

Southern League.

PLYMOUTH ARGYLE v. LUTON.

Played at Plymouth on Saturday. Result:

Plymouth Argyle..... 2 goals.

Luton 1 goal.

The teams were as under:—

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

Plymouth—Sutcliffe; Butler and Atterbury; McCormick, Clarke, and McIntyre; Burch, Leonard, Ingham, Morris, and Holden.

Referee, Mr. T. Armit (Leek).

Luton set out on their longest League journey on Friday afternoon, taking Walders, in addition to the players mentioned above, as twelfth man, it being a bit uncertain if the captain's leg would be sufficiently strong to justify his turning out. However, he did so, and stated at the finish he felt nothing of the strain sustained against Watford, but unfortunately he was "kneed" very badly in the second half, and was afterwards of little use from this cause. Plymouth had the identical side which beat the Crystal Palace so decisively the previous Saturday, and were quite expected locally to simply romp home with a big margin in hand.

For the first minute or so the Argyle forwards put on the pressure but were ultimately beaten back, and a fine pass out from Pearson to Latheron sent Luton away in good style. Butler being taken unawares, badly let "Bobby" in, and he dropped in a well-judged centre, which McIntyre was lucky to get away. On the opposite wing Rankin made a run and centre, which Butler this time shaped much better at and cleared right in the mouth of goal. It was soon evident the game was to be stubbornly contested, and not the runaway affair predicted in the Saturday Press.

Burch was prominent with a dash down the ground which found McCurdy rather too far up the field, and for a moment Luton's goal appeared in danger, but White arrived on the scene in his usual fashion and kicked the ball into touch. The Plymouth crowd have never forgotten the defensive tactics which Luton adopted with a weak referee in charge of their first game at the Western port, and jeered this method of saving the situation in a very pronounced fashion. Indeed right through the game they pointedly "noticed" every time the ball went into touch off a Lutonian, but quite failed to observe any particular interest in such tactics when the boot was on the other leg.

During the first quarter of an hour the most promising movement came about through a centre which Rankin dropped near the goal, and Pearson meeting the ball with his head, almost brought about the downfall of Sutcliffe's charge, the ball travelling about a yard wide of the extreme corner of the goal, Sutcliffe standing helpless at the other upright. Another well-executed movement was started by Pearson giving the ball to R. Hawkes, who, with a clever touch from the side of his foot, transferred to Latheron, and the latter promptly banged the ball right across, Hall eventually putting behind. It was certainly the prettiest attempt up to this time, and was cheered by the home specators.

Luton were having the greater share of the attack, but after twenty minutes' play misfortune came their way. Burch received a pass from the centre of the field and quickly got away with the ball. Both Jones and McCurdy stopped and appealed for offside, and Burch had a clear run to the vicinity of the corner flag. The referee took no notice of the appeal, and the ball being practically placed on Ingham's toe, he was presented with a gift goal, for Platt had not the slightest chance.

For a few minutes after this, Luton's goal was in danger of falling several times, but the steadiness of Hogg and McCurdy and the clever keeping of Platt prevented what might easily have culminated in a big defeat. However, Luton soon recovered, and within ten minutes had managed to equalise with a fine goal. Latheron got the ball from his half-back, and, holding it just sufficiently to draw the defence on his side of the field, passed it to the centre. Pearson made a dash to get it, and finely headed over to Hall, who was in a better position for scoring, and Sutcliffe was well beaten by Luton's inside-right, this being the first goal registered against the Pilgrims in the Southern League this season.

It was now Luton's turn to put on pressure, and nothing but sheer bad luck prevented them taking the lead inside two minutes from the equaliser. Pearson letting drive from quite twenty yards' range, beat Sutcliffe absolutely. With the Argyle custodian quite four yards out of goal and the ball travelling behind him in the direction of the goal, everyone was prepared to see Luton two up. But the ball struck the bottom of the upright and bounced back to Sutcliffe, who was thus enabled to get it away in the luckiest manner possible. A goal at this stage would probably have made all the difference in the result, for the Pilgrims were getting somewhat demoralised.

The first corner of the match came a couple of minutes after, and this advantage fell to Luton, but Latheron placed the ball on the top of the net in trying to get it just in front. From now to the interval Luton were always the better side, but nothing tangible resulted, and the teams retired with the scores equal.

The second half commenced as the former had finished, namely, with Luton the attacking party. Indeed, a pass from Latheron to Bob fully deserved to score, for the latter, instead of having a pop himself, tapped the ball to Pearson in quite an unexpected manner, and altogether took Sutcliffe off the shot which Pearson put in. Once more Pearson beat Sutcliffe, only to miss by the merest shade.

Just as a division of points at least appeared the worst possible result that could come about for Luton, an unexpected attack brought about their downfall. The ball was punted up, and Hogg and an Argyle forward were seen making for it. No particular danger appeared to be coming, for McCurdy and Platt were both prepared, but Hogg, with the best intentions, tried to beat his opponent at close quarters, and the ball came across to Ingham, who was absolutely unmarked. Platt made a dash forward to angle the Plymouth centre, but it was no use, and a wonderfully lucky goal robbed Luton of their just deserts.

There were twenty minutes more to go, but, encouraged by this somewhat unexpected success, the home team now played better than at any previous stage, and Luton never after appeared likely to make up the leeway. Therefore they once more found Home Park a most unlucky spot, for quite a number of League points have been lost on that pitch which, on merit, should have gone in their favour.

Although losing the match, the whole team

showed a welcome change from some of the earlier displays, and those who had the privilege of seeing both matches—that of the previous Saturday against Southampton and the one under notice—were unanimous in declaring the improvement all round truly remarkable. Platt could not be blamed for either goal, and did well when called upon for the brief time in each half during which the Argyle forwards were pressing.

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Hogg and McCurdy naturally had their share in the honours, while at half-back Fred Hawkes certainly proved himself the finest of the six playing. Jones and White were in no way overwhelmed, and compared favourably with their opponents in this division.

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But it was forward where the most improvement was manifest, Pearson playing a really fine game in the centre. His shooting, although it came to nothing tangible, was very fine, and his feeding of the wings was excellent. Bob Hawkes, until he was injured, did some of the cleverest passing it is possible to conceive, although of course he did not tumble into an ideal forward in this his first match in that position this season. Latheron played his usual whole-hearted game, while Hall put in many clever touches. Rankin's fault was the way he brought the ball back several times instead of getting away with it, as this enabled the home defence to fall back and relieve what otherwise might have proved beyond their powers. Still he played a good game on the whole, the five men being really as a line better than Plymouth.

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Sutcliffe did not shape in anything like his old-time style, and should have been beaten more than once. He failed to gather the ball several times, but each time it went a trifle wide, and with only an equal share of the luck. Luton would have astonished the football world by notching a substantial victory. Forward, the Argyle compared unfavourably with Luton, and Ingham, except that he won the match with two gift goals, was far from a success as pivot.