

Southern League

NEW BROMPTON v. LUTON.

Played at New Brompton on Saturday.
Result:—

Luton	nil.
New Brompton	nil.

The teams were as under:—

Luton—Platt; Jackson and McCurdy; F. Hawkes, White, and Jones; Latheron, Gittins, Murphy, Pickering, and Barnes.

New Brompton—Martin; Harvey and Floyd; Lloyd, Mavin, and Walker; Marriott, Cunliffe, Hartley, Lunn, and Smith.

Referee, Mr. L. Bullimer (Northampton).

During Luton's bad time before Christmas, three teams took away two valuable Southern League points from Bedfordshire. Having already avenged this loss in the cases of Tottenham and Norwich, it was hoped a similar result would come about from the return match at New Brompton. Except for the absence of Brown and Hogg on the injured list from the heavy holiday programme, the strongest available side was taken. Warner was left at home because of the disappointing shows he had made in recent matches, and R. Hawkes could not get away from business; but in the case of the captain's absence little misgiving was felt, so well has Jones dropped into what is a new position for him.

New Brompton at one time seemed doomed again for the cap-in-hand business at the Southern League table, but recently they have set to work to make their position safe, and with the falling away of the Palace, it was known it would mean a big effort to prevent them from being the first team to gain full points from Luton. Warrington has been given his release, and thus they were represented by their full strength, except Lee, who, as at Portsmouth the previous season, is not blessed with good luck in the shape of fitness.

Quite a large crowd was present when Luton arrived on the scene, the kick-off being advertised a quarter of an hour earlier than expected when the railway and hotel arrangements were made. The start was only delayed for a few minutes, and no serious inconvenience resulted. McCurdy won the toss, and gave his side what advantage was to be gained from a stiff breeze which blew diagonally into one goal.

The home team went off with a rush, and Jackson was early called upon to prevent a couple of good centres from Marriott being improved upon. However, Hogg's substitute was not to be flurried, and if his kicking was not so clean he made up by dashing tactics, which prevented the lively Kentish forwards from settling down. Gittins was the first Lutonian to show prominence in attack, and he almost repeated his Portsmouth triumph by notching an early goal, but instead of shooting himself he passed to his partner, who promptly returned the ball into the mouth of goal, only to see Barnes tamely put it over the line for a goal kick.

First corner fell to New Brompton through the efforts of Smith, and he took it himself, only to place behind. A breakaway by Cunliffe looked ominous for Luton, especially when Platt, who ran out about fifteen yards to punch the ball, missed it altogether with two or three Bromptonians in close attendance. Any way, Platt could not get back in time to prevent a shot taking effect, and thus New Brompton were presented with the easiest of chances. Someone made the attempt, but, luckily for Luton, missed the target completely, and no such opportunity came again. It was a terrible blunder, for there was an absolutely open goal and not a Lutonian near.

Accurate passing was out of the question if the ball rose in the air, on account of the wind, and both teams went in for big kicking, which certainly made the game a fast one, but little combination was seen. As if to atone for his early mistake, Platt brought off several clever saves, one from a sharp drive from the foot of Cunliffe being a specially smart affair. Murphy attempted an individual dash right down the centre of the field, and for a moment or two appeared likely to get clear away from all opposition, but could not entirely shake off the attentions of Harvey, who was close at his heels, and instead of keeping on he gave the ball to Barnes, who was also following up. Barnes dropped in a nice centre, but Floyd managed to get up and clear by a big kick down the field.

Many long shots were put in on both sides, for so quickly did the scene of operations vary that oftentimes at least one of the backs was nearer the half-way line than the vicinity of his own goal, and consequently offside decisions were pretty frequent. It is true Luton were pulled up oftener than their opponents, but this is quite usual for visiting teams, the spectators coming to the assistance of the defence by shouting appeals and thus calling attention to what otherwise might pass unnoticed in a fast game. The crowd had the laugh at McCurdy when he carefully watched the ball travelling over the goal line, only to discover it had touched a Lutonian, and New Brompton had the luxury of a corner. However, this was badly placed, so no particular harm was done.

