

Football.

THE SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

LUTON TOWN v. BRISTOL CITY.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—

Luton Town.....	2 goals.
Bristol City	nil.

The teams were as follow:—

Luton: Smart; Lindsay and McCurdy; Clifford, Holdstock, and Williams; Brown, Blessington, Burbage, Tierney, and Saxton.

Bristol: Toone; Bach and Davis; Jones, Wilson and Chambers; Nicoll, Stevenson, Michael, Fulton, and McDougall.

Referee, Mr. J. C. King (Wellingborough); linesmen, Messrs. Nat Whittaker and A. N. Other.

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Judging by the play, no stranger, seeing Luton performing against Chatham and Bristol, would have imagined them to be the same team. Between the Dockyarders and the Citizens there is no comparison whatever. The one lot are mere novices at the game, with nothing but their energy and dash to commend them, whereas the others are for the most part thoroughly experienced players and regular professors of the art or science of football.

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Yet against the novices, Luton were completely overplayed, whilst against the professors they not only held their own but scored a brilliant victory. How is it to be accounted for? Well, I did my best to account for the defeat last week, and it is with a very thankful heart that I find I have the far more satisfactory task of accounting for the victory this. But the results show that there are uncertainties at football as well as at cricket.

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Anyone who did me the honour of reading my notes last week will remember that though I sorrowfully admitted that Luton were beaten hip and thigh at Chatham, I did not for a moment admit that Chatham were the better team. On the contrary, I held that they were a lot of weaklings who had the good fortune to catch a much stronger lot on the hop, and my remarks were fully borne out on Saturday, when Chatham went under to Tottenham Hotspur to the tune of five goals to nil, whilst Luton were knocking spots off a team as good as Tottenham.

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The greater interest which is felt in the Southern League games, as compared with those furnished by the Second Division of the League proper, and the fact that there has been a re-awakening of the enthusiasm in Luton, was shown on Saturday, when, notwithstanding the disaster at Chatham, fully three thousand persons turned out to greet Bristol City, a number which, under similar circumstances, would never have been drawn together by any team in the Second Division, bar Woolwich Arsenal.

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Bristol came with a tolerable amount of confidence in themselves. The amalgamation of the Citizens with Bedminster seems to have done no end of good, and the fact that the team had played three matches, won all three, and scored 10 goals to one, certainly augured ill for Luton's chances. But, happily, the Lutonians were not dismayed; they had got Holdstock back again in the half-back line, and Burbage at centre-forward, and those alterations made a world of difference.

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From the very start, the homesters gave evidence of improved form and of a determination to do or die. Fortunately they "did," and as a consequence are as far off dying as they have been for some years past. The kick-off took place at four o'clock, and Luton winning the toss, Lindsay wisely accepted a slight disadvantage from the sun in the first half in order to avoid a greater disadvantage from the same source in the second.

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Luton were early in the vicinity of the Bristol goal, and Holdstock elicited a rousing cheer by dropping the ball just over the bar. The visitors soon retaliated, and from a centre from the left, Michael, who has done the greater part of Bristol's scoring this season, headed in beautifully, but Smart was on the alert, and cleared with a promptness which sent him up several degrees in the favour of the crowd. Burbage then got in a fine run and forced a corner, but this proved fruitless.

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Toone, however, soon had to save from a nice one by Tierney, who had been given an opening by Clifford, and then Burbage again made a brilliant dash and almost succeeded in getting through, the custodian averting the threatened danger by running out and putting the ball behind. Saxton placed from the flagstaff, and Tierney headed wide.

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Luton were now severely testing the Bristol defence, which was of a very vigorous character, and Brown receiving from Blessington, put in a lovely cross shot, Toone saving just in the nick of time. Saxton followed on with a clinker, which cannoned off one of the players into goal, where Toone brought off a smart, albeit a trifle lucky, save. Lindsay next placed well from a free kick, and Tierney headed in, but again Toone saved.

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Nicoll, the old Millwall man, afterwards put in a run for Bristol and finished up with a rattling centre, but Lindsay headed the ball away as far as a good many men would kick it. A foul given against Tierney when, if given at all, it should have been the other way about, made matters look a bit unpleasant, as from the free kick the ball was headed in like a flash, but Smart showed that he possesses a very appropriate name, and he not only saved his goal in fine style then, but he saved again directly afterwards from a good attempt by Nicoll.

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McDougall next shot just by the post, the Citizens looking particularly dangerous at this time, owing in a great measure to some of the Luton men indulging in silly short passing when sound, vigorous kicking was what was wanted. There is a time for passing and a time for kicking, and the time for passing is not when your opponents are crowding round your goal. These remarks, it is perhaps unnecessary to say, do not apply to either of the Luton backs.

