

Football.

The Southern League.

PORTSMOUTH v. LUTON TOWN.

Played at Portsmouth on Saturday. Result:

Portsmouth	1 goal.
Luton Town	nil.

The teams were as follow:—

Portsmouth: Reilly; Turner and Wilkie; Blyth, Stringfellow, and A. Cleghorn; Marshall, Cunliffe, Beddingfield, W. Smith, and S. Smith.
Luton: Ord; Lindsay and Sharp; Hawkes, White, and Williams; Durrant, Blessington, Tierney, and Colvin.

Referee, Mr. H. J. Gilroy (Maidenhead).

Seeing that last season Luton were beaten at both times of asking by Portsmouth, first on Pompey's ground by a couple of goals to nil and then at Luton by four goals to two, there could not have been much hope for the Straw-players on Saturday, except on the supposition that Portsmouth had deteriorated or that Luton had "come on." Bearing in mind that Portsmouth, although just beaten on Kettering's peculiar ground, had vanquished Southampton both at home and away, there did not appear to be much in the first theory, and consequently any improvement in the play must necessarily be due to a levelling-up on the part of Luton.

As a matter of fact, there was a most decided improvement in the football, the game being of a very even character all the way through, and this seems to justify the opinion of those who hold that Luton are a much stronger lot to-day than they were a year ago. A report in a London morning paper would lead one to the conclusion that the increased strength shows itself in an undesirable form, but that report, I am assured, is altogether wide of the mark, for though the game was vigorously contested, there was no undue roughness either on the one side or the other.

The latter view is entirely borne out by the report in a Portsmouth paper, which is now lying before me, for though that report extends over nearly two columns, and includes some notes on the game, there is not a word as to roughness from beginning to end. Other accounts also do not mention such a thing, and a very conclusive argument against it is the fact that in the second half Luton were quite as freely cheered by the spectators as the home team.

There was a big crowd to see the match, the spectators numbering about 9,000, and the gate receipts amounting to just over £265. The homesters won the toss, and Luton had to face a slight breeze, but notwithstanding this, they were the first to attack, and Blyth gave a corner. Durrant placed, and Portsmouth got away, and a dash by Marshall resulted in a corner at the other end. This was well placed, and Beddingfield headed just by.

The Portsmouth right wing again got going, but were repulsed, and for a time the ball was kept travelling from end to end. Eventually Colvin beat Turner in a tussle, and Wilkie was only just able to rush across and clear in the nick of time. After Durrant had failed to make the most of an opening afforded him by Brown, Portsmouth attacked strongly, and ultimately Cunliffe scored with a capital shot from a fine centre by Marshall.

This was twelve minutes from the start, and naturally the homesters were much elated. Portsmouth continued to attack, and following upon one or two ineffective efforts on the left, Marshall got in a beautiful shot, which was well negotiated by Ord. Luton then retaliated with great spirit, and after Reilly had dealt with a singer from Durrant, a very exciting time ensued in the vicinity of the Portsmouth goal, and Reilly made a remarkable save from Tierney. He could not get the ball away, however, and for some moments it was bobbing about in front of the home goal in most tantalising fashion, until at last Tierney handled.

Play was then transferred to the other end, but thanks to the strong defence offered, particularly by Lindsay and Ord, Pompey failed to make any further impression. Luton, after beating off their opponents, took up the running on their own account, and Durrant very nearly did the trick, but Turner just succeeded in getting his head to the ball and averted the danger, whilst on another occasion the Luton outside-right shot high over. Continuing the pressure, Luton gave the home defence a very warm time of it, and once, from a centre by Durrant, Colvin looked certain to score, but Reilly saved splendidly. Portsmouth replied and forced a couple of corners, but when the interval arrived the score remained unaltered.

Tierney, it should be stated, had been off the field twice during the first half, owing to a badly-cut hand, but he turned out with the others on the re-start. For a time the play favoured the home team, and once Sharp nearly headed through his own goal, the ball going against the crossbar. Cunliffe and Beddingfield tried hard to put it through, the latter again hitting the crossbar, and Marshall had a good opportunity, but failed to take it.

