

The Southern League.

LUTON v. SWINDON.

Played at Swindon on Saturday. Result:—

Luton	1 goal.
Swindon	1 goal.

The following were the teams:—

Luton—Platt; Blackett and McCurdy; F. Hawkes, White, and R. Hawkes; Warner, Macdonald, Brown, Pickering, and Barnes.

Swindon — Ling; Gill and Atterbury; Hindle, Oakden, and Potter; Deans, F. Wheatcroft, Lyons, Monks, and Chalmers.

Referee, Mr. A. Green (West Bromwich).

Once again favourable weather conditions attended Saturday's engagement; indeed, but for that terrible downfall of rain when Brighton visited Luton the second week of the season, we have enjoyed a succession of fine Saturdays. An early inspection of the ground proved there had been improvement made in the state of the turf, especially at the town end, where I remember on a former visit a veritable quagmire existed. The Luton directors who accompanied the team next turned their attention to the stand accommodation provided, and discovered that it was a long way behind that on Luton's new ground, while the charges were certainly higher considering the advantages obtained. It was impossible to obtain a covered seat at Swindon for less than one shilling over the charge for admission, the sixpenny stand being of a similar character to Luton's new one at 3d. Certainly two threepenny stands are provided, but they are nothing more than wooden terraces without a vestige of cover.

By the way, on arrival at Swindon we found Lewis had come over to have a look at the boys, his home being at Bristol. He considers his knee practically sound again, and it is quite on the cards he may give it a trial in a match at a not very distant date. Bob Hawkes won the toss, but there was little in it, although Luton, as a matter of fact, were dangerous through the right wing almost straight away. Atterbury intervened and prevented Warner getting his centre across. A like fate was extended to a somewhat similar rush on the Swindon right, but in this instance McCurdy gave a corner in order to avert the threatened danger. From this kick an exciting melee ensued in front of goal, but Blackett eventually cleared from a crowd of players in great style.

Immediately following Luton forced a corner, but Oakden easily cleared, giving the ball to Wheatcroft, who got away with it, finally passing to Chalmers, but the latter's centre was not improved upon. Luton once more took up the running with a well-judged punt up by Fred Hawkes, giving Macdonald a fine opportunity, but his aim was too high and the ball went over. The play was fairly fast, but little combination was shown on either side. Deans got well away and put in a good centre, but Monks, who met it, was tackled by McCurdy and nothing more than a corner resulted.

Atterbury almost let his side down with a bad miskick, but Barnes, who made a dash for the ball, was unable to control properly, and it went harmlessly over the goal-line. White tried a shot which was well-directed, but it had not sufficient force behind it to beat Ling and he cleared with ease. At the opposite goal Deans was observed to be well through with the ball at his toe, but he shot wide and only a goal kick resulted. A nasty foul was made on Pickering just a foot or so outside the penalty area, and Bob Hawkes made an attempt to open the score by putting in a terrific drive, but Ling rose to the occasion and threw away.

A rush by Warner looked dangerous, but Sandy fouled someone, and thus the ball was got away. Just for once Chalmers managed to shake off the attentions of Blackett, and getting away finely, threatened to open the score, but F. Hawkes got back in time and kicked out, thus saving a rather ugly situation. Barnes now made an attempt to force the play and finally dropped the ball to Brown, but Atterbury was not to be eluded and Sandy could not force his way through.

Ling almost made a fatal mistake when he stood unconcerned when a dropping centre by Warner was thought to be going well over the goal. To the surprise of everybody, it struck the crossbar at its junction with the upright and rebounded into play. The Luton forwards, thinking the ball was going out, made no attempt to improve the occasion, and Ling was able to catch and throw away before anyone could get up. A bit later Wheateroft managed to find the net from a pass by Chalmers, but he was standing clearly offside, although the Swindon players appealed strongly for a goal. Another centre from Chalmers was nullified through Platt being fouled by Wheateroft. This being the final incident of any moment previous to the interval, I ought to mention about ten minutes before half-time Pickering received a nasty kick just above the knee which handicapped him all through the rest of the match. As a matter of fact, he was off the field for some minutes previous to half-time.

The second half proved a decidedly interesting period, although we did not have a deal of pretty work. Luton started as if they meant business and were early in attendance at Ling's end. Pickering put in a regular "hot 'un" which the Swindon goalkeeper did well to stop, but in getting the ball away he ran out, and being surrounded by a crowd of players, could not get it clear. Bob Hawkes pounced on the ball some twelve yards out and lifted it cleverly over the heads of both comrades and foes into an empty goal, Ling not having got back to his post.

The spectators were quite prepared to see Luton take a commanding lead, and for some time they certainly promised to do so, but the shooting was scarcely as well on the mark as usual, and Ling successfully defended his charge during this period of Luton pressure. It was in the first half-hour of the second moiety that the brightest play was seen, with Luton streets ahead of their opponents in mid-field. On one occasion a goal looked a certainty, for Macdonald screwed the ball from the goal-line in a wonderfully clever manner and sent right across the goal-mouth, but no Lutonian was prepared for the centre, thinking the ball was past recovery, and thus Mac's clever work was thrown away. A minute later Barnes and Pickering gave the crowd a taste of their prowess by coming through the home defence with the greatest ease, but Pickering enjoyed his usual luck at target practice and only managed to shake the net on the wrong side.

Luton forced many corners, but they were not turned to account, and, encouraged by their crowd, Swindon gradually wore down the Luton attack and assumed the aggressive on their own. So much was this the case that twelve minutes before time we had the spectacle of Pickering being given offside standing well in his own half.

