

Southern League.

LUTON v. BRISTOL ROVERS.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result :—

Bristol Rovers	2 goals.
Luton	nil.

The teams were as follow :—

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

Bristol Rovers—Cartlidge; Hales and Boyle; Appleby, Strang, and Smart; Clark, Turner, Smith, Roberts, and Buckle.

Referee, Mr. G. H. Muir (Southampton).

Last season, Luton beat Bristol Rovers both at home and away, and this year, in the Western League, they had beaten them away and drawn at home, so that on this form there appeared to have been a very fair chance of getting the points at stake on Saturday. With the ground in bad condition and the wind blowing strongly from end to end, a good deal, however, seemed to depend on winning the toss, and when it was seen that McCurdy had been successful in the spin of the coin, the two or three thousand spectators sent up a hearty cheer, and gave themselves over to pleasing anticipations of goals galore.

Alas, notwithstanding the many disappointments this season, the supporters of the home club little knew how thoroughly ineffective their forwards could be. Certainly the prospects had not been improved by the changes made in the team consequent upon the indisposition of Bob Hawkes.

As Hall's recent appearances in the first team have been at half-back, one would naturally have expected to find him put in Bob Hawkes' place—that is, if he were thought to be the best available man—but instead of that, Fred Hawkes, who has proved himself to be about the best forward, was transferred to the half-back line, and Hall was included in the front string.

The change was disastrous, for during the whole ninety minutes the forwards never once got together. Playing with the gale behind them, they showed not the faintest conception of how to turn their advantage to account. The veriest schoolboy could have told them that the conditions called for the open game, with long, swinging passes and flying shots, and instead of that the forwards hugged the ball as closely as possible, passed just for passing's sake, and seemed to think it bad form to take the first opening that presented itself, even if it were better than any likely to be gained by further effort.

Luton went away at the start, and McCurdy putting into the mouth of goal, the ball came off one of the Bristol backs to Pearson, who had a glorious chance of scoring, but threw it away by shooting over. He was less than half-a-dozen yards from goal and had no one but Cartlidge to beat. The home team were soon attacking again, but in a very haphazard, half-hearted sort of way, and then Clark getting a pass, raced away on the right and centred, and Roberts, after hitting the bar, met the ball again and placed in the net.

This early reverse was quite a surprise, but the spectators flattered themselves that matters would soon be put right. With such a gale behind them, Luton could surely not do other than score! The homesters, of course, were nearly always attacking, or perhaps I should say were nearly always in a position to attack, but as the precious minutes passed away, absolutely wasted, the spectators groaned in spirit and afterwards took to cheering the visitors.

The Bristol goal had some narrow escapes. It could not well have been otherwise. But Cartledge was in fine form and brought off some very clever saves. All the same, he must have been mightily pleased at the spiritless and disjointed character of the Luton attack. Rankin got in one or two decent attempts, but Rigate went nearest the mark with one or two teasers just before the interval.

When ends were changed with the Rovers leading by a goal to nil, it was felt that Luton were in for a very severe drubbing, but fortunately the local men put a lot more heart in defence than they had done in attack, and once or twice actually looked to have a chance of scoring. Indeed, if Rigate, who was far and away the best of the home forwards, had been provided with more work, it is quite possible Luton might have equalised.

Hogg came out of his shell in fine style and did his level best to force matters; indeed, at times he seemed inclined to join the forwards. The determined nature of the Luton defence went a long way towards spoiling the Rovers' aggressive work, though it is probable the visitors were also feeling the effects of battling against the wind in the first half.

Several of their attempts, however, only just failed, and once, when McCurdy passed back to Platt and the latter rushed forward at the same moment and missed the ball, it seemed any odds on Smith scoring. Platt, however, just managed to save the situation, and the custodian also saved brilliantly a little later on. But close on time the Rovers scrambled the ball up to goal, and Turner succeeded in putting it through.

Altogether, it was one of the worst exhibitions given by a Luton team for many a long day, and makes the prospects about as gloomy as they well could be. Luton now occupy the bottom position, and unless some means can be devised of making the players "buck up" they are likely to stay there. Rankin was certainly no improvement on Walders at outside-left, and Hall was a failure at inside-right. Pearson has great possibilities at centre-forward, and works hard enough, but he and one or two others do too much passing, and particularly in passing backwards. Passing should be only the means to an end, and instead of that the Luton forwards appear to be making passing the only end in view. The result is—well, we saw what it was on Saturday.