Luton promptly responded and forced a corner, as a result of which Blessington succeeded in netting the ball, but the point was disallowed for offside. A centre by Steve Smith at the other end looked dangerous, but Beddingfield was not successful in his effort, and shots by Cunliffe on the one side and Blessington on the other were the most conspicuous features of the play during the next few minutes.

Once again Luton put the pressure on, and Brown had hard luck with a good shot from long range, which swerved in and struck the crossbar, and soon afterwards the centre-forward nearly got through, but was pulled up at the last moment by Turner, whilst Reilly next ran out and spoiled Durrant when the latter appeared to have the goal at his mercy.

Just before the finish, Portsmouth lost the services of Stringfellow, who had to be assisted off as the result of a collision. In the little time that remained, Luton were every bit as good as the home team, as they were indeed all the way through, but efforts on both sides were fruitless, and at the call of time Portsmouth were left in possession of the two League points, won by the narrow margin of a single goal.

The "Portsmouth Evening News," in its comments on the game, remarks:—"It was a good hard game, and Portsmouth were not allowed to emerge victorious without a vigorous struggle. It must be conceded that Luton have got together a strong combination—far stronger than people have given them credit for.

"The game was not so attractive to watch as either of the Southampton matches, although there was plenty of life and incident.

"The Portsmouth attack showed a great improvement on their display of last Saturday. Although there was still a looseness at times, it will disappear as the season progresses and the men get more into each other's style of play.

"Both sides missed opportunities, and it is a good job for the home team that the Strawplaiters did not turn all their chances to account, or it would have been all up with Portsmouth's unsullied home record.

"The Luton defence was undoubtedly very reliable, and the visitors were always quick to get the ball away when being pressed. The home defence also was generally sound, the halves working well in unison and the backs bringing off some fine clearances. Reilly also performed well, as did his 'opposite number,' Ord."

Altogether, I think Luton people have every reason to feel gratified at the result of Saturday's match, for it seems to show distinctly that Luton are a very much improved team. Why, even in the palmiest days of Luton football, the Club's representatives could not have been depended upon to visit such a lot as Portsmouth and escape with a one-goal defeat.

As a matter of fact, a draw would not have flattered Luton at all, taking the general run of the play into consideration. With the exception of Williams, who was not at his best, and Tierney, who was hurt, Luton were in much better condition than their rivals, and were going a great deal stronger when Stringfellow got hurt. The ten minutes' breathing space afforded them enabled the Portsmouth players to get round a bit and render a better account of themselves.

As to the merits of the players, neither custodian made a mistake, and both did some excellent work. Lindsay shared with Wilkie the honours at back, though Sharp put in some smart play, whereas Turner, who partnered Wilkie, was very weak. At half-back, White showed much improved form, and in the second half Beddingfield was completely bottled up. Hawkes also performed well. Forward, the right wing on either side was seen to advantage, but Blessington was as good as any forward on the field, albeit Marshall, the Portsmouth outside-right, was a terror when he got going. Colvin played well, but Brown was inclined to shoot at too long a range. On the whole, it was Luton's best display up to date.

I understand that there were very nearly two fatalities in connection with the Portsmouth match. The cut to Tierney's hand, which was sustained twenty minutes from the start, was a very bad one, and an artery seems to have been severed, for the unfortunate player lost an immense quantity of blood. After it had been dressed, however, he resumed play, but once more had to retire. He was off a quarter of an hour, but came on again, and in the second half, despite the advice of the other man, he insisted upon playing, although when he commenced to run, the wound again began to bleed.

With indomitable pluck, Tierney stuck to his work, but he was in a very exhausted state at the finish. After the match, he and Blessington

were having warm baths, when Blessington noticed something wrong with his fellow-player, and going to his assistance, found that he had fainted in the bath. He was thus in a very dangerous position, the water being over his chin, and but for Blessington's timely help the result must have been disastrous. The other players were in the dressing-room adjoining.

The other alarming incident was in connection with Stringfellow's injury, which followed upon a collision with Tierney. When the Portsmouth player was down, a bottle of what was thought to be brandy was given to him, but he had no sooner taken a drink than he exclaimed that he was poisoned, and it was found that the bottle contained not brandy but lotion. An emetic of some kind was administered, and the poor fellow was at once taken to a doctor, who attended to him, and he is now little the worse for his startling experience.

