

Football.

The Southern League.

LUTON v. SOUTHAMPTON

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—

Luton	1 goal.
Southampton	nil

The teams were as follow:—

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

Southampton — Clawley; Robertson and Molyneux; Lee, Bowman, and Meston; Smoker, Spence, Harrison, Fraser, and J. Turner.

Referee, Mr. A. Barker (Hanley); linesmen, Messrs. J. Foster and R. Miles (London).

It must have made the hearts of the Luton directors rejoice as their owners gazed upon the packed mass of humanity gathered four-square around the playing arena at Bury Park on Saturday afternoon. That is conjecture; but there was no doubt at all about the whole-hearted enthusiasm and satisfaction of the 7,000 spectators as they left the ground soon after four o'clock. Their favourites had gained the day by 1—0, and last season's champions were the victims.

It is true there is nothing very overwhelming about a one-goal-to-nil victory, but remembering the calibre of their opponents, and the fact that the Lutonians could claim nearly three-parts of the play, supporters of the home team felt that the win was very creditable indeed, and very, very satisfactory. With half the season gone, the Luton combination finds itself well at the top of the table, with fewer matches played than any of its nearest rivals.

As the teams took the field they were given a boisterous reception, and it is worthy of note that the local spectators were not one whit less enthusiastic in their reception of the visitors—a splendid testimony to the sportsmanlike change which has come over the game in recent years. Mac had his usual luck in winning the toss, and he chose to defend the lower half of the field, although it must be said that for once the spin of the coin gave no material advantage to either side, but it was a good omen, and as such it was received.

From the outset it was evident that, despite all the attention which had been given to the turf, it was not in a comfortable state from the players' point of view, and, as a natural consequence, there was a tendency to go about just a little gingerly in the opening stages, but this soon wore off, and in spite of an occasional slide, the game became as fast and exciting as under more normal conditions. The visitors, it may be stated, had taken the precaution to bandage their knees, in order to minimise the danger arising from falls.

After the ball had been set in motion, there were one or two sharp passes, and then, urged on by a mighty cheer, the Luton men rushed the ball up the field, but Turner, who was possibly a little strange to his new position, gave the visitors a free kick for offside when things were beginning to look dangerous for the safety of their goal. It was, however, a good beginning, and quite satisfied the onlookers that, small as the Luton men looked against their burly opponents, they were well metttled.

In the preliminary encounters, Harrison fell over White and wrenched his shoulder, but he seemed little the worse after a moment's lubrication. As the game progressed Southampton soon found the locals like a packet of needles—showing points everywhere. To Luton fell the first corner, and there was no flukiness about it either. Hardly three minutes later Clawley was called upon to fist out a stinging shot "presented with Mr. Durrant's compliments."

Southampton retaliated, and worked their way into the home quarters by a series of effective passes which took the ball right across the field, but J. Turner, to whom remained the finishing touches, had not a chance—the ubiquitous Bennett was in the way, and he both smothered the ball and his opponent's hopes of seeing Southampton one up.

Durrant, who was showing tip-top form, then put in a pretty piece of work, but he slipped at a critical moment, and the ball was soon bounding down the field again. Turner made the next sally from the opposite wing, but the opposing backs were careful to crowd him in, so that when he shot there was little chance of registering a point.

Luton were certainly having by far the best of matters, but once more they seemed haunted by that fatal inability to score. On one occasion Eaton, when well within the penalty area, passed out to his wing when it looked as though he had a clear shot before him, and, not many minutes later, Durrant put the ball into the mouth of goal, and it was headed by nearly every one of the forward line, and, in conclusion, gracefully tipped over the bar.

Southampton burst away from time to time, but it looked as though they were reserving themselves for the defensive game. Repeatedly they were soundly beaten on tactics, and when Fraser and Turner on the left, or their co-forwards on the right, got past the half-back line it was generally a case of "so far and no farther"—McEwen and Bennett were there.

