

The Southern League.

LUTON v. PLYMOUTH ARGYLE

Played at Luton on Saturday Result:—

Luton	1 goal.
Plymouth Argyle	1 goal.

The teams were as follow:—

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

Plymouth Argyle—Horne; Crabtree and A. Clark; Banks, C. Clark, and Digweed; Dalrymple, Anderson, Peddie, Picken, and Jack.

Referee, Mr. C. C. Fallowfield (Streatham); linesmen, Messrs. G. W. Verge and W. H. London (London).

Excellent weather for home fixtures has fallen to the lot of the local crowd during the greater part of the present season. Whenever a fine week-end has come round, the game has chanced to be at home, and, whenever the weather has happened to be contrary, kind fortune has contrived that the local team should be playing away. But, on Saturday, this wonderful spell of luck came abruptly to an end.

Quite a dozen hours before the match rain set in, and, until the last whistle had sounded, continued with provoking persistency. After the incessant downpour, the condition of the Bury Park field can easily be imagined. Everywhere there was mud. In places it must have been ankle deep, not to mention the pools of water that lay freely about the surface. Indeed, football conditions could hardly have been worse, and, considering all things, play of even average excellence could not have been expected. The game itself quite realised these doubtful anticipations. Players, with very few exceptions, seemed unable to adapt themselves to the unusual conditions; the game throughout was execrable, and in no way constituted a fair test of the merits of the respective teams.

Of course, the gate receipts suffered terribly. Instead of a record attendance, which would have been quite within the bounds of possibility under ordinary circumstances, the takings fell very, very far short of the average. A few minutes before play started it even looked as though things might be worse, for there could not then have been more than a thousand people on the ground. Most of these were on the stand, only a few ardent enthusiasts daring to brave the elements along the terraces.

When the teams turned out it was soon evident that changes had been made, particularly on the home side. Bennett resumed his place at right back, Eaton re-appeared at inside-right, and Moody, at inside-left, donned the blue jersey for the first time this season. Plymouth were without the services of their International goalkeeper, Robinson, who is still incapacitated by an injured knee, and in his place appeared Horne, a Devon amateur, who has just commenced to make a reputation.

The spin of the coin left the Luton men with the double task of facing the stalwart men of the Hoe, and the wind and rain, and, judging by the play following the opening exchanges, it looked as though they had given themselves more than enough to do. Almost immediately, the Argyle came to close quarters, and although Mac relieved with a lofty kick, he was soon defending again as vigorously as ever. Inside three minutes the ball had been forced over the home goal line.

Many of the players soon presented inglorious spectacles notably Bennett, whose indulgence in a mud slide, with arms and legs elevated amused the crowd, but hardly improved his personal appearance. Mud-larking was evidently not to the taste of the many, but the visitors, although much heavier, seemed to keep their feet better than the local men. Whilst the latter floundered about the greasy surface, the former took the ball confidently and made tracks for goal. It was dispiriting, to say the least.

Often, however, it was a case of the last dog taking the hare. The ball would bounce in totally unaccountable fashion, splashing dark and sticky fluids over the player who intended to kick it—and didn't; or would stop dead when least expected, repeatedly, with the result that the player who arrived second got it. Mis-kicks were frequent, but it cannot be said that the Luton men shone. Times innumerable the opposing forwards rushed past the home half-back line, and had it not been for splendid work by McEwen and Bennett, there would have been a fine marring of goal averages.

The first piece of really aggressive work was initiated by Bob Hawkes. Obtaining possession of the ball as it came out from a corner kick, he bundled it across to Durrant, who was only too glad of an opportunity to show his speed. Three men in turn were baffled as he dashed up the wing. The effort finished with a splendid centre, which Crabtree headed out, but Allsopp returned to Moody, who, however, spoiled his first opportunity of the season by kicking wildly high over the crossbar.

