

Southern League

LUTON v. WEST HAM.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—

West Ham 3 goals.

Luton nil.

The teams were as follow:—

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

West Ham—Kitchen; Gault and Taylor; Allison, Watson, and Young; Lee, Grassam, H. Stapley, Kemp, and Blackburn.

Referee, Mr. S. D. Peers (Liverpool).

Having beaten West Ham on the previous Monday in a Western League match, and under circumstances which were distinctly favourable to the visitors, the seven thousand spectators who assembled on Saturday were hoping to see the home team meet with their first Southern League success. But the absence of Pearson and Hogg on the one side and the presence of the amateur flyer, Stapley, on the other, made all the difference, and a bitter disappointment was in store.

Although the Hammers won the toss, Luton had the greater assistance from the wind in the first half, and during this period they had fully three-fourths of the play. Unfortunately, however, the forwards were terribly weak, and whilst they were frequently enough in the vicinity of the West Ham goal, it was seldom indeed that they looked like scoring. Brown got in one good shot early on—almost the only one he was responsible for throughout the game—and several times the ball was sent just wide of the mark, but the shots had little powder behind them, and it was only once that Kitchen was seriously troubled.

This was when Luton forced a couple of corners one after the other, and then there was a short spell of exciting play, but eventually Kitchen was fouled and a free kick relieved the situation. The Hammers found very few opportunities of getting within shooting range, but when they did there always seemed unpleasant possibilities, and eventually the only time they were really dangerous—shortly before the interval—a goal resulted.

Rankin was really the originator of the disaster, for he dallied about with the ball near the centre of the field until Taylor rushed in and robbed him of it, and the consequence was that the visitors were immediately placed on the offensive. Then in some way or other the Luton defence got sadly mixed, and Grassam taking advantage of it, had little or no difficulty in beating Platt.

In the few minutes remaining before half-time, Luton tried to get on equal terms, but again the efforts of the forwards were deplorably weak, and West Ham, after having all the worse of the play, crossed over with a goal lead. Some might say this was hard luck on the local men, but really they had no one but themselves to blame for their lack of success.

I daresay there were people optimistic enough to believe that even yet Luton might save the game, but the hopes or expectations of these individuals were rudely dispelled directly after the re-start. In the first minute the Hammers got away, Lee put across a simple-looking centre, and White should have had no difficulty whatever in clearing. To the consternation of the spectators, however, he turned round to kick the ball and clean missed, leaving the goal completely at the mercy of Stapley, who was thus easily able to register the second point.

Following this, Luton made several attempts on their opponents' goal, but again Kitchen had little trouble in coping with the shots put in. His punching was not particularly strong, but it proved strong enough to upset the calculations of the Luton forwards. Then the visitors got down the field once more, and Stapley receiving the ball about twenty yards out, was left unmarked while he took his shot. As might have been expected, it proved a very hot one, and Platt had no chance at all with it. Thus the Hammers were three up.

The remainder of the game possessed little interest for the spectators, many of whom trooped off the ground a quarter of an hour before the finish. The only incident to arouse anything like enthusiasm was a smart tussle which Bob Hawkes had with Lee, who came off second best.

Of course there was no possibility of Luton saving the game, and the prospects of their scoring at all were so remote that the spectators chose to make uncomplimentary remarks rather than offer encouragement.

Luton finished as they began. They could hold their own well enough in midfield, but goal-getting seemed to be absolutely out of the question. The fact that the ball was so often in West Ham territory showed that it was not the halves who were at fault; the weakness was with the forwards.

There can be no getting away from the fact that Brown, though he can play the game, is much too slow to be effective, and the absence of dash is the prime cause of Luton's non-success. Then Latheron was very poor, and the times he passed the ball to an opponent was enough to break Moody's heart. Moody himself put in some good work, but received very little support.

Hall is sufficiently active but often sadly lacking in judgment, and Rankin handicaps himself and his side by making too much for the corner-flag instead of for the goal. Altogether, the forwards on Saturday's showing were a very poor lot.

I don't know that much fault could be found with Jones at back, and McCurdy put in a lot of good work, but there was a deficiency somewhere, or West Ham would not have found the easy openings they did on the few occasions they got near goal. Apart from scoring twice, Stapley did not do a great deal, but Grassam and Lee played well, and Blackburn was also very good. The Hammers, however, were not a great team, and it was Luton's weakness rather than the visitors' strength which was responsible for so decisive a victory.

Other home teams to be beaten on Saturday were Brighton, who unexpectedly allowed Plymouth to get the better of them by 2 goals to 1, and Crystal Palace, who were vanquished by Queen's Park Rangers by 3 goals to 2. The other results were:—Brentford 4, Watford 1; Millwall 6, Norwich 1; Swindon 1, Tottenham Hotspur 0; Bristol Rovers 2, Reading 1; New Brompton 2, Leyton 2; Portsmouth 3, Southampton 0; Bradford Park Avenue 1, Northampton 1.