

FOOTBALL.

LUTON v. MIDDLESBROUGH.

A DRAWN GAME.

HARD LUCK FOR THE HOMESTERS.

The home League match with Middlesbrough on Saturday ended in a draw, but on the play Luton deserved to win by a good margin, fine form being shown by them. That they did not win was due to bad shooting, and to the slippery state of the ground, the latter perhaps being an excuse for the former. The ground was terribly muddy and rain fell during part of the game. The attendance was a poor one, but it was better than some of recent times. The home side lacked the services of McCurdy and Barnes, too, was an absentee. Williams fell back to partner Dow, J. Brown was included in the half-back line, as also was Brock, and Dimmock re-appeared among the forwards. The sides lined up as follows:—

Luton: Daw; Dow and Williams; Brock, Holdstock and J. Brown; W. Brown, McInnes, Draper, Eckford and Dimmock.

Middlesbrough: Hughes; McCracken and Ramsey; Allport, Raisbeck and Percy; Lamb, Osborne, Linton, Evans and Pugh.

Mr. Jones (of Leicester) refereed in place of Mr. J. E. Carpenter, of the same town, who was the appointed official, and the linesmen were Mr. F. Beardsley (Plumstead) and Mr. H. T. Shackleton (Luton), the latter acting as substitute for Mr. W. J. Wilson (London).

Luton lost the toss and had to face a slight wind in the first half. Despite this they were soon pressing, and from a foul on Eckford a corner was forced. This was quickly followed by a second flag kick, and from this the ball was sent behind. McInnes was fouled, with the result that yet another fruitless corner was obtained, and next Brown put across a fine centre, of which advantage was not taken. For the first time the visitors got away, but Pugh, their outside-left, was given offside, and soon after Eckford shot well but the keeper cleared. Dimmock was the next to send in a dangerous shot, but it was from an off-side position. A free-kick accordingly fell to the strangers, but the advantage of it was neutralised by a foul by one of their men. This profited Luton nothing, for Pugh secured and got away well on the Middlesbrough left, finishing up, however, by shooting ridiculously wide. Some good work by Brock initiated an attack by the home side, but Draper shot behind. At the other end the visitors obtained a corner, but were unable to improve upon it, and Draper, securing possession of the ball, ran away and forced his way through the opposition in fine style. To most of the onlookers it appeared that he got the ball through the posts, but it was hooked out by one of the backs and cleared, the referee ignoring a very strong appeal for a goal. A corner soon followed, the ball finding its way behind the net from the kick, and from a subsequent attack by the Lutonians Brock shot wide of the mark. Each side was penalised for fouling in turn, and then from another free-kick, this time for a foul by Raisbeck on McInnes, Dimmock sent high over the bar when the ball had been passed to him. Draper made a gallant attempt to get through and score "on his own," but just failed, and next Eckford was fouled inside the 12 yards line, the referee, after consulting his linesmen, throwing the ball up. Just before half-time Middlesbrough got away, and there was some warm work near the Luton goal; but no mishap occurred, and when the teams crossed over the position of affairs was still this:

LUTON, 0; MIDDLESBROUGH, 0.

When the re-start was made Luton took the ball down prettily and caused the visitors' defence no little anxiety. The attack, however, was not successful, and on the Northerners breaking away they forced a corner. This was easily cleared and at the other end Draper missed the ball altogether when in a good position. Brown next sent in a stinging shot which Hughes succeeded in disposing of, though it required his utmost efforts to do so, and when Luton returned strongly to the attack Dimmock just skimmed the bar with a warm attempt. The home side was now showing very fine form and pressing heavily, and the enthusiasm of the spectators was aroused by this state of affairs. At length, for the first time since the interval, Middlesbrough got clear away, and after Daw had thrown himself down at full length to save one shot, Lamb met the ball and scored smartly before the Luton custodian could recover himself. This reverse only served to inspire the Lutonians to greater efforts and hardly had the onlookers got over their surprise at the visitors' unexpected success, when Brown, from the touch-line sent in a magnificent shot which completely beat the custodian, and thus placed the team on an equal footing once more. A few minutes later there was a jubilant shout when Eckford, receiving the ball from a free-kick taken by Dow, shot through, but it died away in a groan of disappointment when it was seen that the referee had disallowed the point, presumably for off-side, although it was difficult to see the justification for such a decision. Still Luton pressed hotly and Dimmock made a fine individual effort, ending up with a shot which the visitors' custodian only just managed to save. Brown forced a corner and placed the flag-kick with great accuracy, but Dimmock headed out, and just later the latter player shot wide when the ball had again been worked down well to the vicinity of the Middlesbrough goal. Williams sent in a fine long shot which the goalkeeper could only save at the expense of a corner; but this was not improved upon. Then from another corner the ball was headed behind, while in the next few minutes Hughes twice saved in very creditable fashion. Right up to the end of the game Luton were attacking vigorously, and the visitors had quite enough to do in defending their own goal without having a chance to get anywhere near Daw's charge. Time after time the home side were within an ace of scoring, but they could never quite do the trick, indifferent shooting on their part and stubborn resistance by the strangers, combined with the slipperiness of the ball and of the turf, accounting for the failure to score. Dimmock once, when close in, had hard luck with a shot which just missed the post, and just before the close Eckford sent wide of the mark by inches only. Thus when time was called Luton had to be content with a draw, instead of a victory which would have been well deserved, the score then being:

LUTON, 1 ; MIDDLESBROUGH, 1.

FOOTBALL FACTS AND FANCIES.

Although only one League point fell to Luton as the result of the Middlesbrough team's visit on Saturday no one who was present could deny that they deserved the full prize and a goodly harvest of goals to improve their record in that respect.



It was sheer bad luck which prevented the home side from winning. They tried hard and their play deserved a better reward than it met with. It was very disappointing after having nearly all the play and having two apparently good goals disallowed, to finish with a draw at one goal all.



The conditions were not of the most favourable. The heavy rains of the preceding week had made the ground terribly heavy and in the middle of the field the mud was particularly thick. Then, too, rain fell smartly during part of the game and made matters decidedly uncomfortable for the players. There was not, however, much wind.



From the very start the Luton fellows went off with plenty of dash. This was a welcome improvement on some former displays, when the best efforts have been reserved for the concluding portion of the game, sometimes after the match has been hopelessly lost.



There was a fine crop of corners for the Lutonians in the first few minutes, but none of them was turned to account, the art of converting corners into goals having, seemingly, been lost by the locals. It is of no use forcing corners unless they are to be improved upon.



Only three times in the first half were the Northerners found in close proximity to Daw, and only once did they really look like scoring, this being just before the interval. They were, however, driven back, and so there was no scoring before half-time—at least, according to the gentleman with the whistle.



That reservation is added because it did appear to the majority of the onlookers that Draper, after making a good individual run, got the ball through the posts. The goalkeeper had missed the ball, but one of the backs hooked it out again to the custodian, the latter then clearing. There was a confident appeal for a goal from players and spectators, too; but Mr. Jones was evidently not of the opinion held by the appellants, and so did not allow the point.



If the first half was one-sided in regard to the play, what can be said of the second half? Seldom dangerous as the visitors' forwards were in the first half they were only once so in the second period—but on that one

occasion they scored, and thereupon the faces of many of the onlookers lengthened visibly.

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But before the spectators had hardly finished condoling with each other about the disaster which had befallen the Luton team, matters were put straight again by Roland Brown, who scored with a grand effort from a long range.

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Thereafter the Middlesbrough defenders had a particularly sultry time of it, the Luton men, now encouraged to redoubled exertions, never letting them rest. Shot after shot—some good, some bad—was aimed at the visitors' goal, but the luck of the home side was dead out and try as they would they could not obtain the winning notch.

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True it is that on one occasion Eckford placed the ball in the net with a very smart shot; but the referee, for some real or fancied infringement of the rules, disallowed the goal. It was presumed that the decision was that Eckford was offside, but if that was Mr. Jones's reason it was a rank bad specimen of refereeing, for there were several opponents closer in than the little Luton forward.

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Thus Luton had to be content with a "moral victory," which is very poor consolation for the absence of the real thing. They deserved to win by a respectable margin, and to my mind did score two if not three good goals.

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Daw had very little to do in goal. Both backs played finely, and not only kept the opposing forwards at bay but themselves assisted considerably in the attack. McCurdy's absence was much regretted, but Williams was a very capable substitute.

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The half-back line was rather curiously composed, but the men worked well and deserve credit for some sterling play. Holdstock was the pick of the trio and worked hard and effectively. Both of his companions were triers and did much useful service, Brown performing especially well in the first half.