A little later a foul on Allsopp by Dalrymple gave a free kick. Taking it himself, Tommy sent in a "curly" shot which screwed, with the wind, towards the top corner of the net, but Argyle heads savagely butted it out, and away it went down the field. As if in revenge, Dalrymple came up, took the ball past the backs, and centred well. Bennett intercepted the shot, and it seemed as though all danger had passed, but Peddie had followed up well and he returned to Jack, who, coming in opportunely, headed against the under-side of the top bar. Naturally, the ball rebounded into the net without allowing Thompson the ghost of a chance. Thus did Plymouth draw first blood.

This unpleasant reverse was too much for the ball—it burst and had to be replaced. Having gained a lead, Plymouth made every effort, not only to maintain, but to increase it. Picken sent in a dangerous shot, which Thompson just turned behind the post. The visitors were certainly showing greater combination than the local men. Anderson and Dalrymple, on the right, had an excellent understanding, and they managed to give both the backs and Thompson a good deal of trouble.

The Blues now warmed to their work, and the play generally became smarter. Durrant again made himself felt on the right, and one of his centres came to Allsopp. That player at once drove the ball hard at the custodian, and McKee being close on him, he failed to clear. A great shout went up, but the referee disallowed the goal—greatly to the dissatisfaction of a section of the crowd. Allsopp was undoubtedly in an on-side position at the time he shot home, so that the only possible reason why the point was

not allowed must be that the referee considered McKee had impeded the custodian.

Five minutes later, Durrant gave Allsopp a similar opportunity, but he shot atrociously. Just after, there was an excited appeal for a penalty in consequence of an alleged foul in the charmed circle, but only a free kick was given. Towards the close of the first half Peddie allowed Bennett to rob him of the ball in face of an open goal. As the whistle blew, Moody had another wild shot at goal.

Better football was seen in the second half, but the players without exception looked as though they had had enough of it long before the finish. Plymouth did the first bit of pressing, but a fine forward movement was cleverly frustrated by McEwen. Then Fred Hawkes retaliated with a long shot which went over the line. From the kick out, Peddie got away and tested Thompson, who, however, emerged triumphantly.

Scrambling play followed, and, at this period of the game, Luton had certainly the best of matters. McKee and Co. made some dangerous rushes, and eventually succeeded in netting the ball. How it was actually done was difficult to see; the ball seemed to be carried through bodily by the forward line, and Moody put on the finishing touch. Euthusiastic and prolonged cheering greeted this successful termination of a really deserving effort.

Having thus equalised, the Blues pegged away merrily, and, from this time to the close of the game, did most of the attacking. Hoare received a temporary injury to his shoulder during one onslaught, and some delay was caused in consequence. Thompson, too, was not left unmolested. Once he came out quite twenty yards and put Peddie off his shot, whilst on another occasion Dalrymple caused him some trouble.

Durrant returned the compliment with a terrific shot that whizzed by the post, and, a minute later, Eaton imprinted a muddy impression of the ball on the crossbar. The home goal was the next to have a lucky escape. In a scramble outside the posts, Thompson was upset and a weak clearance was tamely returned—out of reach. Everybody thought the ball would roll into the net, but it didn't, it stuck in the mud, and before any danger could come, Freddy Hawkes got it away. It was too close to be agreeable.

In the last few minutes, Bob Hawkes dribbled trickily through the ranks of the Greens, but spoiled his work by dallying at the crucial moment. Tameness characterised the final stages of the game, and both players and spectators were thankful when the whistle sounded.

Considering all things, the result was a satisfactory one, and fairly represented the teams on the day's play. Plymouth have a fine set of fellows, and their methods were singularly successful in the opening stages. Their forward line was at all times dangerous, and had not McEwen and Bennett played such a splendid game, the result would have been very different.

Of the home team, every member worked hard, but, by the unusual conditions, all sting was taken out of their efforts. Under these circumstances, it would, perhaps, be unfair to criticise individual work. The turf accounted for many things, and it appeared to an observant mind that the way the visitors kept their feet was due, not so much to superior smartness, as to superior footgear.

