

The Southern League.

LUTON v. SWINDON.

Played at Swindon on Saturday. Result:—

Swindon	1 goal
Luton	nil.
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The teams were as follow:—

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

Swindon: — Hemmings; Atterbury and Archer; Oakden, Bannister, and Logan; Beadsworth. Lean, Hogan, Pugh, and Cowley.

Referee, Mr. A. Green (West Bromwich); linesmen, Mr. L. P. Green (Reading) and Mr. J. Parker (Chippenham).

It will be noticed that a slight change was made in the composition of the Luton side, inasmuch as Turner was tried in Allsopp's position; otherwise the team was identical with that of the previous Saturday. I presume the reason of this change was a desire to increase the goals on the credit side of the table, but, as the result above indicates, this most desirable object failed to materialise, and the chances of annexing the Southern League championship are fast slipping away.

After the abnormal rainfall of the present season the state of the playing pitch can be imagined, especially when it is recorded that it had been raining the whole night previous. The centre of the field was practically under water, while the goal at the town end was surrounded by a sheet of liquid mud, and long before the interval the players presented a pretty spectacle. But for the pressing need of getting the schedule fixtures through, I feel certain the match would have been declared off, notwithstanding that the overhead conditions were favourable while the game was actually in progress.

Swindon won the toss, and they naturally took advantage of a perfect gale which was blowing into the top goal. Still it was Luton who first threatened danger. Turner, bringing the ball through in good style, put right across to Eaton, who headed into the centre, and White rushing up had the misfortune to send over the bar. But the visitors could not keep the ball at this end for long, and from a nicely-executed movement by the Swindon attack, Cowley was left in a position with the ball at his toe and only Thompson to beat. It looked a certain goal, but Thompson got down to the sphere in grand style near the post, and saved what was certainly a critical moment for his side.

On the opposite wing Beadsworth forced a corner, the ball going behind off McEwen, but nothing came of the resulting kick, while a few minutes later, from a free kick against Turner, Cowley just missed the post with a fine cross shot. For some time Luton could not get down the field, the wind driving the ball back whenever it rose above the players' heads. But the defence held out well, and the home forwards were never allowed to get the upper hand.

By keeping the ball low down, McKee was ploughing his way through the mud when he was badly fouled by Bannister. When our centre rose he was literally plastered with mud, and must have felt uncomfortable right to the finish in consequence.

Of course, the wing men were not handicapped to the same extent as their comrades in the middle; still, even near the touch-lines, the ball at times refused to move when on the ground. Durrant made a fine run, and passing across to Moody, gave the inside-left a good chance, but instead of trying to get through on his own, he put it out towards Turner, who was too far up, and the ball went into touch. Thus a good opening was thrown away.

By this time Luton had settled down and were quite holding their own. Indeed, midway through the first half they were often dangerous, and on one occasion Atterbury was compelled to use his hands to prevent a likely score, but the referee judged this infringement took place just outside the penalty area. Bob Hawkes was entrusted with the kick, but, although he let drive with tremendous force, his aim was not perfect, and the ball passed over the line just wide of the upright.

A nice passing run through by the Luton forwards culminated in a good attempt by Turner, but Hemmings succeeded in keeping the ball out, and thereby earned the applause of the crowd. Again, when McKee was forcing his way through, he was badly fouled by Bannister. Indeed, the fouling tactics of the Swindon centre-half were a feature of the game right through, and he must be accounted fortunate to escape so lightly, although I believe the referee did give him a word of advice. Soon after, the Luton attack again made their presence felt, but Moody fell with a couple of opponents on top of him, and the ball passed over the goal-line.

It must not be thought all the play was near the Swindon goal, for Hogan especially was always dangerous when he got an opportunity, and Thompson did well to get away one of his expresses from a decent range. But the ball did not get far down the field, and Cowley got in a fine shot which Thompson punched out from just under the bar. Before the interval Hogan again put in a terrific drive, which skimmed the bar and passed out of danger. Nothing tangible resulted before the players retired for half-time, and seeing Luton had kept out their opponents against the elements, their players were on good terms with themselves.

But the force of the gale had abated considerably, and the conditions were more equal in the concluding half. It was during the first five minutes after the re-start that Swindon scored through a good shot from Hogan, who was almost alone right in front of Thompson when he received a pass from Oakden. Previous to this, Thompson's charge had escaped in a marvellous manner, following a foul near the touch-line some twenty yards down the field. The ball was placed well up, and with all the players in the goal-mouth it bounced about in a manner far from pleasant from a Luton standpoint, but it refused to pass the line. Although it once appeared through, it struck something, said to be Thompson's face, and rebounded into play again just as the crowd were prepared to shout.

