

THE SOUTHERN LEAGUE

LUTON TOWN v. READING.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result :

Luton Town.....	5 goals.
Reading.....	2 goals.

The teams were as follow :—

RIGHT.	LUTON TOWN.	LEFT.
	Bee (goal).	
Collins.		McEwen.
Watkins.	M'Crindle.	Howe.
Gallacher. Finlayson.	Galbraith.	Prentice. Jack.
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Gallacher.	Kelsey.	Dickenson.
Kaigh.	A. W. White	Stewart.
	Justins.	Warburton.
		C. White.
	Cannon (goal).	
LEFT.	READING.	RIGHT.

Referee, Mr. J. Albert, R.A., of Chatham; linesmen, Messrs. A. W. A. Webb (Reading), and J. Bennett (Luton).

I must confess that I looked forward to the match with Reading with some amount of trepidation. Not that there's anything extraordinary in that, because I have been a victim to a feeling of that sort on many occasions since Christmas. But Reading was the team I feared most of the teams we had to meet in the League, after Millwall.

The Reds found them a rare handful when they visited the biscuit town. I remember that match. So do some others, McEwen and Gallacher, to wit. Our fellows played a superb game while there were eleven of them, and but for the grand goal-keeping of Cannon would have piled on goal after goal.

Then when we lost Gallacher and McEwen the Berkshire boys saw their opportunity, and didn't they take it with a vengeance? They fought like very demons, their onslaughts being of so determined a character that all the Luton people present were truly thankful when the call o' time was given.

Millwall, too, have found them the toughest customers they have had to deal with in the League, apart from Luton, and, in fact, the Dockers had to give them a point. Bearing in mind also the wonderfully improved form which the Reading folks have been showing of late, the match on Saturday could not be regarded as an absolute certainty for Luton.

My trepidation therefore was perfectly excusable, but fortunately it turned out that although it was not unwarranted, it was certainly quite unnecessary. As far as the quality of the play was concerned, there was never the least doubt as to which was the better team.

The visitors, I was informed, were not quite at full strength. But then they never are. I believe there is not an instance on record where the Reading people have not had to lament the absence of someone or other. When we visited the Caversham ground, there were quite a number of absentees, one paper giving a list of three, and another doing ditto, but the curious thing was that all the names were different.

The plainest proof that the match on Saturday was expected to be a tough one was the "gate," fully three thousand persons turning up to witness the contest. And, happy to relate, none of them afterwards regretted having attended, the sixpennyworth provided being excellent value for money.

The weather was favourable, and the ground was in better condition than it had been for some time, though it was naturally very heavy. Both teams found this out long before the finish, for more than one player had scarcely a kick left in him towards the end of the second half.

The kick-off was timed for half-past three, but once again there was delay, owing to the late arrival of the visitors, and it wanted but a little more than a quarter to four when Dickenson set the ball rolling, Luton having won the toss. The homesters started up-hill, with the sun behind them.

At the outset, the home half-backs showed very pronounced weakness, Watkins especially failing in his endeavour to get on the ball, and as a consequence the biscuit boys were enabled to get in the vicinity of the Luton goal. Mills centred, but Watkins made some amends for his other shortcomings by ridding Bee of cause for anxiety.

Then Luton retaliated, and Warburton let in Jack, who sent on to Galbraith, and the latter, eluding White, ran through and scored a splendid goal, cleverly putting in at the opposite side to where Cannon stood, and giving that worthy no chance.

Luton again attacked, and Jack produced the note of admiration, or many of them, with a lovely cross shot, which just shaved the upright. Reading went to the other end, and Watkins gave a corner to a middle from Mills. The left-winger placed, and Howe, in clearing, weakly sent back to him, enabling him to get in a clinking shot. Bee caught, but failed to dispose of the ball, which Dickenson put in the net, thus making the scores equal.

This was very sensational business, two goals within six or seven minutes, and gave promise of an exciting contest. After the return to the half-way line, however, Luton immediately became the aggressors, and a couple of corners were conceded them. The second of these Gallacher placed beautifully, and Prentice sent in a hot shot, which Cannon saved grandly, although on the ground and surrounded by foes.

Other shots followed, but Cannon was equal to every emergency. A third corner proved fruitless, and then a splendid bit of combined work by Finlayson, Galbraith, and Gallacher, elicited cheers. The three of them waltzed up the field in fine style, and Gallacher middling, Galbraith made a splendid effort to convert, heading the ball just by the upright.

Kelsey now managed to get by Watkins and Collins, but he failed to do any damage, and, the play being quickly transferred to Reading territory, Cannon saved from Gallacher in splendid style. Prentice was instrumental in keeping up the attack, and there was another fruitless corner, following which Gallacher had a rare opening, but the ball slipped off his foot and went behind.

A moment later Dickenson broke right through the Luton defence, but he was foolishly interfered with by Stewart, who was given off-side. It did not matter much, as it happened, Bee saving the shot. A corner, given by M'Crindle, was capitally placed by Fletcher, and A. White headed in beautifully. Bee caught, but held the ball too long, and was very nearly bundled into the net with it. Serve him right.

Only twice more in the first half did Reading get a sight of the Luton goal, the attack on their headquarters being almost continuous. Finlayson hit the cross-bar with a grand shot, and M'Crindle did ditto a little later, Cannon saving from the latter attempt, and Justins giving a corner. This, like another which followed it, was unproductive, and then Gallacher, receiving from a good pass by Galbraith, sent the ball right across the mouth of the Reading goal, but Prentice and Finlayson clean missed, and Jack, who had not so good a chance, failed in his endeavour to score.

