

The English Cup.

LUTON TOWN v. WATFORD.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—

Luton Town 3 goals.

Watford 2 goals.

The teams were as follow:—

Luton: Daw, goal; Dow and McCusky, backs; Morrison, Stewart, and Ralley, half-backs; Brown, Brock, Fairgrieve, Malnes, and Eckford, forwards.

Watford: A. G. Baker, goal; Cother and Sharp, backs; Beach, Good, and Wood, half-backs; E. A. Varley, Richardson, Hare, McNea, and Hill, forwards.

Referee, Mr. Nat Whitaker; linesmen, Messrs. A. Cairns (Luton) and J. E. Myers (Watford).

From the moment it became known that Luton would have to entertain their near and dear neighbours from Watford in the penultimate round of the qualifying competition for the English Cup, speculation was rife as to how the result would work out. The two teams move in somewhat different circles, but though the Second Division of the Southern League is not to be compared for class to the Second Division of the League proper, the balance was redressed to a certain extent by the fact that Watford had been showing consistently good form, had never been beaten, and were thus head and shoulders above the general run of their League rivals.

This point was naturally made a very great deal of in Watford, where the additional facts that the Hertfordshire men had beaten Luton in a friendly this season, and had only succumbed at the second time of asking in the Cup-tie last year, were also fondly borne in mind. What wonder then the Watford team came with plenty of confidence, and that that confidence was enthusiastically shared by the numerous supporters whom they brought with them.

These supporters required two special trains to bring them on the L. and N.W. railway, via Leighton, and it can easily be imagined that, with the Watford partisans on the one side and the Luton on the other, things were a bit lively during the progress of the game. The day was an ideal one for football, and about 4,000 persons turned out to witness the encounter, which commenced at half-past two o'clock.

Anyone looking at the scene might be pardoned for supposing that the fight was a pretty even one, and that only the advantage of ground gave Luton the superiority which they were able to claim at the finish. As a matter of fact, Luton were making rings round their opponents during the greater part of the time—particularly in the first half—and the two goals that Watford scored came, the one from a foul and the other from a breakaway.

Nevertheless, matters were unpleasantly close at the finish, and directly after the visitors notched their second point they came as near as a touch to equalising. To put the matter in a few words; Luton showed the class, and Watford the vigour and dash, and in Cup-ties I would almost as soon depend upon the latter qualities as the former.

The excitement which accompanied the game all through became manifest at the start, the Watford contingent cheering tremendously when their men made a brief incursion into Luton territory. The play was speedily taken to the other end, and practically it remained there for ten minutes, at the expiration of which, Eckford placed a corner. Brock followed on with another centre, and Brown headed a splendid goal.

Luton spectators were jubilant, and after a time, as the homesters continued on the aggressive, these spectators began to look on the result as so much of a foregone conclusion that they were able to spare words of comfort for their friends from Watford, telling them that the teams were in quite a different class, and that Watford, though hopelessly outplayed, were doing quite as well as could be expected.

Views to this effect were even more emphatically expressed when, at the end of another twelve or thirteen minutes' play, Brock converted a centre from Eckford, the custodian having his view of the ball obstructed by one of his backs. A vendor of handbooks giving the photos and histories of the Watford players found his wares unsaleable at this time, but he was strongly in evidence again when, from a foolish foul by Morrison, Sharp placed and Hare headed a good goal for the visitors.

This point was received with a wonderful amount of cheering by the Watford portion of the crowd, but almost before the cheering had died away, and long before the man had had time to dispose of many of his handbooks, Luton made tracks for the Watford goal, Eckford showing the pace, and Fairgrieve, who had just been hurt, received the ball in a favourable position, and scored with a magnificent shot which went in at the corner just under the bar.

The handbooks were again a drag in the market, and continued to be so right up the interval, for during that time there was only one team in it, and its name was not Watford. Baker, the custodian, did remarkably well, however, saving a fine shot by McInnes and a tame one from Brown. Then Roland, receiving from a forward pass by Brock, netted the ball, Baker having left his goal, but offside nullified the effort, and a further effort by Brown was similarly dealt with by Mr. Whittaker.

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Some of the spectators said nasty things about the whistle-holder, who I believe was perfectly right in both his rulings, but I could not agree with him when a moment later he gave Brock offside, as Brock took the ball right between the two backs. From a free kick by Dow, McInnes got in a grand shot which struck the bar and was then tinned over by Baker, and half-time being called before the corner could be taken, Luton changed ends with a lead of three goals to one.

