

LUTON v. SOUTHAMPTON.

Played at Southampton on Saturday. Result:—

Luton 1 goal.
Southampton 1 goal.

The following were the teams:—

Luton—Thompson; Bennett and McEwen; F. Hawkes, White, and R. Hawkes; Durrant, Eaton, McKee, Storey, and Allsopp.

Southampton—Clawley; Robertson and Molyneux; Meston, Bowman, and Lee; Evans, Wood, Harrison, Fraser, and Turner.

Referee, Mr. A. Millward (Leyton); linesmen, Sergt. S. Ross and Mr. R. Pook.

For the second year in succession Luton were called upon to open their Southern League programme by a visit to the champions of the previous season. Such an ordeal would daunt many teams, but I can safely say that when the players left Luton, accompanied by a select but enthusiastic band of supporters, they had no idea of allowing the Saints to walk away with the points. It is a long journey to Southampton, the railway arrangements were rather awkward, and to make matters worse the South-Western train was half-an-hour behind its time.

Thus the team did not get to their hotel for lunch until an hour and half before the time of kick-off. On the journey down many evidences were to be seen of the abnormal rainfall this summer (!), and knowing the low-lying nature of the pitch at the Dell, it was expected the turf would be on the soft side. An early inspection, however, reassured the officials, and with the weather improving every minute, prospects of a fine struggle were indulged in.

At Portsmouth the previous Wednesday the Saints had given their three new stars a trial, but of these only Clawley figured on the card for Saturday. Therefore with the exception of the goalkeeper they had exactly the same side that so brilliantly won the Southern League shield last season. It appears Houlker was injured against his old club, while with Evans back at outside-right, Harrison resumed his position as pivot, to the exclusion of Hedley. I found that the feeling in Southampton is favourable to this construction of the front rank, so that it can be confidently stated our opponents were practically at full strength with the possible exception of Houlker. Anyhow, it could not weaken them materially to turn out a side that knew each other's play to an inch for the opening game of the season.

Promptly to time, Harrison kicked off for Southampton, McEwen having been lucky in guessing the fall of the coin, although there was little to be gained thereby. Right away from the commencement Luton gave the locals a taste of favours to come, for Durrant and Eaton took the ball down in fine style, the former especially showing to advantage against Molyneux, but his final effort had the misfortune to hit the side of the net. Still the Saints were kept hard at it defending, and were compelled to concede a corner within two or three minutes of the start. Eventually Turner got possession of the ball, and transferred the play by a grand run on the left. Bennett did his best to stop him, but could not quite manage it; still he covered Thompson to such purpose that Turner could not get his shot in, the ball passing out wide of the goal-post.

After a spell of midfield work, Turner and Fraser made the running on the left, and the outside man put in a good centre to Harrison, but he allowed our "Mac" to hustle him off the ball, greatly to the disgust of the crowd, who had made certain of a goal. Naturally, these rather close attentions on the part of the home forwards scarcely suited McEwen, and to relieve matters he tried a long shot on his own, which Clawley succeeded in reaching. Luton's left wing at this stage were giving the Saints plenty to do, and Allsopp was pulled up for a foul near the corner flag—a rather doubtful ruling, by the way. Coming through again, Allsopp gave Storey a nice pass, but the ex-Bury player did not make full use of the opportunity.

Harry Wood was undoubtedly the prime mover on behalf of the home side whenever any aggressive work was on hand. He almost succeeded in opening the score on one occasion, as Bob Hawkes was temporarily away on the opposite wing. I know it is hard for Bob to leave the ball, but sometimes it does not pay to travel too far away from your post, even if you are able to beat two or three players, the ball, as in this case, being returned before he could resume his proper position.

Up to twenty-five minutes, neither side could claim any advantage, but just here a disaster befel our boys. Harrison was observed to be making for the ball near the centre of the field, and McEwen made a dash also, and although they arrived on the scene practically together, the Southampton centre-forward just managed to scrape through with the sphere, and before anyone else could tackle him, let drive at Thompson with a good shot, which was just out of the reach of Luton's custodian.

Of course, the crowd cheered this opening goal, but I think mingled with their expression of satisfaction was a certain amount of relief, for it could not be said they deserved the lead on the run of the play. Indeed, the goal itself was an extremely lucky point, for Harrison himself appeared scarcely to know where the ball was until he found himself just past McEwen.

I have known times when an opening goal has taken the heart out of the attacking brigade on the losing side. But it was not so on Saturday, for from this point until the interval the play veered round greatly in favour of the Blues. Within two minutes Durrant got the better of Molyneux, who missed the ball altogether, but Storey had the bad luck to strike the cross-bar from Jack's centre. This was distinctly hard lines for Luton, who at least deserved to score as much as Harrison had done.

But it was not long before the dozen Lutonians among the spectators had a hearty cheer all to themselves, for McKee taking a pass from Eaton placed out nicely to Durrant and made towards Clawley. Durrant ran through in great style, and planted the ball near the post. Clawley just got to it, but with McKee in close attendance could not get it away. The leather travelled along towards the centre of the goal-mouth, and Storey had only to touch through. It was a well-worked-for-goal, and really much in advance, so far as merit is concerned, to that which gave Southampton their lead five minutes earlier.