In the other Southern League matches, Wellesborough justified the good opinion formed of them at Luton by entertaining and beating Millwall by 2 goals to 1, whilst Watford, on the other hand, were unexpectedly beaten at home by Reading by 2 goals to nil. Watford, however, were unfortunate in losing the services of Harvey, their centre-forward, soon after the start. At Northampton, Southampton were victorious by 2 goals to 1, New Brompton at home beat Bristol Rovers by 3 to nil, Kettering beat Swindon (who had a weak team out) by 2 goals to 1, and West Ham beat Brentford by 2 to nil.

On Saturday, Luton will be at home to Swindon, and after the excellent display at Portsmouth, I shall look with some confidence to the annexation of a couple of League points at Swindon's expense. The kick-off will take place at four o'clock.

On the authority of a Bedford paper, I stated that among those who had signed on for Queen's Works, Bedford, were T. Hawkes and H. Farr. The statement was made in the journal in question without any reservation whatever. I now learn that neither of these players has signed for the Queen's. Hawkes, I believe, is likely to play for the Luton Amateurs, whilst Farr is still identified with the Town Reserves.

Last week I referred to certain remarks in the "Herts Express" anent the Bedfordshire Football Association and Cup Competition, and I now learn that Mr. G. W. Walker, the hon. sec. of the Association, has addressed a letter to the journal on the subject, pointing out "one or two very glaring inaccuracies," and enclosing a copy of the rules of both the Association and the Cup Competition.

Mr. Walker says: "First you state that 'the management of the Association has from its formation been in the hands of Lutonians.' One cannot be surprised at that, for out of the 46 clubs affiliated last season, 24 were from Luton and immediate neighbourhood. But the real business of the Association is conducted by an executive of six members, two only last season being resident in Luton.

"Again, you refer to the Luton Reserves being a professional team. Allow me to inform you that Barker is the only professional in that team. You will see by our rules that professionals are debarred from taking part in the Cup Competition. Besides, study the following list, and you will see the absurdity of your remark. The Cup Competition commenced in 1895-6, and was won by Luton Montrose, in 1896-7 it was won by Dunstable Town, in 1897-8 by Luton Town Reserves, in 1898-9 by Luton Falcon, in 1899-00 by Bedford Montrose, and in 1900-1 by Luton Town Reserves.

"Wherein, then, consists the gift to the Luton Town Reserves?" After referring to the erroneous impression gathered by the writer of the notes in question from a remark made at the annual meeting of the Association, Mr. Walker continues: "I must, however, thank you for your concluding suggestion. Nothing would delight the officials more than the affiliation of all clubs and their consequent attendance at the annual meetings. We are desirous and always have been that the fullest discussion should be given to all matters affecting the work of the Association, and it is our wish, yea, and our aim, not to emulate the example of Hertfordshire, but to keep everything aboveboard. The one aim and object in view is not individual interest, but the utilitarian principle of the greatest good for the greatest number, and the thorough protection of the weaker and junior clubs from oppression by stronger and senior organisations."

The members of the Luton Amateur Football Club were entertained on Saturday at Wardown by their President, Mr. Halley Stewart. A most enjoyable afternoon was spent at tennis, bowls, and billiards, every courtesy and kindness being shown by Mr. Stewart's family. At seven o'clock the company assembled on the lawn, and the Hon. Sec. (Mr. W. H. Leete) proposed a vote of thanks to Mr. Stewart and family for their kindness. Mr. G. Warren seconded in a few well-chosen words, and the company then dispersed.

The monthly meeting of the Management Committee of the South-Eastern League was held at the Mitre, when all the clubs were represented except Queen's Park Rangers and Hitchin. The officers objected to by the F.A. tendered their resignations, which were accepted with regret. It was resolved not to fill the vacancies at present; also to ask the F.A. if the representatives of the London clubs, who in some cases are delegates to the S.L. and W.L., are debarred from acting on this League. Referees for October matches were afterwards appointed. Mr. G. W. Simmons will referee in the match Luton Reserves v. Hitchin on Oct. 12th, and Mr. A. Wise will officiate on Oct. 26th when the Town Reserves are due at St. Albans.

Stuart Rangers F.C. open their season's fixtures on Saturday next, when they play St. Peter's F.C. at Bedford.