

The League.-Division II.

LUTON TOWN v. BOLTON WANDERERS.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—
Bolton Wanderers 2 goals.
Luton Town nil.

The teams were as follow:—

Luton: Daw, goal; Dow and McCurdy, backs; Morrison, Stewart, and Halley, half-backs; Brown, Brock, Fairgrieve, McInnes, and Eckford, forwards.

Bolton: Sutcliffe, goal; Somerville and Halley, backs; Brown, McAteer, and Frooburn, half-backs; Gilligan, Morgan, Hall, Barlow, and Jack, forwards.

Referee, Mr. W. G. Jones (Leicester); Line-men, Messrs S. R. Carr and J. Hills (London).

For the first time this season Luton on Saturday lost a League match by a couple of goals, and for the first time this season they fully deserved to lose by that margin. Locally, a good deal of doubt was felt as to the ability of the home-sters to hold their own against the Trotters, and generally speaking, a draw was the best that was hoped for. Still, there was the possibility that they might rise to the occasion, and some three or four thousand people went to the Bury Park ground, prepared to greet the victory, should it come about, with all the enthusiasm which such an event would warrant.

Unfortunately, the weather was not propitious. The wind blew very strongly, but the wind was not altogether the worst feature, for the game had scarcely started before a heavy shower of rain came down, and this was followed by two or three more. Luton winning the toss, had what advantages there were knocking about, and had they played up to anything like their best form, they would, in all probability, have made the game nil in the first half.

But they scarcely shaped like goal-getters from the very start. Their efforts were sadly disappointed, and there was a painful lack of method all round, or pretty well all round. I think they were overawed to some extent by the knowledge that Sutcliffe was in goal, and after the International had brought off one or two brilliant saves, the feeling that he was unbeatable seemed to grow, and evidences of demoralisation became apparent.

In this first half, as indeed all through, the halves were very greatly at fault. They were terribly slow in following up advantages, and frequently there was a big and fatal gap between the halves and the forwards. This made all the difference in the world, for the little forwards were badly in need of encouragement against the big, dashing, fearless men opposed to them.

To begin at the beginning, however. The first thing to chronicle was a curling shot by Eckford, and directly afterwards from a centre by Brown, McInnes got in a beauty, but Sutcliffe was equal to both. Fairgrieve then had a good opening, and lost it through hesitating to shoot. Luton came again, and a miss by Halley gave Brown a chance, which led to several others, but the home-sters showed a strange disinclination to shoot.

A foul against the Bolton Brown resulted in a corner, and from a centre by Eckford, a scrimmage resulted, but this was eventually put an end to by a free kick being given against Luton. Dow next stopped a rush by the Trotters, and Eckford and McInnes making a clinking run, the latter sent in a shot which produced one of the most exciting incidents of the match. A desperate struggle took place on the goal-line, or inside it—to the onlooker in mid-field it was very doubtful which—but presently Sutcliffe emerged with the ball and cleared. Luton confidently appealed for a goal, but the referee declined to give it.

The Bolton goal had thus had two marvellous escapes, and this seemed to have a very prejudicial effect on the Luton play. The spectators were disposed to think that the whistle-holder had behaved rather unkindly, and they chuckled a bit when a moment later he gave a goal-kick against Luton and then altered it to a corner upon having his attention directed to the linesman's flag. Brown placed nicely, but a foul relieved the pressure.

The visitors then broke away, and Daw had not shot to deal with, from the foot of Gilbigan. He saved that, but only to be tested with a much more difficult one from Barlow, and this he cleared in excellent style. After the Trotters had had an unproductive corner, Luton took another turn, but they were not shaping in such a way as to inspire any confidence in their supporters, and it was not long before Bolton again got in evidence at the other end, without, however, doing any damage.

A rattling shot by Morrison was very smartly negotiated by Sutcliffe, and then Luton had another piece of hard luck, Brown hitting the crossbar with a clipper. The ball fell down in front of goal, and seemed to lie there for quite a minute whilst two or three men on either side were struggling to get to it. At last, it was got away, and Halley heading in the wrong direction, gave Sutcliffe a teaser, but once more the famous custodian was equal to the emergency.

The most noteworthy incident of the play during the last few minutes of the first half was a grand clearance by Dow, after a miss by McCurdy had let in Morgan, and when the whistle blew there was a blank scoring sheet, and at the same time a blank prospect for Luton. There was no doubt about it, that though the homesters had done far the better of the play, they had never really got together, and the odds were dead against them, now that the Wanderers were to have the wind.

Whether it would have been different if Luton had been allowed that goal from the second scrimmage I cannot say. An unprejudiced observer, who was behind the net, assures me that they were certainly entitled to it, as the ball was quite a foot over the line, and it is just possible that if that point had been conceded, the success would have given Luton the confidence they so much needed.

The visitors opened the second half in very promising style, waltzing down to the Luton goal in the easiest fashion, and Daw had to save from Bell. The homesters retaliated, and a centre by Brown was headed behind by Somerville. An exciting minute followed the kick from the flagstaff, and a little later McInnes put a good one just over the bar. The Trotters responded, but were kept at bay by Dow, and McInnes and Eckford made a splendid run almost the length of the field, only at last to find themselves foiled by the irrepressible Sutcliffe.

The Wanderers were not long in getting to the other end again, and Morgan had a clear goal, and then failed to beat Daw. After that came the most amusing thing of the afternoon, the referee, to the huge delight of the crowd, being knocked over by one of the Bolton players. As luck would have it, comedy was soon followed by tragedy, for scarcely had the applause which greeted some magnificent defensive work by Dow died out than hands was given against McInnes, and Barlow receiving scored a goal from a position which, if not offside, was very near it. The referee, however, declined to give heed to Luton's appeal.

Thus the first goal awarded came after sixty-five minutes' play, and the second was added in about sixty-five seconds. The Trotters had made an attack on the right, and from a bit of a scramble there, the ball came to the feet of Barlow, who was in front of goal with none to stop him, and of course he could do no other than score. Luton were not so fortunate when a somewhat similar chance presented itself at the other end, Brook getting by Somerville, who made a miss, and then being circumvented by Sutcliffe. When Bolton again attacked, Daw distinguished himself by making a couple of saves which had a mixture of luck and brilliance about them, and the game ended in a win for the Trotters by two goals to nil.

On the play, the winners were all two goals the better team. In dash and judgment, but dash particularly, they were streets ahead of our men, and one or other of them often got in a kick whilst a Luton man was thinking about it. They were a lot superior in combination too, for they never got in each other's way, and there was never any gap observable between one division and another.

Taking the game all through, there were two men who stood out above the rest—one on each side. The one was Sutcliffe and the other Dow. The custodian gave a wonderfully smart exhibition, and I should say he had a tremendous influence on the game. Had any other man been in goal, I verily believe that Luton would have scored several times in the first half, but they seemed to be paralysed by his personality. Then, on the Luton side, Dow's play was the one redeeming feature. He was always in the thick of the fight, and his display from beginning to end was brilliant in the extreme.

If Luton had but shown the form they exhibited against Walsall, there would have been a different tale to tell, but playing with no sort of confidence, they surrendered themselves as comparatively easy victims. As already stated, the ladies were chiefly to blame, and whilst Stewart failed to give his forwards the support he usually does, Morrison and Ralley rather stultified their efforts by too much wandering. Eckford and McInnes were the best of a set of forwards who for the most part were too little to make much impression on their weighty opponents, and who were also terrorised or mesmerised, or whatever you like to call it, by the overpowering influence of Sutcliffe.