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However, Luton ultimately transferred the play to the other end, and from a centre from Brown, Clifford sent in a clipping shot, and someone else followed on with a daisy-cutter, but Toone saved the first, and Davis kicked out the second. Luton next forced a couple of corners, and Brown proved very disappointing by placing both of them behind.

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The homesters kept up the pressure until the interval, but when the teams changed ends there was a blank score-sheet. A very satisfactory performance on the part of the homesters, most of the spectators thought, and had they been appealed to individually, I think there were few who would not have said that a similar state of things at the finish would be perfectly agreeable. Luton had certainly had the better of the play, but the teams were so well matched, and the Citizens had such a high reputation, that there was a good deal of fear lest a bit of luck for them might turn the verdict against the home team.

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But when play was resumed, Luton at once acted on the aggressive, and Brown and Burbage making the running, Roland transferred to the centre man, whose shot was spoiled at the expense of a corner. Brown placed and Williams shot, but a free kick for offside or impeding the goalkeeper was given against Luton. The homesters, however, had another go, and Blessington sending the ball forward, it came off one of the backs to Burbage, who rushed through and, making no mistake, scored a splendid goal eight minutes from the re-start.

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This success was the signal for a tremendous outburst of cheering, and the only question was whether the lead would be maintained. Unfortunately, Luton got a little slack after this, there was again a little dilly-dallying with the ball, and the forwards foolishly remained inactive when there was a great possibility of the lead being lost.

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Happily, this period was got through all right, and then Luton came again. Blessington was the first to get another shot at the Bristol goal, and it was a beauty, but Toone successfully negotiated. Then Brown got in a fine run, and was only stopped at last by a foul by Davis. Lindsay placed, Holdstock headed on to Saxton, who headed just the wrong side of the net.

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Burbage again made a dashing attempt to break through the Bristol defence, and was badly kicked by one of the backs. Play had to be suspended for a minute, and the centre-forward continued to go lame until just before the finish, when Lindsay, clearing from an attack by the visitors, sent the ball well up the field. Burbage followed it, took it off Davis, and then finding himself clear, all suspicion of lameness vanished.

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Running nearly half the length of the field, with Bach vainly struggling at his heels, Burbage took the ball along in splendid fashion, right up to within tantalising distance of Toone, whom he completely nonplused, and scored a glorious goal. This led to a scene of wild enthusiasm, the spec-

tators cheering again and again, the cheering being all the heartier from the fact that victory was now assured. The Citizens made a brief response, and from a centre from the left, Stevenson found himself with an open goal, but Smart once more saved in fine style. Luton made a spirited reply, and forced a corner, but there was no more scoring, and the call of time found Luton in possession of a grand victory.

As the players were leaving the field, a rush was made for Burbage by the more enthusiastic portion of the spectators, and he was carried in triumph, shoulder high, to the dressing room. He was not altogether undeserving of this homage, for undoubtedly he was primarily responsible for the victory, and nothing more brilliant than his single-handed runs has been seen on the ground for many a long day. He is a fearless player, and with a little tuition, which I am sure he will not be above taking from the more experienced men in the team, he will turn out just about as good as they make 'em.

One hint which I am sure Lindsay would give him would be not to attempt to dash through every time he gets the ball, but to pass to his comrades when the opening is not tolerably clear. Too many individual efforts would make him a marked man, and in present day football a marked man gets few opportunities of shining and many opportunities of coming a cropper.

But the success which Burbage met with in scoring his second goal shows the importance of following the ball instead of waiting to see where it drops, or where the other man is going to kick it. In nine cases out of ten, when Lindsay sent the ball up the field the opposing back would have been allowed to get in his kick, and it was Burbage's better method which flustered the Bristol man and gave the opening.

Luton's victory was all the more gratifying, perhaps, because they were not absolutely at tip-top form. That should afford us more hope for the future than might otherwise have been the case. There are times when a team plays above itself and scores a win which there is very little hope of repeating. But great as was the improvement on Luton's Chatham form, there was still a little bit in hand, and when this little bit is developed we ought to see something.

The left wing, for instance, was certainly not at its best. I am quite confident that Tierney and Saxton are both capable of much better form than they have yet shown. Don't misunderstand me. I don't mean that they are not trying their best—far from it, but it sometimes takes more than two or three matches to enable men to get into their proper stride—Billy Gallacher, for example—and I am as sure as sure can be that there is a lot more talent in Saxton and Tierney than we have yet seen.

