

Football.

The English Cup.

HITCHIN v. LUTON.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—

Luton	2 goals
Hitchin	1 goal.

The teams were as follow:—

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

Hitchin—Cooper; Jeakings and Allen; Hales, Smith, and Stimpson; Taylor, Payne, Barker, Cannon, and Pearce.

Referee, Mr. A. Avery (London).

Cup-tie form is proverbially an uncertain quantity, and it is always dangerous to regard results as foregone conclusions. Still, if there was a game on Saturday in which it would have been excusable to look upon the issue as absolutely assured, it was that between Luton and Hitchin, for whilst the Lutonians are the only undefeated club in the First Division of the Southern League, the Hertfordshire team has been regarded as unworthy of inclusion even in the Second Division.

Hitchin, indeed, modestly bowed to what was regarded as the inevitable by surrendering their right to play on their own ground in consideration of a guarantee of £25, and for Luton, of course, the only question was as to how many goals they would pile up against their unfortunate victims. So much confidence did they feel on this point, that I am credibly informed that an arrangement was entered into by which, when the game had been made absolutely safe, McEwen and Bennett would change places with a couple of the forwards and so provide a little fun.

That arrangement was never carried into effect, and the seventeen or eighteen hundred spectators, instead of being in the mood for amusement, were on tenterhooks for almost the whole ninety minutes. It shows once again how very risky a business it is of going through that all-too-familiar process of counting the chickens before they are hatched.

As a matter of fact, instead of having exercises in mental arithmetic submitted to them by reason of a bewildering succession of goals, there was for some time more than a remote possibility of Luton actually being beaten. Turner's equalising goal came just soon enough to save the situation, and had it been the other way about, as more than once looked likely, the demoralisation of the homesters would have been complete.

Let it be at once said that on the play Hitchin's unexpected bid for victory was no mere fluke. The goal they obtained in the first two or three minutes was a positively brilliant one, Pearce finishing up a fine run on the right with a lovely centre, to which Taylor put paid with a shot that struck the inside of the bar and glanced off into the net, giving Thompson no chance whatever.

Of course, we all thought it was a mere flash in the pan; that Luton, having commenced with a little fooling and been taken unawares, would soon put matters right. But, alas, we had to wait and wait, and the longer we waited the less hopeful did the prospects become. Hitchin, I should say, never had played such a game before, and in all probability they never will play such a game again. Their early lead gave them strength and confidence, and they not only played hard but played well too.

The Luton men were completely knocked off their perch by the bustling methods of their opponents, who did not stop to admire the niceties of short passing and dribbling in which the Luton forwards foolishly indulged, but went straight for the ball whenever and wherever they saw it, and as often as not they got their kick in.

Of course, Luton were generally on the aggressive, but their tactics were sadly at fault, and their repeated failures were simply exasperating. Jeakings, in particular, was a terrible stumbling-block, and he quite bottled up the Luton left wing, whose efforts were of a very milk-and-water character. Cooper was also very safe in goal.

Once Allsopp hit the crossbar with a good shot, and it was followed by a pretty warm attack, but Hitchin defended with great pluck, and when half-time arrived, they had the satisfaction of retaining their goal-to-nil lead. It may be a further satisfaction to them to know that this was the first time that Luton had been a goal to the bad at half-time in any serious match this season.

In the second half, Luton shaped a lot better, though their work in front of goal still left a lot to be desired. A centre by Fred Hawkes ought easily to have been converted, but the left wing missed it badly, and Storey soon afterwards had a fine chance of getting through, but put in a long shot which caused the custodian very little trouble. Following a corner placed by Bob Hawkes, McEwen returned to the mouth of goal and Eaton headed against the bar, and a little later a brilliant shot by Bob was tipped over by Cooper.

The visitors made a couple of good runs to the other end, and from the second of these they came very near adding to their score, for Thompson was unable to clear from a centre from the left wing, and the spectators endured agonies for one brief moment while the ball hovered in the mouth of goal. Luckily, someone cleared in the nick of time, or it would have been all up with Luton.

It was just after this that the turning-point came in the homesters' favour, Turner taking a centre from Allsopp and scoring a good goal. The relief this brought to the Luton players was seen by the excited way in which they clustered round Turner and wrung his hand, not only by way of congratulating him, but as a manifestation of their delight. Fancy Luton, the leaders, practically speaking, of the Southern League, shaking hands at their success in scoring a goal against poor little Hitchin!

