

The Southern League.

LUTON v. WEST HAM.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—

Luton		1 goal.
West Ham		1 goal.

The teams were as follow:—

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

West Ham: Kitchen; Jackson and Gardner; Bush, Jarvis, and Piercey; Featherstone, Grassam, H. Stapley, Watson, and A. Winterhalder.

Referee: Mr. A. J. Barker (Hanley).

Not many more uninteresting games have been or will be seen on the Luton ground this season than that which was played on Saturday. The weather was cold, though fine, the ground was in very bad condition, the spectators were comparatively few, there not being more than three or four thousand, and the lack of life amongst the players soon robbed the lookers-on of any enthusiasm which they might otherwise have possessed.

Possibly the state of the pitch had a good deal to do with the poorness of the play. The men had the greatest difficulty in the world to keep their feet, and this probably prevented them putting into their efforts that strenuousness which is necessary to make a really interesting game. There were numerous slips, sometimes in midfield, sometimes at critical moments near goal, and the play suffered accordingly.

It will be remembered that when Luton went to West Ham early in the season they secured a very meritorious victory by two goals to one, so that Saturday's match ought to have been a tolerably safe thing for them. As a matter of fact they should have won easily on the run of the play, but there was no sting in the attack, and the Hammers escaped with a point to their credit.

The visitors won the toss, but this gave them little advantage. They looked like getting away at the start, but failed to elude the backs, and Luton transferring to the other end, Brown received the ball well in front of goal, but had the misfortune to handle, and the whistle went for a free kick. I don't think Sandy intended to handle the ball, but intention seldom counts, and as a rule "hands" is given as freely as though the law had never been altered.

Bob Hawkes initiated a further attack, from which a corner resulted. A scrimmage followed upon Warner's kick, and this eventually led to another corner, which was beautifully placed by Warner, but once more the forwards were unable to convert. A moment later, the forwards showed one of their best bits of combination, but again the effort was neutralised by hands against Brown.

The Hammers then retaliated, and Featherstone threatened danger, but was stopped just in time. White was the means of giving his side another opening, passing the ball out to Warner, who gave Macdonald a good chance, but Jackson saved the situation at the expense of a corner. There were loud appeals from the spectators for a penalty, on the ground that Jackson had handled the ball, but the referee gave no heed.

Barnes took the place kick, which was not turned to account, but presently the outside left put the ball across very nicely, and Pickering jumping up, let it go to Brown, who had a clear opening, and took advantage of it by scoring with a smart shot. Now it was thought that Luton would do all right, and the wonder was that they did not increase their lead in the next few minutes, numerous shots at close quarters ensuing upon a centre by Barnes, but in each case the ball rebounded off an opponent.

Then Pickering secured an opening, and put in a shot which looked good for a goal all the way, but Kitchen brought off a magnificent save. Barnes was responsible for another shot, almost as good, but again Kitchen successfully negotiated. The Hammers responded, and Stapley was beating all opposition, when a deliberate trip by White brought his run to a premature end. Nothing accrued from the free kick, but Stapley afterwards sent in a couple of good shots, one of which caused Platt some amount of trouble. At the other end, MacDonald threw away a fine chance by shooting over, and the interval arrived with Luton leading by a goal to nil.

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Some little diversion was here caused by the Unionist candidate, who had put in an appearance some time before, and who now made a tour of the ground, walking amongst the spectators, and being received with booing, cheering, and a waving of yellow bills. The bills had been given away at the gate as people came to the match, and they were now useful in waving defiance.

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Returning to the game, it may be said that Luton did not retain their lead long after the resumption of play. The visitors, acting on the aggressive, Featherstone got in a centre, and after a bit Stapley shot from some distance out. It was a slow grounder, and the spectators were struck dumb with astonishment to see the ball find its way to the net, Platt making not the slightest effort to save.

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It is quite possible that the custodian could not have got to the ball in any case, but his being content to see it go in without an attempt gave it the appearance of being a wonderfully soft goal. This put more heart into the Hammers' attack, and the forwards several times became rather pressing, Featherstone once having a very good opening, but he shot over the bar.

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Luton replied, and Pickering was going for goal with two or three after him, when he came a cropper well inside the penalty area. There were loud appeals for a penalty, but they were disregarded by the referee, who evidently thought it was a tumble and not a trip. Not much need be said as to the remainder of the play, it being of the tamest possible kind. Blackett tried forcing tactics, and several times got well up, but without result.

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Once when tackling a man, Blackett appeared to lose his temper, and after kicking the ball, kicked at an opponent also. The referee blew his whistle promptly, and the spectators anxiously waited to see what sort of punishment was to be meted out for an undoubtedly bad offence. The anxiety gave place to merriment, however, when the official gave a foul—against West Ham.

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Neither side scored again, and neither side looked like scoring. I won't weary readers with a description of what was weary enough to look at, let alone write about; suffice it to say that people were glad enough when the end came, and were thankful that not more than one point had been dropped.

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Speaking individually, it may be said that Platt gave a good display apart from that extraordinary lapse, and no fault could be found with the backs, both of whom kicked and tackled well. The halves were not quite at their best perhaps, Bob especially suffering from the heavy state of the ground, but it was forward where there was most room for a little brightening up. The left wingers gave a very good account of themselves, but Brown could not get on at all, and Warner also was weak at outside right. The visitors were no better, and on the whole, a draw was perhaps the fairest result of an unsatisfactory game.