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The forwards were always pegging away, the best work being done by Brown, Eckford and Draper. The first-named sent across some beautiful centres and his goal was a grand one. Eckford was very tricky, and was a source of trouble to his opponents, and Draper, although playing rather an in-and-out game, did well on the whole. McInnes and Dimmock have both been seen to greater advantage.

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Mr. Jones was not a howling success as referee, but as Luton people do not expect that of him they were not greatly astonished at some decisions which were at least curious ones.

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Second League matches on Saturday :—

Bolton Wanderers	1	v.	Woolwich Arsenal	0
Small Heath	4	v.	Sheffield W.	1
Burslem Port Vale	1	v.	Walsall	0
Newton Heath	4	v.	New Brighton	1
Lincoln City	3	v.	Burton Swifts	0
Luton	1	v.	Middlesbrough	1
Grimsby Town	3	v.	Loughborough	0
Barnsley	5	v.	Gainsborough	0
Leicester Fosse	2	v.	Chesterfield	2

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On Tuesday Sheffield Wednesday beat Barnsley by 5—1.

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The League record to date is as follows :—

Goals.

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									Goals.	
		Plyd.	Won	Lost	Drn.	Pts.	For	Agst.		
Bolton Wand'rs.	24	..	14	..	3	..	7	..	35	.. 55 .. 22
Leicester Fosse	..	23	..	12	..	2	..	8	..	34 .. 37 .. 16
Small Heath		25	..	15	..	6	..	4	..	34 .. 64 .. 30
Sheffield W...	..	23	..	16	..	4	..	3	..	35 .. 57 .. 18
Newton Heath	..	23	..	14	..	6	..	3	..	31 .. 33 .. 17
Grimsby Town	..	24	..	12	..	7	..	5	..	29 .. 48 .. 37
Chesterfield		23	..	11	..	7	..	5	..	27 .. 57 .. 47
Lincoln City	..	23	..	11	..	7	..	5	..	27 .. 38 .. 31
Burslem Port Vale	26	..	10	..	10	..	6	..	26	.. 32 .. 37
Woolwich Arsenal	22	..	10	..	8	..	4	..	24	.. 27 .. 25
Walsall		23	..	8	..	10	..	5	..	21 .. 40 .. 41
N. Brighton Tower	23	..	6	..	9	..	3	..	20	.. 39 .. 40
Middlesbrough	..	25	..	6	..	13	..	6	..	18 .. 34 .. 50
Barton Swifts		23	..	5	..	13	..	5	..	15 .. 31 .. 55
Barnsley		23	..	5	..	14	..	4	..	14 .. 30 .. 53
Gainsboro' Trinity	22	..	4	..	13	..	5	..	13	.. 28 .. 56
Luton Town		23	..	3	..	13	..	7	..	13 .. 29 .. 52
Loughborough	..	22	..	1	..	17	..	4	..	6 .. 12 .. 61

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League matches for to-morrow (Saturday):—At Gainsboro', Leicester Fosse v. Gainsboro' Trinity; at Lincoln, Luton Town v. Lincoln City; at Loughboro', Woolwich Arsenal v. Loughboro'; at Newton Heath, Grimsby Town v. Newton Heath; at Middlesbrough, Burslem Port Vale v. Middlesbrough; at Sheffield, New Brighton v. Sheffield Wednesday.

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The Lutonians are engaged away from home at Lincoln to-morrow (Saturday). The City men are in such a good position on the League table that the chances are that they will score a victory.

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The performances of Southampton and Millwall in the English Cup-ties on Saturday were very fine indeed. The seashiders have once again qualified for the semi-final by sheer pluck and determination, and the admiration with which one regards them has to be accorded also to the Millwallians, whose achievement in drawing with the Villans from Birmingham was a very creditable one.

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I notice that the football papers are again writing up the question of a splitting up of the country into divisions for the establishment of football leagues. It is a thing that ought to have been done long ago; but it is a question whether the Southern League folks will have any of it, for they may be expected to shy at the transfer fees.

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It has been demonstrated that there is not very much difference nowadays in point of calibre between the best Southern sides and the pick of the First League. The successes of Southerners in the Cup-ties forms the best possible proof of that assertion.

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It may be that the Luton club has been left behind in the race. It is an undoubted fact that nowadays the side would fare badly at Southampton, while they would not likely be successful at Millwall. In saying that, too, I am not losing sight of the fact that when the Millwallians came to Luton last November they could not do better than draw.