

The Southern League.

BRISTOL ROVERS v. LUTON.

Played on the Stapleton-road ground, Bristol, on Saturday. Result:—

Bristol Rovers	3 goals.
Luton	2 goals.
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The following players turned out:—

Luton—Platt; Blackett and McCurdy; F. Hawkes, White, and Gallacher; Warner, Macdonald, E. Dobson, Pickering, and Barnes.

Bristol Rovers—Clarke; Hales and Pudan; Tait, Appleby, and Jarvie; Clark, Lewis, Beats, Walker, and Dunkley.

Referee, Mr. H. Ward (Nottingham).

As Luton won at home by a margin of six goals, their task on Saturday appeared comparatively easy on paper. But it was recognised that the Rovers would be extremely anxious to retrieve their reputation before their own supporters, and therefore the result was an open question. Each side had two regular members of the team away, R. Hawkes and Brown being replaced by Gallacher and E. Dobson respectively. The captain's absence was caused by his inability to leave business so early as the journey to Bristol compelled. Cartlidge and Dunn were away from the home team, their places being taken by Clarke and Hales.

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At the time of the kick-off the surroundings were dismal in the extreme. What few spectators were present were crowded under the covered accommodation, and the other parts of the ground wore a truly deserted appearance. The rain was falling in torrents, while the wind was blowing a hurricane. Fortunately, after some twenty minutes matters became a bit pleasanter, at any rate for the spectators, although, of course, the players had by this time become thoroughly drenched to the skin, while the playing pitch was nothing but mud. McCurdy had the good fortune to win the toss, and chose to play with the elements in his favour.

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Notwithstanding the unfavourable conditions, both teams got off the mark at a rare pace. Luton were the first to be really dangerous, through a well-conceived burst on the part of Macdonald, who quite upset Pudan's calculations, and left the Rovers' left back standing. Mac went off in great style, and looked all over a scorer, but Hales, realising the danger, made a dash across and just managed to get the ball away as Luton's inside right was about to let drive at goal. This had the effect of pulling the home attack together, for they quickly arrived at Platt's end by a pretty passing movement, and only good judgment on the part of McCurdy prevented the downfall of the Luton goal.

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But this relief did not last long, and Dunkley and Walker once more brought the ball down in a threatening manner. The former dropped across a backward centre, which Tait attempted to improve with a long shot, but Beats, who was standing offside, gave the ball the final touch, and was rightly pulled up. This decision did not go well with the spectators, and they made the fact known to the referee. By the way, it was not the only occasion Mr. Ward failed to fall in with their views of right and wrong, for during the game no fewer than three times did they set up strong appeals for penalty kicks, but, contrary to last season on this ground, the presiding official was not to be coerced by the crowd's clamour, and not a single one did he award.

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On the whole, the Rovers were having the better of the exchanges during the early stages, but a stubborn defence kept them at bay. Several individual efforts on the part of Luton, however, almost deserved to score. On one occasion Macdonald tried a long shot, which all but beat Clarke, but he just managed to get at it near the post. A fine run down by Warner was stopped by Pudan kicking the Luton forward's feet from under him. From the resulting free kick, Barnes put in a grand cross drive all along the ground, but it just missed the extreme post, and went for a goal kick.

Another chance fell to Luton when a foul occurred some twenty yards inside the Rovers' half, directly in a line with goal, but Blackett, who took the place kick, did not judge properly, and the ball again went for a simple goal kick. Warner secured the ball in mid-field about this time, and ran quite half the length of the field without any Bristol player being able to overtake him. Before attempting to shoot, he worked well in, but Clarke, although he fell in the mud, just stopped the ball from entering the net. He could not get it away, and, with Pickering well up, it seemed a goal must result, but, unfortunately, Pickering just missed the ball, and Hales managed to arrive on the scene and kick away.

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Better luck attended the next visit of the Luton forwards, for after the ball had been kept in the vicinity of the Rovers' goal for several moments without any particular anxiety being evinced by the local defence, it came out to Pickering, and he used good judgment by just slipping it through, evidently to the surprise of Hales and Co., who had left him unmarked. This happened after some twenty minutes' play. Curiously, this success did not bring about any change in the conditions with which the match was contested, and on the whole it was Platt who was oftenest called upon.

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But Peter was in great form. Once he ran well outside the penalty area to punch away a free kick given for a foul throw-in by Gallacher. It was certainly a daring movement, and it had the reward of success. A bit later he made two fine saves during a spell of pressure on the part of the Rovers. It was in this period the crowd first set up the cry for a penalty for handling by White, but, though similarly to last season, they shouted for two or three minutes, no notice was taken, and eventually the danger passed.

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Dobson got going with a single-handed run, but to evade the attentions of the Rovers' halves, he was compelled to work over on the wing before attempting a shot, and Pudan just got in the way of his final effort. It was not often Platt was beaten, but on one occasion he looked so, and Blackett came to the rescue and kicked the ball out of danger almost from under the bar. Fouls were often given, but they were more the result of the slippery turf than wilful intent. Such a one was given against White about thirty yards out, and from this came the equaliser, Beats picking up a centre from Dunkley, who had secured the ball from the place kick, and although the Luton players appealed for offside, the referee allowed the ex-Wolverhampton centre to go through, and he netted a magnificently-judged goal, Platt not having the slightest chance. It was certainly a fine point, but not being in a direct line it was impossible for me to say if Beats was offside when he settled on the ball.

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There was still five minutes left before half-time, when Dobson got clear away, and dodging both backs cleverly, he came right through to within eight or ten yards of Clarke. It appeared as if nothing could stop him netting a goal, but probably on account of the mud he did not properly get the ball when he let drive, and Clarke managed to just smother the attempt, greatly to the relief of the crowd. A goal at this stage would probably have turned the game in Luton's favour, but fortune was on the side of the Rovers, and about two minutes later an extremely lucky point fell to them.

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It came about in this way. Dunkley being tackled by Blackett, attempted to get in his centre, but it was travelling out for a goal-kick, when Walker made a dash for the ball, and just prevented it going over the line. The last-named player had certainly no other purpose than keeping the ball in play, when he kicked it towards the goal. He would not have succeeded in this, only the wind really kept the ball inside the playing area, and it just shaved the first post instead of striking the net as appeared likely. Platt actually ducked to allow the ball to pass out wide of the goal, but it gave a sudden swerve, struck the inside of the further upright, and, behold, the Rovers were a goal to the good. Such a goal would not be scored in a thousand attempts, but it was Luton's luck to suffer on this occasion.

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The wind had almost entirely dropped, and