

HOLIDAY GAMES REVIEWED. LUTON TOWN'S IMPROVEMENT.

At Gillingham on Christmas Day:—

GILLINGHAM	2
LUTON TOWN	1

Scorers:—

GILLINGHAM.—Berry (off Till), Brown, LUTON.—Thompson.

GILLINGHAM.—Ferguson; Robertson, Butler; Jones, Nichol, Riddock; Edmed, Marshall, Brown, Richards, Berry.

LUTON.—Purdy, Graham, Till, Richards, Neal, Millar; Moffat, Reid, Agnew, Dennis, Thompson.

Referee.—Mr. J. C. O'Neill, London.

While the sum total of Luton Town's Christmas-time football may not be all that we had hoped for, I fancy it is as much as most of us expected. So many times during this first half of the season it has been a hopeless task for any writer to face. You may tell the crowd now and then that the losing side have deserved a better fate, but to continue telling that story inevitably brings a measure of contempt upon the narrator, and I have, more than once, received proof that the story has fallen upon stony ground, otherwise, unbelief.

Since the injury to Jennings there has been missing much of the "devil" that enabled the Town to make strong fights against the best opposition, and during this month the play has not been good enough for the metal to be faced. Experiments have, perforce, been made, but the team could not pull together properly, and when a further somewhat drastic change was made for the first of the holiday games many of the supporters pulled wry faces, and felt that the directors had once more drawn a blank.

Actually, the game at Gillingham was lost, but there was such a great improvement in the play that there was some justification for retaining the side to meet the Kent club in the return game at Luton on Saturday. I did not see the match at Gillingham, but saw the other two games, and there was only one thing more pleasing than the actual play, and that was the splendid attendance on Saturday, and again on Monday.

The play of the Town team on each day deserved the attendance, and I have been told by spectators who have seen both First and Second Division games by the best clubs in those divisions, that the Christmas games at Luton were in advance of anything they had seen this season.

They were splendid matches, for on each occasion all the players were right out for victory, and there was a whole-heartedness about their efforts that has been in striking contrast to some of the exhibitions we have seen.

For the game at Gillingham I have to rely on material supplied. It is that Gillingham were the better side in the first half, and because they took their opportunities then they deserved their success, but Luton were a much improved team after the interval, and had very hard luck in not drawing level. Further, Mr. Ernest Fryer, who was in charge of the team on their visit, was complimented by the Gillingham directors on having brought such a strong side, and told that Luton should at least have taken a point home.

At half-time Gillingham led by two goals clear, the first being registered through the ball skidding into goal from Till's foot when he attempted to clear a corner-kick taken by Berry, and the second being a fine effort by Brown. Luton's goal came in the second half, and was a typical Thompson goal. Reid, promoted to the first eleven again, had very hard luck, for he worked hard, and thrice hit the posts or bar in the second half.

The game at Luton on Boxing Day was just as keenly fought, and the crowd were kept in a state of enthusiasm from start to finish, for the fortunes of the struggle changed rapidly at times, though after the early goal scored by Berry for the visitors, the Town were a stronger side. The equaliser came from a penalty kick taken by Dennis, when Robertson scored, ten minutes before the interval Thompson scored direct from a free kick just outside the penalty area, the ball entering the net at a velocity that could only be compared to the speed of a cannon ball from the mouth of a gun. Just before the interval a penalty kick was awarded against Till, and Nichol levelled the scores again.

In the second half Reid gave Luton the lead with a neat goal after Ferguson had made a number of grand saves, but straightway the plucky visitors equalised through Brown, who scored with a snap shot on the turn. Thereafter Luton should have scored several times, but the fourth goal was long delayed, and Dennis got it as the result of another penalty kick for handling, this time against Jones. Just before the end Dennis capped a great run with a splendid shot that struck the bar and came out to Thompson, who easily netted.

This was a great win, and pleased immensely the 11,000 spectators.

Although Gillingham had run Plymouth Argyle to a goal in their game at Plymouth last Saturday week, the form on Boxing Day was not accepted confidently as being a basis from which to draw a line to the Town's prospects. As Plymouth had done very badly against Exeter City, having been beaten by 4-1 at Exeter on Christmas Day, and only shared four goals at Plymouth on Saturday, it was obvious that they would come to Luton determined to improve upon those two games. They got a point, but they admitted after the match that they had been very lucky to get away with anything better than defeat.

Upon a soft ground the Town played the faster and more forceful football, and as there were 10,000 spectators there to see it,

At Luton on Boxing Day:—

LUTON TOWN	5
GILLINGHAM	3

Scorers:—

LUTON.—Dennis (2, penalty kicks), Thompson (2), Reid.