The right wing played a very good game, not so fine perhaps as against Southampton, but still the B.B.'s—Blessington and Brown—were busy B's, and bustling B's, if not brilliant B's. Possibly a greater eagerness to help the half-backs when the necessity arises would add to the effectiveness of the forwards as a whole.

The half-backs on Saturday rendered capital service. Holdstock does not strike the casual observer as being fast, but he has a wonderful knack of getting there, and Michael had very little latitude allowed him. Moreover, Holdstock seems to know intuitively what to do with the ball when he gets it. As to Clifford, I think he played his best game yet; he did a lot of work and he did it well. Williams, as usual, displayed a marvellous amount of energy, and did his full share towards keeping the pot a boiling.

The backs, too, were in splendid fettle, and were seldom or never at fault. McCurdy had apparently recovered from his indisposition, and he and Lindsay were a host in themselves, whilst Smart performed in grand style between the sticks. Considering that he is only just making his acquaintance with serious football, I think Smart has done wonders, and the Club will do well to cultivate him as far as opportunities will allow.

As to the visitors, not much need be said. On paper, they are strong enough to face almost any team, and their string of forwards is one which might well have produced alarm in Luton breasts. But it was the forwards who failed to show up, the Luton defence being a bit more than they bargained for. Hugh Wilson and the other Bristol defenders, however, performed very energetically, and when Luton secured an opening they thoroughly deserved it. Toone did well in goal, and had no chance with either of the shots that scored.

Mr. King, the referee, got into rather bad odour with the crowd, and the reasons for some of his decisions were not altogether clear. His talks to certain of the players were also rather irritating. I don't know whether he was delivering cautions, but repeated cautions always seem to me to be a little worse than useless.

Reading on Saturday beat Queen's Park Rangers by three goals to nil, West Ham United got the better of Southampton by two goals to one, and Bristol Rovers vanquished Kettering by three to one. Swindon drew at Watford at one goal all, and Gravesend accomplished a similar performance at New Brompton.

When Luton gave up the idea of keeping Monks, they were on the point of closing with Whitehouse, the old Grimsby custodian, who has acquired some celebrity in the art of keeping goal, but at the last moment he signed on for Newton Heath. Since then, they have fixed up with Roger Ord, the ex-Arsenal goalkeeper, and if he should render as valuable service to Luton as he has done for the Arsenal, the directors will have no reason to regret their choice.

"Rover" in the "Morning Leader," says:—
"The surprise of the day was the defeat of Bristol City at Luton. It was commonly supposed, and with good reason, that the City team were one of the strongest in the League. On recent form, the same could certainly not be said of Luton, who had been beaten on their own ground by Southampton and at Chatham by the team of that name. It was therefore a genuine 'startler' when the news came over the wire that Luton had defeated Bristol City by 2 goals to nil. The victory will give Luton a fresh lease of life. There is nothing succeeds like success in the football world. Nor can it do the Bristol Baby much harm. He is a lusty youngster who hardly knows his own strength, and perhaps he rather under-estimated the prowess of the Bedford team."

It is worthy of mention, perhaps, that Luton played in their new colours on Saturday for the first time—white knickers and pale blue shirts. They were in the ascendant on this occasion. Let us hope they will be so in many matches yet to come. Saturday's gate amounted to a trifle over £70.

I have been requested to say a word respecting the behaviour of some of the spectators on the terraces. A little boisterousness is all very well in its way, but occasionally there was a nasty feeling displayed on Saturday and I am told that some nasty language was used. Now this will have to be put down with a very strong hand, or trouble will result. Besides, bad language is a terrible nuisance to those who happily do not indulge in it, and men who have any regard for the welfare of the Club ought to do all they can to encourage people to the ground and not drive them away. We think that one of Shakespeare's characters showed extraordinary ignorance in his desire to be written down an ass, but is it not more extraordinary still that a man should be willing to proclaim himself a blackguard?

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Messrs. Sale and Co. are announcing another free football competition, a match-size football being offered for a correct forecast of the score in the Watford v. Luton match next week.

Tierney, dissatisfied, it is said, because the directors did not retain the services of Monks as custodian, took his departure for home on Monday afternoon, and his going was made the occasion of a frolic on the part of some of the other players. For this, two or three have been severely reprimanded, and Molyneux has been suspended sine die. The directors are determined to put down anything of the kind.

Whilst the first team are at Swindon on Saturday, the Reserves will entertain Hitchin Blue Cross, and a thoroughly good game should result. The Reserves are performing in capital style this season, and I hope the supporters of the Club will give them as much encouragement as possible by patronising their matches. The kick-off will take place at four o'clock.