

The Southern League.

LUTON v. READING.

Played at Luton on Saturday.

Luton		Result:—
Reading		8 goals.
The teams		1 goal.

Lut. were as follow:—

—Thompson; Bennett and Williams; Hawkes, White, and R. Hawkes; Durrant, Eaton, McKee, Storey, and Allsopp.

Reading—Nairby; H. Smith and Clinch; Henderson, Good, and Willis; Simpson, Popple, Bevan, Heywood, and Flynn.

Referee, Mr. A. Milward (Leyton).

Unusual interest centred in the League match on Saturday, because it was a meeting of undefeated teams. Luton and Reading were the only two teams in the League who had not had occasion to acknowledge the superiority of some other eleven, and to this extent, therefore, it was a battle of giants. Still, Reading were not regarded as being quite at the top of the tree, and if McKee had been able to turn out, very little misgiving would have been felt locally as to the result of Saturday's game.

It was a great disappointment to the six thousand spectators, however, to find that the Luton captain was a non starter. Mac is an immense favourite, both for his play and his cheery presence, and if his absence had had as dispiriting an effect upon the players as it had upon the onlookers, there is no knowing what might have happened. Fortunately, however, Luton soon gave evidence of their keenness on winning, and their dashing play gave a very sensational turn to the opening stages of the game.

The weather, it may be said, was all that could be desired, there being no wind but just that crispness in the air which had been wanting on previous Saturdays. The going, however, was a little bit treacherous owing to the heavy rains which had fallen earlier in the week.

In the first minute or two Harry Williams caused a considerable amount of anxiety by getting up right in front of the half-backs, but luckily no harm resulted, and presently Luton made their way to the vicinity of the Reading goal. A foul relieved the pressure for a moment, and then Storey nearly succeeded in getting through, being only frustrated at the last moment by Smith. Then, as the result of an effort by White, the home forwards made a nice combined rush, and McKee elicited tremendous cheering by scoring the first goal.

The return to the half-way line was but the prelude to another attack by Luton, Durrant making the running. The ball, however, went behind, and a free kick conceded by White gave the Biscuiters a little more breathing time. Then Durrant, taking a pass by Eaton, made a brilliant run along the touchline, and closing in, sent in a lovely cross shot. Nairby fisted the ball on to Eaton, who was rushing up and sent it into the net.

This, of course, was the signal for a fresh outburst of enthusiasm, and the spectators, comparatively free from anxiety, were now able to give themselves wholly to the enjoyment of the game. Luton returned to the attack, and Allsopp securing and placing a corner, the ball went out to Bennett, who shot just by the upright. Reading responded, and Popple made a dash through, but was knocked off his shot by White, and the ball went over the line.

The Biscuiters were not done with, however, and another vigorous attack gave the defenders some trouble. Bennett at last cleared from Simpson's centre, but a miss by Williams directly afterwards might have caused disaster had not Bennett again come to the rescue. Harry did better work a little later in repulsing a couple of assaults, and then made the hair of the spectators stand on end by clean missing a middle from Flynn. As the other Reading forwards were following up, the situation had a desperate look about it, but Thompson rushed out and cleared in the very nick of time.

Several free kicks against the home team kept the Biscuiters on the aggressive, and Simpson got in a lovely shot which Thompson cleared in grand style. Then Williams was again at fault, and Fred Hawkes was to be seen right over on the left busily engaged in keeping the invaders at bay.

day.

At length, a fine run by Durrant turned the tide once more in Luton's favour, and Naisby had very hard work in clearing from the outside-right's control. After McKee had sent just by the post, Durrant took a beautiful pass from Bob Hawkes and put in a teasing shot, and Storey came very near converting a free kick. An attempt by Allsopp next claimed notice, and then the visitors renewed their overtures, a bad piece of heading by Williams again raising doubts and fears, but luckily Poppitt, to whose feet the ball went, failed to get quite the right direction for his shot. Just before the whistle sounded for half-time, Naisby saved well from a header by McKee, and the teams crossed over with Luton still leading by two goals to nil.

The second half opened very much as the first had done, except that the goals did not come. Luton attacked with great spirit, and several times came near doing the trick. Allsopp was given a good chance by Bob Hawkes, but headed high over, and from a free kick, Bennett put in a beauty which Naisby saved just against the top corner of the goal. Fred Hawkes next worked his way through and had a lovely chance, but shot over the bar, and then Storey, following up a centre by Allsopp, shot very hard when only about a yard or two from goal. Fortunately for Reading, Naisby happened to be just in the way, and thus the further downfall of his goal was averted.

For a long time after this, Luton had much the better of the game, and the Reading defence was kept fully extended. Two or three corners were forced, but not improved upon, and once Durrant and Eaton made a grand burst, and I think Durrant, whose shot it really was, would probably have scored, but it was Eaton who made the attempt, and he failed. A miss by Bennett, the one and only miss he made during the game, let Reading in, but Thompson again cleared in fine style, and a lovely shot by Allsopp at the other end was saved by Naisby just under the bar. The other forwards were not expecting this, or they might easily have scored, as the Reading custodian could not clear at the first attempt.

From a header by Storey, following upon a centre by Durrant, Naisby tipped over the bar, and the corner was not turned to account. It now only wanted two or three minutes to time, and seeing some of the spectators leaving, the Luton men apparently thought the match was as good as over, and slackened their efforts. It was a foolish thing to do, for Reading promptly took advantage, and the ball coming across from the right, a desperate struggle took place in the mouth of the Luton goal. Thompson saved twice in marvellous fashion, but being surrounded by the Reading forwards could not get the ball away, and eventually Bevan scored with a shot which struck the upright and twisted into the net.

It was the last effort of the match, and the goal was practically a gift for the visitors, who could never have got near enough to be dangerous but for that absurd slowing down to which I have referred. Reading have a fine string of forwards always ready to make an opening or take advantage of any that may be presented, and the defence is well balanced without being brilliant. With McEwen available, Luton would generally beat them, but without him—well, I would prefer a shade easier task when League points are at stake.

Great credit is due to Thompson for the very fine exhibition he gave between the sticks, and Bennett played a great game at back. He had plenty to do, for Williams in the first half was terribly disappointing. Perhaps it was over-anxiety that caused him to make so many blunders, but certainly I never saw him play so badly before. He gave a better account of himself in the second half.

All three of the halves were in capital form, working hard and well, both in attack and defence, and the forwards also gave a first-rate display. In the first few minutes they were simply irresistible, and there was nothing in the nature of a fluke about either of their goals. McKee, perhaps, was the best of the inside men, though both Storey and Eaton rendered excellent service, and Durrant was in his happy vein. He might with advantage have been given a little more to do in the first half. All-