

Football Notes and News.

By "Grasshopper."

SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

LUTON'S POOR DISPLAY ON SATURDAY.

Saturday's football match? Oh, dear! We are all anxious to bury it in oblivion; or, at most, we should like to dismiss it in one simple sentence—Luton lost 2-0 to Southampton. At any rate, that tells the truth without going into details. The "Blues" have truly made a disastrous start, and now the talk is not so much about what victories the team may achieve during the forthcoming season, but how far we shall escape defeat.

I have never before known of a match played at Luton that has given such general disappointment as Saturday's game with Southampton. And really, who can wonder? It is only natural that some people are saying hard things this week — not so much about the players, but the directors, or those who are responsible for "capturing" the new men.

It is said that what is really wanted is a "clean sweep," and it is difficult to see what else can be done. During the practice matches—as I said before—there was a suspicion that we had not improved the forward line this season. And now we can see that such is the case. The forward line has been Luton's weakness for years past, and the old trouble will be again acutely felt this season. The difficulty is that one cannot see how the front line is going to be improved with the "material" in hand.

When the directors were effecting a practical clearance at the end of the season, they should have seen that they were certain of getting new men quite as good, or better, than they were parting with. Poor Pickering! That was what they used to exclaim, but what about the inside man's performance already this season. Neither have we improved on Billy Barnes, and as for Warner, though he was often a passenger, he was better than the man filling his place.

Rankin and Hall, who constituted the right wing on Saturday, were very disappointing. True, it is not saying much, but it should be said that Hall was the pick of the forwards; and yet he failed badly at two golden opportunities. Rankin, too, must become more "elastic" before much can be expected of him. "Sandy" was "off song" on Saturday; but he was really made to look ridiculous, and the reason for his being offside so frequently was because of the weakness and slowness of the other forwards. His passing was all right, but being so closely watched by Thorpe, than whom there has been no finer centre-half on the Luton ground, Brown was in need of a couple of smart partners. Farrant appeared too weak, and against anything like a strong defence, could not do much. Latheron, too, who, although a genuine trier, as we all know, is scarcely of the calibre necessary for the first team. There was not the smallest "understanding" between any of the home forwards, and all they managed to do was to "mark time."

And then, too, what can be said about the halves? The Saints set Luton going at such a hot pace, that Bob was almost done up in the first 20 minutes; Freddy White has rarely played such a poor game; and Fred Hawkes was also weak, while as for McCurdy, one imagines that he was indisposed. It was Platt and Hogg who put life into the home display. Peter was really brilliant in goal, though he almost made a "mess" of it once. Hogg was in fine form. There is one thing certain, whatever may be said—the team cannot afford to drop Jones. However, we need not cavil at the defence so much, if we possessed a good string of forwards.

Southampton, who had exceedingly hard luck in not being four goals up in the first moiety, had a very shaky defence, but they had a splendid set of forwards, whose combination could not be broken up on Saturday. Locke, their goalkeeper, a junior, made a good substitute, and brought off one clever save from R. Hawkes, practically the only shot he had to deal with. Bainbridge, Harrison, and Costello, in the visiting front ranks, were always dangerous shots, and Platt was kept very busy.

Meanwhile, what about next Saturday's match? Last season we divided the points with the Saints, winning at home 2-1, and losing at the Dell 1-0. This season they have beaten us both times, and we have secured one point out of a possible six.

Details of the match itself need only be brief. "Bob" lost the spin, and kicking against a moderate breeze, the Luton men were practically from the commencement kept on the defensive. The first movement of note was a fine run by the visitors' front line, but the ball was sent wide at the finish. A mis-kick by Eastham placed the Southampton goal in danger, but Locke was on the alert, and got the ball away. At the other end, Platt received two hard shots from Harrison and Hodgkinson, and dealt with them smartly. For some time Luton were kept on the defensive, and were fortunate in keeping their goal intact.

A great effort by Costello went over the bar. Latheron was conspicuous in the Luton front line, and one shot from his foot gave Locke some trouble. Good play by Brown allowed Farrant a chance, but his shot went the wrong side of the post. After this, play greatly favoured the visitors, and several exciting incidents occurred near the Luton goal. Several times it seemed certain to be captured, but good defence, aided by a slice of luck, kept Southampton out.

A brief spell of midfield play was followed by a smart, combined run on the part of the visiting forwards, and Bainbridge finished an exciting rally by scoring the first goal. Jefferies almost increased the score immediately after, and at the other end the Southampton goal narrowly escaped downfall. Up to half-time Southampton pressed, but there was no addition to the score, the visitors crossing over with a lead of one goal to nil.

In the first minute after resuming, Platt brought off a great save with eager "Saints" in close attendance, and then play opened out a bit. Luton came within an ace of equalising, Locke just saving from Hall at point blank range. Before the home forwards were finally disposed of, they secured two corners, both of which were cleared with difficulty. Offside against Brown nullified a subsequent Luton attack, and Southampton took up the running, without being very dangerous, however. Luton now more than held their own, and made great efforts to equalise. Once Hall ought to have scored, whilst Locke cleverly saved from Latheron. Strong work by Rankin forced a corner, but Johnston steered the ball into safety.

Play in midfield was the rule for a time, but the determination of the Luton forwards caused the Saints to give way, and Locke had some anxious moments. He saved in brilliant style from R. Hawkes, and this led to an attack on the Luton goal. Platt was not troubled much, however, Hogg defending finely. Ten minutes from the close, the "Saints" came away in a body, and Harrison just missed at close range. Hodgkinson followed with a shot which struck the post, and then Costello sent the ball flying into the net. Play slackened considerably after this, Southampton taking things easily, and when time came the score was unaltered.

Result: Southampton 2, Luton 0.