

FOOTBALL.

SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

LUTON v. SOUTHAMPTON.

SAINTS AGAIN SUCCESSFUL.

HOME FORWARDS DISAPPOINTING.

Judged by their first home Southern League engagement last Saturday, the Luton team is not one which will make much headway this season. Southampton were the visitors to the Bury Park ground, and even the most prejudiced partisan will not dare to deny the statement that the result, a victory for the Saints by 2—0, was a thoroughly good representation of the play, and the difference between the teams. Seven thousand local enthusiasts put in an appearance, hoping to be able to cheer their favourites to victory, and it would be impossible to find one person out of that large crowd who was not much disappointed at the poor display of the Blues' forwards.

Great stress had been laid by local prophets upon the improvement noticeable on the previous Monday against Watford, and I must confess that the forwards did so well on that occasion that I hoped to see them perform to advantage against the visitors. The fact that a Southampton junior named Lock made his first appearance in goal for Luton's opponents made everyone feel all the more sanguine.

Mr. J. T. Rowbotham (of Nottingham) had charge of the players, who formed up as under:—

SOUTHAMPTON.

Lock.

Eastham

Glover

Johnston

Thorpe

Hadley

Bainbridge Jefferies Harrison Costello Hodgkinson



Latheron Farrant Brown Hall Rankin

R. Hawkes

White

F. Hawkes

McCurdy

Hogg

Platt

LUTON.

Southampton won the toss, and were the first to get into their stride, so that for the opening ten minutes Luton hardly gave Lock any trouble. The only exception to this rule was when a centre by Latheron was bungled so badly by Glover that the ball glanced off his leg back towards the net. Fortunately for this side the goalie was just in the right place to prevent such a mistake bringing about the downfall of his colours. The home defence was truly magnificent and stood a gruelling time unflinchingly. The Saints' attack was as lively as a kitten, but Hogg and McCurdy were as safe as a rock and Platt showed his best form.

The most promising movement up to now on the part of the home front string was initiated by Rankin and Hall, but when everything looked safe Farrant let fly with a shot that travelled a yard on the wrong side of the post, though it deserved a better fate. A much finer opening fell to Harrison only a little later. Jefferies was instrumental in finding his centre-forward a chance that looked a "gift," but he reckoned without Platt, who saved in an almost uncanny fashion. A minute afterwards the Luton goalie was drawn out and left his charge unprotected just as a centre from Bainbridge was on its way to the feet of Harrison, who was so placed that it would have been the easiest thing in the world to convert. McCurdy, always cool in an emergency, saw the danger and dropped back under the crossbar where he cleared the ball before it could reach an opponent.

The patience of the visitors was rewarded when the game was twenty-five minutes old. The leather flashed across from the left wing and Hogg failed in an endeavour to get to it, leaving Bainbridge with a chance, over which he made no mistake, the ball flying into the net at express speed. This reverse had no effect upon the home forwards, whose spiritless efforts gave no trouble to the Saints' reliable halves and the Luton defence was let off very lightly and luckily on more than one occasion. Just before the interval Hall sent in a shot that one of the backs turned aside in the nick of time and the men ran out for their breather with the Saints ahead by one goal to nil.

The game had only just been restarted when a piece of bungling robbed Luton of a chance to equalise. Hall passed forward to Bruce Rankin, who was in an ideal position, but the outside right was not alert and the ball rolled out of his reach before he realised the significance of his wing-mate's move. Hall disdained all assistance a minute later and wished to get through all alone, but Glover put a check to his career. The inside man found himself presented by "Sandy" Brown with the opportunity he had been working for, but Lock was able to save his final effort. Fred Hawkes tried to improve upon this with an individual attempt and his shot gave the goalie but little anxiety.

Just at this period Luton held their own well and the equaliser might have come at any minute. In fact one of Bob Hawkes' own strong drives went within an ace of scoring. The custodian got to the ball, but found it too hot for him and while on his knees muffed it. Only just in time he recovered himself and cleared, but he redeemed his fault when he dealt cleverly with a fine header by Brown from close in. Latheron having seen a shot from his foot effectually negotiated, the Southampton forwards found their feet once more and quickly had the Luton defence in a tangle, which was only ended by Bainbridge skying the ball. Nearly ten minutes from the finish Costello scored an unexpected but well-earned point with a splendid shot just inside the post. Southampton won easily by 2-0.

While the Luton rearguard displayed as good form as the most severe critic could wish to see, and the halves were reliable, the forwards were distinctly poor. Never did they display that cohesion which marked their work early in the week. Indeed, their movements were all dull, lacking that life and dash which is associated with successful front strings. Latheron was the pick, but his partner was disappointingly weak. Brown was more lackadaisical than the Luton crowd has ever seen him before, and those who remember occasional displays of his last season will appreciate the force of this statement. Neither Hall nor Rankin did themselves justice, and, taken collectively, the forward line was a rank failure. The expressions of disgust of the spectators as they left the field were very uncomplimentary to the new men, and unless an improvement is speedily noticeable, the officials of the Club will soon be complaining of the lack of support accorded by the Luton public.

On the Southampton side the most noticeable feature is the splendid set of halves, against whom only the best forward lines will be able to operate with success, but they found their task on Saturday a pretty easy one.

After the match the Saints had tea at the Thrift Restaurant, Stuart-street.

GOALIE.