

WENT DOWN BRAVELY.

LUTON TOWN'S CUP FIGHT AT BOLTON.

(By CRUSADER).

HOWEVER keenly disappointed may be the handful of LUTON TOWN supporters that made the long journey to Burnden Park on Saturday, I am quite positive everyone will agree that it would be most ungenerous to stint the meed of praise that is their due for a magnificent fight against BOLTON WANDERERS. It is my lot to see them at home and away, and none knows better, for I have seen every match, what hard fortune they have suffered time after time. I flatter myself a little by saying that I know why they have lost, and why they occupy the bottom place on their League chart. When they were drawn to visit Bolton in the Cup-tie I had greater hopes than most of the supporters, for the simple reason that I credited First Division teams with playing more of the classic style of football than we are accustomed to see in the Third Division, and was certain in my own mind that the Town would give the Wanderers something to think about if the difference in style were observed to the full.

"HAND IT OUT."

Late last week I was informed on pretty good authority that the Wanderers could "hand IT out." By IT, of course, was meant vigorous play, and my informant claimed to have seen the Wanderers do so. Such IT as there was in the game was handed out by the Wanderers, but the match was a parlour game compared with some we have seen this season, and though the large majority of free kicks for fouls went against the Wanderers, there was not a great deal to quibble about. It was not rough play that enabled the Wanderers to win the game, because, thank Heaven, here and there in the country are to be found officials who will not allow risk to life and limb.

One writer says that "it was hard slogging" before Smith won the match, and, in my opinion, therein lies the reason for the Wanderers' success; they were able to "slog" when it was most necessary, and the Town were not capable of replying in the same coin. Now the same thing could be said of almost all the Town's defeats this season, especially in away matches. They have played well enough to get a lead, and then have lost it just because the opposition has brought some "slog" into the business.

The only way to stop the "slogger," the scientific slogger, is to "pitch 'em up," and if the Town players in that last 20 minutes could but have gone into the fray with as much determination to stop the Wanderers as the latter had to win, we should have been very much interested in the next round of the Cup Competition.

PERSONALITY WANTED.

As at Exeter, Millwall, Swindon, and Northampton, I longed for one player at Bolton who could stand out from the rest, and by example and precept make his colleagues and opponents realise that the Town had at least one player who could give twelve-pence for a shilling. Had such a player been available I am very confident that we would have won.

As individualists the Wanderers showed more skill, position for position, but as a team they had little in hand at the close.

In the first half, the Town seemed to feel just a little that it was a momentous business, but they got over that, and though they did not have chances equal in number to those made by the Wanderers, they might have scored on one or two occasions. The Wanderers grew more excited as the Town became cooler, and then REID notched a characteristic goal as the result of a splendidly-placed flag-kick by Dennis, there were many anxious faces. At half-time there was a pronounced gloom in the Bolton camp, and with Luton playing with more confidence than ever in the second half, there was almost a panic. The spectators were alternately howling at the referee when he pulled up a Wanderer, even for an obvious offence, and adjuring their favourites to get a move on.

ROUND THE ROBUST.

One of the players who had given me the impression as the probable match-winner was ROUND; not because he was very clever, but because he was masterful. Often he was pulled up, but he persisted, and he was the man who ultimately made the scores level. The Town players claimed that the ball was out of play before the corner kick was won, but there was no sign from the referee, and when Wright middled the ball among a crowd of players the home centre-half scattered the lot as he dashed in and headed the ball into the net.

Even then the Town might have taken the lead, for they gave the Wanderers defence a warm time, but it was not to be, and SMITH scored a clever winning goal with the Town defence scattered following a clever bit of dribbling by Butler, and a perfect forward pace. It is possible that Abbott, had he advanced, could have got the ball before Smith shot, but he was lame.

There is no need to add to the story except to say that the Wanderers showed great glee when the whistle went. Before then they had been glad to fall back on defence, forwards and halves going to the assistance of the backs, and it was remarkable that the Town players maintained persistent efforts to get back to equality when, by all tradition, they should have given up.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.

Had there been a replay I think the Town would have won, for I was not very much impressed by the exhibition of the Wanderers, and I think the Town would have gone into the struggle with greater confidence than they felt at Burnden Park. The Wanderers were a patchy side, and though some may argue that they had a lot of reserves, every one of their team played last season with the first team.