Try as they would, the Luton defence could not get the ball far up the field. Meanwhile the crowd literally worked themselves into a frenzy, and this in some respects affected the players. Any way, Swindon played as if they had just commenced instead of there being only about ten minutes to go. During one of these sustained attacks a regular mix-up occurred near Platt, and the ball was bobbing

about in a most threatening manner, but ultimately Platt was observed to catch it and get it out of danger and the Luton officials present breathed again.

But their relief was of very short duration, for just here the referee signalled a stoppage. It was seen two or three of the players were in a heap a yard or so wide of the goal, and naturally the crowd shouted for a penalty, and penalty it was. Granting for the moment it was a penalty, it was a decidedly lucky thing for Swindon, as the ball was out of play when the incident happened and there was no question of the goal being in danger. Deans made no mistake with the shot, and Platt had simply to stand and see the ball flash by into the corner of the net. Inquiries after the match elicited the information that McCurdy was supposed to have pulled Wheatcroft down, but the Luton player stoutly denies any such intention. He was down, and Wheatcroft running on stepped right on him, and naturally fell over. Anyway, he was on top of McCurdy. It was a most unfortunate event for Luton, for as matters turned out, it prevented them taking a clear lead on the Southern League table.

A probable division of points quite pleased the spectators, and it was Luton who again were the attacking party right up to the final whistle. But although both Pickering and Warner got through in promising style they were not allowed to reap the advantage thus gained through the fouling tactics now adopted by the home defenders. Just before time, Luton's left wing forced a corner from a fine burst through, but they could not be turned to account, and the crowd cheered quite as much when the whistle went, with the score unaltered, as Luton spectators will do on Saturday should Millwall leave both points in Bedfordshire.

Luton played a much improved game on their New Brompton away form; still, they did not rise to the occasion as at Park Royal or the first twenty minutes against West Ham. It was voted by far the best game seen on the Swindon ground during the present season, but all I can say about that is that they have not had the pleasure of viewing such matches as the Luton spectators have been privileged with.

Platt kept a fine goal, and never made a single mistake the whole game, but so well did Blackett and McCurdy play that he was not often called upon. The Luton halves were also in capital form, Bob Hawkes being a special favourite with the Swindon crowd, but I am not prepared to say he did better than his comrades, each of whom was a class above the Swindon middle line. Luton's left wing pair did wonderfully well, especially as Pickering was badly handicapped by a nasty injury, and Sandy Brown was hurt quite early in the game also, which prevented him being as dangerous as usual. Macdonald played a clever game, and afforded Warner many chances to give the Swindon men a taste of his cleverness and speed, although the ex-Tottenham player has been seen to greater advantage with his shooting.

It was evident from the manner the home players tackled they were out for spoiling Luton's fine record away, and two or three were none too scrupulous in their methods, Oakden especially playing the stopping game by acting as "policeman" to Brown. Ling did very well in goal, bringing off several fine saves; but the backs were none too safe, and if they had been hustled a bit more, would have let their side down, I feel sure.

On the journey home, several of the players renewed acquaintance with McEwen and Ross, who were most pressing in persuading their old comrades to join their saloon. Naturally, they were greatly elated at their first away success; still, they found time to express their pleasure at Luton's fine show this season, Davie Ross saying it must be a welcome change from his experience on return journeys with us. Both McEwen and Ross stated they were very comfortable with their new club; nevertheless, they have pleasant memories of "Good old Luton."

The Southern League matches furnished several surprises on Saturday. The victory of Norwich City at Bristol by a goal to nil can hardly be included in this category, perhaps, because the Rovers were so demoralised at Luton that they have never been able to recover. But it was surprising to find West Ham United beaten on their own ground by Reading (3-2), and it was still more astonishing to hear of Northampton's one-goal-to-nil victory at Millwall.

Queen's Park Rangers' 2-0 defeat of Plymouth Argyle was also a little bit out of the ordinary way, even though the game was played at Park Royal. In fact, all the top-markers engaged were beaten except Luton, Fulham, and Southampton, the last two making a draw on the Londoners' ground. Brentford were beaten at New Brompton by 2 goals to 1, and the Southern League table now reads as follows:—

	Plyd.	Wn.	Lt.	Dn.	Goals.		Pts
					For.	Agst	
Fulham	9	4	0	5	11	4	13
Luton	9	5	1	3	21	10	13
Tottenham H.	8	5	1	2	14	4	12
Southampton	8	5	1	2	12	6	12
Plymouth Argyle....	9	5	2	2	12	6	12
Millwall	9	4	3	2	13	6	10
Portsmouth	9	3	2	4	16	9	10
Brentford	9	5	4	0	9	9	10
Bristol Rovers	9	4	4	1	15	14	9
Norwich City	9	3	4	2	11	11	8
Northampton	9	4	5	0	8	20	8
Queen's Park Rans.	9	3	5	1	13	13	7
Reading	9	3	5	1	11	13	7
West Ham	9	3	6	0	8	11	6
Watford	8	2	4	2	7	10	6
New Brompton	9	2	5	2	5	24	6
Swindon	9	1	5	3	6	13	5
Brighton and Hove	8	2	6	0	7	15	4

On Saturday next, Luton will be at home to Millwall, and the meeting ought to be productive of something like the excitement of old times, when Luton and Millwall used to fight for the championship of the Southern League. In their last two S.L. matches, the Dockers, who had been going exceptionally strong, disappointed the expectations of their supporters, but they showed a return to form on Monday, when they beat Plymouth Argyle in a Western League match. The Luton team will be as usual, and the kick-off is fixed for 3.15.