

Football.

THE SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

LUTON TOWN v. QUEEN'S PARK RANGERS.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—

Luton Town	2 goals.
Queen's Park Rangers	2 goals.

The teams were as follow:—

Luton: Ord; White and McCurdy; Clifford, Holdstock, and Williams; Brown, Blessington, Gray, Tierney, and Durrant.

Queen's Park: Clutterbuck; Newlands and McConnell; Lennox, Hitch, and Skinner; Gray, Christie, Ronaldson, Humphrey, and Foxall.

Referee, Mr. F. S. Walford.

It was just Luton's luck! The first Southern League match at home for a century—no, I mean the first League match at home during the present century—and then to get a day like Saturday. The copious showers of the morning put anything but a cheerful aspect on affairs, but the very worst of the weather seemed to be specially reserved for the time of the kick-off.

The driving rain was wetter, more searching, and a great deal more depressing than a regular downpour would have been without the wind, and it was not surprising that less than a thousand people should have put in an appearance by half-past two. The surprising thing was that anyone should have been mad enough to venture out to see a game of football under such miserable conditions. The weather improved a bit later, and the crowd increased also, but the unwelcome efforts of Jupiter Pluvius robbed the Club of at least £30 or £40.

As to the match, the Queen's Park Rangers were bent on winning. So were Luton. But the Rangers had the advantage of being at full strength, and as fit as fiddles, whereas Luton had again to take the field without their captain, and the forward line, including a newcomer in the person of Gray, of Grimsby, was necessarily to some extent experimental. Added to the advantage already named, the Rangers had the further very considerable one of winning the toss, and starting with the wind and rain behind them.

That they meant going for all they were worth was soon evident, and they were quickly on visiting terms with the Luton custodian, McCurdy failing to clear at the first attempt and then kicking on to Ronaldson, who seemed to be booked for a goal all over. Ord ran out, however, and just got hold of the ball, which, in trying to avoid the Ranger on the rampage, he carried, and a foul was given against him, but from this Luton cleared.

Gray—the Queen's Park Gray—next put across the mouth of goal, and Foxall had a lovely opportunity, but Ord cleared splendidly. The visitors continued to have the best of matters, what time the whistle was not blowing—for infringements of one sort and another were uncommonly frequent—and the Luton goal had several narrow escapes.

Then Durrant showed up with a nice run, brought to a conclusion by a foul against the Rangers, but the free kick was not turned to account. And let me say this, that Luton fritter away their most promising free kicks by indulging in fancy business which seldom or never comes off. A good, honest kick is much more likely to be productive than the roundabout methods usually adopted when the kick is taken near the goal.

A dash and a miss by White nearly proved the downfall of Luton, but McCurdy came to the assistance of Ord, and when the latter was out of goal, Mac just succeeded in preventing the ball from going over the line. Directly afterwards Luton were not so fortunate. Gray got by Williams, and McCurdy being too far up the field to cover the half-back, the Rangers' outside-right sailed away and beat Ord with a shot which just shaved the upright.

Upon the return to the half-way line, Durrant went off in a canter, but was again fouled by Lennox, who was almost constantly indulging his propensities in this direction, and from the free kick Clifford received and sent just wide. Then another disaster befel the homesters, for Humphrey seized an opening and going clean away scored a beautiful goal.

This seemed to be about the finishing touch to whatever chances Luton ever had, but after White had been beaten and McCurdy had dashed across and cleared, Brown raised the hopes of the spectators with a shot which passed just across the goal and by the opposite post. Williams next received from a throw-in and put in a lovely shot, which brought Clutterbuck to the ground, but other of the Rangers came to the fallen custodian's aid, and a clearance was effected.

A curling shot by Holdstock was nearly successful, and Clutterbuck in saving came into collision with the upright. It was the goalkeeper who was hurt. Brown next got in a centre which gave Durrant a fine opportunity, but the left-winger clean missed it. From a free kick, Williams turned back to Clifford, who grazed the bar with a capital shot, and then the whistle blew for half-time.

Although the Rangers crossed over with a comfortable lead of two goals, the wind was still so strong that the chances of Luton drawing level were not altogether outside the range of vision of optimistic spectators, but it must be confessed that the homesters did not set out about their work in very promising style. Clifford continued to perform prodigies of valour, but there certainly seemed to be no clear understanding between the team as a whole.

Moreover, there was not too much smartness. Eventually, Blessington got in a shot which Clutterbuck nearly muddled, and this was followed by several others, a good one by Tierney deserving special notice. A centre by Brown was muddled because two or three other of the forwards went for it at the same time, but at last Blessington put the ball in the mouth of goal, and the Rangers failing to clear, Durrant scored a good goal.

Now that the process of wiping off arrears had begun, there was a hope that it would continue, and Gray had a very good chance of doing the trick almost directly, but he passed instead of shooting, and the opening was lost. Then Luton were deprived of the services of Holdstock, whose knee went wrong, and necessitated his being carried off the field.

White now came into the half-back line, and McCurdy had an enlarged sphere of operations. The battle was waged with varying fortune, but for the most part the Rangers were more workmanlike in their methods, and but for the fact that Ord was ever ready in goal, and made two or three very fine saves, the probability is that the visitors would have increased rather than have lost their lead.

As it was, the minutes chased each other away, and it was getting unpleasantly near the finish, when the hoped-for but long-given-up goal came. Clutterbuck gave a corner to a good shot by Durrant, and the latter placing, the Rangers cleared for a moment, but Williams met the ball and scored the equalising goal with a tremendous drive. The Rangers appealed against it on the ground that it had touched Tierney, who was under the bar, but the referee pointed to the centre of the field.

Not more than a couple of minutes remained for play, and when the whistle sounded, there was a renewal of the cheers—not so frantic, perhaps, but very hearty nevertheless—which had greeted the success of Williams' brilliant shot. Thus, for the first time this season, Luton made a draw in a Southern League match.

I cannot say that, taken altogether, I was delighted with Luton's play. There was a want of smartness and determination about some of the men, and considering that they are only playing one game a week, I don't see that there is any reasonable excuse for the absence of brightness and staying power. Clifford was again the best man of the lot, and it was the immense amount of work that he put in that saved the game, apart, of course, from Ord's excellent goal keeping.

In the first half, Holdstock was evidently clean out of form, and had not Clifford practically done the work of two men, there is no knowing where we should have been. Williams, it goes without saying, was full of life and energy, but, oh, Harry, why will you sometimes dally with the ball when it would be so much better and easier to get rid of it?

McCurdy made some mistakes, but on the whole played up strongly, and White, notwithstanding that his judgment was occasionally at fault, performed splendidly. And when he went half-back he rendered a first-rate account of himself. As to the forwards, Tierney was the hardest and most successful worker, but if he were to try to do with a little less circumlocution, he would be infinitely more effective.

Blessington was rather disappointing, and Brown was sometimes good and sometimes the reverse. Durrant performed well, and if he would instil just a wee bit more dash into his play he would be hard to beat. Gray, the new man, created a very favourable impression, though he did nothing of the sensational order. He evidently knows his work, and will probably do a lot better when he has had another week or two's training.