Of the other Southern League matches, perhaps the most interesting to Luton people was that at Swindon, where Portsmouth snatched a lucky victory by a goal to nil. Southampton's victory over Fulham was quite expected, and both Pompey and the Saints now have a lead of two points over Luton, though the latter have two matches in hand in the one case and three in the other.

New Brompton scored another victory, beating Queen's Park Rangers by two goals to nil, and at Kettering, Millwall sustained another defeat, although the Dockers were the first to score.

ally stopped by a clever bit of work by Crabtree, and then after Durrant had been badly fouled, Horne brought off a grand save from a crowd of players.

A fine run by Durrant was the outcome of a lovely centre, and then Allsopp missed a golden opportunity. A minute later hands just outside the penalty line nearly lost the visitors a goal, for it was very lucky for Plymouth that Bob Hawkes' shot cannoned off one of their men.

Luton were working terribly hard, but ill-luck was dodging their footsteps, and only the slippery ground was the reason that McKee did not equalise. It was hard luck for Mac, but he could not possibly help slipping, with the mud over his ankles.

Once Peddie got through and ought to have scored, but he miskicked with his final effort, and then at the other end from a shot by Durrant, Clark kicked the ball on to the side of his own net, whilst on another occasion Luton seemed bound to equalise. Fate was all against the Lutonians, though.

Rain was still pelting down, and the spectators and players alike seemed drenched to the skin. At the interval the spectators seemed hopeful of at least a draw, for Luton would now have the wind and rain at their backs. After the first couple of minutes in the second half Luton commenced to attack, but there was not much sting in it, the players not getting together in combined strength.

A smart bit of work by McEwen led to Durrant forcing a fruitless corner, and then Plymouth had a turn for a minute or two.

A little later a terrific shout signalised the fact that Moody had equalised. It was a great shout, and he received hearty congratulations from the rest of the team.

Luton had much the best of the game afterwards, but the ground was altogether too bad for serious football, the players being too dirty and knocked up to go the pace.

Play slowed up towards the finish, and there was a general sigh of relief—especially by the players—when the final whistle blew.

MONDAY'S COMMENTS.

The "Daily News" said:—Luton lost another point in their race with Portsmouth and Southampton for the Southern League championship by allowing Plymouth Argyle to share the honours at Luton. Meanwhile the Saints were chastising Fulham and Portsmouth were gaining a narrow victory at Swindon. Luton are undoubtedly losing ground in the sprint for home, though they still have a little in hand, as it is possible for them to aggregate 58 points to Southampton 54 and Portsmouth 56. But the two latter, besides having points in hand, are both going more strongly than Luton.

The "Athletic News":—The Southern League bids fair to be a triangular duel between Southampton, Portsmouth, and Luton, but we fear for the Strawplaiters. Even if Luton lose they will have the satisfaction of playing at home to an average "gate" of £100—which is encouragement from a town of 36,000 people.

The "Sunday Special":—Although all the games in the Southern League yesterday were played under wretched conditions, the football in most instances reached a high standard, and the results have the effect of making the championship more open. Luton, who for so long held the best record, had another severe task, and could only draw with Plymouth Argyle, whereas Southampton and Portsmouth both succeeded in winning. The champions experienced little difficulty in overcoming Fulham, but Portsmouth had a very hard struggle with Swindon. While these three games were of chief importance—as their outcome leaves Luton two points behind the two Hampshire clubs—the best match of the day proved to be that at Tottenham, where Reading were the visitors.

The "Telegraph":—All the matches in the Southern League on Saturday were played under the most depressing conditions, rain falling at every ground, and the turf being so treacherous that skilful play seemed altogether out of the question. As expected, Southampton won comfortably, but at Luton there was a hard struggle. Plymouth Argyle were the first to score, and Luton only managed to equalise. No change takes place, therefore, in the positions of the three top clubs, but by reason of fewer games played Luton still possess a good chance of finishing on top.

The "Daily Express":—