taking the game as a whole, but he was decidedly nervy and ran out three or four times at grave risk. Purdy kept goal well again, and the only faulty save he made was when he failed to get hold of a high centre from James in the first half, and Till and Anderson cleared from the goal-line. It is a moot point whether he should have prevented the goal. The backs played clever football, but as outlined early on, there is a lack of vigour about their work. They never shirk the charges of the opposition, but never do they charge, and in these days that is not good for the goalkeeper, who frequently gets rushed because of the lack of someone to interpose with lusty shoulders. Smith should have been knocked over ere he got the ball when he scored. Apart therefrom the backs tackled cleverly and kicked cleanly, though Anderson did not show his best powers of recovery. The most missed man was Jennings from the middle line. Bob Millar could not be expected to fill the position equally well. In the first half he was not much in the picture, but in the second he did much better, and was a force in attack. As much may be said of Graham, for he let James have too much scope in the first half. In the second he kept

A FAIRLY TIGHT REIN

on him. But Bob Graham is not a half-back. Richards had a heavy task in guarding against the activities of Taylor, who was a clever forward. Moreover, he did a lot of work towards compensating for the absence of Jennings, and his big shoulders were too often in use for the crowd to like him. The more I see of him and Graham, the more I am sure they would make a fine pair of backs, and the more I see of Anderson and Till the more wishful am I of seeing them play half-back. They could help the forwards more than do Richards and Graham, and

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the latter could use their weight to better purpose than do Anderson and Till. The forwards lacked leadership. Reid did not distribute well, for Thompson got "starved" in the second half, and Moffat alone got passes from the centre. Moreover, he was not so thrustful as usual. Dennis had his senses knocked out of him early on, and did not recover until the second half, so did not shine a lot until then. Thompson worked hard, and when he went to centre-forward there was a vital difference in the attack, but the change came too late. Shankly was clever, and some of his

FOOTWORK DELIGHTFUL,

but he did not shoot much, and he will not have forgiven himself for his miss. Moffat was as lively as ever, and was probably the most dangerous of the quintette, though he held on too long at times.

Brown I have referred to. His backs were very shaky, but used their brawn. Harwood was a fine half-back, and Burnham a good deputy when the captain was injured. Smith, James, and Taylor all did well forward.

Mr. Davis was a good referee, and it was Luton's misfortune only that prevented him having a re-play at Luton. One linesman was good—the other seemed to get scared at the crowd.

The crowd numbered 4,823, and the receipts totalled £266 9s. 3d.