It was astonishing that pressure could be kept up so long without effect. The Luton forwards went on peppering away in a most praiseworthy fashion, assisted by M'Crindle, who perhaps did more shooting—and very good shooting it was too—than has been done by the half-backs during the whole season.

But it was no good; the ball could not be forced through. Galbraith grazed the bar with a fine flying shot, Finny just missed the corner, and various other shots went whizzing over the top, and by the sides. Cannon entirely filled up the space in goal, and neutralised every shot that wanted neutralising.

Two saves in particular deserve special mention. The first was from a header by Galbraith, who received close in goal from a centre by Gallacher, and the second was from a shot by M'Crindle, who sought to convert a middle by the outside right. Cannon was on the ground when he received the shot, but he managed to dispose of it, although Galbraith and Prentice were practically on top of him. It was splendidly done and enthusiastically cheered.

When the interval arrived, honours were still easy, and many were picturing the possibility of this state of things prevailing up to the finish. Luton, it was certain, could not have more of the play than they had had, and as the failure to score had not been for the want of trying, there was just the chance that after all, they would be robbed of the victory they were striving so hard to achieve.

When play was resumed, Luton soon renewed their hostile overtures, and Jack sending across to Gallacher, the latter dropped the ball in front of goal, and Prentice headed on the net. Fouls now became of rather frequent occurrence, Stewart being the chief offender. At length a bad goal kick gave Jack the ball, and he passing on to Galbraith, the centre-forward went to the front and scored a second goal in very neat fashion.

The return to the middle of the field afforded the visitors but little relief, as Luton were quickly on the job again, and Cannon running out to save, was floored by Galbraith and Jack, and while he was on the ground, Prentice notched a third point with a splendid shot.

The spectators, of course, cheered again, but a minute or so afterwards there was another charge. Stewart, who was palpably offside, but who was not so given, got a clear run and sent into goal. A scrimmage ensued, and Bee saved two or three times, but eventually Stewart had the satisfaction of petting the ball.

It seemed now that the scoring was to go on, for no sooner had the ball been restarted, than Galbraith, with the aid of Jack, got clear, and going for all he was worth, lured Cannon to one side of the goal and very nicely popped in the other, making the score four to two.

Reading made a determined effort to repeat their previous performance, working their way up on the left, and Dickenson heading over. Directly after, O. White got in a grand long dropping shot, which Bee let slip through his fingers, and then picked up and disposed of. It all appearances the ball had gone over the line, but a goal was allowed. Still, the visitors could hardly complain, because there is no doubt that their second goal should not have been credited to them.

From now up to the finish, Luton again had all the best of the play. Once from a corner placed by Gallacher, Galbraith headed over just as Jack landed Cannon in the net. Watkins next tried two or three shots, and then Prentice headed through from a fine centre by Gallacher, but offside nullified.

Just before the end, Luton made another strong assault on the Reading citadel, and after Cannon had once saved he came and punched another shot up in the air. The ball alighted on Prentice's head, and the next moment it was safely resting in the net.

Thus Luton won a splendid game by five goals to two. Play all through was of an exciting character, and, considering the state of the ground, was very fast. Luton, however, were far and away the better team, and from first to last put any amount of spirit into their work.

Galbraith, it was gratifying to note, had quite recovered his old form, and played with a dash and energy which went a long way towards winning the game. He kept his wings going beautifully, his passing to the outside men being very clean. Gallacher also was in fine fettle, and he and Finlayson did a great deal of smart and clever work, notwithstanding the fact that they were closely watched.

Prentice, too, put his whole heart into the game, and I might add, his whole head also, for the effectiveness of that cranium was truly astonishing. His performance was a capital one in every respect. Jack, albeit a trifle slow, rendered a good account of himself, and once more displayed the remarkable affection which he seems to entertain for goal-keepers.

M'Crindle was the only one of the halves to play up to reputation. In the first half he did uncommonly well, especially in shooting, a department in which our half-backs have hitherto shown lamentable weakness. As a rule, of course, the shooting ought to be left to the forwards, but there are times when opportunities present themselves to the half-backs, and they ought not to be neglected.

Watkins was very much off during the first part of the game, but improved afterwards. Howe was not up to the mark. The heavy ground seemed to affect him very much, and often he appeared to have hardly strength enough to kick, though his tackling was good. McEwen, it goes without saying, did all that was required of him at back, but I like him best when he pays less attention to the man than he did on this occasion. Collins made a very fair partner indeed, in spite of one or two mistakes.

The only man on the Reading side calling for special mention was Cannon, who defended his charge with wonderful pluck and success, especially in the first half. I don't know how many goals would have been scored against a less reliable custodian.

Stewart, perhaps, was the hardest worker among the Reading forwards, and Mills and Fletcher played a very fair game. Warburton, who, I understand, is a Reserve, stuck to his work well, although hardly man enough for his job. White and Knight were better, but neither of the backs seemed to belong to the first-class order.

Ilford went to Swindon on Saturday in the confident expectation of taking a couple of points out of the railway lads. But they were bitterly disappointed, the Swindonians coming off victorious by seven goals to three. The following is the League table up to date :—

	Pld.	Won	Lost	Drn.	Goals for	Goals agst.	pts.
Millwall Athletic....	12	9	0	3	55	18	21
Luton Town.....	11	6	3	2	27	20	14
South'pton St.Mary's	10	6	3	1	20	17	13
Reading.....	12	5	6	1	23	28	11
Ilford.....	10	4	4	2	16	21	10
Clapton.....	9	4	5	0	17	24	8
Royal Ordnance.....	11	2	7	2	16	28	6
Swindon.....	10	3	7	0	19	31	6
Chatham.....	9	1	5	3	9	15	5