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At this time, I think it would have been generally conceded that Luton would win by a very substantial margin, and doubtless they would but for some very indifferent shooting on the part of the forwards, some wonderfully smart goalkeeping by Baker, and an accident which occurred when the second half was twenty-six minutes' old. McInnes, first of all, with a rare opening, shot too high, but a moment later grazed the bar with a header.

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Watford retaliated, and McCurdy gave a corner, which was not improved upon. Luton soon made their way to the other end, and Ralley had a splendid chance, but dallied and lost it. A bad foul by Beach caused Fairgrieve to strike an attitude, and then from McCurdy's kick, McInnes or Eckford headed in, and Baker brought off a brilliant save. In negotiating another shot the custodian fell down, but even then Luton failed to get the ball through.

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Brock after being hurt was fouled again, and from Dow's kick, someone sent the ball flying against the crossbar, but once more Baker was equal to the occasion. Luton, still in the vicinity of the Watford goal, had just had an unproductive one near, when Hare receiving the ball made a bee line for the Luton citadel. There was a momentary misunderstanding between Dow and McCurdy, and the old Arsenal man, taking full advantage of it, showed both a clean pair of heels, and beat Dow all ends up.

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The Watford spectators were frantic with excitement, and their favourites redoubled their exertions. There was no more chance of Luton obtaining a very decisive victory after this. In fact, the visitors came precious near equalising almost immediately, going down the field at a rare bat, and Hill, with a clear opening, sending just by the post. Even when Beach twisted his knee and had to be carried off the field, Luton still found themselves opposed by a sturdy lot of fellows.

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Eckford missed the upright by inches, and Fairgrieve headed just over the bar from a corner, whilst Baker distinguished himself again in saving from McInnes and in circumventing the other forwards. He also successfully negotiated a beauty from Brown, and then the Watford forwards got away in a bunch, and it looked for all the world as though they were going to score. How the danger was averted, nobody could say, but averted it was, and from the corner that followed, Dow effected a clearance.

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Luton made one last great effort to increase their advantage, and from a corner placed by Eckford, Ralley cut in and Stewart headed against the bar, Baker again tipping the ball over. The corner was not turned to account, and the call of time being given directly afterwards, Luton had to be content with a three-goal-to-two victory, which on paper is not much to brag about.

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Was it that with so much of the play Luton did not score more freely? I suppose the brilliant custodianship of Baker might be given as one great reason, but apart from that I think a rallying with chances and tame and erratic shooting were the chief causes. McInnes and Eckford were again the shining lights of the front string, but Brock and Fairgrieve both played very well, though they would have done better if they had avoided that habit of taking the ball straight along the centre, no matter whether there be an opening or not. Brown came on in the second half, but in the last two matches he has scarcely shown the pluck and perseverance which characterized his earlier displays.

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putting in some very clean kicking. Daw really had very little to do in goal, the shots he had to deal with being few and far between.

As to the visitors, Hare was streets ahead of the other forwards, and again demonstrated that the Arsenal let a good man slip through their fingers when they parted with him. Good played a fine game at centre-half, the backs were sometimes very strong, and at others a trifle uncertain, and Baker, as already stated, was a host in himself between the sticks. The team as a whole showed rather more vigour than would generally be tolerated, but Mr. Whittaker was disposed to allow a good deal of latitude. Taken altogether, however, the refereeing did not afford much room for complaint.

The "Herts Leader" (Watford), in its comments on the match, says:—Watford were beaten. Although the score was only 3—2 in favour of Luton, it would be unjust to the Lutonians to say they did not deserve their victory. They were quite the better team on the day's play, having fully three-quarters of the exchanges. Still, it would have been no surprise to any of the four thousand spectators present had Watford drawn level, and thus done as well as they did last season. How it was that Watford nearly drew level was the fact that when in front of goal they were much more dangerous than their opponents. During the last twenty minutes, or during the time that Beach was off the field, it was quite on the books that the equaliser would be provided by Watford. True, Baker had four times as much work to do in that time that Daw had, but he gave a brilliant display, and was quite unbeatable. Dow and McCurdy played their best game of the season. Dow was in exceptionally fine form, kicking, tackling, and placing in clever style. Beach could not hold Beckford. On the other side, Stewart, in the centre, was the pick of a line which did not show up prominently. Hare, as at Luton last year, was at the tip-top of his form. He worked splendidly from beginning to finish, never tiring. He was badly supported, and had he had another man he could depend upon, the Luton backs would have had a very different afternoon's work. Molinos was the pick of the Luton string, closely followed by Beckford.

The gate on Saturday amounted to £92, a sum considerably less than I imagined. Appearances are certainly deceptive, for I should have thought the crowd numbered at least 4,000 persons.