

LUTON v. SMALL HEATH.

NARROW WIN FOR THE "BEUMS."

MORE REFEREE-BAITING.

Saturday saw decided the last Second League match at Luton for the season—in all probability also the last that will be played here; at any rate for some time to come. There was a moderate muster of spectators. The visitors were Small Heath, who stand well up on the League table. The afternoon was brilliantly fine and warm—the weather was, indeed, more suitable for cricket or tennis—but despite the taxing nature of the atmospheric conditions some capital football was witnessed.

The teams were:—

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

Small Heath: Robinson; Archer and Pratt; Adey, Wigmore and Leake; Bennett, Aston, McRoberts, Main and Wharton.

Referee: Mr. W. J. Jones (Leicester).

Luton lost the toss and faced the sun. Early in the game they showed up prominently and attacked strongly. Holdstock heading over the bar after Burbage had headed in from Brown. Brock was giving a good display, when he was badly fouled. A great misfortune happened to Luton, Dow injuring his ankle to such an extent that he was ultimately compelled to retire. Holdstock sent the ball into the keeper's hands with a good effort to score, McInnes having meanwhile failed to obtain possession. Burbage, who was showing up prominently, was nastily fouled. Another good show by the Lutonians was spoiled by the operation of the off-side rule. The referee was cordially hooted for some remarkable decisions. A terrific drive by McRoberts led to the ball striking the post and so going out of play. This was a slice of luck for the locals, for had the ball been a few inches nearer the centre of the net the effort must have succeeded. The centre forward again shot wide, and then Daw saved by steering over the bar. Holdstock here retired for several minutes. Again the ball was sent across the mouth of the Luton goal, and a corner fell to Small Heath. From this McInnes very nearly headed through his own goal. A good run and centre by W. Brown led to the concession of a corner, from which Eckford headed over. When a flag-kick had been secured by Luton and made no particular use of, the Small Heath men got off well and Main scored what to many seemed an off-side goal. To the surprise of the crowd the referee allowed the point. Before the interval arrived McRoberts got the ball into the net, and once more it was urged that the point was illegal; but again Mr. Jones disregarded the protests and allowed the point. Thus at the interval Small Heath led, the scores being:

SMALL HEATH, 2; LUTON, 0.

Dow, who had resumed a few minutes after his mishap, did not turn out after the interval and so Luton had but 10 men. They played a splendid game despite this drawback and had hard luck not to draw level. Corners fell to either side after the resumption, though without result. Then W. Brown centred magnificently and Eckford dashed up and headed through. To the general amazement Mr. Jones decided against the scorer. This was a bad blunder, for the goal was perfectly legitimate. More corners were awarded, and towards the close Burbage went away at a rare pace and scored a beautiful goal. The end came with the figures standing thus:

SMALL HEATH, 2; LUTON, 1.

At the end of the game a large crowd surrounded the referee, who was escorted to his dressing-room by a bodyguard of players and officials. The demonstrators informed Mr. Jones in pretty plain terms what they thought of him and his refereeing; but there was no recourse to violence. The wielder of the whistle was safely taken to his box and locked in, and by means of gentle persuasion on the part of the officials the crowd was induced to disperse. It ought to be said that the demonstration was not a very serious one, those who participated being for the most part youths and boys. There was no idea of violence being offered, though it was evident that the referee's decisions were not by any means palatable to the crowd.

FOOTBALL FACTS AND FANCIES.

I suppose the Second League match at Luton on Saturday will be the last that we shall witness here, at any rate this season. The probability is, indeed, that it will be absolutely the last, for the Lutonians are now certain of exclusion by the automatic operation of the rule, which lays it down that the last two clubs on the League table shall retire.

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Of course we all regret the unfortunate pass to which the club has come in these latter days of its existence. It would not have been so bad had the team occupied a position somewhat higher up the League table, but to finish absolutely at the bottom with the unfortunate Loughborough lot was the unkindest cut of all. It is no wonder that support has been alienated, for people will not go to see a losing team.

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Still, the display on Saturday was remarkably good, especially taking into account the unsuitable nature of the weather. When we remember that Small Heath have assured themselves of the third place on the League list we must conclude that to escape with only one goal of a deficit must be regarded as a creditable performance on the part of the Lutonians.

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But this was not all. The Lutonians played in such dashing style as to sorely trouble the Small Heath defence. Indeed, with Dow missing from the ranks in the second half they played a better game than their opponents and thoroughly deserved that success which was denied them. It would have been well had the Lutonians finished in this firework fashion.

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It cannot be denied that the loss of the game was in an important degree attributable to the eccentricities of the referee. Though I do not go so far as some of the spectators and say that both Small Heath points were off-side I do most distinctly declare that the second of the goals never should have been allowed and that the point which was obtained by Eckford soon after the interval should have been granted, that player dashing past several men before taking the ball. It will be perceived that these alterations to the decisions would just give Luton the victory, and I go so far as to say that on the day's play they thoroughly deserved it.

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Let it not be thought that I am impugning the ability of the Small Heath players. Far from that. They played a very good game, marred only by several unnecessary indulgences in fouling.

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It was the Luton men who were the heroes of the day. With only ten men on the side after the interval—and one of those a man who had been injured—they gave such a superb display of pluck as has rarely been witnessed on the ground. It was quite a treat to me, and I could not help reflecting that had the players infused a little more of this energy and determination into their earlier displays they would not have been shut out of the League as they now have been.

