

Southern League.

LUTON v. FULHAM.

Played at Craven Cottage on Saturday.
Result:—

Luton nil.
Fulham nil.

The teams were as under:—

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

Fulham—Fryer; Ross and Thorpe; Collins, Morrison, and Goldie; Bell, Edgley, Hamilton, Wheatcroft, and Threlfall.

Referee, Mr. R. Horrocks (Bolton).

Few Lutonians looked for a victory at Fulham after the staggering defeat at Brighton, and some misgivings were expressed at the selection of the team, but of course this was before the match. Notwithstanding these doubts as to the ability of the side, several hundred supporters followed the team on their first visit to town, and many more would have done so if they had known the fine exhibition the Blues were about to give by the banks of the Thames. Without exception, even the London Press acknowledge the visitors were the smarter side and really deserved to win instead of dividing the points.

Only two changes were made in the team which failed so badly at Brighton, although White returned to his old post at centre-half, and thus three positions were altered altogether. I do not think the substitution of Jackson for Hogg caused any surprise, for his form during the practice matches met with general approval, and he was reported to have played in brilliant form at Maidstone. But it certainly caused a mild sensation when it leaked out that Jones was not playing. Naturally, many people at once ran away with the idea he must have played a poor game at Brighton to warrant his exclusion, but I understand this was not the case. The directors simply considered White's style of play would come in more useful against the champions, and Freddy was given the chance to prove that he could hold his own in the best company.

Last season the Fulham enclosure was practically re-modelled, and was certainly the finest ground in the Southern League so far as the spectators' accommodation and comfort were concerned. But during the past close season the playing pitch itself has received most attention, and on Saturday it looked a perfect picture, and without a doubt the Fulham directors have now the most up-to-date ground in the League. The start was delayed until 4.35, to enable the crowd who swarmed the top of the great banks to have a look at the boat race, and it was taken as a good omen that the Light Blues were to the front as they passed Craven Cottage.

Bob lost the toss, but with the pitch sheltered as at Fulham this means very little, except for the inconvenience of the sun during the summer-like weather dazzling the sight of the ball. It was a minute or so before Luton found their feet, and the home side were the first dangerous. Quite early in the game Bell appeared to be getting into a shooting position, when McCurdy came to the rescue and judiciously gave a corner by kicking into touch. But corners were comparatively safe all through the match, and at no time did danger appear probable from this source. A few minutes later Luton's goal was placed in jeopardy from a right wing attack, and with McCurdy in difficulties, Platt came forward without reaching the ball, which appeared to be making for goal, when Fred Hawkes jumped to the rescue, and with a tall kick right over the goal presented Fulham with still another corner. It was one of the luckiest incidents of the match from a Luton point of view, as a goal at this stage might have put quite another aspect on the play.

About the first time Luton threatened danger it was the result of some pretty play by Barnes and Pickering, who worked the ball through the Fulham lines in great style. Barnes showed a clean pair of heels to Ross and centred finely to Pickering, who had closed in, and the latter taking a flying shot, had the misfortune to miss the goal by a yard or so. During an attack on the Luton goal, McCurdy fouled Edgley just about a yard from the penalty line, and Ross taking the free kick, almost did the trick with one of the best attempts at scoring from a place kick it has been my lot to witness. The ball travelled along the ground at a great pace, but just as it appeared certain to enter the goal by shaving the inside of the upright, Platt threw himself full length across the opening and turned the ball on the outside of the post. It was the finest save of the match, and earned loud applause from the crowd—especially the Luton portion.

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R. Hawkes getting possession of the ball, tried one of his special bursts right through, beating Goldie and Ross in fine style, and taking deliberate aim, he let drive at Fryer, but that worthy was not to be beaten, and he managed to get to Bob's shot and prevent it taking effect. Luton by this time had found their feet, and were giving the Fulham defence plenty of work, White on one occasion only just missing with a good driving attempt. Naturally this turn of the tables did not meet with approval from the Fulhamites, who expected their team to get through just how they liked, and Hamilton was made the scapegoat of the repeated failures to get away. Just behind the Press seats distinct hisses were indulged in by the disgusted followers of Fulham, and before the finish Hamilton's work was the subject of jeering comments from all quarters.

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During another attack on Platt's charge, White came into collision with Threlfall, and the latter left the field for a few minutes, but apparently not much damage was done, for the left-winger proved, with Bell on the other extreme, the most dangerous of the Fulham vanguard right up to the close. At the opposite end Luton appeared at last to be getting a real opening with Brown in possession, but just as Sandy was about to shoot he was jumped into by Collins, and with two other Fulham men surrounding him, was literally knocked off his shot. This incident took place well inside the penalty area, and the Luton players stopped for the usual penalty for such offences, Barnes leaving the ball, which was pretty close to him, to appeal to the referee, but Mr. Horrocks paid not the slightest heed, and Fryer had a lucky let-off in not being called upon to face a penalty kick. Luton had quite held their own in the first half, and came in for much cheering as they left the field at the interval.

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But it was in the second half that Luton really played the game, and it must have been an eye-opener to the majority of the crowd to see the ease with which the visiting forwards got down the field time after time. It is true they did not manage to squeeze one past Fryer, but this was more their misfortune than their fault, and, writing after the match, I cannot even now understand how it was the Fulham goal escaped the threatened danger. Fulham's defence has almost become a proverb in Southern circles, and right well they played up to their reputation. By the way, Ross was none too gentle in his methods, as Barnes well knows. It was a nasty foul which brought down Barnes just opposite the Press seats, and many Fulhamites were pleased when it was seen Billy was able to resume playing, for he went down like a log and apparently fainted while on the ground.

