

THE UNITED LEAGUE.

LUTON TOWN v. WOOLWICH ARSENAL.

Played at Luton on Tuesday. Result:—

Luton Town 1 goal.

Woolwich Arsenal 1 goal.

The teams were as follow:—

Luton: Perkins; Dow and Moore; C. Ford, Williams and Crump; Brock, McInnes, Kemplay, Burgess, and Ekins.

Arsenal: Ord; McPhee and Anderson; Moir, Dick and Davis; McGeogh, Haywood, Hunt, Hannah and Shaw.

Referee, Mr. J. C. Tillotson.

A more disastrous day than Tuesday for a holiday match there could not have been. The wind all the morning had been blowing great guns, and when this went down a bit, the rain, which had been persistently doing its best to damp the ardour of football enthusiasts, descended in torrents, not only making it extremely uncomfortable for people out of doors, but also turning the pitch on the Bury Park enclosure into a quagmire. At one time, it seemed very doubtful whether it would be possible to play a League match, but after effectually spoiling the gate, matters mended a little, and the teams turned out in the presence of about a couple of thousand spectators.

With the conditions so extremely unfavourable, none but the most optimistic could have anticipated a high-class display, especially as both teams had been through a pretty good gruelling in their previous matches. As a fact, however, the game was both better and worse than might have been expected. It was better in regard to the amount of work put in. For an exhibition of dogged and determined work it could scarcely have been surpassed. It was worse as far as the foulness of the play was concerned, for the Arsenal, taking advantage of the extraordinary complacency of the referee, carried the tactics for which they have acquired a somewhat unpleasant notoriety, to the extreme limit.

Mr. Tillotson is a referee of great experience, but I am afraid he must have seen a good deal of remarkably vigorous football if he could detect in Tuesday's game nothing more than ordinary fouls, or nothing more than an occasional and apparently not very serious warning could set right. The fouls of Anderson and the three halves were gross, open, palpable, and these men seemed to gather fresh courage as they went on.

When a Luton forward got the ball and appeared likely to break away, he was tripped up almost as a matter of course. Generally, a foul was given, but these trips were so constantly repeated that the strong hand of the law might with much benefit to all concerned have been a little more in evidence than it was. Then in the second half Moir seemed to think he had entered for a wrestling competition, and the bouts he had with Ekins might have gained him some credit in that direction, but from a football point of view it was simply shocking.

Although I have only spoken of the visitors, I do not wish it to be inferred that all the Luton players were entirely free from blame, but their weak and puny efforts were completely eclipsed by their evidently more practised opponents. Still, I think with the majority of referees there would have been more than one penalty on both sides. Then, again, Mr. Tillotson was far from strict on the offside rule. In the first half, the Arsenal left wing frequently infringed it with impunity, whilst Ekins got in one of his most dangerous centres from a palpably offside position, and the wonder was that Luton did not score from it. Altogether, Mr. Tillotson's leniency would have damaged the reputation of many a younger man, and coming from him, was amazing.

Having unburdened my mind somewhat on the score of the whistle-holder's sins of omission, I will now proceed to details of the play. Luton won the toss, and took what advantage they could from the wind, which, however, blew almost directly across the ground into the grand stand. The first incident was a laughable one, Burgess in his anxiety to get the ball into the Arsenal goal, knocking it towards the desired haven with his hand. The free kick which followed, relieved the pressure for a moment, but Luton soon made it manifest that they were going to get a goal if possible, and after Brock and Kemplay had made a gallant attempt to get through, Ekins was applauded for a lovely shot taken from the touch-line and punted out by Ord.

Williams afterwards sent a shot by the right, and then Dow got in a long and well directed kick. Kemplay obtained possession and a mis-kick by McPhee gave him a nice opening. Off he went at a tangent, with Anderson and the other man in full cry, but Kemplay managed to keep to the front, and letting fly with all he was worth, sent the ball crashing into the net. Thus Luton were one up.

The homesters continued to show surprising good form, but Burgess, who exhibited a great deal of pluck and dash at the commencement of the proceedings, soon found the pace a trifle too warm for him, and was consequently rather weak when it came to a culminating effort. Another grand centre by Ekins led to a strong attack on the Arsenal goal, and eventually Ord was tested with a splendid shot by Williams. Then the visitors got away two or three times.

and Dow at last was obliged to concede a corner, from which nothing tangible accrued.

Luton again put the pressure on, and after Williams had had another shy, Burgess made a good run, and Williams and Ford coming to his assistance, McInnes received and sent over the bar. Two or three bad fouls by Anderson, with Brock for the victim, next claimed attention, and then Ford put in one for Luton, the free kick leading to a fruitless corner. The Arsenal forwards followed with one or two pretty runs, and just before the interval Perkins had to make his first save. It was in every way worthy of him. Hannah got clear and running the ball right in, sent in a clipping shot, which Perkins negotiated in his most accomplished manner, much to the satisfaction of the onlookers.

At the interval, Luton still retained their lead, but things did not look very promising when play was resumed, Moore not reappearing until the Arsenal had made two or three assaults on the Luton goal, the most dangerous being from a well-placed corner, the ball striking the cross-bar and leading to a great scrimmage in front of the uprights. It was soon after this that Ekins, though clearly offside, was allowed to take the ball up and centre across the mouth of the Arsenal goal. Kemplay and Brock both made a rush for it, and both missed, whilst McInnes, who was not in so favourable a position, put the wrong side of the net.

