

WON AT WALSTALL

BROWN'S SNAP GOAL GIVES LUTON THE VICTORY

A Game of Checkmate

(By Crusader).

LUTON TOWN 1
WALSALL 0
WALSALL.—John: Walters. (F.)
Houldey; Godfrey, Bradford, Archer;
Parle, Bartley, Mays, Eyres, Barnes.
LUTON.—Harford; Kingham, Hodgson;
Clark, Richards, Fraser; Heslop,
M'Nestry, Brown, Rennie, Bryce.
Referee: Mr. G. C. Denton,
Northampton.

TAKE little account of the score: the result was a triumph over circumstances. I have never seen a Northern Section match, but from what I have read and heard I should imagine that Walsall, who were in that Section so many years, played a characteristic Northern Section game. Possibly their ground conduces to this. It is much smaller than the Town ground, there is little turf on a sandy surface, ground work is all but impossible because of the deviation of the ball, the spectators are very close on two sides, and they are the noisiest—perhaps not without humour—the League. Behind the Town goal gathered some hundreds strong, and yelled at the referee for every decision given against Walsall, and on every tackle by the Town defenders they were appealing for something or other. It is not too much to say that the Town could never settle down to football as it should be played, and as they can play it; but they took a leaf from the book of Walsall, and beat them at their own game.

BACK PLAY

With the pronounced slope in their favour Walsall at once revealed that whatever skill there might be in their ranks, it was of less consideration than getting through the opposition at any cost, hence we saw the ball more in the air than on the ground; the home backs slogged it from their own penalty area into the Town's, with the result that forwards and backs of either side were overkicked, and it was largely a duel of defenders. Consequently, in estimating the merits of the players, first credit must be awarded to the Town backs. For a time they continued to try and use the ball to the advantage of their forwards, but with opponents rushing hither and thither, charging unceremoniously and kicking wildly, challenging in bolsterous fashion, these methods were useless, and so it was a case of the inside wingers and halves of both sides being jumbled up in mid-field, eager to intercept kicks that happened to fall short. Had the teams met on a field of average dimensions with reasonable going underfoot, the victory would have gone to the Town by a bigger margin.

CHECKMATE

In some respects the Town were fortunate to win, perhaps, because Walsall had more of the play territorially, but coolness in trying circumstances, energy when it was demanded, vigour to checkmate roughness, were forthcoming, and so the spoils came to Luton. Walsall had plenty of pace and stamina, but the order of the big boot did not pay on this occasion, though one could well believe that many much cleverer sides than Luton would be swept off their feet by the whirlwind methods of the home team. I believe this was Mr. Denton's first League game: he will go far, I think, for he showed that he could not be ruffled by the crowd, and declined to accept some of the quaint decisions of the linesmen. I thought he might have been a little firmer in dealing with the Walsall players, Houldey and Mays in particular, during the first half, but he handled the game exceedingly well; knew his own mind, and when in a position to see and judge did so irrespective of the linesmen, who may or may not have been swayed by the "carryings-on" of the crowd.

HARFORD BUSY

The Town began with a neat advance, and Rennie had the first shot at goal following a corner-kick he had forced. He was well out of his reckoning. Brown had a try just afterwards with similar result. Then Walsall showed their mettle, and for some time vigorous onslaughts had the Town defenders harried, and Harford had his work cut out to deal with the rushes of the forwards. Mays being very anxious to get the goalkeeper into the back of the net, Harford made a grand save from Barnes, and realised that the punch was the thing, for unless long shots were put in there was no time to hold on to the ball.

Kingham and Hodgson were hard-pressed, and the efforts of the halves to feed the forwards with ground passes were unavailing, the ball beating them time and again. The Town halves and inside forwards then seemed to fall into the idea that first-time kicking was the best way of beating the home halves and forwards, and they opened out the game better without troubling John a great deal.

ACROBATICS

After twenty-five minutes I was telling myself that it was simply a matter of the Town defenders keeping their heads and we would win. With M'Nestry and Rennie hanging back, it was not surprising that there was little testing for John. Once Brown managed to get hold and went at top speed for goal, but Walters used his weight in a sort of wrestling bout, and managed to prevent the youngster getting in his shot. Richards and Clark began to use their weight, too, and Clark floored Barnes very heavily after he himself had been knocked into a sitting position by the winger. Mays began to fight shy of Richards, too, but he was always barging at Kingham and Hodgson, though without managing to get either of them down. Once Mays leaped right on to Richards' shoulders, and fell over when referee not only penalising him, but gave him a much-needed lecture. The Town played better towards the interval, and John had to save two or three shots, but Harford made another great save from Bartley just before the change of ends. Half-time:—

WALSALL 0
LUTON 0

Immediately on the restart the Town went to the attack in skilful fashion—an attempt once more to play their own game. The backs came down to the vicinity of the centre-line, and Hodgson sent the ball wide from that distance. The crowd howled when Richards sent Bartley flying, but the Town centre-half had headed the ball, and the smaller man's challenge had been too vigorous but there was not enough weight behind it to dislodge the Town pivot. The referee refused to be dictated to by the crowd. Play was generally in midfield now, for the home forwards could not make contact with Harford, and the Town halves and inside forwards could not gauge their passes on the small ground, so that the ball was frequently out of play. John had to run out and pick up the ball on several occasions, but though his kicks, like Harford's, carried well beyond the half-way line, the ball was soon back in the neighbourhood of the home penalty area.

