

Football Notes and News.

By "Grasshopper."

SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

LUTON'S DEFEAT OF READING.

At last Luton have made an effort to creep up the Southern League table. After several weeks of failure, this result is very cheering; and though it is not much to make a song about, the Blues have at length commenced on the upward grade, and by managing to beat Reading on Saturday the Strawhatters have moved one from the bottom of the League table! Of course this is entirely due to Leyton losing by the odd goal to Brighton.

All the same, only a point or so separate the bottom half-dozen teams. Brentford, who are immediately above Luton, are a point in front, while Brighton, with a match in hand, are a couple of points ahead, with Portsmouth and Watford, four points to the good with an equal number of matches. But it is confidently believed that as Luton have one or two "snips" in front of them, they have now an excellent chance of getting well away from the position of "wooden spoonist."

A suggestion was made to the writer the other day that a first-class antidote for the continued failures of the Town would be for the directors to pay the players according to results. No doubt that would be all right in theory, but in practice, what would happen? If players knew that they depended entirely for their salary on winning the game, they might be tempted to introduce too much "vim" into their play, with the only result of a good time for the undertaker. Moreover, now that the Town have commenced on the upward path, there is no necessity to put into execution my friend's novel idea.

In beating Reading on Saturday by 3 goals to one, Luton have obtained four points out of their three Christmas-week matches. That is a very fair percentage, when one remembers that Norwich captured a very lucky point from them. Last season the Berkshire team took three points out of Luton; at Luton the final result was a draw of one goal each, but at Reading Luton were defeated 7-2. Already this season the Town have met Reading twice in the Western League; away the score was a draw of one goal each, while at Luton the locals won 3-1.

Luton fully deserved their win on Saturday, but certainly not by such a big margin, 2-1 being quite a sufficient indication of the game. Reading played really splendid football, but at times they appeared inclined to rather overdo it, with the result that their forwards, though their side had perhaps more of the play than their opponents, scarcely ever seemed dangerous. Beats, who played at centre-forward, and who could have been at Luton if his services were only accepted, proved himself a splendid pivot, and the combination of the wings was like clockwork. But after Beats had beaten Platt rather easily, Reading never appeared likely to find the net. It was Moody who equalised from the corner; it was a fine header, but it was equally hard luck on Rae, the custodian, not succeeding in getting the ball away, after it had struck the cross-bar.

Rankin, who played a much improved game at centre-forward, put Luton ahead in the second moiety. Later, Walders tried a pot-shot from a 30 yards' range, and to the surprise of the three thousand spectators Rae failed to stop the shot. It was, however, a very lucky effort—indeed it was not Walders' game to shoot for goal, but to centre—and the odds were a hundred to one against a shot of that description finding the net. White played a fine game at centre-half, and was largely responsible for keeping the ubiquitous Beats at a respectable distance.

The turf was very hard, and in consequence the ball was tricky. No doubt the cold weather was responsible for such a sparse attendance. Luton won the toss, and with the wind at their backs, opened the attack. From the run down, Fred Hawkes had a glorious chance right off from a centre by Rigate, but he made a very weak attempt to turn it to account. A good clearance by Rae gave Reading a breathing space, but they were soon on the defensive again, and Rae had to save from Moody. An attack at the other end varied proceedings, and Platt did well to clear from Dougall, while Minter followed with a shot that just missed the mark. The game was very even at this period, and both ends were visited but there was an almost entire absence from shooting. A speculative effort by Rigate was safely dealt with by Rae, and the Reading goalkeeper had to handle a good one from the same player shortly after. A breakaway by Reading saw the Luton defence in trouble, and Platt had to confess himself beaten, a shot by Beats doing the trick.

This shot acted as an incentive to the visitors, and they swarmed round the Luton goal. Minter almost got another, the ball glancing just past, and then Luton attacked. The home forwards played well together, and from a corner, Moody headed through the equalising point. The exchanges up to half time were fast and even, but there was no addition to the score, which stood at half time at one goal each.

Reading attacked on resuming, and were unlucky in failing to take the lead. A good shot from Boden was saved, and an exciting struggle at close quarters, following a free kick, ended in favour of Luton. A splendid run by the home forwards took play to the other end, where Walders sent across a capital centre; this was neatly met by Rankin who headed the ball into the net. Luton played well after this, and Rae was frequently tested. Reading were not so often aggressive now, the bustling work of the home halves putting them completely off. Then Walders gained possession and, running through, beat man after man, and wound up with a shot that gave Rae no chance.

Reading improved after this, and had quite as much of the game as their opponents. A good shot by Gee was finely saved by Platt, and at the other end Rae's charge had two lucky escapes. Platt was then called on by Dougall, and Rae had a further chance of distinguishing himself. Luton made many dangerous attacks, but the Reading defence played finely, and did not look like being beaten again. Towards the end both sides worked splendidly, but nothing further was scored. Result: Luton, 3 goals; Reading, one goal.