

THE LEAGUE.—DIVISION II.

LUTON TOWN v. BLACKPOOL.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—
 Luton Town 3 goals.
 Blackpool 2 goals.

The teams were as follow:—

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

Blackpool: Fletcher; Scott and Stirraker; Wallace, Parkinson and Howson; Eaves, Cartwell, Birkett, Leadbetter and Hoyle.

Referee, Mr. T. Wells (Plumstead); linesmen, Messrs. Munson and Styles.

The only satisfactory thing about Saturday's game was that Luton secured the two points, and thus strengthened their position on the League table above Blackpool, who, with a win, would have been running the Strawplaiters uncomfortably close in their endeavours to escape the ill-fated bottom three. Apart from that, there was scarcely a good feature about the game. The weather was bad, the crowd was small, and the play was execrable.

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I have seen a good many exhibitions of one sort and another, but I don't think it has ever been my misfortune to witness such an absolutely wretched forward display as the Luton front string gave on this occasion. Had they been a lot of men who had never seen a football before, they could scarcely have done worse. Every man jack of them was all the time wanting to dribble, and the fact of it was that they couldn't dribble for nuts.

When they got the ball, it was ten chances to one that they would take it straight on to their opponents, who had only got to stand still and let it come to them. Sometimes there would be a bit of successful passing, though whether by accident or design it was hard to tell, but as for any idea of forcing matters at the critical moment, there seemed to be not the slightest sign of it. Each man went on his own, and not one of them ever dreamed of protecting or assisting his fellow, while the thought of concentration in attack had apparently never once presented itself.

The half-backs have often had the blame for demoralising the forwards, but on this occasion I should say it was the other way about. Young Ralley—who I was glad to see given a chance once again, kept his head better than the whole bunch, bar Dow, but for the most part it seemed to be an article of faith with half-backs and forwards never to part with the ball until an opponent had had an opportunity of tackling. The consequence was that no sooner did an opening present itself than the ball was sent back, and the work had to be done over again.

Fortunately for Luton, it was only Blackpool they had got to deal with, or goodness only knows what the result would have been. A team of anything like average ability would easily have got into double figures against Luton on their Saturday's form, and luckily, with a lot like Blackpool to fight against, it was a case of six of one and half-a-dozen of the other, and that is how it was that Luton triumphed in spite of their weakness, and secured a victory which they in no way deserved.

The visitors won the toss, and had the advantage of a fairly strong breeze to start with, but their efforts were miserably poor, and Luton did the most of the pressing. Two or three times the homesters got up the field, and then Brock put in a centre from which Kemplay headed just by the upright. Attacking again, chiefly through the instrumentality of Ralley, W. Ford received the ball right in the mouth of goal, and then shot so tamely that Fletcher had little difficulty in saving.

Birch had an even better chance a moment later, from another of Brock's centres, and after the custodian had saved from as soft a shot as it was possible to put in, there was a bit of a scrimmage which ended when Birch happened to send the ball in the net. To the great surprise of the onlookers, however, the goal was disallowed, the reason being, I suppose, that the goalkeeper had been impeded. It could not have been for off-side, because Fletcher played on the ball immediately before Birch put it through.

The visitors went to the other end and gave Perkins a moment's anxiety, but the ball being taken back, Fletcher gave a corner to a good shot from Durrant. The kick was badly taken, and the result was that Blackpool got away, Perkins being called upon to save a lovely shot from Hoyle. Luton were soon at the other end again, and Durrant, who was palpably offside, headed the ball to the mouth of goal, where Kemplay performed the seemingly impossible feat of sending wide.

It was marvellous how Luton let so many chances go a-begging, but when the turn of the visitors came, it seemed that they were going to be just as bad. It was a miskick by Williams which gave them their opening, and Cartmell dropped the ball in front of goal, where the most extraordinary misses were made by both assailants and defenders. At last Luton cleared, but Blackpool returned to the attack, and Leadbetter, with no one to say him nay, netted the ball with a well-directed shot. There was a strong appeal for offside, but the referee would not listen to it.

Soon afterwards, W. Ford made a splendid opening at the other end, but just as he was going to shoot, Brock, with an impetuous and ill-timed rush, took the ball from his toe, to the great disgust of Ford. It ruined what chance there was, but Brock endeavoured to make amends directly afterwards by a spirited attempt to convert a middle from Durrant, the ball grazing the crossbar.

Blackpool had the best of matters in the first few minutes of the second half, but at last from a free kick, Dow placed the ball nicely in the mouth of the visitors' goal, and W. Ford succeeded in equalising. A little later, Birch scored again, but was given offside. Some terribly dull and uninteresting play followed, until at length the homesters went away in much better fashion, Birch passed out to Durrant, the latter centred, and Kemplay placed Luton one ahead.

A third goal followed soon afterwards, and was easily the best of the day, W. Ford scoring with a beautiful shot. This in turn was succeeded by one of the funniest imaginable, Blackpool having the benefit of it. The visitors went away on the right, and Birkett, who was yards offside, prepared to receive the centre. Whilst Perkins was appealing for offside, the ball came to his hands, and the consequence of his divided attention was that he fumbled it and let it slip over the line.

Of course, it ought never to have been a goal, because, though Birkett did not actually touch the ball, he was obstructing the custodian's view, and that was quite sufficient to constitute offside. It was not the only mistake which the referee made during the match, but perhaps the most laughable incident was the occasion on which the ball went behind and neither the whistle-holder nor the line-men could say whether a corner or a goal kick ought to be awarded. The defending side got the benefit of the doubt.

There was no more scoring after Blackpool had been credited with their second point, and the game ended as stated. Dow was undoubtedly the best man on the Luton side, Williams not being quite as reliable as usual, and taken all round I should say the second best was Ralley, who if he did sometimes keep to the ball longer than he should have done, generally showed better judgment than was exhibited by the men around him. W. Ford never gave a glimpse of his true form until ten minutes from the finish, and Brock, who started well, was generally left severely alone by his friends and smothered by his opponents. Some of the visitors played very smartly at times, Birkett and Leadbetter being particularly noticeable among the forwards, and Fletcher showing up well in goal, but taken on the whole they were a very poor lot.

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