

Football.

The Southern League.

LUTON TOWN v. SWINDON.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—

Luton Town	3 goals.
Swindon	nil.

The teams were as follow:—

Luton—Ord; Lindsay and Sharp; Hawkes, White, and Williams; Durrant, Blessington, Brown, Tierney, and Colvin.

Swindon—Menham; Downie and Vernon; Richardson, Logan, and Codling; Cowan, Bradshaw, Pettican, Becton, and Oakley.

Referee, Mr. A. Peters (Kettering); linesmen, Messrs. Belsten (Walthamstow), and Leaning (Eltham).

At four o'clock on Saturday, the time announced for the kick-off, the gate prospects were not encouraging, the crowd on the terraces on the Dunstable-road ground being one of very small proportions. But the Swindon players, like the spectators, were rather late in turning out, and when the kick-off actually took place—some ten minutes after the advertised time—the people round the ropes made a much more respectable show in point of numbers.

Swindon of late years have been on the down grade, and when they came last season to play the return match, Luton had to offer them a substantial pecuniary inducement in order to get them to fulfil their obligation. They have made a fresh effort this season, but the fates so far have been unkind, and it was not expected they would get much satisfaction out of Saturday's match.

Neither did they, except the satisfaction which arises from the plucky fighting of an uphill battle. It is the sort of satisfaction to which the Boers are entitled in their prolonged and desperate struggle to maintain their independence, but unfortunately many of us are not men enough to concede them even that. But that is quite another story, and one into which I will not enter now.

Luton were confidently expected to bag a brace of points at Swindon's expense, and in this they were ultimately successful, but not until Swindon had done their level best to prevent it. Indeed, there were times when a little luck might have made Swindon's efforts unpleasantly threatening to Luton's superiority, for though the latter were all over the better team, they were exceedingly slow in turning their opportunities to account.

The fact of it is that when the Luton defence were putting in every ounce, and when the halves were working as I have seldom seen halves work, the forwards were content to indulge in very pretty play without showing that dash and determination which are necessary in the vicinity of goal to make attack effective. Then when the forwards were inclined to take matters more seriously, the half-backs were suffering somewhat from their previous overwork.

Luton started with the advantage of the breeze, and Menham was soon called upon, first having to save a header from Tierney and then a clipping shot from Hawkes. Luton then got down on the left in very taking style, and Colvin put in a good centre, whilst Hawkes and Blessington were next conspicuous, but without result. The visitors made a brief incursion, and then Colvin, receiving a fine pass from Williams, went away at a spanking pace, but was fouled by Downie, and down he went. From the free kick White obtained and sent the ball just by the top corner of the goal.

The Swindon defence was unexpectedly strong, and Luton were again and again frustrated in their efforts to get near goal. Once Colvin looked like scoring, but his shot, behind which there was a lot of powder, cannoned off Downie's head, much to the detriment of the head. Two or three corners for Luton followed, but they were not improved upon, and then at last, when from a well-placed kick by Sharp, Brown scored what looked like a good goal, the spectators were chagrined to find it disallowed for offside.

White at this time was particularly distinguishing himself by the tremendous amount of work he was putting in, and Hawkes was also playing a great game, but somehow or other all the attempts of the forwards seemed to go awry. Menham, of course, was pretty well tested, but not nearly so severely as he ought to have been, considering the openings that presented themselves. A grand shot by Colvin struck the bar and went over, and Brown and Blessington put in several, whilst even Lindsay had a try, but all to no purpose.

Eventually, however, when the game was about thirty minutes old, Codling, who had been repeatedly going for Hawkes in an unfair manner, fouled him again, and from the free kick, Lindsay back-heeled to Sharp, who shot hard and straight. Menham tried to clear, but he failed, and Brown put on the finishing touch. Then, as so often happens, the one goal was speedily followed by another, Colvin racing away almost at once and putting in a beautiful centre. Durrant returned the ball across the mouth of goal, and Brown easily scored number two.

With the exception of a couple of spirited attempts by Cowan, whose second shot went just over the bar, all the aggressive work up to half-time was done by Luton, and there were one or two pretty hard tussles in the neighbourhood of the Swindon goal. Still, the most dangerous shot was one from Brown, which Menham just managed to tip over, and from the corner, Tierney and the Luton centre-forward got in good ones, but both were successfully negotiated by Menham.

