

LUTON TOWN v. WOOLWICH ARSENAL.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—

Woolwich Arsenal 2 goals.

Luton Town nil.

The teams were as follow:—

LUTON TOWN.

Right. Goal. Left.

Williams.

McCartney.

McEwen.

Davies.

Stewart (capt.)

Docherty.

Gallagher.

Coupar.

Clarke.

McInnes.

Little.

O

Hayward.

White.

McAvoy.

Crawford.

Brock.

Davis.

Farrell.

Anderson.

Caldwell.

McAuley.

Ord.

Left.

Goal.

Right.

WOOLWICH ARSENAL.

* * *

Referee, Mr. J. E. Carpenter (Leicester);
Linesmen, Messrs. Brierley (Leicester) and W. J.
Wilson (Surrey F.A.).

I said last week that Saturday would be a red-letter day for Luton, and it was red with a vengeance, for the Arsenal Reds completely outshone the local players, the red shirts were all over the whites on the field of battle, and the only favours to be seen in the streets at night were those worn by the Arsenal supporters.

I wish it had fallen to the lot of some other person to tell the story of Saturday's fiasco. Certainly I have no inclination for the task. Very rarely indeed is it that I definitely make up my mind as to what the result of a match will be, but on this occasion I had no doubt whatever that Luton would win, and I expected them to win handsomely.

Everything pointed to it. On the form previously shown there was no comparison between the two teams. Luton, practically speaking, had been winning all along the line, while the Arsenal had many ignominious failures to their credit, or discredit. In addition to this, Luton had the advantage of playing on their own ground.

And yet when it came to the test, the team of all the talents was smashed and pulverised by the team which had no reputation at all, except a very poor one. Truly, there are some things quite past accounting for, and this is one of them.

I can honestly say that I never saw Luton give such a miserable exhibition, and if anyone had told me it was possible, I would not have believed it. They never shaped like a winning team. The Arsenal knocked all the combination out of them at the outset, and they never got together afterwards.

It is a somewhat singular thing that, as far as the home matches are concerned, if Luton have failed when they were expected to succeed, it has almost invariably been on some great occasion and before a crowded audience. Millwall have usually had the satisfaction of administering the thrashing, and now it has fallen to the Arsenal to take the job in hand.

Saturday was a delightful day for football. There was no sun to interfere with the play, and scarcely a breath of wind, and as a result of the rain in the middle of the week the turf was in perfect condition. There was thus every inducement for a big crowd to turn out, and every reason to anticipate a good game.

Excursions from Plumstead brought five or six hundred of the Arsenal supporters, some of them being in anything but a sober frame of mind when they arrived here. Other spectators came from St. Albans, Harpenden, Leighton, Dunstable, Hitchin, etc., and when the Red Cross Band had finished the selection with which it enlivened the period of waiting, there must have been quite five thousand persons on the ground.

The grand stand, admission to which was a shilling, was packed, the terraces, including the reserved portion, were well filled, and at either end of the field the people stood three or four deep. The gate altogether realised about £138, and this the Luton directors no doubt regard as the only satisfactory thing about the affair.

Stewart lost the toss, and punctually to time Clarke set the ball in motion. The Arsenal were the first to show a disposition to act on the aggressive, but Coupar was the means of turning the attack, and after some decent passing among the forwards, Clarke got in a shot which Ord saved. Hands against the visitors gave Luton another chance, which was not taken, and a mis-kick by McEwen at the other end enabled McAvoy to get quite clear, but his shot was much too high.

A foul against the Arsenal afforded Luton a

A foul against the Arsenal afforded Luton a further opportunity of getting in Ord's vicinity, but though Clarke did some good work, nothing came of the effort, Gallacher eventually heading behind. The Arsenal right-wing having been checked by McEwen, McCartney went to do a similar service on the left, and came into collision with an opponent, on whose account play had to be suspended a few moments.

The Arsenal were now going for all they were worth, the rocky nature of the Luton defence speedily becoming apparent to them, and impelling them to the most strenuous exertions. A corner off McEwen was not improved upon, Gallacher getting off with the ball, but the visitors were down again very quickly, and Crawford sent wide.