GILLINGHAM.—Berry, Nichol (penalty), Brown.

LUTON.—Purdy, Graham, Till, Richards, Neal, Millar; Moffat, Reid, Thompson, Agnew, Dennis.

GILLINGHAM.—Ferguson; Robertson, Butler; Jones, Nichol, Riddock; Edmed, McKee, Brown, Richards, Berry.

With more confidence than usual I give the opinion that the Town should have won handsomely. It seemed to me that the forwards of both sides suffered a good deal from excitement, and so chances were missed what, in the ordinary way, would have been accepted.

There was only one goal in the first half, and that was credited once more to Dennis, who again had the pleasure of taking a penalty kick. But there were many narrow escapes for Plymouth, and once a shot from Reid or Dennis, I could not quite gather which player shot, was diverted right on the goal line by Russell when his goalkeeper was well beaten. Craig also made many clever saves, and the crowd were quite unprepared for the surprising display of the Town team, who held their more famous opponents very easily, and gave their defence a gruelling time.

It was the same in the second half, and, while I have no quarrel with Mr. Small, who, I think, did his work thoroughly, I believe practically every one of the spectators on the stand side had a grudge against the laziness of one of the linesmen. Plymouth was far away from the play when a Plymouth player used his hands inside the penalty area to prevent the ball going into the goal-mouth. The referee looked to the line official for confirmation in the second case, but that worthy was on the other side of the middle line—an extraordinary position for a linesman, considering how near the play was to the visitors' goal.

When we least expected it Plymouth got in a successful raid, but it was one of those goals that have too frequently due this season to lack of understanding between Graham and Millar. The former had run across, and Millar had overtaken Healy; then each waited for the other to go for the ball, of which Healy appeared to be all but dispossessed, and either of the Town players could have got it. Both left it, and Healy promptly recovered it, slipped into the centre and beat Purdy. After that the Town played well enough to win, and the Plymouth defenders had a hard time, but they came through the ordeal, and with a little trittering away of time and a reinforcement of defence they managed to get away without defeat.

It was a really fine struggle, and had the Town been successful, the crowd would have been very happy indeed. Certainly I have not met one who was not pleased with their play in general.

One of the most remarkable features of these Yuletide games has been that the same team has figured in all three games. That is something in these days. I am certain there are hundreds of us who would like to make a change here or there in the team. For my own part I can never understand the omission of Norman Thompson, for he is one of the brainiest players the Town have had on their books during the last ten years. I make that confession as an instance of my own idea of improvement, and it is backed by the opinion of others. Yet, after the games of Saturday and Monday, who could be omitted justly?

Then there is John Shankly, who had made improvement even this season, and many fancy him, while Miller and Littlewood, to say nothing of Love, have their admirers. To be quite frank, however, I think it will please the bulk of the supporters if there is no tampering with the present eleven while they are playing so well. "Give them a chance to get together," is the most popular cry, and I should not like to oppose it. The front line is more industrious than scientific, perhaps, but the play is so keen, fast and vigorous that only the best of defences will be able to withstand it.

Moffat is at a disadvantage against some of the rough stuff he meets, but he has held his own very well, and Reid is shaping better at inside-right than he has done at inside-left or centre-forward. He wanders too much from position during attack, especially now that Agnew is included, for the latter has the quality of passing nicely to the opposite wing, and such good work has come undone because Reid was not in position at the right moment. Nevertheless, he has played well.

Thompson, at centre-forward, makes for a far better attack than Thompson on the extreme wing. He is no drawing-room player, but likes to mix it with the biggest opponents, and his continual harassing of the opposing backs has been a decided factor in giving the Town the balance of the play. Agnew has not lost the newness of his change yet, and he has to satisfy many critics, but he is thorough, and unafraid, goes the whole game at high pressure, and if he is allowed time to settle I think he will prove of real value to the attack. It should not be forgotten that Dennis has shone more and merited every game he has played since Agnew returned, and in the last two games there has been no forward to surpass the left-winger.

Miller's work at half suggests that he is getting back to the form that brought him into prominence at the end of last season. He can hardly do better than that and remain at Luton. Richards is also doing a great deal better, and I am glad that he

At Luton on Monday:—

LUTON TOWN	1
PLYMOUTH ARGYLE	1

Scorers:—

LUTON.—Dennis (penalty), PLYMOUTH.—Healy.

