



SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

READING V. LUTON.

A BOLSTEROUS DAY. — RESCUE BOYS BADLY BEATEN. — LUTON'S PENALTY KICK. — THE REFEREE "MOBBED."

For six weeks past, Reading folk have been promising themselves a fine and large revenge for their heavy defeat at Luton. And Saturday gave them the longed-for opportunity on their own ground. But a bitter disappointment was laid up in store for them, and the reputation of local prophets was for ever blasted.

Let me remark in passing on one striking difference between Millwall and Luton in their dealings with the Berkshire club. Last year, we defeated the Reading men both at home and away, while Millwall could only draw on the Carisbrooke ground. Our record in the two encounters this season is even better than in 1894-5, as we have again won both games and scored 16 goals to 2 as against 8 to 4. I don't fancy Millwall can possibly eclipse these figures, as they only got home by 2-0 on their own ground, and they will hardly win by 5 clear goals away. How strange this thirteenth!

Well, footballers in the March town were pretty sanguine, as I have said. The following pages and cracker utterance is from the leading local football paper, but I am assured that the rank and file of the club's supporters were far more confident:—

"To-morrow the long delayed but much to be desired opportunity will be given the football community of Reading of witnessing a battle that will be fought out to the last inch. The calamity that overtook the Kennet-siders at the straw playing town is now more revived, and the committee know full well that the task before them is not a light one. Luton have shown all through a form that has the power ring about it. They have also the knowledge of having beaten the well-known Newton Heath eleven, and they will naturally be anxious to make things hot. The rescue boys, I understand, will come out in full force, and the latest acquisitions will be put into harness. Although I am hardly of opinion that the Kennet-siders will be victorious, I have no doubt that they will be able to stave off defeat equal to that sustained at Luton."

It was a bolsterous, bolstering sort of day, and the prospect of seeing the Reds play their own game was very remote. Leaving Luton at 9.5, the party arrived in the county town of Berkshire about 11.30, but owing to the utter break-down of arrangements, it was something just short of an hour before dinner could be obtained. And we all know that a solid meal close on 90 minutes of slopping exertion is not the best of preparations. This was an unfortunate start to the day's operations, and I began to think that weather and "wittles" between them would about fashbergat poor Luton.

The greatest drawback of all was the absence of Calverley, which came as a surprise to everyone at the last minute. I hear that his foot was badly hurt at the finish of Wednesday's game with the 3rd Grenadiers—oh those "friendlyes!"—and it was quite unfit for action on Saturday. Fortunately Birch, who was down as twelfth man, has been well used to the position, and it fell to his lot to fill the vacancy. Otherwise the team was as usual, Russell being in goal.

It is not everywhere that you have to be ferried across a river to reach a football ground, and Reading is unique in that respect. The eager crowd made the trip quite exciting, and they swarmed into those old flat-bottomed punts like London gutter-boys into a free bus. The field is very little above the level of the Kennet, and though not flooded, as some of us expected, its surface was very wet and slippery.

The wind swept across the ground with the force of a gale, and erratic, haphazard football was a frequent conclusion. The crowd was the largest so far this season, and numbered 5,500. The Reds first appeared on the ground, and had a fair reception. There was great cheering when Reading came out—a steady roar of applause, the yell, "Hi-Hi," being a strong under-current. The sides lined up in the following order:—

Luton:—Russell, goal; McCartney and McEwen, backs; Watkins, Steart and Docherty, halves; Birch and Cooper, full-backs; Parkinson and Raine, forwards.

Reading:—Cannon, goal; Hall (17) and Justice, backs; White, Evans, and Knight, halves; Gray and Marshall, Reid, Cunningham and Wheeler, forwards.

Messrs. E. Walsh and G. George were the time-keepers, and Mr. C. D. Crisp, of Ryde, acted as referee.

The start was made at 2.45, five minutes before the appointed time. London won the toss, which gave them slightly the advantage of the goal. The first incident was a free kick for Reading, owing to the ball rolling up Galbraith's arm, and from this, Marshall shot wide. Then Luton came down, and gave the home defence a lively time, the ball, however, going out. The first goal was given on Cooper's behalf, against the stripes, but offside stopped a determined attack by the home forwards. By way of a change, Reid got away, and passed out to Gray, who was palpably offside, but, nevertheless, rushed away and sent the ball into the net. When Mr. Crisp refused to allow a goal, and gave a free-kick to Luton instead, the crowd were—well, not pleased.