Both ends were then attacked in turn, but the attempts of the Arsenal had the more sting in them, owing chiefly to the fact that Moore was pretty well incapacitated, and was quite unable to tackle. The other defenders, however, worked like horses, Dow and Williams being very conspicuous, and the Arsenal were beaten back again and again. Then it was that Ekins, in trying to get away, was so badly fouled by Moir, whilst immediately afterwards Brock was fetched over by Anderson. Williams replied with several for Luton, not so dirty, but sufficiently pronounced to call for free kicks. From one of these, Hannah got clear, and sent in a beautiful shot which was just as beautifully saved by Perkins.

More fouling by Moir, and loud and angry demands to "turn him off the field," made things rather exciting, and then Davis, taking a free kick given by Dow, put in a fast low shot which led to a few exceedingly warm moments in the mouth of the Luton goal, but eventually Perkins was triumphant. McInnes, in making the running to the other end, was tripped twice in succession by Dick, and after the free kick had been taken, Williams got in a grand shot all along the floor, Ord bringing off a good save.

Only about five minutes remained for play, and people were just making up their minds that Luton would be left in possession of a well-deserved victory, when the Arsenal went down on the right, and profiting by Moore's inability to stop the rush, McGeogh worked his way up to goal and shot. Perkins made a brilliant save, but before he could fully recover himself, Shaw netted the ball with a very clever shot. Thus Luton had one point taken from them.

And yet, although there were only three or four minutes to go, the wonder is that the score did not undergo a further alteration. In the first place, the Arsenal went straight away from the half-way line, and the inside forwards dribbled the ball to within two or three yards of goal where, just as they were going to put on the finishing touch, Perkins stooped down and took the ball clean off their toes. A moment later Ekins was clear at the other end, but he shot at too long a range, and Ord easily saved.

The game therefore ended in a draw.

torious. It may be stated that Perkins only touched the ball twice during the whole of the second half.

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Once Kemplay headed a goal that was disallowed for offside which the players assert should have been allowed, for Kemplay was placed on side by one of the locals, who played it before the centre-forward headed through. From the stand it looked to be offside, but if one of the others touched it before it reached Kemplay, of course it was a legitimate point. It seemed hard lines, too, for Luton when the final whistle blew, for Ekins was just on one of his great sprints, he had beaten half and backs, and was quite clear with only the goalkeeper to beat and thirty yards away from goal when time was sounded. The refereeing, though, was very good indeed; very different from Saturday's exhibition.

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I was delighted with the Lutonians' display. They played one of their very best games of the season in the second half. They worked better together, and probably the chief secret of their improvement was because the men kept their places better. Perkins was Al in the first half, but his place was almost a sinecure in the second. Moore kicked well and strong, although his knee troubled him a little bit. Williams did grandly in the second half. The halves were a decided improvement on Saturday's form. Crump was good, Sharp played a capital game, and little Rally did splendidly.

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The man that gave the most satisfaction in the forward string was Brook. He did a lot of clever useful things, and he showed that dash and fearlessness which have apparently been lacking so long. On the other extreme wing, Ekins was in fine fettle against his old comrades, and Birch worked effectively and well. Kemplay played a good game, and McInnes, though last, was far from being the least effective, for Tommy played a clever, classy game. He dribbled well, with good judgment, and gave his confreres many good opportunities.

The game therefore ended in a draw, a state of the poll which was perhaps warranted by the state of the play. It was a very hard battle, and but for the evils to which I have referred would have taken rank among the best. The merits of the teams differed considerably. The Luton defence was more brilliant than that of the Arsenal, and the latter's forward play was prettier than that of Luton, where Burgess was the weak spot. The Reserve exhibited plenty of pluck, and showed a good idea of the game, but he was sorely handicapped by want of training. He thoroughly deserves another trial, and several after that, but if he will take my advice he will not cultivate any fancy kicks. There's no time for them in the League matches of to-day.

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Brock gave a very much better display than in his last game on the Luton ground, and put a lot of dash into his work, but as a wing man he should learn to part with the ball at the first opportunity. As I have said before, and as anyone watching the game can easily see, an ordinary centre, taken on the run, with the ball dropping about twenty ayds from goal, is generally far more effective than a much cleverer centre put in from the corner. McInnes, Kemplay and Ekins all played in first-rate style, and George was heartily cheered for the sturdy way in which he played up to Moir, despite the latter's rough usage.

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All three half-backs did splendid service, Williams in particular being nearly always on the spot, whether it was in attack or defence. Dow also played a great game, his kicking being remarkably clean and well-timed, whilst Perkins once again proved himself to be the best goal-keeper Luton ever had.

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As to the visitors, the forwards, as I have said, formed the more taking part of the team, being a well-balanced set, and going away in a line whenever they got the chance. The halves were vigorous—a great deal too vigorous, in fact—and Anderson, when he confined himself to fair tactics, gave a good account of himself. McPhee was a bit weak. Ord in goal did all that was required of him, but he did not have so much to do as Perkins in the second half.

On Saturday, Luton go to Plumstead to play a League (2nd Division) match with Woolwich Arsenal. At the time of writing, it is uncertain what the eleven will be, but it seems probable that we shall get nearer the full team than we have done for a long time past. Moore, it appears, fell down and cut his knee on Tuesday; it was not a recurrence of the old injury.

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Luton's postponed matches with Reading and Newton Heath have been arranged. Luton will go to Newton Heath on Feb. 25th, and Reading will visit Luton on March 20th.

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The gate on Tuesday was a remarkably good one, considering the weather. It amounted to nearly £70.