

LUTON AND THE SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

DEFEAT OF GRAVESEND.

Though the Gravesend club found itself, at the beginning of this season, in the position of having to get together a team, the managers succeeded in securing the services of a thoroughly capable set of exponents of the art of football. These men have given a fairly good account of themselves, and it is difficult to explain the fact that they occupy a very humble position in the League table. Their visit to Luton on Saturday produced a very good game, and at one time it looked as though the visitors were going to run the home side very close.

The sides were :—

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

Gravesend: Hamilton; Lockie and Warburton; Parkinson, McAvoy and Bigden; Jury, Russell, Pugh, Madden and Penny.

Referee, Mr. T. Crabtree (Ealing); linesmen, Mr. E. J. Brentnall (Wimbledon), and Mr. H. D. Casey (Tottenham).

The weather was not of the best, the ground was in a slippery state, while the attendance was not nearly so large as could have been wished, though it must be confessed that the muster of admirers of the home team was moderately good. Luton won the toss, and set their opponents to face what little wind there was. Gravesend went off in first-rate style, their smartness (especially that of the forwards) being deservedly admired. The men were quick on the ball, and made excellent use of their chances. Comparatively early in the game Pugh altogether beat McCurdy, who was not playing nearly so well as usual; but Lindsay came to the rescue and cleared with a splendid kick. Pretty play was witnessed from the Luton front rank men, and this was followed by another good exhibition by Lindsay. Durrant shot over the bar, Saxton having taken up nicely and sent on to the left-winger in capable style. It was generally conceded, indeed, that Saxton's display at centre-forward was amongst the best of the season, for though his shooting was not very accurate he kept his wings together excellently, and fed his companions in an unselfish manner that evoked high praise. It was somewhat disconcerting to the home lot to see the visitors score first, Pugh sending through after some capital all-round play by the Gravesend front string. The strangers were not long suffered to hold the lead, however; for in a very little time Dempsey scored from a capable centre by Lindsay. Brown afterwards narrowly missed scoring, and then free kicks against Luton gave the visitors a chance of advancing, which they were not slow to seize. The Luton men were still playing a very slow game, and of the Gravesend side it still had to be said that their shooting was not of the best. Blessington missed a very easy chance, Saxton followed suit with a terrible let-off, and Brown failed almost equally dismally. Following a corner to the home side Brown secured the ball and hooked it past Hamilton very neatly, so giving his side the lead. More corners were secured by the Luton players, but these were not turned to account. However, towards the close of the first half, Saxton managed to get the ball into the net, and so when the customary interval arrived the positions were :—

LUTON, 3; GRAVESEND, 1.

After the resumption play ruled even for a considerable time, both sets of forwards doing far better work. Brown, after a bit, had a very narrow escape of scoring, his shot producing a corner, and Blessington made amends for the failure of his wing-mate by sending through with a very fine effort. This success greatly elated the home supporters, for it was rightly thought that this would vastly improve the chances of ultimate success on the part of the "blues." Durrant, who had been performing well at outside left, distinguished himself by putting in one of his best straight drives, the ball striking the cross-bar with considerable force, and rebounding into play. Next came a corner, this being as little productive as the majority of the others that had gone before. The fifth home goal came from a scrimmage. It began to be thought that the Gravesend contingent would be prevented from again breaking through, but they succeeded in getting past all opposition and scoring. The concluding portion of the operations was conducted almost in the dark; indeed, towards the finish, it was impossible for the bystanders to accurately follow the course of the ball. When the end came the figures were :

LUTON, 5; GRAVESEND, 2.

FOOTBALL FACTS AND FANCIES.

The smart way in which the Gravesend players started on Saturday made an excellent impression on those who witnessed the game, and also led one to wonder how it was that the team occupies so lowly a place on the Southern League table. Such a capable lot ought to have had better fortune.

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Of course I am aware that slackness on one side serves as a foil to smartness on the other; and there was no gainsaying the argument that the Lutonians were not by any means at their best. Indeed, when the visitors scored first it began to be thought that the "blues" were in for a beating on their own ground.

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However, this reverse served to wake up the locals and it was not long before they were level with their foemen. Then they went ahead and never looked back. The first three goals, though, were not devoid of a distinct element of luck.

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The second half was somewhat more interesting than the first, the sides appearing equally matched, and some excellent football being witnessed. The home-aters succeeded in scoring twice to their opponents' once, and so won comfortably.

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Considering the difficulty in which the Gravesend club was found at the beginning of the season in regard to a team, it is somewhat surprising to find the side so capable. The wonder, indeed, is that they are not higher on the League list.

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What I liked about the Gravesend forwards was that the men were smart on the ball and that they lost no time in dashing off towards goal. Had the home defence been bad, the visitors would have scored several goals, for their shooting was good.

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I wish it could be said that the Luton forwards were similarly to be admired. But they were not. They were clever enough in mid-field, it is true. When goal was near at hand they became weak as water as a rule and shot any way but straight.

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It was quite the exception for Lindsay to be heard shouting directions. On Saturday he was frequently noticed advising his men. It seemed as though he held the opinion that the forwards might have done better.

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It was quite depressing to observe the regularity with which the front rankers got within range and then failed. None of them could shoot with any degree of accuracy, and it is a puzzle to know how the five goals accumulated.

