

FOOTBALL.

SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

LUTON v. PORTSMOUTH.

POMPHY BEATEN IN A POOR GAME.

A WELCOME TWO CLEAR GOALS' WIN.

The contest between the Southern League candidates for the title of "wooden spoonists," Luton Town and Portsmouth, on Saturday afternoon, on the firmes ground, resulted in a victory for the home side by 2—0. It is the irony of fate that the two teams who finished in such good positions last season should find themselves at the present time occupying the lowliest places on the Southern League table, but no one who watched them do better on Saturday will need seek far for the reason. A flatter game has seldom been seen in Luton, the cause of the dullness being the insufficient forward work of both sides. Though the Town won it would be idle to say the crowd felt they were getting value for money, and a fair proportion of the spectators hailed the approach of the finish with pleasure rather than regret.

In saying this it must not be supposed that they were dissatisfied with the team as a whole, or even with individual members. For the defence they had nothing but praise. It was the lack of combination and understanding among the attackers that spoilt the afternoon. To be candid, the work showed so little improvement since the commencement of the season that some of the more optimistic supporters could not put aside a fear that the club will not rise much higher in the table. Nevertheless, the victory was very welcome, for it was the first win the team had secured since October 26th, when a surprise was administered to Crystal Palace.

I was a spectator during the greater part of the match, the halves and backs finding little trouble in breaking up the weak efforts of the Pompey forwards. Hogg and Dimmock kept up the best traditions of Luton for excellent work in the rear, and the halves were sound. Moody was the most useful of the forwards, his heading of the greatest value to his side. The rest of his comrades in the front string were moderate. Rankin pleased not a few, but he has never played so well in the pivot position as when he has given his first trial there.

Luton was set to start the ball rolling and were the first to settle down. The goalie was brought to his knees by a smart shot by Rankin and the custodian was very smart to save another very hot one from Bob Hawkes. The latter's namesake in the forward line dribbled through well and passed out to Rankin who shot over the bar instead of centering. At the other end the Town was favoured with a slice of luck when Wilson missed 'an opening presented him by Birtles. Bellamy received a nasty kick on the knee which necessitated him leaving the field for ten minutes and on his return he changed places with his wingmate.

Moody endeavoured to pierce his way through the defence unassisted until the backs forced him to relinquish his idea and transferred the ball to the other end. Dimmock immediately returned it with a clean clearance from which Rankin gave Philip some trouble with a well-directed effort. Walders followed the centre-forward's example with a clever middle from the opposite wing but the Pompey goalkeeper was still alert and twisted the sphere round the post for an abotive corner.

White had the misfortune to kick the ball to Birtles close to goal, but the forward dallied so long and shot so weakly that he never looked a scorer. Luton then pressed for a full minute without gaining any advantage until a hot shot by Moody showed the splendid capabilities of Philip who saved cleverly. Moody endeavoured to find his weak point a second time but his aim was imperfect and the leather flashed behind. Bob Hawkes performed similarly with a free-kick just outside the penalty area.

A corner at the other end temporarily altered the complexion of affairs but it turned out resultless and Luton took up the running again. Rankin was the first to get a clear chance, but he dallied with it at the critical moment and found himself robbed just afterwards. Bob Hawkes treated him to an example of shooting without hesitation and Philip was very alert in keeping his colours flying. Another foul on Rankin brought the usual punishment which Captain Bob was unable to turn to account, but the Portsmouth custodian's fists came into action twice in quick succession in a short, sharp period of danger.

Hogg was guilty of a foul upon Wilson and it says much for the sportsmanship of a section of the 5,000 crowd that immediately shouts of "Play the game, Hogg," was raised. The free-kick resulted in no danger to the homesters and play was transferred to the other half of the field where neither Rankin nor Fred Hawkes was alive to his opportunities and let pass unnoticed a centre from Walders that might have been converted with a mere tap. Rankin was pulled up for offside when he looked like banging into the net and just afterwards he landed the ball on the top of the crossbar.

The few minutes' rest arrived with neither side having scored, though of the two goalkeepers Philip had had much and Platt little to do. The crowd cordially applauded the Pompey custodian when he re-appeared on the field in recognition of his splendid services to his side during the first half. Kirby, who was the pick of the visiting attack tried to get through alone, but Hogg stopped him at the expense of a corner and another flag-kick was conceded shortly afterwards by Platt but neither spelt the least danger.

Dix received a pass from Kirby and had what looked to be a "gift" but he wildly shot behind when he had no one but Platt to beat. Walders managed to place the ball between the posts at the other end but the whistle had just sounded because the ball had been out of play. Rankin was placed on the injured list and left the field for repairs. During his absence Moody headed the ball into the net in neat fashion from a centre by Rigate. This goal was obtained during Rankin's absence but the re-appearance of the centre-forward a few minutes later brought about a second goal. Rankin had no sooner got into his place again than he was enabled to put in a shot that struck the crossbar. It rebounded back into play at the foot of Fred Hawkes who scored with ease.

A minute afterwards Kirby should have reduced the lead but when standing close in skied the leather over the crossbar and out of the field. Platt saved a magnificent shot from Wilson and for some minutes there was every evidence that the fact that they were two goals behind had had a good effect upon Portsmouth who showed themselves in better light than they had previously done. Kirby only just missed the post with a nice header on one occasion and on another Dimmock had to bring him to a standstill.

Pompey continued to fight hard to get on more even terms and it was only Luton's sterling defence which held for them the lead already obtained. For the first time during the match play began to get really interesting but unfortunately the light was also getting bad. A few minutes before the finish Rankin retired and the homesters were left with only ten men but they had little difficulty in holding their own and the Town ran out victorious by 2-0.