

THE LEAGUE.—DIVISION II.

LUTON TOWN v. SMALL HEATH. 11

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—

Small Heath	3 goals.
Luton Town	2 goals.

The teams were as follow:—

Luton: Perkins; Dow and Williams; C. Ford, Sharp and Crump; Brock, McInnes, Kemplay, Birch and W. Ford.

Small Heath: Clutterbuck; Archer and Pratt; Walton, Leake and Robertson; Bennett, Gardner, Wilcox, Abbott and Wharton.

Referee, Mr. F. S. Walford (Middlesex); linesmen, Messrs. Wooley (Kogworth) and Bailey (Leicester).

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Not for a long time has there been so much genuine enthusiasm displayed on the Luton ground as was the case on Saturday. There was not a large crowd, numbering, as it did, less than two thousand persons, but those who did patronise the game had their money's worth, and no doubt were glad that they were there to see for themselves that Luton really had hard lines in losing a match they made such a gallant effort to win.

The credit due to Luton was all the greater from the fact that it was palpable that they were playing against a better-class and more evenly-balanced team. The Heathens have proved their prowess on many a hard-fought field, and to-day they stand as well as any club in the Second Division of the League, with the single exception of Manchester City. Taken all-round, they played a better game on Saturday than Luton, but none the more for that, the grit and determination of the Strawplaiters nearly upset the apple-cart of the Birmingham men.

Luton had rather a characteristic bit of luck to start with, Hewitt, who had turned out to play, twisting his knees before the game commenced, and having to be led off the field. William Ford was then pressed into the service, but he was so evidently afraid of running any risks that he was nothing more than a passenger in the first half, and scarcely touched the ball during the whole of that time.

Luton began well, however. McInnes, winning the toss, had set the Heathens to face the sun, and in the first ten minutes the home-sters went at it hammer and tongs, and the Small Heath citadel had a wonderfully narrow escape from a hard drive from Birch, the ball passing a few inches the wrong side of the post. Directly afterwards, Crump again sent the ball to the front, and McInnes headed in, and once more it seemed that Luton must score, the leather finding its way between a number of players until it reached the custodian. Had some of the forwards followed up quickly, I question whether Clutterbuck would have had much chance.

After this, the home-sters fell away considerably, and the Heathens took up the running to some purpose. Wharton at length got in a beautiful centre, and Bennett let fly at half-a-dozen yards' range, but Perkins in some extraordinary way or other got hold of the ball after it had nassed him and throw it away. The visitors appealed for a goal, and it really looked like one, but the referee, after consulting a linesman, awarded a goal-kick.

goal-kick.

Luton then took the play to the other end for a minute or two, but the Heathens were soon back, and from hands against McInnes—a decision which Tommy apparently did not agree with—Pratt placed in the midst of a crowd of players. Perkins ran out with the intention of punching away, but Abbott got his cranium to the leather first, and the next moment it—that is the ball—was safely reposing in the net.

But as Shakespeare says, sorrows come not single spies but in battalions, and before Luton had recovered from one disaster they were overtaken by another. Small Heath raced away from the half-way line, and Wharton put in a shot which Perkins saved but could not clear, and Abbott, who was well up, again did the needful, his shot striking the underneath part of the bar and glancing off into the net.

This seemed to practically settle matters, but strange to say, Luton made a vigorous response. McInnes secured a corner, which W. Ford placed behind, but a moment later, the skipper, who had worked his way out to near the corner-flag, was tripped by Archer and the referee, after consulting his assistants, awarded a penalty, which Dow turned to account. Directly afterwards, Dow again took the public eye with a tearing shot, a regular eighty-one tonner, which Clutterbuck saved just under the bar. Luton continued to go for all they were worth up to the interval, but their efforts to get on an equality were of no avail, and when the teams changed ends, Small Heath still had the satisfaction of leading.

But if Luton went for all they were worth at the end of the initial half, what am I to say of their play at the beginning of the second? They simply surpassed themselves. Brock scored from a centre by W. Ford in the first two or three minutes, but after some of the players had danced a hornpipe, they found to their chagrin that offside had been given. The forwards, however, followed on with another strong attack, and W. Ford put in a brilliant shot, which would have beaten many custodians, but was not too warm for Clutterbuck. Brock tested him with another, and Luton then had an unproductive corner, after which Small Heath went to the other end, where Perkins saved beautifully a shot from Wharton, which Dow only partially diverted.

Then Luton came again, and after Crump had netted the ball with a free kick, no one else touching, Dow placed from hands against Archer, and the result of a desperate scrimmage, in which the custodian got a bit damaged, was that W. Ford scored the equalising goal with a hot shot. The Heathens tried to persuade the referee that the ball went through the net, instead of between the posts, but they failed in their endeavour.

Following upon this, the visitors worked their way up the field, and Gardner got in a terrific drive, which was well negotiated by Perkins, but a foul by Dow again placed the Luton goal in danger. A clearance was effected from the free kick, but Leake returned the ball, which struck the hands of one of the Luton players and went behind. It seemed an accidental occurrence, so far as could be seen from the Press table, but a penalty was given, and Abbott taking it, again gave his side the lead.

In another attack, Dow really did incur a penalty by deliberately pushing a man in the back, but apparently Mr. Walford had made up his mind that two a day were sufficient, and he looked the other way, or winked the other eye, I don't know which. There might have been two other penalties after this, both in favour of Luton, once when Birch was held by Archer, and again when Brock was badly jumped at by Pratt. Neither was given, and all Luton's other efforts, gallant as they were, were not destined to bear fruit.

Practically the whole of the play in the latter part of the game took place on Small Heath territory, and the spectators cheered the home players with all the enthusiasm imaginable, but the end came with the score remaining at three goals to two in the visitors' favour. Altogether, the game was a thoroughly good one, and the only regret was that the spoils of war did not go to Luton, who thoroughly deserved them for the plucky display they made against their formidable opponents.

McInnes played a capital game among the forwards, and was well seconded by Brock and Kemplay. Birch also was very energetic, but unluckily he could not forget that single-handed goal he scored on the previous Saturday, and he was continually trying to do the same on this occasion, with the result that much of his work went to waste. W. Ford, as I have said, was out of the hunt in the first half, but in the second he did some very smart work. Charlie Ford and Crump played up capitally at half-back, the former especially being noticeable, but Sharp was not a success. Both Dow and Williams put in some grand work at back, and were frequently and deservedly cheered, and Perkins effected some fine saves between the sticks.

As to the visitors, they were good all round, having not a single weak spot, and that was just where they had the advantage over Luton. The outside forwards were very speedy, and the inside men also showed up well, Abbott being particularly prominent in the scoring department, notching all three goals. The half-backs were a capable trio, who were well supported by the men behind them, Clutterbuck especially distinguishing himself in goal.

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