

Football.

THE UNITED LEAGUE.

LUTON v. KETTERING.

Played at Kettering on Saturday. Result:—

Luton Town 1 goal.

Kettering 1 goal.

Teams:—

Luton: Ord; Lindsay and McCurdy; Clifford, Holdstock, and Williams; Brown, Blessington, Hawkes, Dempsey, and Saxton.

Kettering: Baldry; Clarke and Draper; Roulstone, Panter, and Pollock; Webb, Becton, McMain, Coleman, and Lawrence.

Referee, Mr. Ward (Nottingham).

Luton have every reason to be satisfied with the result of Saturday's encounter at Kettering, because any team visiting the Northamptonshire ground very soon becomes convinced that the advantages are all on the side of the home team.

The Rockingham-road ground is a curious pitch, and is all against a strange team. The ground slopes from one end to the other, and the slope is considerable, but to make things more awkward still, it also runs down to either side from the top goal. So whether playing downhill or up, Kettering's visitors are handicapped, for at one end it is the easiest thing in the world to run the ball out of play when trying to control it, and uphill the task of making headway and most of all to centre, is extremely difficult.

On Saturday, Kettering won the toss and set Luton to play downhill in the first half, their preference being to take the stiffest end themselves in the first moiety, and then to pile on the agony—if they got the chance—in the second. As was only to be expected, Luton at once went off downhill, but it required the exercise of much judgment to keep the ball within bounds, and too frequently the propensity of the leather for rolling over the boundary line spoilt good attempts at attack.

Chief work very early devolved upon Luton's right wing, and from a centre Williams was able to test Baldry's skill, while a few moments later Blessington, after some pretty passing, got in a capital shot which narrowly missed, the relief of the spectators at the escape finding expression in applause for Blessington's effort.

Brown and Williams having also made good tries, Kettering took a turn, Pollock and McMain being prominent. However, Luton got away again, and Saxton receiving took a long shot, which fell just under the crossbar. It was a teaser for Baldry, and slipping through his fingers just under the bar, he had to step back to recover and throw away. It was the best thing Saxton did throughout the game, and to the quick eyes of the few Lutonians present on the look-out for points, it was rightly a goal, but Mr. Ward apparently never gave it a thought. The Luton players say it went over the line a good foot, and there were those on the Kettering side who were fair enough to admit it.

Play proceeded, and Blessington kicked over, but at the same time was ruled offside. From the free, McMain got off and made a capital run. McCurdy, who was not kicking at all well, just managed to spoil him, and the ball was hustled away. For a foul shortly afterwards, Luton had a free kick, and receiving from Lindsay, Blessington headed across, and Dempsey shot over. More good work on the right found Blessington with a good opening, but it was so easy playing downhill to shoot over, and this once again was the disappointing sequel.

One could go on enumerating such details, but the repetition is hardly necessary. Suffice it to say that Luton did the bulk of the attacking. Kettering had their turns, but Ord was never called upon to handle, though once or twice things looked rather dangerous, once from a corner conceded by McCurdy, and again when a foul was awarded against him.

The number of fouls awarded by Mr. Ward were, by the way, rather exasperating, for the game was a very clean one, and there seemed to be no cause at all for some of his decisions. Lindsay proved a hard nut for the left wing to crack, but once he held an opponent rather too openly, the outcome being a free kick, from which Becton sent right across the goal mouth. The interval arrived with no score.

Kettering Rifle Band whiled away the dull moments of the interval, and when the teams took the field again, Kettering at once began to make tracks for the Luton goal. Becton was the first to essay a shot. He sent in a swift grounder, but found Ord quite ready, and the ball was neatly disposed of by the Luton custodian. McMain directly afterwards gave the Luton defence a by a corner.

Shortly afterwards, Clark sent the ball right down, and there was a rush for goal, but Ord seemed to have cleared all right, when the referee's whistle sounded for some reason or other, and to the dismay of the Luton players a foul was awarded. What it was given for was a mystery to all of them, and as it was within about six yards of the goal, Lindsay promptly told his men to clear away, with the idea doubtless of preventing a second player touching, but the Kettering man who took the kick back-heeled to Webb, and before it was realised what all the movements meant, the ball was through, and a most unsatisfactory goal was registered against us.

No sooner had the teams re-started, however, than Luton were away. The ball travelled across to the far corner, when Brown fetched it round smartly, and to the surprise of everybody it fell in front of goal and rolled into the net, Baldry making no attempt to save until it was too late. He seemed to have altogether misjudged it, and fortunately for Luton they found themselves on an equal footing with their opponents.