This equalising point came after twenty minutes' play, or, to put it in another way, it had taken Luton just over an hour to get this one point. The Hitchin goal was repeatedly threatened afterwards, and eventually Storey seized an opening near the half-way line, and going for all he was worth, out-distanced the backs, and put on the winning point with a shot that gave Cooper no chance. Just before the shot was taken, Allen made a very deliberate attempt to frustrate the effort by clinging to Storey's shirt, but was happily unsuccessful.

Hitchin were not done with even yet, and in one of their assaults Thompson was penalised for carrying the ball. An anxious moment followed, but Luton smothered the free kick and averted the danger. Pearce next took a nice

pass and sent in a beautiful shot, which Thompson put over the bar, and the Luton custodian cleared again from the well-placed corner. This was the last incident of note, and Luton thus got over the biggest fright they have received this season.

As already stated, Hitchin played grandly, and there seemed scarcely a weak spot in the team. Jeakings, who learned his football at Luton, was perhaps the strongest man, and he gave an exhibition that was highly creditable to himself and extremely useful to his side. Cooper also performed well in goal. The forwards were dashing and speedy, Taylor and Pearce showing up prominently on the wings, and Barker giving a good display at centre. The halves, also, were indefatigable.

Perhaps the most convincing proof of my assertion that Hitchin were playing the game of their lives is the fact that Cox, who is supposed to be one of the best of the Luton Reserve forwards, was simply nowhere on this occasion. Storey, except for that great run of his, was painfully slow, and Turner is spoiling his effectiveness by too much circumlocution. Allsopp was sometimes good and sometimes the reverse, and it was left to Eaton to be the most business-like of the whole bunch.

Little need be said as to the defence, except that McEwen worked like a nigger at back, and his partner and Thompson both did well. The halves betrayed a little disposition to wander, and I think they would have shown to more advantage had they each been content to do his own work. I have criticised the Luton play more than I should have done because the faults so noticeable on Saturday have been observable before, and unless the men pull up in time and sternly resolve to put in all the dash they can and rigidly eschew every unnecessary embellishment, it will not be long before they lose their unbeaten certificate.

By the way, why does not Allsopp make a little more sure of his corner-kicks? On Saturday, one could hardly be sure which goal he was aiming at.

The Portsmouth "Football Mail" has some interesting notes on the forthcoming match at Luton, saying "everything points to a tremendous struggle for mastery, and in order to repeat last season's excellent performance Portsmouth will require their strongest side and to be in their best form. Up to the present Luton have only had one goal scored against them at home this season in four matches. This clearly points out Luton's chief source of strength, and when you come to analyse things it is not difficult to discover why goals have been so hard to get against the Strawplaiters this winter.

"The goalkeeper, Thompson, made a great name for himself with Bury the season they won the Cup by swamping Southampton at the Crystal Palace, and he is still regarded as a brilliant 'keeper' by those who have had the opportunity of seeing him perform lately. In front of him are Bennett, late of Northampton, and the famous 'Punch' McEwen, of Bury, and a former Lutonian. Bennett is well-known to Southern League enthusiasts. He is one of the 'stop 'em at any price' style of backs, and a fit and worthy successor to Lindsay. McEwen is a regular little fire-eater, his great forte being his tremendous (for his inches) tackling.

"This is the trio, then, which the Portsmouth forwards must negotiate if victory is to be theirs next week. The half-backs are about the same class as last season, with the brothers Hawkes (?) on the wings and White, another local, in the centre. Forward, Luton have Storey, a youngster from Bury Reserves, who is spoken well of as a centre-forward; Turner, the old Arsenal inside-left; Durrant, a fast and dangerous right-winger; Allsopp, last year's left-winger; and Eaton, an inside-right from Leicester Fosse. If Portsmouth can defeat this collection of talent, they will have made some amends for the defeat by Southampton and the consequent loss of the Southern Charity Cup. Personally, I cannot see why the same side that defeated Northampton so decisively three weeks back should not be able to account for Luton. But Pompey would stand a much better chance of being the first team to put a spoke in Luton's wheel if they had not to undertake the journey to Reading on Wednesday. This latter game is certain to be keenly fought out, and the players will not have sufficient time to fully recover from the effects of on hard struggle before they are required to turn out for another important set-to."

There were only a couple of Southern League matches on Saturday, Southampton beating Reading by 2 to 1, and Bristol Rovers gaining a victory over New Brompton. The following is the League table up to date:—

Goals