

The Southern League.

LUTON v. MILLWALL.

Played at Millwall on Saturday. Result:—

Luton 2 goals.
Millwall 1 goal.

The teams were as follow:—

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

Millwall—Joyce; Campbell and Stevenson; Comrie, McLean, and Blythe; Bradbury, Hunter, Heaton, Jones, and Watkins.

Referee, Mr. T. Armit (Leek).

Although Luton occupy such an exalted position in the Southern League table, they had not until Saturday won a match away from home in that competition since the opening month of the season: in fact, nearly six months. Indeed, their only away victory during this period was a fluky one-goal win at New Brompton in the United League, when a mistake of the home defence presented Pickering with an open goal. Several times, it is true, they have fully deserved to bring away the spoils, but fortune was against them, sometimes in the shape of official rulings.

It is rather curious success should come when, taking the match right through, Platt's charge bore a greater amount of pressure than in any previous game. Many times during past years have I seen Luton press for practically the whole half and then their opponents, the first time they got away, managed to get a goal. Just for once, the boot was on the other leg, and it was Luton who enjoyed the good fortune in this respect at Millwall.

During the morning the weather promised to be a repetition of the previous Saturday, and with a return to drier pitches, it was hoped a victory away would result from the improved conditions in this respect. But though the Millwall turf was certainly firmer than for several seasons when Luton have visited that delightful (!) spot, as a result of a steady rain about the time the spectators began to assemble it became somewhat treacherous and many slips were the result. It will be noticed White had not recovered from his injury of the previous week, and Gallacher played at centre-half for the first time in the Southern League.

Quite early in the game Platt gave evidence that he was in good form by cleverly touching a fine drive from Hunter over the bar at the expense of a corner kick. The manner in which the Millwall attack commenced pleased the crowd, and visions of an ample revenge for that 6-1 defeat at Luton rose in their minds. It was certainly not forgotten, for the players were greeted with the remark, "No six-one to-day," as they came on the field. Luton were practically penned in their own half for the first quarter of an hour, and it would be wearisome to recount the number of goal kicks at this stage of the proceedings. Suffice it to state the Luton defence was firm as a rock, and what few well-directed attempts came to Platt between the uprights were confidently dealt with by him.

The Luton forwards did not get a chance to settle down, for their opponents monopolised the play to such a tune that it was seldom the Lutonians could get a kick at the ball except to repel an attempt at scoring. But when they did manage to force the ball over the half-way line full use was made of the opportunity. Pickering worked his way through on the left and drew the Millwall defence to that side of the field; then, realising he had little chance of getting clear, he tipped the ball over to Macdonald, who had simply to dash between the backs and confront Joyce, who seemed quite unprepared for this manoeuvre on the part of the Luton attack and stood helpless when Macdonald let drive into the net.

It was certainly fortunate to get the lead on the first occasion a serious visit was paid to Joyce, but the goal was well worked for and quite deserved to score. It might have been expected this success would alter the run of the game and that Luton would improve, but such was not the case, and Millwall continued to confine the exchanges to the Luton half of the field right up to the interval.

About the nearest shave the home team had of equalising came as a result of a free kick some forty yards out against Gallacher. No fewer than three times did Platt bring off a grand save before the ball was got out of danger. On another occasion Hunter appeared to have a clear course to goal, but Gallacher managed to get up in time, and Hunter ran right into him. Both players fell, and the Millwall forward apparently got the worst of the collision, but he resumed after a little attention.

Hereabouts Blackett went off, it being understood his leg troubled him, and he did not return until the second half, but the Luton defence was not to be beaten, for offside came to their aid in consequence of Blackett's absence. Therefore Luton were able to retire with the only goal to their credit at half-time, although it came about on the only occasion the forwards got anywhere near the Millwall goal.