It must be confessed that the Arsenal were playing not only vigorously, but very foully into the bargain, and the referee seemed to be totally unable to realise what was going on, or if he got an inkling that something was wrong, he appeared quite uncertain as to the culprit. Thus, when McEwen was badly fouled by one of the visiting forwards, a shout of execration went up from the spectators, and the referee promptly penalised Luton, only to reverse his decision a moment later upon the advice of Mr. Wilson.

Possibly these little incidents had something to do with Luton's indifferent display. At any rate, they soon showed a determination not to be eclipsed by their opponents in the shady side of the business, and when they have recourse to tactics of this kind, their football always suffers.

Luton's free kick was of very doubtful advantage, for the Arsenal were soon attacking, and Davies heading the ball on to one of the forwards. Hayward raced away and put in a beautiful shot which Williams tipped over the bar. Hayward placed from the flagstaff, and another corner resulted, but this proved fruitless. From a throw-in, however, Hayward had a grand opening, but shot tamely, and Davies gave a third corner, whilst a minute afterwards McCartney conceded still another.

This was beautifully placed by Brock, and the ball was kicked backwards and forwards among a crowd of players until at last White managed to get it off the ground and into the net, his shot being a very good one, and quite out of Williams' reach. Sixteen minutes had elapsed from the kick-off, and the game being still in its early stages, there was hope that Luton would yet pull themselves together.

And the hope was justified by the next movement, for immediately after the re-start, the homesters went away, and Clarke sending the ball forward, Gallacher got clear, but shot wide. A free kick for the Arsenal, followed by a corner, were the next things of note, and then Coupar was hurt by Davis, the crowd showing disapproval of the Arsenal player's action by beseeching the referee to "turn him off." The official, however, gave Luton a free kick, and McCartney placing, the ball rebounded back to Stewart, who headed over.

Once more a foul against the visitors gave Luton a look-in, and Stewart sending on to Clarke, the latter nicely headed to Coupar, who headed into the goalkeeper's hands. From another free kick, McCartney obtained a corner, and Clarke got in a grounder which nearly took effect, but Ord saved, and punted out a moment from a nice one from Docherty.

Replying to a further attack by the Arsenal, Luton really did put a little spirit into their play, and a centre by Gallacher ought to have been turned to account, but both Clarke and Little, who had chances, seemed afraid to shoot. A corner resulted, however, and this led to one of the hottest assaults yet made, another corner being the outcome, but Little undertaking the kick placed behind.

Luton then had another try, and Gallacher getting in a good centre, Coupar shot, and Ord saved in the nick of time by giving a corner, as he had only just succeeded in getting rid of the ball when he was knocked over. Docherty placed well, but the Arsenal cleared and went to the other end, the right wing threatening danger until Williams ran out and transferred the ball to mid-field.

A couple of fouls against the visitors followed, and from the second Davies, taking the kick, back-heeled to McCartney, who sent in, and the ball went behind off one of the defenders. Some of the Arsenal supporters appealed for a foul against Davies for not kicking forward, and the referee consulted with the linesman, apparently with a view to finding out whether their knowledge of the law relating to free kicks was correct. Eventually he gave a corner, and Gallacher placing, Little headed just by the upright.

This was the last incident of note before the interval, and the teams crossed over with the Arsenal leading by a goal to nil. Upon the re-start, there seemed some hope for Luton, as Docherty handed the ball on to Clarke, and the latter passed forward to McInnes, who nearly got through. The homesters continued to attack until Docherty fouled Crawford, and then play swung round again to the other side.

A corner resulted from the free kick, and though nothing came of this, the visiting forwards soon found the Luton backs at fault, and Hayward scored with a beautiful shot, but the

referee, after consulting with Mr. Wilson, disallowed the point. Three fouls against Luton next gave the Arsenal as many chances, but they were not taken, and after that the homeers really did have hard luck at the other end.

* * *

They forced the ball right on to the very goal-line, and kept it there for a time, but no one seemed able to give it just the touch that was needed, and at last Ord managed to get it away. Luton, though very much disorganised, were holding their own much better, and if they could but have got together, they would have made mincemeat of the Arsenal, who were evidently feeling a little bit fagged.