The bombardment of Southampton's goal continued, and they have to thank themselves that they are possessed of an exceedingly capable custodian. Time after time, as spectators held their breath in expectation, Clawley's fist came between the ball and an open goal, or he caught or kicked as the case might be. It was disappointing, but, after all, that is half the beauty of the game.

The pressure was relieved by a foul given against Fred Hawkes, and from the kick Fraser looked dangerous, but Durrant came up the field in the nick of time, and left the aforesaid player staring blankly for the vanished ball. It was delightful to see the little local men bustling their big opponents.

Thompson was now called upon for his first serious save of the game, and, of course, he was just where he was wanted—somehow Thompson always is. A moment later Mac did an equally meritorious piece of work, coming across the field and taking the ball away from J. Turner at an anxious time. It was a taste of what Luton's little man gave them at Southampton in the old year.

A couple of fouls against Fred Hawkes just outside the penalty area made things look dan-

gerous for the homesters, but the Saints failed to make the most of their opportunities. Soon after, a foul in favour of McKee in a similar position at the opposite end of the field was taken by Bennett, who tried a greased lightning shot which just grazed the bar.

About this time, the repeated onslaughts on Clawley's charge must have made that player envy his confrere in the opposite goal. The most notable attack was by Turner, who, from long range, sent in a bouncing shot that momentarily mystified the custodian, but, although he was caught in two minds, he managed to keep it beyond the precincts. In the last few minutes of the first half the Saints' right wing tried to rush the ball past McEwen and Thompson, and Thompson had just cleared with a lofty one when the whistle blew, and the teams retired with a clean score sheet.

The second half proved much more interesting and exciting than the first, and the crowd followed with the utmost keenness every incident in the football drama being enacted before them. Play from the start was fast. No sooner was the ball in motion than the crowd discovered that Turner and Storey had changed places, the latter now playing in the outside-left position. In the previous half this wing had not been anything like so good as the right wing, and subsequent play showed the wisdom of the change. In the early exchanges Mac, in trying to negotiate Spence and Smoker, yielded a corner, this being the first the visitors had gained.

The ball was well placed from the flagstaff, but Turner headed away. It was just after this that the homesters suffered a misfortune by the temporary loss of Eaton, who was lamed and had to retire. During his absence, Storey partnered Durrant, leaving Turner with the left wing to himself.

The visitors for a time attacked with considerable persistence, and the spectators felt in rather a gloomy mood, but happily Eaton soon came out again, and though he still appeared to be under some disadvantage, he nevertheless contrived to render very useful service. He had hardly returned, however, before another stoppage had to be made, Robertson kicking Storey rather badly and receiving a caution in consequence.

From the free kick Bob Hawkes placed nicely and Clawley had to save. The Saints quickly transferred the play, and a centre by Smoker gave some trouble, while a further effort by Harrison was nullified by offside. Luton retaliated, and smart attempts were made by Durrant and F. Hawkes, Clawley successfully dealing with the first, but the other resulting in a corner. Storey placed well, and a very sultry time ensued, but at last White raised the siege by sending over.

Storey next made a good run on his own, winding up with a hot shot which rebounded off one of the backs. McEwen afterwards aroused enthusiasm by a dashing bit of work, not only repulsing an assault, but seizing an opening and finishing his effort with a fine long shot, bang into goal, Clawley having to kick out.

Try as they would, however, it seemed that Luton could not score, despite the plaintive appeal of an occupant of the grand stand, who said, "Just one goal, Luton; you deserve two, but one'll do." From a good centre by Durrant McKee made a desperate attempt to get through, but Clawley ran out and cleared just in the nick of time.

A moment later, Durrant got away again, and a good cross shot looked bound for a goal, but the ball passed close by the opposite post. Eaton followed on with a smart shot, and then Durrant, who was going great guns, was once more making for goal, when one of the Sotonians—Meston, I think it was—collared him and held him fast.