BROWN'S GOAL

The one goal came from one of the very few decent attempts at combination. It began on the right wing, where Clark turned an assault by the home left. The ball travelled into the middle, and M'Nestry pushed it out to Heslop, who went a few paces and then lifted it into the middle; Brown nodded it to the left, and Bryce darted in before Walters and promptly returned it for BROWN to shoot before the ball touched the ground, and John was helpless to save. It was a well-won goal, and the Walsall supporters showed their appreciation until the ball was brought to the centre when they resumed their vociferous encouragement to their favourites. The Town players, however, put a big valve on their one goal lead, and were determined to keep it, so the strivings were chiefly concentrated on keeping the ball out of the danger zone, rather than attempt to score. As the minutes passed the crowd became more excited, and the Walsall players were infected, too, but nothing could shake the solidity of the Town defenders.

NARROW ESCAPES

A big clearance by Hodgson sent the ball right over the stand, and when a new one was promptly thrown on the field, and thrown in from touch, Rennie hit it first time, and sent it to keep the other company. The referee took time off for this. For a long time there was almost as little to write about as there was to see, for Walsall were flurried, and their attacks were breaking up almost before they had begun, and the Town were seldom endeavouring to attack in combined fashion. Once Bryce beat two opponents, and then drove in a storming shot that was only inches too high. There came two narrow escapes of the Town goal; each time the ball came across from Barnes, and the first time Harford's arms were not long enough to intercept, but the ball went wide; the second time there was a hot scuffle in the Town goal-mouth but Harford managed to get to the ball just in time and clear.

M'NESTRY'S III-LUCK

On the other hand, a few minutes before the end, there came another bright bit of work by the Town forwards. This time it was on the left-wing, and the home defenders were quite baffled as the ball came over to the middle; M'Nestry rushed out of a crowd of players anticipating the pass, and deftly turned the ball past John, but the whistle went for offside. I am certain that M'Nestry was not offside, but that this was yet another of the failures of officials to realize that it is not the position of a player when he

receives the ball, but when it was last played that should determine. M'Nestry has suffered many times through this fault of officials, who do not grasp the quickness of the player. Still, there was nothing to worry about when the whistle went.

THE REARGUARD

Harford kept goal splendidly again, and though he has had many games in which he has had a great deal more work, he has never been safer. Kingham, who has seemed inclined to laziness in a few games recently, touched his very best. "The classiest back I have seen this season," said a First Division club representative after the game, and that sums up the skill of the Harpenden youth. He played finely, his tackling being judicious, and his kicking clean and sure. Hodgson was not so heavily worked, because it was on the home left wing that Walsall's hopes were chiefly centred. The dapper little back was imperturbable as ever; his judgment saving a lot of running about, and it was amusing to hear the crowd urging the home forwards not to allow the Town skipper so many free-kicks. It was just a matter of positioning, though when the struggle was hot he was usually on the spot.

HALVES

Clark and Fraser were some time in getting accustomed to the kick-and-rush methods, and their obstructive work was not very good in the early stages, but they gradually settled down, and in the second half Clark rose to his very best. He refused to allow Barnes any rope, and the tussles between him and the opposing wing were marked by a good deal of knock-about business, but he came off trumps, and found time to give passes to his wing. Similarly with Fraser, except that he did not do much charging at any time. Towards the end I thought he was going to become a forward, but he changed his mind apparently, and strengthened the defensive lines. I had seen Richards at centre-half only once previously, and that was as long ago as 1927. In that game he was anything but a success, but at Walsall on Saturday he was just the man for the job. Largely defensive his work was, but his strength and courage enabled him to stem the fierce massed efforts of the home inside forwards, and his headwork and kicking were strong and sure. I don't know what sort of testimonial Mays would give him, but I fancy the language would be plentifully strewn with adjectives.

FORWARDS

The forwards could not settle down to their normal game. There was not much room for M'Nestry or Rennie. The former contrived to puzzle the home halves and backs a good deal, and Rennie gave many fine passes as usual, but initiation of attack in the customary way was almost out of the question, and they were engaged for much of the game in passing away the time, by which I mean to infer that they were keeping the ball away from the opposition rather than trying to make goals for themselves. Heslop and Bryce both did well in spite of the vigorous measures they had to encounter, and the former in particular was against a rough customer in Houldey. Brown was in some degree overweighted, but the more I see of him the better I like him. He has ideas, and not only opens out well, but is quick to dart through the gaps. The goal he scored was a snap shot, a chance seized promptly, and that is what we want from a centre-forward.

WALSALL'S BEST

Walsall have a goalkeeper in John, and the backs never stood on ceremony. They were typical with the rest of the team. "Get into 'em," was the general exhortation from the crowd, and it was acted upon, whether needed or not. Bradford played magnificently at centre-half, being tireless, and very clever. I am sure that Helliwell was not missed at all. The others were mainly stoppers and rushers. Barnes was a fast and clever left-winger, perhaps the best forward on view in this game, and Bartley was always a dangerous man. Mays was a worker who seemed to be dominated by the idea that he had to knock somebody about, and there was no wonder that he received admonition.

There were 4,000 spectators.