

THE LEAGUE.—DIVISION II.

LUTON TOWN v. NEWTON HEATH.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—

Newton Heath	1 goal
Luton Town	nil.

The teams were as follow:—

Luton: Gentle; Dow and Williams; Birch, Balley and Crump; Brock, McInnes, Kemplay, Ford and Ekins.

Newton Heath: Barrett; Stafford and Erentz; Draycott, Griffiths and Cartwright; Bryant, Morgan, Lee, Gillespie and Cassidy.

Referee, Mr. J. Stark; Lineamen, Messrs. A. Avery (London) and Mr. T. Roberts (Derby).

We had the weather in samples on Saturday, with a sample of pretty well every possible kind—sunshine and rain, wind and snow, warm and cold, with a marked tendency towards the latter. Unfortunately, there was not much variety to the football provided on the Bury Park enclosure, which was never anything more than moderate, and which for at least half the time was about as bad as two teams could make it.

Spend your money to the best advantage, by purchasing your boots and shoes at Freeman, Hardy and Willis, 36, George-street, Luton, the largest boot retailers in the kingdom. New goods for present season. See windows and compare prices.—[ADVT.]

At the outset, I had no sort of hope that Luton would win against Newton Heath, a club which has a good name and possesses some players with reputations. But after seeing the first half, and noticing Luton's gallant defence against a not over-brilliant attack, I came to the conclusion that our little lot had a capital chance of bringing off an unexpected victory. Alas, alas, there are times when it is not safe to reckon upon anything, and the Luton men, having given us so many disappointments this season, thought it no sin to add one more to the list.

The wind was so very strong that when Newton Heath won the toss and had the breezes at their backs there seemed to be no possible hope for Luton. And the fifteen hundred spectators sort of held their breath, when, after the homesters had made two or three futile attempts to get on visiting terms with Barrett, the Heathens swarmed to the attack, and as it seemed completely unnerved Gentle by their eagerness to get a goal. The custodian shaped very queerly at a shot from Lee, and after Morgan had struck the bar with another, Gillespie got the ball through, but the effort was nullified by offside.

Luton made a run to the other end, and Ekins centred right across the mouth of goal, but Brock made a sad muddle of his shot, which went much nearer the opposite flagstaff than the goalposts. The Heathens then got away, and Gillespie emerging from a ruck of players at a respectable distance from goal, tried a long shot. Whether a kind of paralysis crept over Gentle, or whether he got stuck in the mud, I cannot say, but he did not move until it was too late, and the ball glanced off the upright into the net.

With goals of this description knocking about, it seemed any odds on Newton Heath piling up a lot, but luckily, a change came o'er the spirit of the dream, and the custodian, having been caught napping once, made up his mind that there should not be a repetition of the affair. Almost directly he saved a good shot just underneath the bar by giving a corner, and next tipped a similar one over the top. Eventually, Luton managed to take the ball to the other end, but there was an utter absence of anything like combination near goal, and their efforts consequently did not amount to much.

The Heathens came again, but thanks to the stubborn defence of Williams and Dow, they were driven back, and from a centre by Ekins, Barrett put in a good shot, which Barrett fumbled. There was no other forward on the spot, however, and the goalkeeper was able to "save his bacon," as the youngsters say. Williams was next applauded for a pretty piece of gallery play, in which he got by four or five Heathens, one after the other, but the effort altogether did not take Luton much "forrader."

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The visitors had the best of the play up to half-time, as was only natural, but their attempts at goal-getting were surprisingly weak for a team of their calibre, and when the whistle sounded for the interval, the score remained at one to none in favour of Newton Heath. A small enough margin under the circumstances, and the spectators flattered themselves that Luton were easily capable of redressing the balance. But fond imaginings are sometimes pleasanter than realities, and so it proved in this case.

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There was an idea among the onlookers that the Luton forwards would go at it hammer and tongs, and either shoot a goal or rush the ball into the net. The idea found vent in enthusiastic cheering as the homesters went up the field from the half-way line, but the cheering soon ceased and the idea quickly departed. The fact of it is that for the whole forty-five minutes, the forwards never showed even the most elementary notion of how to get a goal, and Williams and Dow came nearest doing the trick, Dow especially being responsible for a splendid shot, the ball striking the bar and dropping in front of goal, where there was no one to put it through.

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The principle upon which the forwards seemed to act was this. When you get the ball, dribble and dribble until you have given the other side every possible chance of taking it from you. If they fail, then have a shot, but on no account are the other forwards to follow it, in case there should be a chance of bustling it through. When the ball is going towards one of the opposing backs or half-backs, wait and let him have perfect freedom in heading or kicking. Of course, I don't think for a moment that the Luton forwards intended to follow any such plan as this, but that was how it worked out, and if they had been playing till now I don't think they would have got a goal. As a matter of fact, Newton Heath were more dangerous than Luton even in the second half, but their shooting was very defective.

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If Luton had managed to equalise, one could only have said that they had got more than their deserts, but they did not get the goal or goals which ought to have been easily forthcoming, and they therefore lost the much-needed points. As to the merits of individual players, Gentle, as I have said, was exceedingly shaky at first, but afterwards acquitted himself well, and saved a few difficult shots. Dow and Williams were the best men on the side, Williams stopping the Heathens in brilliant fashion in the first half, and Dow showing up better in the second. Ralley was the smartest of the halves, and there is no doubt that with judicious coaching, he would make a very capable man. Birch was terribly slow at first, but afterwards improved considerably, and Crump was far below his best form.

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Kemplay was most unfortunate, and could never get the ball to go in the direction intended, whilst W. Ford's display was of a very indifferent character. Molnes and Brock were not nearly so effective as usual, and Ekins evidently found the flesh he had put on during the enforced rest a hindrance to speedy locomotion. As to the visitors, I can only say if Saturday's form was anything to go by, that they have very sadly deteriorated. In the second half, the backs kicked out with a frequency which would have been a discredit to sixth-rate men, the forwards were very little improvement on the Luton front string, and the goalkeeper, in the few times he was tested, seemed very unreliable.