

Football Notes and News.

By "Grasshopper."

SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

LUTON v. SOUTHAMPTON.

LUTON STILL CHAMPIONS.

Having finished half the season with an almost unprecedented record for Southern League football, Luton have opened the second half and begun the new year with a signal triumph over Southampton. The two points were gained, even though it was a somewhat "fluky" win, victory being secured by the narrowest margin, and from a penalty kick.

A slight alteration was made in the Luton team. Tommy Allsopp, who has not played so well during the last few matches—but who seems, all the same, to have done almost as good as any of the other forwards, especially of late—was left out, Storey being selected to fill the Leicester man's place. Whether Storey should play inside left with Turner outside, or the reverse, was not decided until the morning of the match. Peter was placed on the wing, with Durrant on the opposite side. The rest of the team was as usual.

Southampton had also to make one or two slight alterations in the front line, and their team turned out on the field in the appended order:—

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

Mr. A. Barker, of Hanley, had charge of the whistle, and I noticed that without countenancing any roughness, he gave the combatants plenty of rope.

For such an important match a large gate was anticipated, and I should say the spectators numbered fully 6,000. The ground was hard, and in consequence the centre of the field was strewn with sand.

McEwen's luck had not deserted him, and again he won the spin. He elected to defend the railway goal in the first half, and take advantage of the slight south-easterly breeze.

Harrison started for Southampton in splendid sunshine, and the game opened at a fast pace. Luton were the first to take the offensive, Storey sending the leather well towards the farm goal, but Turner, over-anxious, spoiled the chance by getting offside. Still, the home side occupied their opponents' quarters. Both teams settled down, and every shot, pass, or movement was followed with the closest interest. Luton were displaying admirable combination; in fact their play, particularly in front, was a great improvement on their Christmas week form. This was decidedly encouraging.

The local halves fed the forwards continually, and Clawley was soon tested. Durrant shot behind. Harrison failed to get by Bennett, and Luton resumed the attack. It was at this juncture that the visitors' custodian showed what stuff he was made of. The attack of the locals was vigorous, but the old Tottenham goal-keeper proved impregnable. Still, I think if the Luton forwards had not been so eager we might have got a goal, especially from a corner when Turner headed over; Eaton did very nearly the same thing; and White also shot too high.

The visitors began to press, and a couple of shots were sent across the goal mouth dangerously near. Without any definite result play was transferred to the other end, and this was how the game continued up to half-time. Though it was a battle of the giants, Luton, up to now, had certainly the best share of the fight, the forwards showing great dash and tenacity. Bennett and McEwen so completely broke up the visitors' forward attack that the Hampshire men had to be content with keeping the goal intact.

On changing ends, Southampton played rather better, but Luton's defence was superb. So was also that of the Saints, and the game proceeded in a most even manner. The characteristics of the first moiety were again brought out in the second. Though both attacked in turn, neither side was able to do much. Fraser gave Thompson a difficult shot to deal with, and for a moment the spectators held their breath. But Thompson, alert and cool, succeeded in getting the leather away. To my mind this was the only time Southampton were really dangerous, and it must be admitted they had hard luck in not notching the leading point.

So had Luton in the first half, but now their reward was near at hand. The home forwards had worked gradually down the field, and when Durrant was about to centre midway between the corner and the goal, Molyneux handled, and as a result a penalty was given to Luton. From this Bob Hawkes, amidst tremendous cheering safely placed the ball in the net. Clawley did not have a ghost of a chance.

As nothing further was scored, despite Southampton's supreme effort to draw level, Luton left the field victors by one goal to nil.

I do not care much for goals from penalties, especially if that is the source from which the only point is won. In this case, too, it was not a very serious—certainly not a wilful—infringement of the laws of the game. Neither Durrant nor Eaton would have scored from the position they were in. However, on the day's play there could be no question about Luton having the best of the game, and on those grounds they were, to my mind, entitled to their little bit of good luck.

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I was very much disappointed with Southampton, and after they had been half an hour on the field, I could not understand why there had been so much pessimism amongst local spectators. The Saints are a great team undoubtedly, but on Saturday they met their equals. Clawley is a great safeguard, and their backs are powerful, though Molyneux was terribly worried by Durrant. The halves were a good lot, and the forwards were also fine, Joe Turner and Harrison, who fed the wings continuously, being especially worthy of mention.

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As to the winners, Durrant played an exceptionally good game. His centres were deadly in their accuracy, and he was as fast as ever, but the condition of the ground was a serious handicap. Jimmy was without doubt the finest centre. Eaton played up well, until he was hurt, and had to retire for ten minutes. Afterwards, he was not able to do much, though he assisted the defence materially when Luton gained the lead. I thought McKee only fair, and Turner was an energetic worker, while Storey, who was put outside in the second half, played a very decent game.

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Without the least doubt, Bob Hawkes was the best man on the field; his play on Saturday was superb. If it is a fact that the Selection Committee were present to look up players for the South v. North match, Bob cannot be overlooked, neither can they pass over Durrant. The other halves were medium.

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Little "Mac" was again in the pink of condition, and played a grand game. Bennett, though strong, was not quite in his usual form. Thompson was what he always is—doubly safe. It is quite true that after they had obtained the lead, Luton had to act very much on the defensive, but their victory is none the less creditable for that.

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For a long time Luton have held the best record in the competition, and their victory over Southampton on Saturday gives them the lead, to which their admirable and consistent play fully entitles them. Had any side a really

good chance of winning at Luton, Southampton were considered the most likely to succeed, but they failed, and, as a consequence, Luton hold a clear advantage of 2 points. Nor is that all, for they have three games in hand.

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Having established such a complete ascendancy over all rivals, Luton must be regarded as the probable champions in succession to their victims of Saturday. Southampton made a splendid fight, and might have effected a draw had not an infringement of the rules caused the award of a penalty kick, from which Luton scored the only goal of the match.

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So Luton remain unbeaten, and have scored 26 points out of a possible 32. Six clubs have managed to avert defeat when opposing them, but only Fulham and Portsmouth have accomplished so much when visiting Luton. Apart from the great battle between the two leading clubs, the most noteworthy event on Saturday was the defeat of Plymouth Argyle at Northampton.