The referee, without a moment's hesitation, awarded a penalty, and amidst breathless excitement Bob Hawkes, the hero of so many penalty kicks, was called forward to undertake the all-important task. There were not many who would have cared to take on the responsibility at this critical stage, for it wanted only about fifteen minutes to time, but Bob appeared to be as cool as a cucumber.

Clawley came out to the six-yards' line, the whistle blew, Bob took one or two steps and kicked, and the next moment the ball was in the net. Then the pent-up feelings of the crowd found relief, and there was such a shouting and cheering and waving of handkerchiefs as had not been seen on the ground for many a long day.

In the little time that remained, the visitors made very determined efforts to get on level terms again, and several times the Luton goal was in imminent danger, whilst from another run by Durrant, Southampton narrowly escaped having a second penalty given against them for a trip. For the most part, however, the home-sters were content to defend, and this they did right well, the result being a glorious victory over a team which had not bowed the knee to Luton for some years past.

Considering the frozen state of the ground, the game was a very fine one, and the result was quite in accordance with the play, for taking the match all through, Luton had fully two-thirds of the play. But the homesters met with a very strong defence—almost as strong as their own, in fact—for Clawley was safe in goal, Robertson and Molyneux played very resolutely at back, and the halves also performed well. Forward, however, the Saints were decidedly weak, Harrison and Turner being the only men to inspire any fear.

Thompson, the home custodian, had comparatively little to do, but he showed himself as clever and reliable as usual when called upon. Both backs played a great game, and Mac was decidedly the best back on the field. He and Bob Hawkes had a rare game with the Southampton right wing, and Bob could safely go where the fight was thickest and then return, if the ball went out to Smoker or Spence, in time to put the stopper on. Indeed, this happened so often that it came to be regarded as quite a matter of course.

Fred Hawkes and White both gave an excellent account of themselves, fully meriting the confidence placed in them, but the forwards, owing perhaps in some measure to the condition of the ground and to a greater extent to the strength of the defence opposed to them, were a little disappointing. Durrant was quite the most conspicuous of the five, but it was in the second half that he showed to the greatest advantage.

McKee struck me as being a little bit off-colour, and the left wing was far from success-

ful in the first portion of the game. Both Turner and Storey, however, did much better work when they changed places, and Eaton, as usual, performed well and unselfishly all the way through. But to get the best out of our forwards, I think Durrant and Eaton ought to be the extreme men, with Storey inside-right and Turner inside-left. Eaton certainly played a wonderfully effective game outside when Durrant was on the injured list.

On Saturday next, Luton will have a splendid opportunity of avenging their defeat in the Cup-tie, as they are due to visit Fulham. The latter's cup of joy, I have no doubt, would be filled and brimming over if, in addition to knocking Luton out of the Cup Competition, they had the distinction of inflicting upon them their first Southern League defeat, but I hope the Lutonians will make no mistake this time.

I am quite confident that Fulham are nothing like so good a team as Luton, and that they won in the Cup-tie by the merest fluke. But we must not have another fluke of the same kind, or people will be making comparisons—much to Luton's detriment. Let our forwards put on their shooting boots for the occasion, and let our halves and backs be on their guard against free kicks, and then we shall be all right.

Eaton, I am sorry to hear, will not be able to make the journey, not having sufficiently recovered from the mishap last Saturday, when a Sotonian landed on his foot. Still, we shall have plenty of talent in the front string, with Durrant and Storey on the right wing, Allsopp and Turner on the left, and McKee in the centre, and I shall quite look for a win. But there is one point upon which I would earnestly appeal to the forwards, and that is, not to overdo the short passing.

It is announced that Fulham have signed on Goldie, the left half-back who played for Liverpool last season, and, with two other Liverpool players, was suspended until Jan. 1st for certain irregularities in connection with his signing on for Portsmouth. Goldie is said to be the best left half-back in the country. Plymouth have also made a capture in the person of James Crabtree, the well-known Aston Villa player. I am not quite sure whether Goldie will be qualified to play against Luton next Saturday.

