

THE SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

WEST HAM UNITED v. LUTON TOWN.

Played at Canning Town on Saturday.

Result:—

West Ham United 2 goals.
Luton Town nil.

The teams were as follow:—

West Ham: Monteith; King and Craig;
v and McEachrane; Hunt, Grassam,
Corbett, Ratoliff, and Taylor.

Luton: Ord; Lindsay and Street; Olifford,
Cox, and Williams; Brown, Blessington, Gray,
Tierney, and Saxton.

Referee, Mr. Partridge.

Owing to the important Cup-ties being fought out at Woolwich and Tottenham, there was only a very small crowd to witness the encounter between West Ham and Luton, and the fifteen hundred spectators who assembled looked completely lost in that tremendously large area called the Memorial Grounds at Canning Town.

In this place the people are located some considerable distance from the field of play, because outside the pitch there is a tolerably wide cinder track, then a stretch of turf, and after that a banked-up cement cycle track, which is said to be nearly half-a-mile in circumference. It will therefore be seen that it would take a very big gate indeed to make much of a show here.

It was fortunate for some of us that there was not a great rush of people for the football match, because the ordinary traffic from Fenchurch-street on Saturdays appears to be much larger than the railway company know how to deal with. There are some people, I believe, who complain at their treatment on the Midland. They ought to try the London, Tilbury, and Southend trains, and then if they did not get up an illuminated address of thanks to that humane and enterprising body of gentlemen who direct the affairs of the Midland Company, I should be very greatly surprised.

When we started from Fenchurch about a quarter-past one on Saturday afternoon, there were twelve of us in a compartment constructed to accommodate ten. At the next station a young woman and two or three men got in, despite a warning that the regulation number had already been exceeded. When we stopped again our number was augmented to eighteen, and at the next station still another squeezed himself in, making ten sitting down and nine standing up, the nine being wedged in from door to door.

And this, I was told, was no unusual occurrence, but is typical of what is happening every Saturday, a statement which was borne out by the fact that all the other compartments seemed to be in the same crowded condition. Such a condition of things is a disgrace to the Company which makes money out of it, a disgrace to the Government which tolerates it, and above all, a disgrace to the people who are willing to submit to it.

To return to the match, however, I may say that Lindsay's reappearance justified the hope that Luton would succeed in gaining a point as a result of the meeting, but the hope was not realised, and never looked like being realised when the game had once commenced. That, however, was not Lindsay's fault, for Lindsay, notwithstanding his long period of enforced idleness, remained fresh to the finish, which was a good deal more than could be said of some of the others.

The Hammers won the toss, and at once swarmed to the attack, Taylor especially being conspicuous in his effort to bring about the downfall of the Luton goal. The visitors made a brief response, and Gray almost succeeded in getting through, but Monteith cleared. Then the teetotallers came again, and Ratcliff hit the post with a lovely shot, which Ord smartly cleared. Roger saved next from a header by Taylor, and after that Ratcliff again sent the ball against the upright. Not discouraged by their ill-luck, West Ham put on the pressure once more, and Taylor succeeded in steering the ball by the hitherto invincible custodian. Luton made an appeal for offside, but it was not entertained.

This seemed to put Luton on their mettle a bit, and after a strong assault, the ball came back to Cox, who sent in a very hot drive, the leather going just wide of the mark. From a corner given by Williams at the other end, Kelly headed over, and then Luton retaliated, Gray first of all sending wide, and Brown at the next attempt putting behind.

The Hammers were still inclined to press their advantage, and some faulty and rather hesitating play by Street made things look anything but lively for the Lutonians. Hunt once seemed absolutely safe for a goal, but luckily Lindsay rushed across in the nick of time, and he cleared again almost directly when Grassam looked like dribbling through.

Once Luton got within striking distance, but Tierney, who headed into Monteith's hands from centre by Brown, was given offside. For the most part the attack was left to West Ham, and it was thanks chiefly to Ord's splendid saves that they did not succeed in increasing their lead.

When hostilities were resumed, after the interval, Luton showed to rather more advantage, so far as having a greater share of the play was concerned, but they were miserably weak in front of goal. Instead of shooting or going straight away when an opening presented itself, they passed backwards and forwards for nothing in the world but the sake of passing and without making an inch of ground.

Tierney especially had some excellent chances, very often made by his own good play, but in almost every instance he dallied with the ball until the opportunity was lost. The second half had not been long in progress when an unfortunate incident happened, Taylor being grazed by Lindsay in a way that provoked the angry shouts of the crowd.

I did not see how the thing happened, but play had to be stopped for a time until Taylor came round, and when the game was finished, the Luton captain was subjected to a somewhat hostile demonstration. Taking the second half all through, Luton had more of the play than their opponents, but the latter were always the more dangerous, and Ord had some very nasty shots to deal with, a couple from Hunt having a particularly dangerous look about them.

It was certainly owing in a very great measure to Ord that West Ham were not able to add to their score, and as for the non-success of Luton, the forwards had no one to thank but themselves. In fact, if they had been playing till now, I question whether they would have had anything tangible to show for their pains.

Brown, I think, was about the best of the bunch, for though in the first half he displayed his old weakness for putting behind instead of in front of the goal, he was by far the most likely-looking one of the lot in the second moiety, and his nimble runs and very decent centres elicited favourable comments from those spectators who were in my vicinity.

Gray was the best of the inside men, and was certainly much more straightforward in his methods than the others. Tierney spoiled his play in the way already referred to, and Blessington was clean out of the hunt towards the end of the game. Saxton did nothing worthy of comment.

Williams and Clifford were easily the best of the halves, the dashing tactics of the former being the more successful perhaps, but Cox was outplayed from start to finish. His weakness no doubt had a prejudicial effect upon Gray's chances of shining, and it is to the credit of the centre-forward, perhaps, that under these circumstances he was able to make as good a show as he did.

Lindsay, as I have stated, was able to go the whole ninety minutes, and he finished up even stronger than he began. Street did not quite come up to expectations, but the very heavy going bothered him a good bit. Under more favourable circumstances, he will probably do a great deal better. Ord's display has already been spoken of, and it need only be added that he was very warmly applauded as he went to the dressing-room.

For the winners, Craig played a very strong game at back, the halves were all in excellent trim, and Ratcliff and Taylor among the forwards were almost unstoppable during that portion of the game in which West Ham did the damage. The team as a whole were smarter in every way than their opponents, and as a rule were on the ball before the others had time to think about it.

On Saturday next, Luton will be at home to Portsmouth in a Southern League match, and local lovers of football will therefore be provided with a game worth seeing. Luton team:—Ord, Lindsay and Street; Hawkes, Clifford, and Williams; Durrant, Blessington, Gray, Tierney, and Saxton. Referee, Mr. Bailey, of Leicester. Kick-off, 3.15.