* * *

Ord cleared from a centre by Gallacher, and then Anderson gave a corner almost from the middle of the field. Little placed very nicely, and Clarke sent a few inches wide of the mark. The visitors replied, and after McEwen had defended well, Davis found himself with a splendid opening, which he threw away by a wild shot.

* * *

Luton retaliated, and from a centre by McInnes, who had now changed places with Little, Gallacher put in a tremendous shot, which rebounded off one of the Arsenal men. Then Clarke passed the ball on to Little, who tested Ord and found that individual equal to the occasion.

* * *

Luton were having so much the better of the play, that the spectators began to flatter themselves that the equalising goal would come, and frantically adjured the homesters to play up. Davies being fouled by an opponent, McCartney was entrusted with the free kick, and the ball was put in again and again, but at length a foul against Davies relieved the pressure.

* * *

After a bit, the Arsenal got away and McAvoy again netted the ball, but was given offside, and Luton responding to the attack, Stewart put in a lovely shot which Ord saved, while Williams did ditto to a beauty from Brock, who shot from an offside position. Some amusement was afterwards caused by Docherty, who, finding himself on the ground and unable to reach the ball with his feet, deliberately bowled it along with his hand, but even this escaped the notice of the officials.

* * *

The game dragged on, and it seemed that there would be no more scoring, many of the spectators leaving the ground under that impression, but in the last minute the Arsenal profited by the demoralisation of the home team, and McAvoy getting clear away, scored an easy goal.

* * *

Taking the game altogether, I should say that, as far as Luton were concerned, it was far and away the worst exhibition given on the home ground. The form shown was positively inexplicable. Here were a team who had drawn with Leicester Fosse and beaten Gainsborough Trinity and Newton Heath, giving a display which would have been no credit to the poorest professional team in the south of England.

* * *

I have seen the side go all to pieces before, but I have never seen the whole eleven men descend to such a level of mediocrity. There was not a single one among the whole bunch that did himself anything like justice. The rot that set in was utter and complete, and how to account for it is a task quite beyond any ordinary person's ability.

* * *

The only thing I can say in explanation is that the Arsenal were a smarter team, and their smartness broke up the Luton combination. If Luton had played their proper game they would have won easily, but directly they began to copy the tactics of their opponents they were lost. The reason is obvious. The Luton team rely upon their cleverness rather than their smartness, and when they let their cleverness go by the board, they are done for.

* * *

But the match proves another thing. Hitherto Luton have won their games by the strength of their defence, and it is now plain that when the defence fails, as it failed on Saturday, there is no hope for them. Even Williams was not as brilliant as usual, and the two Macs were as uncertain as they generally are certain, both in tackling and kicking.

* * *

Stewart possibly was the best of the halves, Docherty being clean off colour, and Davies anything but the Davies we are used to. There was not a really good man among the forwards, though McInnes did the lion's share of the work. Clarke played very well in mid-field, but showed a great aversion to making the dash which is so often necessary for goal-scoring. The right wing was the reverse of dangerous, and the left was entirely a one-horse show, Little being a mere passenger.

* * *

As to the visitors, their team had undergone some re-arrangement since their previous match, Crawford and McAvoy going forward instead of half-back. The change seemed to work well, for both gave a good account of themselves, though Hayward and Brock were the smartest men in the front string. The half-backs played pretty strongly, but the backs were better, and Ord did all that was asked of him in goal.

* * *

The refereeing, as I have said before, was about as bad as it could be, and possibly had a lot to do with the wretched nature of the play. But Luton's readiness to give foul for foul, and perhaps a little more, merits the strongest condemnation. It always plays havoc with their combination, and gives a great advantage to opponents, besides disgusting a lot of their supporters.

* * *

There were no surprises in the other Second Division matches, Newton Heath beating Leicester Fosse by two goals to nil, Gainsborough Trinity defeating Blackpool by four goals to one, Darwen and Small Heath making a draw at one all, Burton Swifts vanquishing Walsall by three goals to two, Grimsby beating Lincoln City by four goals to two, and Burnley rubbing it into Newcastle United by three goals to nil. Manchester City were the only team to share with the Arsenal the honour of obtaining a victory away from home, and they defeated Loughborough by three goals to none.

* * *