Whilst the first team are away, a match of considerable interest will be provided on the Town ground by the meeting of the Reserves and Grays United. Grays are a very strong lot, and if the Reserves are not very careful they will get a dusting.

Luton's victory over Southampton on Saturday was the first they have achieved at the expense of the Saints since their re-admission to the Southern League. During the past three seasons Luton have been beaten in the home matches by 4—3, 2—0, and 3—1, and away by 5—0, 1—0, and 2—0. This year the Lutonians have secured three points out of a possible four.

Commenting upon the first half of Saturday's game, the Southampton "Football Echo" says:—"A feature of the first half was undoubtedly the magnificent play of Southampton's rearguard. Luton had almost two-thirds of the play, but were utterly unable to make any impression upon Molyneux and his colleagues, all of whom were brilliant."

Speaking of Luton as "the likely champions of the Southern League," "Rover" in the "Morning Leader" says: "Most of the clubs have been taking stock of themselves lately, and apart from the usual vagaries of holiday form, there has not been much to grumble about. In the South, so far as public interest is concerned, our own particular league is going well and strong, and was never perhaps in so flourishing a condition before. Generally speaking, the championship has been a sort of monopoly for two or three clubs, but although Luton seem to have got a very strong lead just now, there are really half-a-dozen sides this season who have good grounds for fancying their chance. So much might happen during the course of the next few months. The English Cup has a nasty knack of interfering with league interests, and for that reason perhaps Luton may be disposed after all to think that it was a wise dispensation which led to their being beaten at Fulham in the last round of the qualifying competition. At any rate, the Strawplaiters did themselves a rare good turn by worsting Southampton on Saturday, and as the only unbeaten team of the three chief leagues, they have certainly every excuse for regarding themselves as the prospective champions. The only blot or weakness on their record so far is the weakness of the attack. The goal record is not a flattering one, except so far as the defence is concerned, and be it noted that Luton have given away at least four goals fewer than any other club in the League. They lose about two-fifths of a goal per match, and score one and a fifth for themselves, and if they can only keep it up they must win the championship for certain."

The gate on Saturday realised £144, as compared with £107 in the Southampton match last year, when a shilling admission was charged, and £95 in 1901.

The excellent show made by Northampton at Luton on Boxing Day was evidently of no fluke character, for on Saturday they entertained and beat Plymouth Argyle by a goal to nil. Portsmouth improved their chances of championship honours by beating Reading, and Millwall are still in the running, although the fact that they have yet to visit Luton may cause them some disquietude.

The following is the League table up to date:

					Goals.		
	Plyd.	Wn.	Lt.	Dn.	For.	Agst.	P.
Luton Town	16	10	0	6	22	10	26
Southampton.....	19	10	5	4	39	21	24
Portsmouth	17	10	4	3	24	18	23
Millwall	17	10	5	2	39	21	23
Reading	18	8	4	6	27	20	22
Plymouth Argyle.....	17	9	4	5	27	14	21
Bristol Rovers	17	9	6	2	34	18	20
Queen's Park Rangers...	17	8	5	4	32	19	20
Tottenham Hotspur.....	16	4	6	6	18	20	14
Wellingborough	16	6	8	2	24	38	14
Brentford	17	6	8	3	19	25	15
Swindon Town	17	4	8	5	18	29	13
Fulham	15	3	6	6	13	16	12
Northampton.....	18	5	11	2	18	40	12
West Ham United	15	4	8	3	17	22	11
Brighton and Hove.....	15	4	8	3	26	38	11
New Brompton.....	17	2	8	7	11	27	11
Kettering	17	4	11	2	16	36	10

The following comparative table shows the position of the various clubs in the League table up to date: