

Football.

The Southern League.

LUTON v. NORTHAMPTON.

Played at Luton on Boxing Day. Result:—

Luton	1 goal.
Northampton	nil.

The teams were as follow:—

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

Northampton—Perkins; Clark and Murrell; Neal, Griffiths, and Howe; Frost, Brown, Benlow, McIntyre, and Murray.

Referee, Mr. W. H. London.

The weather, though threatening, was decidedly favourable for this game, and the spectators rolled up in such numbers as to make the Luton directors regret very much that they had to divide the gate with the visiting club. A pooling arrangement, it appeared, had been entered into, by which Northampton were to take half the proceeds at Luton, a similar division to take place on the occasion of the return match at Northampton on Easter Monday.

The attendance on Saturday was certainly the largest this season, and there must have been over 6,000 people present. Not for a long, long time had the stand accommodation been so severely tested, and the officials had the quite unusual experience of closing the turnstile and refusing to take more money, in consequence of lack of room.

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With all these people present, many of them not being regular followers of the game, some of us were hoping that Luton would rise to the occasion and give such a display as would make the lookers-on regret that they did not more often visit the ground. The home team had everything in their favour, but alas, they altogether failed to take advantage of their opportunity.

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The forwards gave a really heartbreaking display. Attacking for fully three-parts of the game, they failed to make openings which seemed well within their reach, and when the openings did come they failed even more signally to turn them to account. I am quite ready to admit that Northampton, who started with only ten men, Clark having missed his train, played desperately hard in defence, but still, after making every allowance on that head, there was no excuse at all for Luton having to be satisfied with one goal, and that from a very unsatisfactory kind of penalty.

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In the early stages, a beautiful pass by Bob Hawkes enabled Allsopp to get in a sensational sort of centre, Perkins having some difficulty in tipping the ball over the bar. Nothing came of this or any other of the corners that fell to Luton during the game, and it must be confessed that corners have been of comparatively little value to them all through the season.

Soon afterwards, Bob Hawkes, in going for goal, was tripped on just the safe side of the penalty line, and the free kick was not turned to account. For some time after this, Luton attacked with great spirit, but Perkins was not greatly worried, a good long shot by White giving him as much trouble as any. The Cobblers got away now and then, and once Brown sent in a terrific shot, which Thompson saved and cleared in splendid style.

After Eaton, from an offside position right in front of the Northampton goal, had hit the crossbar, a scrimmage ensued upon a centre by Allsopp, and it looked any odds on Luton's success, but Perkins at last managed to effect a clearance. Two exciting incidents occurred just before the interval. In the first case Frost, eluding a dash by McEwen, was making a very dangerous-looking run, but just as he was getting into Thompson's proximity he trod on the ball and fell down. Luton immediately transferred the play to the other end, and Turner had a clear run, but being challenged by one of the backs, he shot rather wildly and sent wide of the mark.

The second half was very much a repetition of the first. Early on Turner had a glorious chance of opening the score, McKee engaging the backs and leaving his comrade with the goal at his mercy. Instead of taking the ball in, as he might easily have done, Turner trusted to his shooting powers, and his trust was not warranted by the result, for the ball went over the bar.

Allsopp threw away another opportunity by failing to meet the leather from a cross from the other wing, and if it had not been for the penalty, the probability is that the homesters could have gone on playing till now without getting the ball into the net. But before the penalty was given, Northampton gave the spectators a very anxious moment, Benbow getting absolutely clear. Thompson, however, ran out to meet him, and he shot straight at the custodian, who was loudly cheered for his clever tactics.

The penalty was given about twenty minutes from the finish, but for what it was awarded I was quite unable to see. Bob Hawkes taking the kick, added to his reputation as a sure and certain shot by successfully netting the ball, though Perkins, getting on the run directly the whistle sounded, did his best to smother the attempt.

After this, Northampton resorted to the one-back game and strengthened their attack, the battle being waged with a fierceness which made the proceedings full of excitement. There was no more scoring, but Luton were never sure of their victory until the whistle went, and Northampton had every reason to feel proud of the extremely good fight they had made.

The Luton forwards, as already stated, gave a very disappointing display, the left wing being particularly at fault, whilst the right wing was not nearly as effective as it had been in recent matches. Of the half-backs, Bob Hawkes was the best by a long way, and he really performed in splendid style. Fred was very good, but White, though active and stubborn as usual in defence, did not afford the forwards the best of support in attack.

Both backs played a dashing game—sometimes the dash was just a little more conspicuous than discretion—but Bennett would have done better had he shown less feeling. Very early in the match, he was guilty of several quite unprovoked fouls. Thompson did not have a great deal to do, but whenever tested he was found to be as smart and reliable as ever.

Perkins also showed fine form in goal for the visitors, and if Saturday's exhibition was a fair

sample of what he has been doing this season, he is in no way responsible for the Cobblers' lowly position. The Northampton defence altogether was much stronger than might have been expected, and the forwards seemed to be dangerous whenever they were allowed to get away. That being so, it was difficult to account for the fact that of fifteen matches played they had only won three.

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Mr. Millward should have refereed in Saturday's match, and was in attendance to fulfil his engagement, but being unwell the whistle was entrusted to Mr. London, whose place on the line was taken by Mr. Dockrill.

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Whilst Luton were just scraping home through the medium of a penalty kick, West Ham were rendering them very useful service by defeating Southampton, and thanks are also due to Reading for beating Plymouth. We are indebted to Tottenham for drawing with Portsmouth, but we should have liked it all the better had they got another goal and bagged the two points instead of only one.

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The gate at the match on Boxing Day realised a trifle over £164, which constitutes a record for a sixpenny gate in Luton.