

LUTON v. READING.

Played at Reading on Monday. Result:—

Luton 1 goal.
Reading 1 goal.

The players turned out as below:—

Luton—Platt; Blackett and McCurdy; F. Hawkes, Gallacher, and H. Lane; Latheron, Warner, Brown, Pickering, and Barnes.

Reading — Newbigging; Henderson and Watts; Gettins, Bannister, and C. Brown; Bainbridge, Higginson, McCafferty, Allman, and Leonard.

Referee, Mr. A. E. Farrant (Bristol).

Reading are one of the Southern League teams Luton invariably do well against, but the composition of the eleven which made the journey on Monday did not altogether inspire confidence. To begin with, Bob Hawkes could not get away, while, as mentioned elsewhere, White had previously made another most important engagement for this particular day before he was aware of the alteration of date. In addition to this re-shuffling of the half-back line, Macdonald received a nasty injury to his ankle against Southampton, and it was discovered on Monday morning it was quite impossible for him to turn out.

The best was therefore made of the available material at the command of the Club, H. Lane coming in for his initial Southern League match, although he has several times previously assisted the first eleven in United League matches. Latheron crossed over from his usual wing to play outside to Warner.

Reading were also somewhat in difficulties in raising a representative team. Like Luton, they were without the services of their amateur captain, and in his place Watts turned out. He has been a bit of a roamer this season, having played for Grays United and Southern United, but with both these clubs in financial difficulties he had not been playing recently until Saturday last, when he once more came out in a Reading shirt, and from paper reports did well. Judging from the attendance, Reading will not be financial gainers by the alteration of dates, but that, of course, is their look-out. I should say 1,200 spectators would be a liberal estimate of the numbers round the ropes, although the kick-off took place as late as 5.30.

By winning the toss, Reading had the advantage of a stiffish breeze, and for a time appeared likely to run away with the Lutonians. It naturally took a little time for the re-constructed Luton team to settle down, and, luckily, during this period the Biscuiteers failed to get a goal. McCafferty put in about the most dangerous attempt from a decent range, but Platt is not often beaten by such, and he brought off a clever save.

The first time Luton got away came about through a nice run by Barnes on the left wing, and he transferred the ball right across to Warner, who in turn passed it over to Latheron. Just as the latter was about to get in his centre, Watts bundled him over rather roughly, but it certainly saved a goal, for with the inside men all up, it was almost any odds on one of them scoring. The free kick taken by Blackett was somewhat easily cleared, and play once more veered to the other end of the field.

Following a throw-in near the goal-line, Platt almost missed a good attempt from Higginson. But the efforts of the home forwards were not long in meeting with their reward. Bainbridge, after a swift rush down the right, put the ball right across the goal-mouth. McCafferty missed the centre altogether, although it appeared any odds on his netting if he but touched the ball at all, being only a few yards out. But Allman was on the spot a yard or so wider, and before any Lutonian could tackle him, he had the ball in the net with a hard drive right away from Platt, who naturally expected the attempt to come from the other side, with McCafferty in such a good position.

Latheron, soon after the re-start, raced away past Watts and put in a grand dropping centre, which Pickering just failed to gather, or an equaliser must have resulted. At the opposite end Leonard was allowed to get in a middle right off the goal-line within a yard or two of the corner flag. Allman prevented the ball swerving behind, and, touching it towards the centre, McCafferty with a first-time attempt just failed to convert.

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Luton had another look-in when Warner was fouled near the penalty area, Blackett's place kick being pounced upon by Pickering, but Newbigging got down to Pickering's shot at the bottom of the upright and cleared amid cheers. Midway in the first half Latheron, in making one of his dashing runs down the right wing, cleverly headed the ball by Watts, who could not turn so well as in his younger days, and "Smiler" managed to get in a fine centre. In travelling across the goal the ball touched a Reading defender, and from the resulting corner kick the equalising goal came about.

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Newbigging and Brown both made for the ball as it dropped, and the former just missed it, but he struck Sandy a terrible blow on the side of his jaw, and the ball cannoned off Brown's head into the net. "Rather a soft goal," said the Reading spectators, but Sandy scarcely thought so, I judge. For a brief spell after this goal, Luton improved, and on one occasion Leonard was offside midway between his own penalty and half-way lines.

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Platt almost let his side down when he came out to meet a left-wing attack and failed to gather the ball. Bainbridge was presented with an absolutely open goal, as Peter could not get back in time to reach the shot if it had been directed towards the uprights. Fortunately for Luton, Bainbridge sent the ball in the opposite direction and a simple goal kick resulted. It must remain a mystery how the Reading crack winger failed to reap the advantage of Platt's misjudgment. At half-time, therefore, the score stood 1 goal each.

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The second half was drawn blank, but this was more the result of bad shooting than clever defensive tactics, although of course the latter had something to do with the result. The Reading forwards were the chief sinners in this particular, and they seldom appeared likely to take advantage of openings, even when they were presented. The downfall of Luton's goal looked pretty evident, however, when, during a sustained spell of pressure, Bannister struck the crossbar with a swift rising shot. The ball rebounded to the left, and Platt, following it up, managed to charge down the return attempt.

A diversion was made by Brown and Warner working the ball well down the field with a clever combined movement, and the former tried a shot from good range, which Newbigging had considerable difficulty in disposing of, but he managed the trick. After this, Reading held the upper hand in the exchanges for some time and forced several corners without any particular danger threatening, owing to bad placing.

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About the last real chance Reading had of winning the game was some eight minutes before the finish, when Platt, in fisting away a shot from Allman, put the ball right on to McCafferty's toe, but the latter failed to return the shot, and danger passed for the moment. As time approached, Luton did much better, and on at least two occasions appeared likely to bring off a complete surprise. Latheron got clean away and passed the ball back to Warner, who tamely kicked it straight to Bannister, and the latter cleared. But the closest Luton came to securing the lead was almost the final kick of the match.

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Brown, taking aim from thirty yards down the field with a surprise shot, caught Newbigging quite unawares, but though the aim was pretty true, it just failed in its object, the ball almost brushing the bar at the juncture with the upright and passing out. This goal would have ensured fourth position on the table and possibly third at the finish, but a division of goals was really as much as Luton deserved.

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Still, a total of 41 points constitutes a record for Luton in the Southern League, the previous best being 40, two seasons ago when sixth position was taken. Considering the hard work recently put in by the team, they must be congratulated on the finish up of the season. Since April came in, six Southern League matches have been played, and seeing four of them were away from home, it is certainly a fine performance to only lose one, and that through an official error, at Plymouth.

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The signing-on process at Luton has been continued, and the signatures obtained up to date are:—Platt, McCurdy, Fred Hawkes, White, Gallacher, Warner, Macdonald, Brown, Pickering, and Barnes, while it is probable that Blackett will have appended his signature before the appearance of these notes, thus completing the team. The directors, however, contemplate signing on three or four new players.

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