

THE LEAGUE.—DIVISION II.

LUTON TOWN v. GAINSBOROUGH TRINITY.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—

Luton Town	4 goals.
Gainsborough Trinity	2 goals.

The teams were as follow:—

Luton: Perkins; Williams and Moore; O. Ford, Sharp and Crump; Brook, Melnes, Kempster, Birch and Durrant.

Gainsborough: Raynor; Bayley and Pundrey; Hall, Morris and Mauro; Foxall, Walters, Wigmore, Scott and Fenton.

Referee, Mr. F. B. Walford (Middlesex); linesmen, Messrs. W. Sumpter (Sandwich), and W. R. King (Nottingham).

As far as the weather itself was concerned, it was all that could be desired on Saturday, from a spectatorial point of view, at any rate, but a thaw, following upon two or three days' frost, had put the ground into anything but a satisfactory condition. It was worse than greasy, and the difficulty which the players had in keeping their feet was enough to prevent the game taking rank as a great one. The calibre of the two teams landed somewhat in the same direction, as Gainsborough, though they have been doing some fairly smart things of late, cannot be classed as among the best. And Luton, not yet having arrived at the turning to that long lane of ill-luck, were still unable to put their full team in the field.

Howitt, Dow and W. Ford were as yet only convalescents, and Ekins, of course, was not to be thought of, so that the directors were reduced to some shifts. Williams had to keep to his old position at back, while Sharp played at centre-half, Durrant had to go over to the left wing in order that Brook might appear on the right, and Birch took the inside-left. It was the best that could be done under the circumstances, but brilliance could hardly be looked for, and if looked for, it was certainly not forthcoming.

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There were not more than 1,500 spectators, but a cheer was raised when Melnes kept up his reputation for winning the toss, though there was little enough in the advantage it gave. Early on, Durrant scored a goal, but as he had already been given offside, not much merit attached to the performance. Melnes, however, soon showed up with some good work, and then Birch and Durrant got in a couple of capital shots, the custodian flinging the second one over the bar. The corner was fruitless, but directly afterwards Luton attacked again, one of the Gainsborough backs missed the ball, and the result of a general scramble was that Brook netted the ball, thus giving the homesters the lead.

This they appeared to be fairly well satisfied with, for after the return to the half-way line, the visitors found very little hindrance in their progress towards the Luton goal, and a corner was conceded them. This was well placed, and a dangerous-looking assault ensued, but Moore and Perkins saved between them. The home forwards then went up the field in pretty style, some really admirable passing being shown, but the corner which was the outcome was not turned to account. The visitors responded, and Williams was applauded for the way in which he stopped Fenton, who turned a double somersault.

Play for some time after was about evenly distributed, but at last Birch was afforded a glorious opportunity. Brook, receiving from Melnes, put in a good centre, and Bayley completely missing the ball, Birch had nothing to do but put it in the net. He took it to within about three yards of Raynor, and then shot straight at him, the consequence being that the ball rebounded, and the Trinitarians succeeded in effecting a clearance. Gainsborough, thankful for their left-off, immediately made tracks for the Luton goal, and Moore's failure to stop Scott enabled that player to put across in front of Perkins. Crump kicked and missed, and Foxall, with a clear goal, shot wide. Once again the visitors came, however, and Moore again being at fault, Wigmore equalised with a good shot.

This reverse seemed to stimulate the home team a bit, and after repulsing their opponents on two occasions, McInnes, who was the life and soul of the Luton attack, got away and put in a good shot, which Raynor saved. At the next attempt, Purnfrey gave a corner, and after this had been placed by Durrant, McInnes passed out to Brock, who centred nicely. A scrimmage followed, and ultimately McInnes put the ball past Raynor. Gainsborough made a strong appeal for offside, an appeal which seemed to me quite justified, but the referee was obdurate, and Luton were thus once more credited with the lead. Having obtained this, they again took matters easy, and the Trinitarians ran through the defence with scarcely any trouble. Perkins had to save a beauty from Foxall, and the latter next placing a corner, the Luton goal had a wonderfully lucky escape, Scott eventually sending wide.

Half-time arrived with the score standing at two to one in Luton's favour, but when play was resumed, an alteration soon occurred. The allegation would have been to the advantage of Luton, had not Kemplay been held on to by Purnfrey, just as he seemed to have got a clear course. The referee did not notice the infringement, and Gainsborough were soon at the other end. Foxall was given an opening, and he put in a stiff cross shot, which Perkins did not fairly get at, and Wignmore easily put on the finishing touch. At this point it seemed to be anybody's game, for some of the home team seemed unaccountably slow, whilst two or three of the visitors were particularly smart.

Happily for Luton, however, a couple of good efforts by Brock put a different complexion on affairs altogether. He first of all sent in a lovely shot, which appeared to be going just in the corner of the goal, but Raynor and the post stopped it between them, and when the ball dropped, Kemplay or McInnes landed it in the net. There did not seem to be the least doubt about its being a legitimate point, as it was quite clear that the goalkeeper played on the ball, but Mr. Walford, to make assurance doubly sure, consulted both lineemen, each of whom declared for a goal, and a goal it accordingly was.

After the visitors had been to the other end, and had enjoyed the luxury of an unproductive corner, Brock's second effort claimed attention. He and McInnes went down the field in capital style, and Brock, receiving from his captain, dedged Munro, and put in a good centre, which Kemplay just managed to convert, although he had all his work cut out to beat Purnfrey. This gave Luton a lead of two clear goals, and it settled the game. The subsequent play was not of a very exciting character, and perhaps Gainsborough had quite as much of it as Luton. Towards the finish, McInnes made an excellent opening, but just as a score seemed certain, he was badly fouled by Bayley, who received a caution. The free kick proved of no value, and the game therefore ended in a win for Luton by four goals to two.

I cannot honestly say that it was a thoroughly well-merited victory. There were times when the Luton play was extremely disappointing, when the men seemed to hesitate most painfully and when they appeared to be altogether incapable of stopping the smart rushes of the Gainsborough forwards. At any of those times, it was possible that Luton would more than lose their advantage, and had the Trinitarians once gained the lead, Luton's chances of success would have been rather remote.

As I have already said, McInnes was the most effective of the Luton forwards, and he was marvellously smart. He beat his opponents again and again, and when the other side got the ball, if McInnes was anywhere about, it was a moral certainty that it would not go far in the wrong direction. His passes, too, were always well-timed. This praise may sound a little lavish, perhaps, but the fact is that McInnes seems to be as active as ever, and can hold his own with the best and youngest of them.

The next best forward, I think, was Brock, who until he got hurt in the second half put plenty of go into his work, and in spite of some very rough usage by Purnfrey, was always game. Kemplay also did well, but Birch was painfully slow, and showed for him a very remarkable hesitation in shooting. Durrant was still less offensive and put very little spirit into his play. He will have to show better form than this if he be desirous of maintaining or enhancing his reputation.

I scarcely know what to say about the half-backs, who were sometimes good and at others sadly deficient. Crump, I should say, played the most dashing game, and Sharp the most effective, but generally speaking, there appeared to be a want of method and also a want of combination or support. At back, Moore was not seen to great advantage, but towards the end of the game he had the misfortune to twist his ankle. Williams worked hard and well, and Perkins did all that was possible in goal.

Of the visitors, the most conspicuous man, perhaps, was Wignmore, who played splendidly at centre-forward. If there was the slightest chance of getting away, he took it, and when the spectators saw him going for goal, they always anticipated the worst. The outside men, Foxall and Fenton, were likewise very dangerous, and the smartness of these three caused the Luton defenders no end of trouble. The halves played pretty well, and Purnfrey was the better of two fairly strong backs. Several of the Gainsborough men were pretty vigorous, and I should say more than one of the Lutonians received very nasty knocks.

There were only three other matches in the Second Division of the League. Barnsley made reimbursement of Loughborough, beating them by nine goals to nil. New Brighton vanquished Walsall by six to none, and Burton Swifts beat Huddersley by two to nil. The following is the League table up to date:—

Goals

2nd Div. Lut. Dec. 29th. 1901