A hurricane of wind was blowing dead across the field, and the ball was continually in touch on one side of the playing pitch. Throw-ins, sometimes half a dozen in succession, became extremely monotonous. The effect this had on attempted scientific play may be well imagined while the precarious footing afforded by the soft ground made falls very frequent on the part of the Reds.

Birch got in a decent centre, but unfortunately "Gully" handled again, and a foul against Evans on the Luton centre led to a spell of hot attacking by Luton. Hands off Reid made things warmer for Reading, and from a pass by Evans, Parkinson shot yards too high. Poor Wheeler was left completely in the cold, the ball only coming his way once in the first quarter of an hour. In a tussle for the ball, Galbraith received a nasty kick from Evans, and play was stopped a few minutes on this account. On resuming, play became lively. Cunningham rushed away and shot over Howell's head, and at the other end Parkinson sent in a beauty, which Cannon saved at the expense of a corner.

This and another corner given by Knight, were placed wide. Amid a terrific demonstration the Reading forwards broke away, and Howell scored superbly two difficult shots in quick succession from Wheeler and Gray. Luton retaliated and Cannon was twice called upon, two goal-kicks following.

A storm of rain now broke over the ground. The "Hercules" crowd once again exercised its powerful lungs when Galbraith went for Cannon just as he had saved a hot hit under the bar. Two corners, one after another, were awarded the visitors without any advantage accruing. Then Russell kicked away from Reid, and a minute afterwards Evans tried Cannon's best skill with a long cross.

"Don't forget Wheeler!" shouted the grand-standites, but the little Watford man scarcely touched the ball half a dozen times during the first half. At last came Luton's opportunity. From a throw-in by Docherty, Parkinson shot with fine judgement almost from mid-field, and the ball whizzed past Cannon, who thought it was going out, into the net, 30 minutes from the start. Luton's first goal was loudly cheered by the little band of their supporters present, but otherwise a solemn silence prevailed.

Directly afterwards, Cooper and Galbraith broke away, and seemed certain to score, but Cannon averted the danger by giving a corner. A mis-kick by McEwen in Luton quarters made Lutonians equally breathless, but Russell saved grandly. Several minutes were made by the visitors before half-time arrived, the score then being:—

Luton	1 goal
Reading	0 ..

Though playing against the wind, Luton's form greatly improved in the second half, and their superiority became more pronounced than ever. Twice Evans got down the field, and then, availing themselves of a bad pass by Watkins, the Reading left attacked, and McEwen gave the home team their first corner. This came to nothing, and soon Parkinson was taking very

deliberate aim—in fact, standing still to shoot—in Cannon's vicinity. Munster, Russell threw away from Gray. A pretty run by Ekins and Parkinson followed, and Galbraith shot finely, Cannon storing the ball over the cross-bar. The old Goalkeeper had to save smartly from the corner. Whistle was now fouled, and from the kick, McKean headed the wrong way, but Russell ably covered the mistake.

Again the Luton forwards careered down the field. Birch crossed to Ekins, but Parkinson waited too long to shoot, the ball rebounding. Cooper was also too slow a minute after, and then Gray, who was waiting under the bar, was given offside. A centre by "Parker" enabled Birch to land the ball on the top of the net, Galbraith evoking a big demonstration by "going for" Cannon in his usual style.

Now came the turning point of the game, Evans "set himself" for Galbraith as the Luton centre was bearing down upon goal, the result being that Hughes turned a complete somersault over his back and narrowly escaped serious injury. Mr. Crisp rightly gave a penalty-kick and Cooper made no mistake, scoring Luton's second goal 25 minutes from the interval. The Reading folk made a great hullabaloo at this decision and the booting lasted for some time.

Judge then of their feelings when four minutes afterwards, Ekins ran down and met in a superb centre which Birch promptly headed through! With a 3 goals' lead, Luton had all the upper hand for the rest of the game. The rain had now ceased and the sun shone for a while. The referee twice stopped the game owing to the enthusiasm of the spectators on the field of play. Heading forced a couple of corners before the finish but when "time" arrived, the result was

Luton,	3 goals
Reading,	0 ..

Directly after the sounding of the whistle, the crowd broke over the barriers and rushed towards the referee. There was some booting and cries of "Go for him" and "We will give the ——— something." Mr. Crisp was, however, surrounded by some of the players and by Luton and Reading committeemen and got away to the pavilion with some hustling.