Right up to half-time Luton were giving great anxiety to the home defence, and the crowd were extremely anxious. With four or five minutes to go, Eaton made a dash and robbed Molyneux just as he was about to tip the ball to his partner. What is more, the ex-Fosse forward was observed to have forced his way through and it looked all over bar the shouting, but Eaton had hardly recovered from a stumble when he took his shot and greatly to the home crowd's delight the ball struck the bar. However, Luton were not done with, and within a minute Durrant banged the sphere into the goal-mouth again. But once more Clawley's charge was saved by the crossbar, and thus three times did Luton miss by inches only during the initial half. Soon after this the referee called the players off with the score still standing 1-1.

In the second half, after a spell of attack on the part of Luton, the Saints settled down and were more dangerous. But our defence was all there, and gave no quarter. McEwen fouled Evans about thirty yards out, and Mr. Millward promptly awarded a free kick. Robertson put in a beauty, but Thompson proved himself master of the new rules and saved right under the bar by giving a corner. This was placed nicely and after several players had tried their best, Turner got his head to the ball and almost put by. Indeed, there was a general shout and not a few hats went up, but it passed just outside.

Affairs were rather lively, both McEwen and Thompson having their eyes badly cut during a melee, but after a short stoppage the game continued. Just after, a more serious accident arose, for Thompson was badly floored by Lee after he had got the ball away. Our goalie lay in the goal-net helpless for a minute, and it looked a bad business for Luton, but although pressed to leave the field by the referee, Thompson stuck to his post as soon as he recovered. Up to this point the game had been contested in the best of spirit, but two or three players were losing their heads, and fouls were more frequent.

Lee and Durrant were by no means on the best of terms, and when the Southampton half-back pulled Durrant over, our right-winger did not relish his attention and retaliated, coming under the ban of the referee in consequence. But try as they would, Bennett, McEwen, and Thompson were not to be beaten. Some two or three minutes before the final whistle a diversion was made on the part of the Luton vanguard, and McKee succeeded in getting the ball past Clawley for the second time, but unfortunately he handled before shooting and no score resulted. The game thus finished with the same score as at the interval.

Southampton will be among the top sawyers, I am certain, and it was a decided success to share the points at the Southern port. Their officials were the first to confess that we fully deserved our single point, and at the interval acknowledged their team were lucky to be equal in goals. They carried far more weight than Luton, and towards the close used it to some tune. In Molyneux they have a fine back, who does not resort to shady tricks, while their middle line are a fine trio, although Lee could restrain himself with positive advantage to the game. Forward, Wood and Turner were most in evidence the former being a marvel considering the years he has been playing.

As to the Luton team, when all did their best I do not care to individualise, but Thompson quite played up to his reputation, and we shall have no cause to grumble if he continues to keep his charge in similar manner. At back both Bennett and McEwen did excellently, and promise to make this line as feared as the old McCartney and McEwen combination. With five such forwards opposed to them, the half-backs were kept busy, White especially doing well. In the front rank Durrant was undoubtedly the star, and Molyneux had a sultry time. But right along they appear to be falling into each other's play, and after a game or so will prove a good scoring combination. McKee gave his comrades numerous fine passes, and Storey in particular must thank our burly centre for using his weight in holding the opposing defenders off.

The goal netted at Southampton on Saturday was the first one Luton have obtained at the Dell, for it was on the old Southampton ground the others were scored. Since our re-entry to the Southern League the score at Southampton

for his previous experience on this ground was when he visited it as a Northampton player, and the Saints won by 11-0 and 7-0, making no fewer than 18 goals in two games.

The comments of some of the London and other papers on the match may not be uninteresting:—

The "Standard": Luton found Southampton a little below strength. Nevertheless, the visitors gave a capital exhibition, and the draw which resulted was by no means a lucky one for them, for they are a considerably improved side.

The "Daily Mail": Durrant, Storey, and McEwen did the best work for Luton, who were, perhaps, unlucky not to win the match outright.

The "Daily Chronicle": There was a surprise in the Southern League when Luton made a goal draw at Southampton. The inference is that Luton have come on, rather than the Saints have gone back. Indeed the Strawplaiters have a fine side on paper, and there may not be a better pair of backs in the country than Bennett, of Northampton, and McEwen, whose experience was fully demonstrated at the crisis on Saturday.

The "Morning Leader": Amongst the surprise packets in the Southern League on Saturday were Fulham and Luton. Luton must be a much better lot than we thought, and our Southampton man, whose "Football Star" notes were full of such pleasing assurance, acknowledges that the Strawplaiters were every bit as good as their hosts. That is splendid.

Southampton have soon given evidence that their inability to beat Luton was due to no falling off on their part, for on Monday they entertained and beat Portsmouth in a Western League match by five goals to two. Harrison, the Saints' centre-forward, whose substitution on Saturday for Hedley gave some of the scribes an excuse for saying Southampton were not at full strength, scored four of the goals against Pompey.