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Whilst speaking of the forwards I must be allowed to say a good word for Saxton's display in the centre. True, his shooting was not first-class; but he fed his wings very skilfully and was seen to perform his own share of the work.

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It is a pleasure to be able to accord this praise, because Saxton has been very adversely—and not altogether deservedly—criticised by some of the spectators. He has proved himself a useful member of the team, and I sincerely hope he will maintain this form.

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Blessington and Dempsey as the inside men were not great as shots. They played clever football as a rule, and Brown was frequently in evidence on the right, while it was apparent that Durrant's injury was still worrying him somewhat.

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Of the half-backs Clifford pleased me most, though Heldstock and Williams both performed very well indeed. It was evident that Clifford did not appreciate the decision of the linesman who pulled him up for a foul throw.

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I was puzzled to know what to make of McCurdy. He has never played a worse game. He could scarcely do right. In justice it ought to be said that it was not for want of trying, and that every footballer must be expected to have an off-day occasionally.

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It was fortunate that Lindsay was in his best form. He was a holy terror to the forwards on his wing and was almost impassable. It was a treat to see the home captain hustle in just at the right moment and punt the ball well towards the other goal. It was from one of these splendid efforts that the third goal was scored.

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Ord was in very good form, though he was not unduly tested. He brought off some nice clearances, and he was not responsible for either of the goals that were secured by the Gravesenders.

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The smartness of the visiting forwards has already been commented upon. They are a workmanlike quintette and performed capital service. Pugh in the centre was repeatedly conspicuous.

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The halves were fairly capable and the backs were good, while the custodian knew his work. The defence was, indeed, good all round, and had the team had the same amount of luck that favoured the victors—but then they had not.

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I have not harshly criticised a referee for some time, for there are always plenty ready to do that without very much provocation. It is necessary to say, however, that Mr. Crabtree was altogether too fussy. In fact, it was difficult more than once for competent judges of the game to determine what on earth certain decisions were given for.

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Commenting on the game in the *Morning Leader* on Monday, "Rover" said: "At Luton the home team had not much difficulty in getting the best of Gravesend by 5 goals to 2. With five wins and five losses Luton have done fairly well since their return to the Southern fold, and as they are an improving side I feel sure they will go up a good deal higher. Few teams will go to Luton and return with two points this season."

Southern League games on Saturday :—

•Tottenham Hotspur	... 1	bt	Kettering	... 0
•New Brompton	... 2	bt	Queen's P'k Rangers	... 1
Millwall	... 2	bt	•Watford	... 1
•Portsmouth	... 1	bt	Bristol Rovers	... 0
•Luton	... 5	bt	Gravesend	... 2
•Swindon	... 2	bt	Southampton	... 1
•Bristol City	... 4	bt	Chatham	... 0
•West Ham United	... 1	bt	Reading	... 0

• Home teams.

The League table on Monday was as follows :—

	Played.	Won.	Lost.	Dr'n.	For	Agst	Pts
Bristol City	14	10	2	2	37	12	22
Southampton	12	9	2	1	27	15	19
Portsmouth	12	9	2	1	24	11	19
Millwall	14	9	4	1	32	20	19
Bristol Rovers	12	8	3	1	25	11	17
West Ham United	12	6	5	1	18	12	18
Reading	12	4	4	4	12	9	12
Tottenham Hotspur	10	4	4	2	14	12	10
Luton	10	5	5	0	13	14	10
New Brompton	12	4	6	2	15	18	10
Queen's P'k Rangers	12	4	7	1	19	19	9
Kettering	11	3	6	2	14	21	8
Gravesend	11	2	7	2	18	35	6
Swindon Town	12	2	8	2	8	24	6
Watford	12	2	9	1	12	27	5
Chatham	12	2	9	1	7	35	5

"Wanderer", of *The Sportsman*, writing with regard to the Gravesend match, makes this allusion :—
 "The Bedfordshire combination is a strong one this autumn, and their prospects of lowering the colours of the Queen's Park Rangers in the Association Cup-tie next Saturday are exceedingly bright."

This is precisely my opinion. If the "blues" play up to anything like their form they ought to beat the Rangers without much difficulty. It will be remembered that the Lutonians have beaten them this season in a Southern League game at Kensal Rise with ease by 3—1.

Though the home side ought to win to-morrow they will not have a walk-over by any means. The forwards must make up their minds to show somewhat better combination and to shoot in far better style, for the Rangers are not novices.

It is interesting to note that the goal record of the locals in English Cup matches this season is 13 against 2. What will be the respective totals after to-morrow?

The first eleven record to date is: Played, 18; won, 10; lost, 5; drawn, 3; goals for 41, against 22.

The Reserves easily disposed of the Berkhamsted team on Saturday, and brought the goal record to 68 against 12, a truly remarkable one. The juniors have played 14 games, of which they have won 12, lost 1 and drawn 1.

It is not to be expected, of course, that the seniors can score so freely as this—in fact, they have performed very well—but it could be wished that the margin was somewhat more in their favour.

The "gate" on Saturday was not a good one. Something less than £40 was taken. It must be remarked that this "gate" should cover two weeks' wages and the expenses of the team away from home on the occasion of the return match. It does not require a very strong effort to realise that £40 will not do all this.