The second half does not call for much description, for though the visitors had more of the play than they had in the first half, the work of their front string was anything but brilliant, and Ord was generally well able to deal with anything that came his way. Only one goal was scored, and that fell to Luton, but it appeared to me to be a rank offside. The ball was rushed through by Brown from a centre by Durrant, and it was the centre-forward who, in my opinion, was right offside.

Menham, who appealed whenever there was a possible opportunity, was very emphatic in his remonstrance with Mr. Peters over this last goal, but the referee was obdurate and the point counted. Setting this against the one disallowed in the first half, however, perhaps matters were fairly evenly balanced. The concluding stages of the game were marred by an incident in which Sharp and Cowan figured, the latter being badly kicked by the Luton man.

It may have been a pure accident, but I am bound to say it looked suspiciously like a case of what is popularly called "getting your own back," and if so, I can only say it was most reprehensible, for the game ought to be played without anything of this sort. Of course, I know it is very aggravating to be badly treated by an opponent, but to reply in a similar way is only to make matters worse, and especially so, because generally speaking the reply has a more deliberate look about it.

I think I have already made it tolerably clear that Luton were much the better team, and in that respect it need only be added that their superiority ought to have been marked by at least double the number of goals. There was no really weak spot in the home team, but at the same time the efforts of the forwards seemed to lack sting.

Colvin was in great form whenever he got the chance, and might very well have been provided with a little more work, but Tierney, of course, was not at his best, and the only wonder was that he was able to play at all. Brown was generally to the fore when there was an attack to be made, and yet somehow or other I could not get away from the impression that a little more smartness in the centre would have made a world of difference. Blessington and Durrant both performed well, but it is just a question whether the passing on the right wing was not a trifle overdone.

Both White and Hawkes put in a tremendous amount of work in the first half, the former especially, and the way in which they got on the ball was marvellous. But, after all, there are limits to human endurance, and so much high pressure was bound to have its effect later on. Williams played a very good game all through. Both backs were in capital form, Sharp showing a lot of dash, whilst Lindsay proved once again that he takes a lot of beating. But the captain is at his best when he does not try to make use of his weight. Ord, it need scarcely be said, did everything that was required of him in smart and workmanlike fashion.

As to the visitors, the defence was far and away the best part of the team, and the custodian, backs, and half-backs, Codling excepted, deserve every credit for the gallant stand they made. I make an exception in Codling's case, because he was not content to play the game against one who was less bulky than himself and who gave him no provocation whatever.

Watford came a cropper at Southampton on Saturday, being beaten by five goals to nil. Portsmouth, on the other hand, visited Millwall and were victorious by three goals to two. At Reading, the Spurs played a drawn game of one goal each and at New Brompton West Ham effected a pointless draw. Kettering at home, beat Brentford, who were not at full strength, by three goals to one. The surprise of the afternoon, however, was the victory of Northampton at Bristol, the Rovers being beaten by two goals to one.

The Luton first team are due at Brentford on Saturday, and I am hoping that they will

manage to pick up a couple of League points. As it is Brentford's first Southern League match at home, however, they may be depended upon to go for all they are worth, and Luton will need to be on their very best behaviour in order to attain success.

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Whilst the first team are away, a very interesting match will be provided on the Dunstable-road ground, the Reserves having to entertain the West Ham United Reserves in the South-Eastern League. The Hammers, it will be remembered, beat the Reserves at Canning Town, and the Luton men are very keen on reversing the verdict on this occasion. Kick-off at four o'clock.

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The prospects for Luton's first Cup-tie of the season, to be played on Saturday week, are not very bright, General Gatacre being due at Luton on that afternoon to distribute war medals. Unfortunately, the ceremony will take place just about the time of the match, and the consequence must be that the attendance at the latter will suffer very materially. If the kick-off could be made an hour later, it might work out all right, as the crowd, or the football portion of it, might then go from the West Ward Recreation Ground, where the distribution will probably take place, to the football field.

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The annual general meeting of the shareholders of the Luton Football and Athletic Company is fixed to take place to-morrow (Friday) week. Agenda: To receive report and balance-sheet, declare a dividend, etc., etc.

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Whilst a football match was in progress at Markyate on Saturday afternoon, between Markyate and Dunstable, a hare ran on to the field of play, and after an exciting chase, in which both teams joined, was captured and killed. The match was afterwards resumed, Dunstable winning by five goals to one.