

Southern League

LUTON v. READING.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—

Luton 1 goal.

Reading 1 goal.

Teams:—

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

Reading—Whittaker; Lindsay and Gettins; Allman, Comrie, and Weir; Bartholomew, Minter, Edgley, Davis, and Carrick.

Referee, Mr. H. Smith (Boston).

The closing match of the season 1906-7 will live in the memory of the supporters of the Luton Club. If matters had panned out as most of them wished, the weather would have remained fine during the afternoon, and Luton, by avenging the 7 goals to 2 defeat sustained at Reading last December, would have finished up third on the Southern League table.

But the weather was by no means ideal, and for the first half-hour the players ran about in a downpour of rain. This may have accounted to some extent for the tameness of the exchanges, but it soon became evident that all the twenty-two players were not really in earnest, and, to make matters worse, early in the second half one or two of the Reading men indulged in tactics of a very questionable character.

Comrie was the chief offender in this respect, but the penalty from which Jones scored for Luton about a quarter of an hour from the finish was given against Weir for tripping Gittins as he was getting through. Some of the Reading players evidently did not like the idea of the penalty being awarded against them, and argued the point with the referee.

One of the visiting players even went off the field, near one of the posts, just before Jones took the kick, but the referee ordered him to come on the field again. Then, when the game was restarted in the centre of the field, Edgley, evidently bent on taking full advantage of the leniency of the referee, dribbled towards his own goal.

After this, the Reading defenders kicked the ball out of play at almost every opportunity, and on one occasion Pickering received some rough treatment at the hands, or rather feet, of Comrie. He retaliated under the very eyes of the referee, who, however, did nothing but award a free kick.

Up to this point no one had expected that anything unusual was likely to happen, but when Reading scored their goal, matters got much worse. Carrick received the ball near the centre of the field, and was so palpably offside that when he passed to his partner, no one seemed inclined to take the effort seriously.

Davis was allowed to dash away, however, and finished up with a shot which Platt did not attempt to save. The referee pointed to the centre of the field, and for a second or two there was a silence that could almost be felt, so great was the general consternation.

Even one of the Reading directors loudly expressed the opinion that Carrick was at least six yards offside when he received the ball, and a feeling of disgust at the turn things were taking seemed to be experienced on all hands. Still, the goal counted, and Luton were thus robbed of the opportunity of finishing third on the S.L. table.

Things went from bad to worse. A minute or two afterwards Edgley had a little game with the ball while players, officials, and spectators were patiently waiting for a throw-in, and no one would have been surprised if the referee had ordered him off the field, but once more a lack of firmness was displayed by the official in charge.

By this time the spectators were feeling very little interest in the play itself, but as only another five minutes remained it was hoped that matters would fizzle out in the natural course. But, no. The referee, at the instance of a linesman, stopped the game on the side of the field near the threepenny stand, and all the players, including the goalkeepers, were seen to gather round.

For a minute or two the great majority of the spectators wondered what had happened. There were the players and officials engaged apparently in wordy warfare, which seemed to be of an interminable character. It is doubtful if the like has ever been seen in serious football.

At length the referee walked across the field to a spot much nearer the grand stand, and after some further delay, threw the ball down. Here and there around the pitch it had been suggested that perhaps the referee had ordered a player to leave the field, and as soon as play re-commenced F. Hawkes and Carrick were seen making their way to the dressing-rooms.

Then a mighty roar went up, and the onlookers continued to boo and shout until the end of the game. As has been intimated, only a very few people knew why the two players had been turned off, and the absence of any apparent reason caused the demonstration to assume more alarming proportions, for Fred Hawkes is one of the most popular of the Luton players.

Seen in the dressing-room directly after he was turned off, Fred Hawkes said that when the ball had gone out of play Carrick picked it up and threw it at him, hitting him on the head with some force. Fred naturally resented this, and admitted charging Carrick in the back in order to "get his own back." Evidently this little episode was not noticed by the referee, as he was following the play, and the matter was reported to him by the linesman, who appeared to be much the stronger man of the two.

When the referee blew his whistle for the last time, the interest centred around the gates through which officials and players pass to the dressing-rooms. Fortunately, in addition to the policemen on duty, a number of plain clothes constables were on the spot, and helped to keep the crowd back. Notwithstanding their efforts, however, the players, the referee, and the linesmen were jostled by the crowd and had some difficulty in getting through.

Several of the Luton directors and players assisted the referee to get by without much trouble. The remaining players were cheered as they passed, but while the excitement was at its height there was a good deal of pushing, and a Reading man—not a player—is said to have assaulted one or two of the plain clothes police-

men. He was afterwards reprimanded by the Chief Constable.

Meanwhile many of the spectators on the opposite side of the ground had climbed over the fence with the intention of making their way to the grand stand. Some of them, however, made for the two footballs that had been left on the pitch, and within a few minutes some five hundred people had invaded the field of play.

Gradually, however, the excitement subsided, and the Chief Constable giving orders for the ground to be cleared, very few people remained until the officials left the ground some time later. Of course, the matter will be reported to the F.A. by Mr. Smith, but the Luton directors have decided to send a report with reference to the way in which the referee conducted the game, and I understand that they will be supported by Reading.

With regard to the game itself, very little need be said. After the first half-hour Luton were the better team, and if they had turned all their chances to account, would have won easily. Not only were good opportunities missed, but some promising movements failed to materialise owing to the almost listless behaviour of some of the forwards, and Gittins especially was the subject of much ironical cheering from the crowd.

But badly as the players performed, there was not one of them half so much to blame as the referee. Doubtless Mr. Smith would get through all right in an ordinary game, but he showed himself hopelessly at fault in the control of players whose feelings have been excited by some untoward incident. How he can justify his conduct in sending Hawkes and Carrick off for an offence which he did not see, whilst allowing Pickering to remain when the kicking took place right in front of him, entirely passes comprehension.