In the second half Luton did a bit more pressing than during the first; still, Millwall had almost as many tries at Platt's charge, for their shooting was, on the whole, better directed. But the worst feature of the concluding "forty-five" was the unfair tactics indulged in by the players, especially one of the Millwall defenders, whose great idea seemed to be first to foul an opponent before attempting to play the ball. It was a most unpleasant spectacle to see first one player and then another being injured, and the referee did not penalise half the offences.

Brown got in one good attempt which Joyce did well to get away, otherwise it was Platt who was still holding the fort against a series of attacks. It would only be repetition to recount the number of times the Millwall forwards had a pop at goal; suffice it to say Platt was playing with the confidence born of success.

Eighteen minutes before the finish Hunter received a nasty kick in the mouth from Blackett, the Millwall player having the misfortune to come into contact with Blackett's foot in an attempt to bring the ball over his head. Hunter was assisted off the field and did not return. Stevenson played the one-back game, Campbell apparently having a roving commission, as he was all over the field; indeed, at times he was right among the forwards.

Naturally, Luton got down a bit oftener, and Pickering was forging his way towards Joyce in good style when Stevenson made a dash across and brought the Luton man down inside the penalty area. Bob Hawkes decided to have a try to convert the resulting penalty kick, this being his first attempt since the present season commenced, and he proved himself quite as certain a scorer as under the old rule by placing the ball in the extreme corner with a low shot. As there was little more than ten minutes to go, it looked a good thing for Luton, but they reckoned without the referee, who, within two minutes of Luton's goal, gave Millwall a similar opportunity to score by the award of a penalty kick against Gallacher.

It was a terrible blunder on the referee's part, for it could only be for handling, as Gallacher was not near enough another player to foul him, and I am equally certain the ball did not touch either his hand or arm, as he was directly facing the Press box at the moment. Heaton was entrusted with the kick and he let drive with great force, but Platt was on the alert and quickly flung out his leg and the shot was safely disposed of by one of the Luton players, who had scarcely moved off the 18 yards' line, so quickly was the ball returned. Platt, for once, came in for the hand-shaking process by his delighted comrades.

It ought to be mentioned that Blackett had left the field immediately after Bob netted Luton's second goal. F. Hawkes fell back to preserve a clean sheet, but unfortunately this move turned out to the discomfiture of Platt, although it was no fault of Freddy's. A shot from the wing was put across, and Platt, who had a good view all the way, would have disposed of this with ease, but in its flight the ball struck Hawkes on the breast, and this diverted it sufficiently out of its course to beat Luton's goalkeeper for the only time during the game. It was rough luck, certainly, for if ever a custodian deserved to have the credit of

keeping his charge intact, Platt did on Saturday. But he had this satisfaction—no Millwall player could do the trick. With only one minute and a half to go, there was really no chance for Millwall to retrieve the situation, and it was a sorrowful crowd that trooped off the ground when the referee called time.

As will be gathered from the running comment, little credit attached to the Luton front string. It was seldom they got the ball at all, and on the few occasions danger was threatened to Joyce it was the left-wing pair who brought the ball through. Of the halves, Bob Hawkes was most in evidence, Gallacher not settling down to his latest position so well as the previous week, while Fred Hawkes was naturally a bit less confident than usual after his two or three weeks' absence from the team.

If any one player was responsible for the welcome victory it was Platt, who has certainly not played a better game since his first appearance against Plymouth, and this is high praise, for he has given many fine exhibitions. Neither Blackett nor McCurdy made any mistakes, but with their comrade behind in such fine fettle they could go about their work with every confidence. Bob Hawkes, by netting the penalty, had the distinction of scoring Luton's fiftieth goal in the Southern League.

Millwall quite spoilt their good work by shady tactics; otherwise they played in their well-known style of keeping the ball always on the move. But though they shot hard and often, they appeared to lose many opportunities through not giving sufficient time to steady themselves in front of goal, and many attempts were yards too high. Stevenson was the better back and Blythe the cleverest half. All the forwards were pretty fast, with Jones probably the pick of the basket.