

The Fatal Football Tie.

English Cup Re-Play.

LUTON LOSE BY THE ONE GOAL.

Luton just lost in the re-play at Sunderland on Wednesday. That was what practically every supporter of the Blues expected. There might be the general expression of opinion that the visitors to the Durham town would more than hold their own—but that was only on the top; deep down there was the conviction that Luton had this season gone as near to the Crystal Palace as they would get. After our "light" has been put out, so to speak, it may be profitable to review our efforts this season. After having a long succession of the worst luck, Luton have this year made a nice little nest egg out of the competition. True, they only made about £14 out of the match at Gainsborough, but they divided a decent "gate"—for a mid-week match—at home. Then, again, the gate receipts at Luton on Saturday proved an easy record. The amount has been published at £594, but I have been assured that that was a miscalculation on the first casting up, and that the total was a little over £570. However, that is a long way in front of the £283, the previous record, when nine years ago Luton met Bolton Wanderers in the Cup. The takings at Sunderland on Wednesday were £538 11s. 6½d., probably the highest amount taken in Sunderland at a Wednesday match. So that Luton probably bring back with them about £230.

In the re-played tie, Luton lost by a single goal, the final score being 1-0 in favour of Sunderland, and therefore the representatives of the South did not disgrace themselves. But one is afraid it must be confessed that Luton's performance shows better on paper than it actually did on the field. Taking the match all through, it was simply a game between Sunderland's forwards and Luton's defence. But, then, what a defence the Wearsiders had to meet! Of this the Blues gave a good indication last Saturday; but on Wednesday they were even better. The magnificent play of Hogg, McCurdy, and Platt would have made itself felt even against one of the best teams in the country. The halves did not shine quite so much as usual, and the forwards were nowhere. Oh, for one or two sharpshooters! But the directors have been calling for them for ages, and yet they do not come.

Luton played exactly the same team as did duty on Saturday, but a couple of changes were made in the Sunderland ranks. As anticipated, Mr. Mason, the referee in Saturday's match, was unable to fill the engagement, and Mr. Hammond, of Heywood, took charge of the whistle.

On the whole it was but a tame encounter. The ground was hard, was covered with a thin layer of sand, and was dyked at each side with ridges of straw that had formerly blanketed it so that it would be fit for the game. The game started by the visitors, Sunderland soon showed they meant business, for within five minutes of the kick-off MacIntosh put the ball into the net, after receiving it from the Wearside Hogg. But the home centre had handled.

The home men attacked vigorously for some time after this, but they found the opposing backs a sturdy pair, particularly McCurdy. Once Bridgett appeared to have a nice chance when he shot over the bar. Sunderland did not get another chance like this before the visitors got to the other end, and both Murphy and R. Hawkes caused Ward to use his hands. Now the game developed into an up and down the field race, in which the players were all handicapped by the slipperiness of the ground. Once Raine and Hogg forced a corner that led to an exciting bombardment of the Luton goal. Twice at least it seemed as if a goal was inevitable, but Platt was there, and saved splendidly, the crowd loudly applauding his brilliant efforts. After this the visitors did not get into the home half so often, and Sunderland's right wing was especially conspicuous. It appeared to be much too strong for the wing opposing it, and it was well served by the remainder of the Wearsiders. Grand work by the Luton backs spoilt all their efforts, however, rush after rush being stubbornly repulsed.

Still there was nothing exciting until the Sunderland left wing broke away. MacIntosh made a determined effort to rush the ball through the goal. Cool Platt was again equal to the call upon him, and once more play became loose. The Sunderland men on the whole were the better and more aggressive side, but they found the defence of McCurdy, Hogg (Luton), and Platt ever ready and full of resource. Two or three corners were next forced by Sunderland, and after one of them Willie Hogg put in a shot which would have scored but for luck favouring the watchful Platt and placing one of his arms in the way of the ball.

After the interval each side made a sharp, hot attack that was unsuccessful. Then the home forwards swooped on Platt in fine style, and a goal seemed inevitable. The ball remained within a few feet of the Luton goal for nearly a minute, and how it was kept out is inexplicable. Yet not only was it kept out but the situation was saved in the end by McCurdy conceding a corner that did not give much trouble. Sunderland made several more attacks soon after, but could not find a breach in the grand defence, though once Willie Hogg just missed the goal by inches.

Gittins was making tracks for the other end when he was brought down by Watson, who was loudly hooted for the performance. If anything, a Northern football crowd is a crowd of sportsmen. After this Luton made a brief onslaught in which Ward found it necessary to leave his goal in order to deal with a shot from the left wing.

Sunderland were invading again in a few minutes. They were more business-like now, and found the desired opening at last. Bridget sent the ball right across near the goal, and Hogg being too close to the line as well as hampered by McCurdy to try a shot himself, kicked it to Raine. That player put it to MacIntosh in front of goal, and the centre did the necessary to put it by Platt very easily, the goalie having no chance to stop it. There was a great shout. Now Sunderland led! The second half was 24 minutes old.

Shortly afterwards Platt fumbled a hard shot from Gemmell, but McCurdy managed to get the ball away. It was a narrow escape, however. Sunderland made a number of efforts to increase their lead, and once when Platt missed his kick there was a good chance however, and sturdy McCurdy got the ball away.

The visitors' attempts to draw level were easily frustrated, the Sunderland defence always being strengthened immediately Luton got over the half-way line. Towards the end of the game a tendency towards foul play became pronounced, both sides being penalised for infringements. But the interest was gone from the game, and it finished rather quietly with Sunderland one up.

The match generally speaking had resolved itself into a trial between Sunderland's attack and Luton's defence. Luton were never brilliant in attack, and never deserved to score, but in defence they were splendid. They attended closely to all invaders, and adopted bustling tactics with success that spoiled many fine efforts on the part of the Sunderland forwards. As a result if these characteristics of the game Ward was not a busy man, but what he had to do he did well.

Result: Sunderland 1 goal, Luton nil.

Says a Sunderland critic:—"Platt was the hero of the Luton defenders, although there was a goal scored against him. He played an exceptionally fine game, particularly in the first half. The two backs were a very reliable pair, and in defence they were ably assisted by the half-backs, who also served the forwards well. The forwards, however, were a spasmodic and irregular lot, and made but a poor show when compared with the remainder of the team. Taken all through, the game was not of a very interesting character, and the score hardly represented Sunderland's superiority."