

LUTON v. READING.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—

Luton 3 goals.

Reading 1 goal.

Teams:—

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

Reading—Rae; Coquet and Wilkes; Walker, Boden, and Hallworth; Dougal, Minter, Beats, Rodger, and Gee.

Referee, Mr. D. Hammond (Manchester).

Fortune smiled on the Luton team on Saturday, when they accomplished their best Southern League performance for some time. Previous to Saturday, they had not won a match since they beat Millwall by 3 goals to 1 at Luton on Nov. 30th., and the victory over Reading was all the more appreciated by the supporters of the home team, for it was thoroughly deserved.

In those dark days of the previous weeks, Luton had played very poorly on heavy grounds. But during the holidays, when the ground was hard, we witnessed the hoped-for recovery. The improved form shown on Christmas Day and Boxing Day was maintained on Saturday, and—what is more important—it produced a crop of goals which were sadly needed, for Luton are the lowest goal-scorers in the Southern League.

To tell the truth, the opening exchanges were not altogether pleasing to people who pay to see the game played as it should be. There was too much of that waiting and letting the other man get in his kick, to please the critical spectator, although from the point of view of the players perhaps there was some cause for it, considering the fact that this was the third match the men had been engaged in within four days.

After Reading opened the scoring twenty minutes from the start, the play became more interesting. Both sides tried hard, especially during the second half, and it was then that Luton's superiority was the more evident. The home forwards played better and with more success than for a long time past, and the spectators were not slow in demonstrating their satisfaction at the turn affairs were taking.

It is a coincidence worth recording that R. M. Hawkes won the toss for the third time in succession. He set his men to kick towards the far end, and within a couple of minutes a centre by Rigate provided Fred Hawkes with a splendid opportunity. The inside-right did not get at the ball properly, and Rae cleared when the odds seemed to be against him.

Both ends were visited in turn after this, and Fred Hawkes getting the worst of a collision with the Reading right back, had to go off for a few minutes. Reading's goal was the result of a free kick given against Hogg for a foul on the outside-left. R. Hawkes and McCurdy prevented the inside-right from getting in a good shot, but Platt could only push the ball a few yards on the ground, and Beats sent it rolling between the posts.

Coquet sustained an injury in the subsequent play, but was able to resume after a short stoppage. A weak clearance by Hogg gave the Reading inside-right an opportunity, but he sent wide. A good shot by Rigate was followed by a corner. The outside-right took the kick, and Moody got his head to the ball, which dropped just under the bar, and although Rae put both hands up, he could not prevent it from going in.

This happened five minutes before the interval, but before that arrived Luton forced three corners, which led to some exciting play. Reading next took up the running, and Platt tipped the ball over in saving from Minter. Nothing else of note happened, and so the teams left the field of play on equal terms.

The outstanding feature of the play in the early part of the second half was the fine display of Platt. He saved several shots which might have scored, and the least mistake on the part of the Luton custodian would have had an important bearing upon the result. A good shot by Boden and a foul against Hogg threatened danger, but Platt emerged triumphant.

Five minutes after the resumption some smart passing on the Luton left wing took the ball up the field in fine style, and Rankin headed through from Walders' centre. It was the most cleverly worked for goal seen on the Luton ground for some time. Rae scarcely attempted to save, and it is quite probable that he thought the ball was going over.

Both Platt and Rae rushed out and stopped dangerous movements on the part of both sets of forwards after this, and, as has already been intimated, the Luton goalkeeper was very much on the alert during this part of the game. On one occasion Rae only just prevented Fred Hawkes from scoring.

A miskick by Coquet near the centre of the field left Walders in possession, and the outside-left rushed towards the Reading goal. Three Luton forwards ran up to receive the centre, but Walders drove the ball in with a low shot. Rae met it, but the pace of the ball was too much for him, and so Luton's third goal was scored.

A fine run by Rigate almost ended in one of the Reading backs putting through his own goal. A couple of corner kicks taken by Rigate were cleared. Then, about ten minutes before the finish, Moody was hurt when he and Coquet were trying to control the ball, which had been kicked forward by one of the Luton halves. Moody left the field, but the ten men continued to play so well that the issue was never in doubt.

Shortly before the finish Wilkes got the worst of a collision with Rigate, and Rae seemed to be of opinion that the Luton outside-right was at fault, but the referee sent Rae back into goal. In the last minute Gee put in a fine shot and Platt gave a corner, but nothing came of it.

Altogether, the form shown by the forwards went far to justify what I said last week as to the constitution of the front string. The five men played well together on Boxing Day, though they failed in front of goal, but the combination was much more pronounced on Saturday, and happily effectiveness was also associated with it. Walders quite justified his inclusion, and I say this apart from the wonderful goal he scored, because as a matter of fact that sort of attempt would not come off above once in a hundred times, and the proper game would have been to centre to the inside forwards, who had the middle of the field almost to themselves.

The victory was the more meritorious because it was known before the game that four members of the team, including both backs, were really not fit to turn out. Hogg was the least fit, and before the finish he was quite done so far as running was concerned, though in other respects he continued to render good service.