Being a goal behind, the visitors put a deal more energy into the attack, and for a time it appeared pretty certain the result would wear a more favourable aspect. Eaton gave McKee an opening with a nice overhead pass, and his comrade put in a real stinger, which Hemmings could scarcely hold, but he secured at the second attempt and kicked down the field. This was a

really fine save, and was of great value to Swindon, for I am convinced an equalising goal at this stage would have quite settled the railway men's hopes.

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As it was, they adopted kicking-out tactics, which were quite justified under the circumstances, but which would have been too risky if the scores were level. A bad foul on F. Hawkes thirty yards from goal was splendidly placed by Bennett, and Hemmings almost made a mess of it, the ball slipping from his grasp on the goal-line, but no one was up sufficiently to drive it home, and the Swindon goalie got it out of danger.

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Bob Hawkes raised the hopes of his mates by a characteristic burst, but the holding nature of the turf prevented him working the ball in his usual style, and he could not quite accomplish his object, although he got well in towards the goal before he lost possession. On the opposite side of the ground, Durrant was coming along in fine style, but Archer got in the way, and the ball went out at the expense of a corner, which, however, was put behind.

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The next item was thoroughly enjoyed by the spectators, although White, who was the cause of the fun, could not appreciate the trip which sent him sliding on his back. When Freddy rose from his mud-bath he presented a woeful appearance, for not a sign of his blue shirt was visible, it being thoroughly saturated with Swindon mud.

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On the whole Mr. A. Green beld the whistle in a capable style, but he made an awful mistake in pulling Moody up when clean away for offside. Moody received the ball directly from Atterbury in midfield, and was going for Hemmings practically unattended, which anyone who knows Bert's control of the ball would judge spelt a goal, when, to the surprise of everyone, the whistle went, and thus a fine chance of pulling the game out of the fire was spoilt.

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After Thompson had safely negotiated a long shot from Hogan, the Luton left wing put in a nice bit of work, and Moody taking Turner's final pass, tried Hemmings with a nice attempt. The Swindon custodian stopped the ball, and before Eaton could get up he succeeded in getting it out of danger. This was practically the last time Luton forwards got really dangerous, for the home backs were always wasting time whenever danger threatened, and kicked into touch on the least provocation.

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With only three minutes to go, Hogan was badly fouled by Bennett, but fortunately for Luton the offence was just outside the penalty area, and only an ordinary place kick was given, from which nothing resulted. This was the last incident of note in what was, taking into account the terribly holding turf, a good exhibition of football, and the Swindon players had a grand reception as they left the field.

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On both sides the defence was seen to most advantage, and of the two goalkeepers, Thompson had the greater number of dangerous shots to deal with, and was in no way to blame for the defeat. Hemmings, as the result shows, did all that was asked of him, but the manner of his saving left something to be desired, and once or twice, if the visiting forwards had been well up, a different result might have been recorded.

Bennett and McEwen played up to their reputation, and received all the help that the half-backs could give them. The heavy going was all against Bob Hawkes' style of play; still, he was judged by the Swindon spectators as one of the best halves that have visited their ground. Before the game started, the home officials were rather dubious as to the ability of Archer at left back. This player is a local product, and was making his initial appearance in the Southern League, in consequence of Milligan's suspension by the Football Association. Although, of course, Durrant at times beat him, both in cleverness and pace, he came out of the ordeal in such a manner that I feel sure he will keep his place until the regular player resumes his position.

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The Swindon half-backs, while not so clever as Luton's middle line, were untiring in their efforts, but Bannister quite spoilt his play by foul tactics, and will be well advised to moderate his energies in this direction. The forwards it is difficult to properly criticise, because of the unfair conditions under which the game was played. But, on the whole, the Swindon line came out the more dangerous, Hogan especially being a continual source of danger with some really excellent shooting. He put in at least half-a-dozen shots, which might have beaten an ordinary goalkeeper. Cowley also made several good runs at outside-left, while Lean, who has been out of the team since October, played a good game and fully justified his inclusion.

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Durrant was undoubtedly the most prominent member of Luton's attacking brigade, but he did not get the ball across quite so much as he should if his comrades are to score from his good work in bringing the sphere through the ranks of his opponents. On the opposite wing Turner put in some clever work at times, but he was continually given offside when well placed, and thus time after time opportunities were thrown away which otherwise would have been turned to account. The inside men were sadly handicapped by the heavy going, and could scarcely move at all at times on this account. Moody's knee again stood the strain, and apparently he has quite recovered from the accident which at one time appeared likely to close his football career.

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The Cup-ties interfered with the League programme on Saturday. The best performance by a Southern Club was the victory of Tottenham Hotspur at Everton by 2 goals to 1—a splendid achievement and one of which the Spurs may well feel proud. Southampton easily accounted for Burslem Port Vale, but Portsmouth were badly beaten at home by Derby County—5 goals to 2. Plymouth Argyle at home made a draw with Sheffield Wednesday, and Reading also effected a draw with Bolton Wanderers.

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