

THE LEAGUE.—SECOND DIVISION.

LUTON TOWN v. SMALL HEATH.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—

Small Heath..... 2 goals.

Luton Town 1 goal.

The teams were as follow:—

Luton — Williams, goal; McCartney and McEwen, backs; Davies, Stewart, and Docherty, half-backs; Gallacher, Coupar, Donaldson, McInnes, and Birch, forwards.

Small Heath—Webb, goal; Archer and Pratt, backs; Dunlop, Leake, and Robertson, half-backs; Inglis, Goode, Higgins, Abbott, and Oakes, forwards.

Referee, Mr. A. Kingsoott.

Saturday's affair was generally regarded as a tolerably safe thing for Luton, for though the locals were beaten by four goals to two at Birmingham, they were somewhat unfortunate, and it was confidently anticipated that they would turn the tables when the Heathens visited Bedfordshire. But it is one thing to make forecasts, and quite another to carry them out.

The weather was delightfully fine, which was very nice for the three thousand spectators who patronised the match, and the pitch was dry and dusty, which was bad for the Luton players, who seem to show to greatest advantage on a sloppy ground. The wetter it is, in fact, the better it seems to suit them.

Still, as Luton had beaten Manchester, Newcastle, and Burnley, and had held their own with all comers, except the Arsenal, it was felt they could not well succumb to Small Heath. The visitors, however, turned out in wonderfully good trim, and such a fine and athletic lot of young fellows did they look that some of the spectators had misgivings, as they compared them with the older and heavier Luton men.

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The Red Cross Band having given a preliminary selection, the teams lined up, Luton, as a consequence of winning the toss, having the wind behind them. They started off at a rare pace, too, and speedily forced a corner, whilst a little later Coupar sent the ball across the mouth of goal, only for Birch to be given off-side. For nearly five minutes the play was confined to the Small Heath territory and then the visitors made a brilliant burst, the left wing speedily getting in evidence, and Robertson, to the consternation of the onlookers, eventually meeting a return and scoring a magnificent goal.

Luton made a vigorous response, and a good piece of work by McInnes gave Gallacher an opening, but Billy shot the wrong side of the net. McInnes next headed wide from a kick by Stewart, and then Birch missed a centre from Gallacher. However, the homesters soon secured another corner, and the visitors had no sooner cleared from this than they had to yield a third, but Stewart put wide from a beautiful kick by Docherty.

Luton continued the attack, and McInnes sent in a shot which seemed certain to take effect, but the custodian just saved it from going in the corner of the goal. Gallacher grazed the post with a lovely shot, and after McEwen had been applauded for some splendid work in keeping the Small Heath right wing in check, the onlookers were convulsed with laughter by the spectacle of the referee falling over a prostrate McEwen.

Keeping up the pressure, Luton forced another corner, but Birch nullified Gallacher's well-judged kick by sending terribly wide. McCartney placing from hands against the visitors, a fifth corner resulted, but this like the others, was fruitless. Gallacher having just missed the mark with a good shot, the homesters had corner number six conceded them, but the day appears to have gone by when Luton could score from a corner. The visitors made an incursion, but were quickly driven back, and a fine shot by Docherty was tipped over the bar by Webb.

Gallacher placed from the flag-staff, and Docherty had two shots and Birch one, without effect. When McInnes made a dashing run and

a fine shot, which Coupar converted, thus placing the teams on an equality. It was a grandly-got goal, and fully deserved every cheer it evoked. If this had been the finish of the game, one would have been able to give both sides credit for very fine play, but unfortunately for Luton, there was a long time to go, and the longer they played the worse they fared.

The Heathens worked tremendously hard, and Oakes and Abbott were all over Davies and McCartney, who thoroughly convinced most of the spectators of the truth of what I have repeatedly urged, viz., that they ought not to be played together on one wing. Williams was several times called upon to save, though the shots were not very difficult ones, but at last Luton got away, and Birch had a rare opening, and shot the wrong side of the post.

A moment afterwards, Teddy, who was clean off, had the goal at his mercy, but instead of shooting, he put tamely to the front, and Pratt effected a clearance. Nothing further of any note transpired before half-time, when the scores remained on a level.

But it was a different matter when play was resumed. The visitors almost immediately went away on the left, the ball was then transferred to the right, and Inglis gave his side the lead with a rather long shot, which a good many people thought Williams ought to have saved, but I rather think McCartney diverted its course, and thus upset his calculations.

Luton replied to the goal by forcing a corner, and later on several capital centres were put in by Docherty, still another corner being the outcome, but nothing more tangible. The hopes of the spectators were raised when Donaldson was fouled in the vicinity of the Small Heath goal, as they thought a penalty was going to be given, but the infringement had taken place just outside the twelve yards' line, and the free kick proved of no advantage.

After Webb had saved a good shot from Stewart, Gallacher dropped the ball in goal, and McInnes was distinctly unlucky in carrying it behind from the custodian's save. The play subsequently developed into an uninteresting exhibition from the spectatorial point of view, owing to the fact that the Heathens more than held their own, Luton seldom looking like pulling the game out of the fire.

The forwards were quite demoralised, Donaldson appearing never to be able to do anything right, and Birch being pretty well in the same boat. Coupar seemed to have given way to the many discouragements, and practically the hopes, if any hopes remained, were centred on Gallacher and McInnes. A centre from the right-winger looked a bit dangerous, and at last he himself worked his way to the mouth of goal, and then put very wide.

Just before the finish, a corner for Luton afforded a possible chance of equalising, but it didn't come off, and the spectators left the ground with gloomy looks and with all the buoyancy knocked completely out of them. It was quite an unlooked-for reverse, and was the more deplorable as it had the effect of eliminating Luton from the first flight. A week or two ago, there seemed a strong probability of their securing the fifth place, but it is now practically certain that they will have to be content with the middle position or thereabouts.

But there is one thing, their defeat on Saturday cannot be attributed to ill-luck. They were fairly and squarely beaten by a better team. I don't know that Small Heath have any exceptionally brilliant men, but they are a very smart lot all round, and have youth and enthusiasm on their side. They were never long in getting in their kick, and for dash and speed they were considerably above the average. Webb, their custodian, has only just been picked up from a minor team, and Saturday's was his first League match. I think the Small Heath directors were perfectly satisfied with his display.

As to the Luton men, I don't quite know what to say about them. The only member of the team who played a really brilliant game was McEwen, and he did indeed do wonders. The amount of work he put in was astonishing, even for him. His partner was not nearly up to the mark.

Docherty was again the best of the halves, but Stewart showed some improvement on his recent form, and in the second half Davies played a sound and useful game. Donaldson, as I have said, gave a very poor show, and seemed to be greatly lacking in judgment. It is perfectly true that he was closely watched, but that being so, why did he not pass out to his wings instead of so often trying to do the impossible himself? McInnes and Gallacher did their level best, and Coupar also performed fairly well, but the play of the forwards altogether was very ragged.