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Time after time Luton swarmed round Fryer, and it seemed it would be only a matter of time before the excursionists from Luton would have the opportunity of cheering at the unexpected success of their pets, but it was not to be. On one occasion Fryer was compelled to leave his charge in order to prevent Schofield getting in a shot well out on the wing, and it was only the matter of a single stride which prevented Luton's new winger getting to the ball first.

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A nil game is always difficult to describe, and I will content myself by stating that if Luton had had their just deserts they would have been at least a couple of goals up at the finish, for the whole of the team performed grandly in the second half and quite outplayed their opponents.

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It was not a game which called for sustained efforts from either custodian. Still each had some critical situations to face, and it speaks well for Platt that he compared very favour-

ably with Fryer. But what Lutonians were most anxious about was to know if Jackson would respond to the task set him, that being to fill Blackett's old position as it should be filled. I am pleased to record that, with the exception of just a wee bit of hesitation at the commencement, he came through one of the most trying ordeals to which it is possible to put a young back with distinct credit to himself and the team. He has only to maintain this form to make his place a certainty, and for a player in his first season in class football to do this is very creditable. McCurdy played one of his best games, and taking the match through stood out as the best defender on the field.

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But it was the half-back line which showed the greatest improvement, and it is difficult to apportion the praise. Bob Hawkes almost surpassed himself, and when I state that, I mean he put into the shade his last season's form, for he would be the first to admit he had not previously been at the top of his form this season. He was far and away the cleverest player on the field, his artistic work at times literally "bringing down the house." White went to Fulham determined to prove he had lost none of his ability, and played probably the classiest game of his life. He has always been noted for hard work, but on Saturday he put in some really fine touches, and seemed quite at home with his comrades on either side. F. Hawkes was possibly not quite so much in evidence as his colleagues, but he made no mistake and played the plodding game to perfection.

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When a forward line do not notch a single goal, it, as a rule, gives little satisfaction to its friends, but on Saturday even this department did well, with the important exception of finishing without any tangible result. Schofield, although not quite in the form he was at Brighton, gave a nice exhibition on the wing, and with Warner as a regular partner will play much havoc with Southern League defences, there is little doubt. Brown without being showy, caused Morrison to keep on the look-out, insomuch that the last-named did not take his usual share in attack, which is something to be thankful for, judging from past experience. It was decidedly the best display of Brown this season, and the attention he came in for from the whole of the Fulham rearguard speaks well for his judicious feeding and shooting.

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Many critics voted Barnes and Pickering the better wing, and although this may not have been the case from a Luton point of view, their work was greatly in evidence in getting the ball into the vicinity of Fryer, Barnes being especially active in this direction. Where all did well, it is difficult to individualise, but to my mind Schofield and Brown were the more effective players in this department.

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PRESS OPINIONS.

The newspapers generally speak very highly of Luton's play. The following are a few extracts:—

“Daily News”: R. Hawkes, the Luton captain, was again the most prominent man on his side. Seldom, if ever, has “Bobby” been found wanting, and he has long since been regarded as one of the most scientific halves of the day. White, at centre-half, also did yeoman service for his side, while Barnes and Pickering were always conspicuous amongst the forwards. . . . On the day's play the Luton front rank was infinitely superior to that of Fulham. The visitors carried off the chief honours, and if they did not gain a victory they certainly deserved one.

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“Daily Chronicle”: Luton alone played the real football, the open game that permits of each section of a team doing that which it is intended to do. They played the game as it should be played, the free, open sort that it is intended to be, and they played it well, too. So well did their forwards combine in their attacks upon the thrice-concentrated, stultifying defence, that the sympathies of Fulham's supporters went out to the visitors. They cheered the Luton men frequently, and it was all because the visiting side was playing as the public wanted them to play, as, in fact, everybody who possesses the true sporting spirit would have a team play. Brown played a finely judicious forward game for Luton, he and Warner being the best forwards on the field, while the display of R. Hawkes at left half-back compelled the admiration of all who realise that a half-back's work should consist of assisting forwards as well as defending a goal. The Fulham supporters realised that, and showed their appreciation of his work. Prominent in every attack, Hawkes never failed to break up the precocious and un-Fulham-like attempts at combination by Bell and Edgley.

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“Morning Leader”: Luton created a very favourable impression, and, when one speaks in the minor key about the lack of goal-scoring, it is well to remember the ability of a youth named Platt. The Luton custodian behaved splendidly during the opening half, although it is true he had tradition to help him in the saving of goals at Craven Cottage. High shots were aimed at Platt in some profusion during the first half-hour, and Fulham then had a very good share of the game. At the same time, when the Luton forwards did get away they were just as dangerous, and the men on the left wing, Barnes and Pickering, were always a thorn in the side of the defence. In the second half Luton were the better team. Sandy Brown was paid a high compliment by the defence. The members of the black-and-white brigade kept him in leading strings, so to speak, for nearly the whole time, and only upon rare occasions was he allowed to get in his shot. Probably the best three men on the Luton side were Bob Hawkes and White at half, and McCurdy at full back. Hawkes, with his auburn hair and pale features, was always one of the leading actors, and he went about his work with so much serenity that, to use a racing phrase, the Lutonian would have scarcely blown out a candle at the finish of a hard match.

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