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While sympathising with the referee in having to be escorted from the ground I do not wonder that the onlookers were led to indulge in some sort of a demonstration. It was irritating to see good points denied to the Lutonians and rank bad ones given to the other side. Even this, however, forms no excuse for such a display of rowdyism as was witnessed. It is discreditable to the club and to the town and must be reprehended.

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There is no doubt that many of those who took part in the hostile demonstration thought that the fact of this being the last match of the season on the ground rendered them and the club safe. Nothing of the kind. If the organisation continues in existence next season and the Association receive a report from the referee it may still be possible to suspend the ground for a period to be decided upon by the Association. I do not suppose it will be done, for the referee had nothing much to complain about save, perhaps, "moral and intellectual damage."

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I was very sorry for Dow, who was crocked soon after the commencement of the game. Curiously enough it was not the leg that was injured on Good Friday that was now damaged, but the other ankle. "Johnny" made a plucky effort to continue, but he was in such pain that he did not resume after the interval. It will be readily understood what his retirement meant for the other defenders.

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To McCurdy is due an especial word of praise. He played in magnificent style, his kicking being true and useful. He rarely, if ever, missed a point, and in fact he never played a better game for his side. He was materially assisted in the second half by Williams, who fell back from the half-back line. The halves, too, gave a very fine display.

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Amongst the forwards Burbage was very prominent. Were he supported on the insides as he ought to be he would, with experience, make a very fine player. He was very closely watched by the opposing halves on Saturday, but despite this he managed to break away on more than one occasion. The effort which led to the scoring of his goal was a notable one. W. Brown was second best and Eckford deserves a word of commendation.

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Amongst the Small Heath forwards McRoberts was most prominent, though he was materially assisted by his comrades in the front rank. The halves were a hard-working trio, and the backs were really fine. Robinson in goal was tested on several occasions and invariably performed excellently.

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To-morrow (Saturday) the Lutonians wind up their League season with a match at New Brighton. The Tower men have done so much better than our own that it is scarcely reasonable to anticipate any other result than a defeat for the Southerners.

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I intend publishing the customary summary of the season's results next week and shall be glad if secretaries of the junior clubs in the district would oblige by forwarding summaries of their season's results with all possible dispatch.

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The Luton Town record is such a poor one that I do not intend this week to thrust the figures before the attention of readers, but merely to point out that whereas in all the matches of the season the locals have only been able to score 86 they have had 123 piled up against them. This compares very badly with the figures of some three or four seasons ago.

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The Second League results on Saturday were:—

*Walsall.....	1 dr	Sheffield Wednesday	1
*Bolton Wanderers.....	3 bt	Gainsborough Trinity	0
Small Heath.....	2 bt	*Luton Town.....	1
New Brighton Tower...	2 bt	*Leicester Fosse.....	1
*Middlesbrough.....	2 bt	Newton Heath.....	0
Grimsby Town.....	1 bt	*Barnsley.....	0
*Burton Swifts.....	2 bt	Woolwich Arsenal...	0
*Burslem Port Vale.....	2 bt	Lincoln City.....	1

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The Second League table on Monday was as follows:—

							Goals.	
	Plyd.	Won	Drn.	Lost	Pts.	For	Agst.	
Sheffield W...	38	24	4	5	52	81	22	
Bolton Wand'rs.	33	21	8	4	50	74	25	
Small Heath....	34	20	6	8	46	78	38	
Leicester Fosse..	33	17	9	7	43	52	30	
Newton Heath...	33	19	4	10	42	61	26	
Chesterfield.....	33	16	6	11	38	64	58	
Grimsby Town...	32	16	5	11	37	60	44	
Woolwich Arsenal	33	15	4	14	34	56	42	
Burslem Port Vale	34	14	6	14	34	39	50	
Lincoln City....	32	13	7	12	33	45	42	
Walsall.....	33	12	2	13	32	50	53	
N.Brighton Tower	32	11	9	12	31	55	55	
Middlesbrough...	33	8	8	17	24	39	66	
Burton Swifts....	33	9	6	18	24	43	79	
Barnsley.....	32	8	7	17	23	43	68	
Gainsboro' Trinity	31	7	6	18	20	42	73	
Luton Town.....	33	5	8	20	18	39	69	
Loughborough...	32	1	6	25	8	17	97	

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On Monday in the Second League Bolton Wanderers beat Burslem by 2—0; Barnsley beat Woolwich by 3—2.

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The season's record of the Clarence, the champions of the Junior League, has reached me, and will appear in due course next week with the remainder of the local summaries.

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The triumph of the Luton Reserves (champions of division 2 of the Bucks. and Contiguous Counties League) over the scratch team that came to Luton on Monday to oppose them was a very easy affair. The Reserves played a really good game, and might have scored far more frequently had they wished.

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The junior footballers of the town have a wind-up on the Town Ground on Saturday to what has been—for them if not for the seniors—a successful season. The Luton Clarence (champions of the Junior League) play a team selected from the other clubs of the organisation and the presentation of the League Cup and the Reporter shield will afterwards take place, the latter trophy being for the leaders in the Second Division.

FOOTER.