

Football Notes and News.

(By Grasshopper).

Southern League.

LUTON v. PORTSMOUTH.

THE STRUGGLE FOR BOTTOM PLACE.

The momentous question at present— who shall be bottom of the Southern League—was settled on Saturday afternoon on the Bury Park enclosure, when the competitors for the “wooden spoon”—Luton and Portsmouth—met to decide the point. And be it remembered, the matter was decided; no halving the points this time, and thus keeping the public in suspense for another week or so. Luton won, and Pompey has been relegated absolutely to the bottom—for the time being. Having said that Luton won on Saturday, one feels like stopping at that point and thus avoiding the necessity of entering into generalities.

After having witnessed the game, the unprejudiced observer must have a shrewd suspicion that the clubs are pretty much in their proper places, and that at any rate the tail end of the League table is practically a true indication of the merits of the bottom half-a-dozen clubs. True, it is a big fall from second place to bottom, and from fourth place to being next to the bottom; but there we are. All things considered, Luton have practically had as much “fat” as they have had bad luck; the same remark equally applies to Portsmouth. The truth is, Luton has not this year an improved team, and on Saturday afternoon the frequent remark made was that one could not have chosen a decent team out of the 22 players!

Of course, Portsmouth could point to the fact that they came minus three of their best men—Buick, Glen, and Williams—but even if at “full strength” it seems unlikely that they would have done much better. As it was, the vacancies were filled by Bowman, Kirby, and Dix respectively. McCurdy was unable to turn out for Luton, but a good deputy was found in Dimmock, the handy man of the team. Otherwise Luton played their usual eleven, Rankin being again at centre. Last season, it will be remembered, the clubs divided the points, Luton winning at home 3-1 and losing away 1-0.

The visitors won the spin, and placed their opponents to play against the sun. Portsmouth were the first to open the attack, but Hogg soon cleared, and then the home forwards, including Rankin and R. Hawkes, gave Phillip, Pompey's custodian, a few hard drives to save. Luton were certainly having the best of the play, but the visiting goalkeeper was not having difficult shots to deal with. After Portsmouth had been hemmed in for a time, Moody missed finding the net by “inches.” After he had been a spectator for some time, Platt was called on; but though the visitors made an occasional incursion into Luton's territory, they were never dangerous. The first half ended in a blank score, and no doubt many expected the result would be a draw; but, poor as the game had been, the Blues certainly deserved to have the lead.

Upon resuming, the locals went away with a rush, but failed to penetrate the Portsmouth defence. The visitors had a couple of decent chances, but they were spoiled by offside. Luton pressed for some few minutes, and on one occasion Phillip cleared by cleverly throwing away. Rankin was hurt in the knee, and play was temporarily stopped. From a centre by Rigate, Moody, who was conveniently placed, headed Luton's first goal. Five minutes later, Rankin hit the bar with a rattling shot. Fred Hawkes took the ball on the rebound, and scored the second goal. Dix ran down, and centred to Kirby, who missed an open goal.

Result: Luton, 2 goals; Portsmouth, nil.

It was not much of a game. True at times play was fast, but the entire absence of combination amongst the forwards on both sides robbed the play of real interest. It was not football; it was kick and rush. The defence on the home side was all that could be desired, and the halves, too, were all right; but the front line was again at fault. The team is just now greatly in need of a centre that can shoot well. Unless the Luton forwards “buck up” at Bradford on Saturday, they may expect that the Park Avenue team will register a formidable score against them.