Gill is a grand goalkeeper, but the backs, apart from being quick and bold, did not inspire confidence. Cope was a clever half, and Round, though he does not show a lot of skill, has some personality. Thornborough had anything but a happy afternoon, and the same may be said of the wing in front of him. Smith was thrustful, but Jack and Butler redeemed the line from mediocrity.

Abbott again gave a good display in goal, and Kingham and Graham put up a magnificent defence. Both won high praise, as also did the middle men. Black, Rennie and Fraser were all skilful in footwork, and the centre-half has improved his heading a lot. What he does lack, however, is just that dominant force that would put him in the first flight. The wing forwards should have had more work in the second half, for both were fast and clever, though holding on just a trifle too long at times. Yardley was a much better player than at Brighton, and, indeed, gave a good account of himself, while Woods gave the benefit of his experience to his colleagues of the attack and of the rear alike. Reid did not get much rope, and the ball did not run at all kindly, but he got a fine goal, and made some useful passes.

It was a good game considering the dreadful conditions, and 20,256 spectators paid £1,356 to see it. They had their value if only in the suspense they suffered.

BOLTON COMMENT.

The Bolton Evening News gives a very fair indication of the feelings of the Bolton people. It says in Monday night's paper:—

NOT ACCORDING TO PLAN.

"The Wanderers have only themselves to blame that they had not safely 'lucked Luton Town away' at half-time, writes 'The Tramp.'"

"David Jack's prophecy that the game would be won in the first half-hour ought to have proved true, but the inability of the Wanderers to take their opportunities, along with Cup-tie luck, which throughout ran strongly in Luton's favour, upset it, and actually the issue was decided in the last 20 minutes. It is no exaggeration to say many of us were by that time rapidly losing hope, even of a replay, and the Bolton players themselves were feeling the strain, as was shown by the way the flank half-backs picked the ball up in haste for throws-in; by the way, Smith watched the Luton goal-kicks like a cat in the hope of getting something for nothing; and by the way Round dashed among the forwards for every centre and corner-kick. Eager and anxious they were to get on terms, and once that had been done, they played as feverishly for the winning goal. And all the time one felt 'This shouldn't be. We have made two chances to Luton's every one, yet ours is an uphill fight.'"

"That is why people are shaking their heads and saying the Wanderers were 'lucky.' Lucky they were, in the sense that a team which scorns to accept obvious chances rarely wins a cup-tie. Pertinacity, happily, won through in this case, but one fears such a thing might not happen again. The crowd at least will enjoy itself better if future policy is the taking of everything that comes. Luton actually held the lead for more than half the game, 48 minutes to be exact, and they were in front up to the 70th minute, with every appearance of remaining so.

PLAY OF LUTON.

"The 'Strawplaiters' surprised not a few spectators by the excellence of their football. There were crudities here and there, but on the whole it was fast, go-ahead, and effective play, good enough to beat the Bolton half-backs frequently and to keep the backs busy too. Pointon, in fact, slipped Jennings and Thornborough time after time in ominous fashion, and had it not been for some good tackling in the Bolton goal-mouth, notably by Bob Haworth, the Third Leaguers might easily have added to their lead. The Wanderers had longer spells of attacking, and made more openings. Their trouble was in their bad finishing. Twice Smith looked a certain scorer, only to put one ball wide and the other against the bar. Repeatedly Butler's centres flew past Abbott untouched, and in goal-mouth melees, following corner-kicks, the Wanderers simply could not force the ball over the line, on one occasion when Abbott lay helpless on the ground.

"When Round's equaliser to Reid's opening goal came 25 minutes after the interval, followed quickly by Smith's 'winner,' both the Wanderers and crowd were jubilant—the surest indication that confidence had been shaken. In a fast, strenuous game, on a muddy pitch, the Wanderers showed, in addition to weak shooting, a very serious deficiency at half-back, which might have cost them dearly, for it clearly threw the whole team out of gear. Thornborough had not the positional genius of Nuttall, and was unhappy with his feeding, while Round was continually beaten without coming to grips with the opposition. The big boy had a bad match, redeemed to a degree by his plucky attempts at goal which finally found reward. Cope was the best of the three, and with Haworth, made up a sound right flank, Jennings having his poorest game since going full back. Gill did all that was required of him in good style, and Butler and Jack were easily the pick of the forwards; in fact the best wing on the field, the Bolton left never showing the same understanding. Smith used tremendous energy in carrying out his policy of harassing the Luton backs, and characteristically scored from a difficult angle after failing from easier positions. The line can get together better than this, and will need to if the team is to go farther in the cup competition."