

Football.

LUTON v. SOUTHAMPTON.

Played at Southampton on Monday.
Result:—

Southampton	2 goals.
Luton	1 goal.

The teams were as under:—

Luton—Platt; Hogg and McCurdy; F. Hawkes, White, and Jones; Walders, Hall, Brown, Pearson, and Rankin.

Southampton—Burrows; Eastham and Glover; Johnson, Thorpe, and Hadley; Bainbridge, Lewis, Harrison, Jefferies, and Moucher.

Referee, Mr. H. Pollitt (Manchester).

Luton have never been able to earn much glory at Southampton, and thus it was almost too much to expect winning honours with a newly-constituted forward rank in their opening match at the Dell. Last season it will be remembered the weather conditions for the opening match were far from ideal for football because of the heat, but this time the rain, which commenced about a quarter of an hour before the kick-off, made matters very unpleasant the whole of the first half. From a financial point of view this was a serious matter, and as Luton were interested through the change of the original date, it was unfortunate. At the start, very few spectators were present, but before half-time there were estimated to be at least 4,000 in attendance.

Both teams were materially altered from last season, only five "Saints" who played in the corresponding fixture last year figuring on the card, the half-back line being an entirely new one. R. Hawkes being unable to get away in mid-week, Jones was given the left-half position; otherwise the Luton team was according to general expectations. McCurdy, acting as captain, managed to win the toss, but small advantage was gained thereby. Indeed, disaster quickly overtook the Lutonians, for Harrison, kicking off, passed the ball forward to his inside partner, who was tackled by White, and the referee promptly awarded the home team a foul only a yard or so outside the centre circle. This was placed by Eastham, and the ball dropping at Moucher's foot, he worked himself into position and let drive with a grounder which appeared to be going wide, but just struck the bottom of the upright and went off at a tangent right across the goal mouth. Platt stood helpless, for Lewis, who was not more than a couple of yards out on the opposite side of the goal, had simply to touch through, the game being less than one minute old.

It was an extremely lucky point, but it had its influence on the game, and it meant that Luton were in for an up-hill fight right away from the commencement. At the opposite goal Luton were not so fortunate, for taking a pass from his half-back, Sandy put in a rather tame shot, which Burrows came out to meet, but failed to pick up. The ball rolled through his legs, but it stopped dead just behind him, and he was able to turn round and recover at a second attempt. A goal at this stage would probably have livened things up a bit, but, as it was, the game became quite tame, and there was very little artistic work in evidence. Both sets of defenders were more than able to hold their opponents' attacking line in check, and long kicking was a distinct feature of the play in the first half.

Bainbridge proved himself the most dangerous customer in the aggressive line, and caused Jones and McCurdy to put in all they knew to keep him in check; indeed, one long attempt from the touch line was all over a scorer but for White getting his head to the ball right in the goal mouth, and thus relieving the danger. On another occasion White came to the rescue when Platt stopped but could not clear a shot from Moucher on the opposite wing. After some twenty minutes' play, a corner fell to Luton's share, this being the first in the match, but nothing came of it, and play on the whole was far from exciting for a considerable period.

Eventually, a clever run on the part of Bainbridge culminated in his parting with the ball and placing it well across goal, presenting Jefferies with a glorious chance, but he quite failed to take it, and tamely shot wide. After a short spell of attack on the part of Luton, Harrison pounced on the ball a few yards inside the Luton half, and getting off before the middle line were aware of the danger, appeared to have a clear run into goal, but McCurdy just managed to get at him, and without hesitation tripped him up amid howls from the crowd, who were hoping for a goal. The rain by this time had literally soaked the players to the skin, and some thought the referee would stop the game, so heavy were the showers, but the players kept to the field, and on half-time approaching the weather cleared. Still, it was most difficult to control the ball, and many mistakes were made on this account. Southampton were given the advantage of two or three corners, one, at least, of which was of the doubtful order, Jones appearing well in play when he got at the ball. Still, it was of little moment, as nothing came of it, except that Jones was noticed to be holding repeated conversations with the holder of the whistle. Luton tried once or twice to improve matters before the interval, but could not manage to get in a really dangerous attempt to Burrows, who did not appear too comfortable in goal, and it was perhaps fortunate for his side that practically nothing came within scoring range.

The first item of interest in the second half was a drive up the field from Hall, which Rankin secured and put in a shot from thirty yards' range, but his aim was a trifle too high, and the ball travelled over the crossbar at a tremendous pace. A bit later a foul was awarded against Jones, and the ball being well placed, Harrison headed just wide of the upright from a nice position in front. Matters also looked a little dangerous a few minutes later, when Harrison got clear away with only Platt to beat, but he kicked the ball a trifle too far forward before making his shot at goal, and Platt dashing out, sent the ball on to the roof of the stand. Helped on by the cheers of the crowd, the home forwards hereabouts put in several smart shots, and Platt three times in quick succession brought off good saves, two in rather close quarters, with the players literally surrounding him.

Rankin hit the bottom of the upright with a shot following a kick down the field from F. Hawkes, but as a rule the Luton forwards finished very tamely. But this was not the case with one effort. Brown cleverly passed with a side-foot kick to Pearson, and the latter let drive with a cross shot which was certainly travelling in the right direction. Eastham, however, partially turned round and struck the ball down with his hand inside the fatal eighteen yards, and a penalty was the result. Jones was entrusted with this, and scored with a fine ground shot, which entered the corner of the goal well out of Burrows' reach.

This equaliser came midway in the second half, and a division of points appeared a fair possibility, for the Luton defence was holding out well. But ten minutes before the finish Jefferies obtained what proved the winning goal, although again it was in a way a lucky one. Harrison put the ball out to Moucher, and the latter returning it across the mouth of the goal, Jefferies rushed up and had the good fortune to have the ball drop right on his outstretched foot and glance through the goal. This really settled matters, for Luton could not expect to enjoy the luxury of equalising a second time in the closing minutes. The crowd were most enthusiastic in urging the "Saints" to put on another, and but for the steadiness of Platt and his backs they undoubtedly would have done so. However, the odd goal is sufficient to gain the needed points, and the end came with victory resting with Luton's opponents.

Undoubtedly, the chief cause of the absence of brilliant forward play was the drenching rain during the early stages, for it was almost impossible to control the slippery ball on the wet grass. Any way, the Luton forwards were not seen to the advantage expected from the practice game displays. Rankin was the most effective in getting the ball down, but the whole line failed to get in a really dangerous attempt inside the space defended by Burrows. The only shots which had sufficient pace to beat a goalkeeper were either too high or too wide, and Burrows had quite an easy ninety minutes.

From the Luton point of view, the best feature of the game was the stubborn defence set up, and in this department no weakness manifested itself. Platt did not have as much work to get through as in many games last

season; still, he made no mistakes. Hogg and McCurdy kicked strongly, and the Saints' attack paid them wholesome respect right through the match. No members of the half-back line stood out brilliantly above his comrades, but all three worked their hardest and each did well in his respective styles.

The great improvement in the Southampton side since last year was the work in their middle line, and in Johnson, Thorpe, and Hadloy they appear to have remedied their chief weakness of the previous season. Bainbridge seems likely to be an acquisition, but Lewis, from Brighton, was far too clumsy and appeared slow.