

THE SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

LUTON TOWN v. BRISTOL ROVERS.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—

Bristol Rovers 1 goal.

Luton Town nil.

The teams were as follow:—

Luton: Ord; White and Lindsay; F. Hawkes, Clifford, and Williams; Durrant, Blessington, Barker, Tierney, and Brown.

Bristol: Gray; Kifford and Griffiths; Davies, Robertson, and Neilson; Williams, Jones, Beucher, Griffiths, and Paul.

Referee, Mr. H. E. Walker (Reading).

Luton and Bristol Rovers have met on three different occasions this season, and each time Luton have been worsted, though only in the case of the Cup-tie can it be said they were fairly and squarely beaten. In that game the home-sters played miles below their proper form, and fully deserved the quite unexpected drubbing administered, but in the match at Bristol early in November, and again on Saturday, they had by far the larger share of the play, and then were beaten in the end by the narrow margin of one goal.

Although the Rovers won the toss on Saturday, and had what advantage there was from a strong but somewhat puzzling wind, Luton fully held their own in the matter of general play, but the Rovers had the luck to score from a break away. In the second half the homesters, despite the absence of Clifford, who got hurt and had to retire, practically penned their opponents in for the whole forty-five minutes, and then could not score.

This disappointing result was due to the ineffectiveness of the forwards, and particularly Barker, who was almost played to a standstill at a comparatively early stage of the proceedings. But the forwards generally lacked life and dash, and though numerous opportunities presented themselves, they never looked much like being taken. I venture to say that if the two front strings could have been changed, Luton would have won, not by a single goal, but by half-a-dozen.

The game had not been started more than two or three minutes when Tierney gave Barker a splendid opening, but the centre-forward shot tamely and the ball rolled harmlessly by, just as the custodian slipped down in an endeavour to reach it. Brown next put in a couple of centres, which went a-begging, and then Clifford gave Barker another good opportunity, and again it was spoiled by weak shooting.

Boucher nearly got through at the other end, and Williams, the Bristol outside-right, obtained a corner, but Luton soon got away, and from a beautifully-placed corner by Brown, the ball was bobbing about from head to head in front of goal, until at last a foul against Williams relieved. A brief attack by the visitors, repulsed by Ord, was replied to by Luton, and Brown, beating Kifford in pretty style, got right up to the mouth of goal, when one of the Rovers got his leg in front of him. The spectators appealed for a penalty, but it was not given.

A minute or two later, Paul showed up with a smart run, and putting in a beautiful centre, Williams (the Bristol man) got his head to it just against the post, and Ord had no possible chance, except to appeal for offside. But though the referee made more than one mistake during the afternoon, I think he was right in this instance in giving the goal.

Luton made a vigorous response, and after Barker had failed to take advantage of an opening, Durrant secured a clear chance, but unfortunately Blessington took the kick, and the ball went wide of the mark. Then a curious thing happened. Brown was deliberately fouled by Kifford apparently within the twelve-yards' line, and the linesman put up his flag and the referee blew his whistle—and gave a foul against Luton. The linesman called attention to the mistake, and the whistle-holder thereupon threw the ball up, a solution of the difficulty which was not generally appreciated.

Just before the interval, Blessington had the chance of a life-time. Williams nicely placing a free kick, and Griffiths clean missing the ball, leaving Blessington with an open goal. The Luton inside-right might have walked the ball in, but instead of doing that he shot hurriedly, and Gray just succeeded in punching out.

In order that the visitors might catch the 5.15 train to London, the teams crossed over at once, and play was proceeded with. Bristol were the first to attack, and Ord saved from Griffiths, the inside left. Then Brown got away, and put the ball right across the mouth of goal, where nothing but a little dash on the part of Barker seemed to be necessary to enable him to score, but the dash was not forthcoming, the effort being delayed until it was too late.

A bouncing shot by Blessington was just tipped over the corner by Gray, but nothing came of the corner, nor of the one which the custodian gave directly afterwards to a fine shot by Brown, though there was a lot of pushing by the visitors in their anxiety to clear from a centre by Durrant. It was just after this that the accident happened to Clifford. He was making a desperate rush for the ball to prevent it going over the line, and fell down twisting his knee, and having to be assisted off the field.

Luton now played the one back game, White taking Clifford's place, and they played it so effectively that the visitors seldom got over the half-way line and when they did they were almost invariably pulled up for offside. But, notwithstanding the fact that they were continually pressing, Luton could not score, the efforts of the forwards seeming to get more and more feeble, and the game ended in a very lucky win for the visitors by a single goal.

Nothing much need be said in further criticism of the players. There was little or no fault to be found with the defence, except that Hawkes appeared to tire a bit towards the finish, but one could hardly be surprised at that. All things considered, he plays remarkably well. The great weakness, as I have said, was with the forwards, Brown alone showing to anything like advantage. If all the others had been as smart as Roland, Luton would have won easily. Tierney was not up to anything like the previous Monday's form, and the right wing was not conspicuous for the brightness of its play. The visitors, on the other hand, depended for their success upon the dash of the forwards, who, whenever they found an opening, went for goal in a particularly energetic and business-like way.