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The crowd were fairly satisfied with the blank sheet at half-time, and expected when the teams crossed a different aspect would be put upon the game. In the early stages after resumption it really seemed this would be the case, for Platt and Co. were kept well employed in repelling shots from both long and short distances. Not only did the forwards have a pop, but Lloyd and Mavin joined in the fray with several decent attempts to beat Platt. But this extreme pressure did not last long, and Luton always afterwards did a full share of aggressive work.

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Following a spell of Luton's attacking, a corner was forced, which Latheron placed nicely, but Pickering, in trying to head into goal, got his cranium a bit too far under the ball, and one of the home forwards lying handy, went clean away, but eventually lost control, and Platt easily cleared what might have been a serious situation. New Brompton's method of attack appeared to be to give the ball to Smith on any and every occasion and trust to him showing a clean pair of heels to Hawkes and Jackson. He certainly was the most troublesome member the Luton defenders had to deal with, for time after time he got the ball almost to the goal-line and flashed it across in a most threatening manner, but the other members of the New Brompton front string were unable to turn the openings to account, even Cunliffe making two or three bad misses when excellently placed.

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When Luton succeeded in getting the ball near the home goal they certainly made better efforts to score, and with the least shade of luck would have placed New Brompton well in danger of finishing in the bottom place but one on the Southern League table. Gittins missed by inches only from a grand run and centre by Latheron, and Murphy put in a terrific drive which almost shaved the crossbar as it flew over the goal. Again, Gittins met a centre from Barnes and gave Martin a hot shot to hold, but he managed to do so just in time to prevent a score.

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About the nearest that New Brompton came to scoring was the result of one of Smith's corner-flag centres, which was only disposed of by giving a corner, and Platt had considerable difficulty in finally clearing, for the ball could not be got far away for an appreciable time, and once was almost put through by Jackson. The pressure was ultimately relieved by a goal kick.

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Less than ten minutes remained when Pickering all but did the trick with one of the best shots of the afternoon from twenty yards' range. He settled on the ball well out from a miskick on the part of Floyd, and letting fly with a cross drive, Martin was caught un-awares, and although he stopped it, he dropped the ball right on the line, and if any Lutonian had been up a goal must have resulted. It was a magnificent attempt, and

Pickering had hard lines in not actually netting.

Martin only saved his goal from falling during the closing five minutes by rushing out and thus forcing Murphy, who had dashed clean through the backs, to take aim earlier than he otherwise would have done. It was a good effort on Murphy's part, and Martin was rather lucky to prevent a score. Luton at the finish were having more of the game than their opponents, the final effort being a good run by Barnes, but with Harvey at his heels the whole time, he only managed to get his shot a foot or so over the bar.

Although no goals were scored the game was far from dull, and the strong cross wind was chiefly responsible for the lack of ability to control the ball at critical moments. Luton's defence stood the strain for lengthened periods in fine style. Platt, except for the early blunder, played a marvellously safe game. McCurdy was the cleaner kick undoubtedly, but Jackson played a good game all through. No half-back stood out above the others, but as a trio they were certainly most effective. The changes forward naturally made a difference to the combination, but on the score of shooting little fault could be found, the blank score-sheet notwithstanding. Any way, with less pressure they put in more likely shots than New Brompton's front string.

New Brompton's most dangerous forward was Smith, and he is still capable of winning a game on his own if left alone. He got across many fine centres, but Hartley in the centre failed badly on two or three occasions by dallying tactics. Mavin did well at centre-half, and was the mainstay of the defence. Harvey and Floyd were none too safe behind, and this gave Luton several openings which might have meant goals. But Martin played a good game in goal, and succeeded in retrieving the situation each time, albeit he was extremely lucky to get Pickering's shot away at a second attempt.