After this Luton played up with much spirit, and forced a couple of corners, from the second of which Dempsey appeared to have a good chance, which he did not turn to account. A misunderstanding between Clifford and Lindsay was shortly afterwards almost fatal, but a corner averted the danger. Draper next came near scoring, but headed over, and Webb spoilt a good run by shooting badly.

In the last ten minutes darkness made it very difficult to follow the ball, but Luton continued to have a fair share of the play, and from a corner Williams put high over, Blessington also using his cranium to the same effect. Then Kettering made a desperate effort to get ahead, and Lindsay badly infringed the rules by holding a player when within the twelve-yards' line. Fortunately in the darkness it escaped the notice of the referee, though curiously he stopped the game and threw the ball up. Such a decision was somewhat perplexing to the spectators, but from the Luton point of view it was much more acceptable than a penalty.

The game was pretty fast from end to end, and the next minute found the Luton players worrying Baldry, who had to negotiate. Then Kettering went away, but the whistle sounded for the cessation of hostilities with the scores standing at one goal all.

Under ordinary circumstances Luton would have won. On their own ground Kettering want a lot of holding, and they have a big advantage over visiting teams in knowing the peculiarities of their pitch. Upon the half-back line fell the bulk of the work, and they did it well. Holdstock held McMain pretty tight all through, and while McCurdy was hardly up to form, Williams played a good game. Clifford and Lindsay were always safe, though some of the tactics of the latter were not altogether appreciated by the local crowd. Ord had not more than three shots to negotiate in the whole match.

Hawkes was not at all a success, for he rarely got the ball, and was little else than a passenger. Saxton and Dempsey were also weak. The bulk of the attack fell to Brown and Blessington, who played a pretty passing game, the latter being particularly useful, but their efforts too frequently went begging at the finish. Roulstone played an effective game, and the backs were good.

Undoubtedly the one weak spot in the Luton team is in the front rank, but one would hardly expect to find it spotted by a man "at the front." Yet such is the case. If the Luton Club had no other claim to gratitude, it would certainly deserve the support of all patriotic people, for providing a subject of interest for the men who are doing their country's work in South Africa. Nothing at home has been followed with so keen an interest by Luton soldiers at the front as the varying fortunes of the Football Club.

The following letter has just been received from Ingogo, South Africa:—"To the Editor.—Dear Sir,—I have much pleasure in acknowledging the receipt of your paper, which I have received weekly during the period of the present war. Being a native of your town, it has proved very interesting to me, on account of local and other varied news, more especially the football news. As regards the local team, I am very keen in watching the individual play of each of the members in their respective places, and in my opinion what is wanted is a good reliable centre-forward. Another Galbraith would do. Wishing your paper every success, and at the same time hoping to see Luton Town well to the fore at the completion of the Southern League,—I remain, dear sir, yours, etc., Wm. Toyer, Sergt., 5th Dragoon Guards, South Africa."

The draw for the final round of the division in the English Cup Competition was favourable to Luton, and we shall therefore have the pleasure of entertaining Queen's Park Rangers on Saturday week. The Rangers, who have been strengthening their team recently, are confident of their ability to beat Luton, and are undergoing a fortnight's special training for that purpose. But we shall see.

On Saturday next, Luton will receive a visit

from Gravesend, who are a much better team than is commonly supposed. I am told by one who saw the game that when Bristol City beat them it was quite a fluke, as Gravesend had much the better of the play. Then the Shrimpers went to Reading and beat the Biscuit men, and last Saturday they vanquished Watford by 4 goals to 2, after being two goals to the bad at the interval. The kick-off will take place at 2.45.

* * *

A meeting of the Beds Football Association was held at the Cowper Arms, Cheapside, on Tuesday evening, when the Luton Buxton Rovers protested that in their match with Woburn Sands Albion the ground was not of the proper dimensions, and that the game was stopped several minutes before time. After some discussion, the match was ordered to be replayed at Woburn.

* * *

The Reserves on Saturday completed the first half of their Bedford and District League campaign, and it is gratifying to note that up to the present they have not met with defeat, and have thus obtained all the points possible. There are seven teams in the League, and for the six matches played, the Reserves now have a goal record of 40 against 6. This is a very creditable achievement. Stantonbury St. James are second on the list, their record being—Played 5, won 3, lost 1, drawn 1, goals for 8, against 4. points 7, while the wooden-spoonists are the Queen's Works, who have played six games, all of which were lost, their goal record being 4 against 30.

* * *