LUTON.—Purdy, Graham, Till, Richards, Neal, Millar; Moffat, Reid, Thompson, Agnew, Dennis.

PLYMOUTH.—Craig; Cosgrove, Russell; Logan, Pullen, Smith; Healy, Sloan, Batten, Leslie, Black.

Referee.—Mr. E. E. Small, Bristol.

has been given the captaincy. He has a will of his own, and some of that inspiration that means a lot to a side. He can hold his own with the rough element, and although he is more of an attacking half than a defender, his immense strength and courage have a vital influence when the defence is hard pressed. On Saturday he made some of us cross by holding the ball too long and getting robbed, but there was almost an absence of this sort of thing against the Argyle, and he played a capital game.

I have left Sid Neal to the last. His inclusion at centre-half after being played in other positions in the second eleven evoked a lot of frowns, but he has turned up trumps. If he had another couple of inches in height he would be a great player on form such as he showed against the Argyle. Seldom in the bad books of the referee, he yet can give and take a lot of strength, and his service to the forwards, and the occasional powerful shot, were heartily praised. Someone had an inspiration when he was suggested as pivot.

Graham and Till do not deserve to be loaded with such a number of goals against them as the records show. Both are playing grandly, and there is little to choose between them. Their styles differ, but they fit each other very well, and they have an understanding of each other's play. In their latest co-operations they have met very good attacks, and have emerged with honour. Purdy is keeping goal well, too, though I have thought once or twice that he was not so confident as before the Millwall debacle. Still, he is part of an improving side, and in each of the games he has made thrilling saves when all seemed lost.

THE RESERVES.

And now I should like to say how thoroughly enjoyable was the football of the Town Reserves on Christmas Day, when they trounced Watford to the tune of 7-1. There have been games more exciting, but I have not seen cleverer forward play by a Town attack this season. It was not that Watford were not well represented; they had a hefty side, a strong attack and a robust middle line, but they were such a co-operation between the Town halves and attack that Watford were smitten hip and thigh.

The first half ended with the Town leading by 5-1. ROGERS, LOVE and Norman THOMSON, a "hat trick," for the Town, and BALL for Watford. In the second half ROGERS and MILLER scored for the Town, and Robinson shot wide from a penalty kick.

The whole of the Town team played splendid football, and the new men, Rennie and Roe, confirmed the good impression of their first match—against Watford Reserves. It was the thoughtful work of the middle line that enabled the forwards to attack so often, but the clever work of Thomson and Miller took the eye. Thomson is one of the brainiest schemers we have had for some time, and he and Miller often made football look very simple. Love also did well, his close attention to defenders harassing a lot, and Rogers and Robinson put in effective work on the left wing. Both are doing far better than in the early part of the season. At back, Anderson and Bedford had plenty of work to do, and did well. The latter appears likely to do better in this position than ever he did elsewhere. Mingay made three or four very fine saves, one from Bell in the second half "bringing down the house."

LUTON TOWN RESERVES 7
WATFORD RESERVES 1
TOWN RESERVES.—Mingay; Anderson, Bedford; Walker, Rennie, Roe; Miller, Thomson, Love, Rogers, Robinson.
WATFORD.—Fryer; Wright, Hewitt; Baker, Eggleston, Carter; Rance, Morris, Bell, Mummery, McCulloch.

At Watford on Saturday the home team had a partial revenge, for they won by 4-2. They were fortunate, for in the first half the Town team should have made the result safe. PAPWORTH for Watford, and LITTLEWOOD, for Luton, scored before the interval. BELL, PAPWORTH and MUMMERY were successful for Watford, and THOMSON for Luton in the second half. Our Watford correspondent says that the Town defence was not as safe as Watford was on the previous day, but compliments Mingay, the halves and the forwards on a good display.

WATFORD RESERVES 4
LUTON TOWN RESERVES 2
WATFORD.—Fryer; Wright, Hewitt; Baker, Eggleston, Carter; Morris, Bell, Papworth, Mummery, McCulloch.
LUTON.—Mingay; Anderson, Bedford; Walker, Rennie, Roe; Miller, Thomson, Love, Littlewood, Robinson.

LEAGUE'S AMATEUR CUP-TIE.

I am officially informed by League & District that they have the permission of the F.A. to forego choice of ground in their F.A. Amateur Cup-tie between Leytonstone, League were drawn at home in this, the first round of the Competition Proper. The support, so far this season, has been very disappointing, for at the Beds Senior Cup-tie, there were only about 200 present, though Luton Town were not playing at home. As a considerable gate may be expected at Leytonstone, it has been decided to play the match there.