

Southern League.

PORTSMOUTH v. LUTON.

Played at Portsmouth on Saturday. Result:

Portsmouth 1 goal.

Luton nil.

The players were as under:—

Luton—Platt; Dimmock and McCurdy; F. Hawkes, Jones, and R. Hawkes; Rigate, Rankin, Pearson, Moody, and Latheron.

Portsmouth—Cook; Thomson and Warner; Digweed, Buick, and McDonald; Birtles, Kirby, L. A. Louch, McCafferty, and Dix.

Referee, Mr. H. S. Bamlett (Gateshead).

Luton have never yet managed a point at Portsmouth, and therefore Saturday's defeat by the smallest possible margin cannot cause great surprise. At the commencement of the season Portsmouth were pretty generous in giving points away, but recently they have succeeded in welding a team together which has proved itself at least the equal of their usual strength. On Saturday they were at full strength, and consequently were looked upon as easy winners, but up to the interval Luton more than held their own, and were unfortunate in not crossing over with a lead which would probably have given them another away victory.

The turf was in fine condition, and there was scarcely any wind, so the fact that Bob Hawkes had his usual luck in tossing made practically no difference to Luton's chances. Play opened pretty quietly, but after a few preliminary kicks Luton got through by the agency of a free kick, which Buick headed clear. The ball, however, was promptly returned, McCurdy sending it right across the field. Rigate and Rankin obtained possession, and the former centred finely to Pearson, who tested Cook with a good attempt from close range.

Luton's attack made matters pretty warm, chiefly by "three-inside" tactics, the wing men not getting a chance so frequently as usual. Still the inside forwards were playing pretty football, causing Thomson and Warner to be hard at work the whole time. A right-wing movement led up to a corner, given by Digweed when hard pressed, and this Rigate placed in a beautiful position. Pearson, in attempting to clear the backs, got the ball a trifle too high, and it landed on top of the net. Cook was also called upon by a dropping centre from Luton's left wing, but this he easily cleared.

Although play was chiefly in the home quarters most shots came from long range, and thus Cook had comparatively an easy time. Still he was pretty smart in getting away a fast grounder from Pearson. The Pompey goalkeeper fell in bringing off this clearance, but just managed to dispose of the ball. McCafferty succeeded in eluding F. Hawkes on one occasion, but Dimmock made a dashing clearance when a goal appeared likely. Returning with the ball once more, McCafferty worked himself well into goal and let drive at Platt with a hot shot, but Peter caught this in good style, and dodging both Louch and Kirby, cleared an ugly situation in a masterly manner.

Dix made the running on the left wing, and finished up with a well-judged centre, which Louch missed badly, and Platt cleared with a tremendous kick up the field. The first corner to Portsmouth came after some twenty minutes' play, but Bob Hawkes cleared this with a clever kick, just robbing a couple of the home attack who were waiting for the ball to drop. Platt gave Portsmouth a second corner when a fast shot from the centre of the field came rather unexpectedly and bounced from his extended hand into his face.

Still, on the whole, Luton were having the greater share of the game, and Warner tried to alter matters by dribbling the ball down the field and for a moment it appeared he would actually get a goal on his own, but fortunately his final effort culminated in a simple goal kick. Rigate raced through following this, and placed the ball across the goal. Moody tried to get at it, but Thomson was in the way, and Moody pushed the Portsmouth back, and thus the situation was saved for Portsmouth by a foul being given against Moody just in front of goal.

The game was stopped for several minutes through a dog getting on the field, and it took a deal of trouble to get off, so much so that the spectators were very impatient and called loudly for the game to proceed. But eventually the dog was lifted over the railings, and the game proceeded in peace. A miss by Thomson let Latheron in, and it looked a very promising opening, but Warner, dashing right across the field, relieved the pressure rather luckily. Birtles forced a couple of corners, each of which was cleared with some difficulty,

F. Hawkes eventually placing the ball into touch.

The nearest thing to a goal for Luton came about just before the interval, Rigate putting the ball at Pearson's toe when the latter was standing just clear of the backs. Feeling he was offside, Pearson hesitated for a moment, but as the referee made no sign he went on, and it appeared nothing but a dash out by Cook could prevent a score. But Pearson, in trying to make certain, turned the ball a trifle too wide, and the ball passed over the goal-line about a foot on the wrong side of the upright.

Luton commenced the second half as they left off, and were soon down at Cook's end, Rankin getting the better of a duel with Warner and placing the ball out to his partner. Rigate put in a fine centre, only to find Thomson on the spot, and the Pompey back cleared with a big kick from the mouth of goal. Moody tried a shot from a pass by Pearson, but it would probably have paid better to have taken the ball a bit nearer before letting drive, for once more the ball was placed wide. A minute later another similar movement was charged down by Cook, who came out just as Moody was about to take aim.

McCafferty was playing finely at this stage, and twice he called upon Platt with clever shots, only to find Luton's goalkeeper nimble in picking up the ball and then sending it well out of danger. Kirby also made his presence felt, but shot wildly, the ball going yards over. The game was now gradually but surely going in favour of Portsmouth, and it caused no surprise when McCafferty, meeting a rather weak return during a spell of pressure, drove the ball high up into the net. It is true the ball came rather awkwardly to McCafferty, and he was a bit lucky to get his shot home, for it was rising all the way to the goal and appeared likely to sail over, but Platt was completely beaten, and, as events turned out, the game was won.

There was a good half-hour still to play, but for quite twenty minutes of that Pompey were all over Luton, and Platt's charge had more than one lucky escape. Louch once got clear away, and Platt coming out, left an open goal. The ball was shot from the left wing into what was an absolutely open goal, for not even McCurdy was about to save matters. But to everyone's surprise the ball refused to go over the line, and rolled slowly right along the goal-mouth and finally out of danger. It was a most lucky incident for Luton.

During the final ten minutes Luton made a desperate attempt to at least equalise, Rankin putting in an extremely fine run, with Buick close at his heels the whole time. Rankin's final shot went in at a terrific pace, but Cook got down to it and picked up cleverly. Still Portsmouth were not done with by any means, and the closing stages were certainly the liveliest of the whole match. A right-wing break-away by Birtles found the Luton defenders napping, and Platt was called upon to face a sudden attack. Aided, however, by a certain amount of good fortune, the pressure was relieved, but not until at least three attempts had been made to place the ball into the goal.

At the opposite goal Cook almost let through a fine attempt from Pearson, who was standing a bit back and tried a pot shot. This Cook stopped but did not clear at all well; indeed, it appeared to be over his shoulder when he finally touched the ball from under the bar, and Luton appealed for a goal, but the referee was not in a good position at the moment, and quite properly gave his verdict in favour of the defence. Another strong appeal was set up for a penalty kick when Moody was apparently pushed off the ball by Buick just as he was about to shoot. This time the referee consulted his linesman before deciding, but once more the home side got the benefit of the doubt, and the whistle soon afterwards sounded time with the result exactly as last season.

Although, taking the exchanges in the second half, Portsmouth deserved their win, Luton played a very good game, and should have made matters safe at the interval. In commenting on the game, the Portsmouth Press states the home defence was in excellent fettle, and a word of praise is said in favour of Cook. It also says Cook had a good deal more to do than usually falls to the lot of a Portsmouth goalkeeper, and stopped many difficult shots in good style. This criticism speaks well for the Luton attack, for the Pompey scribes are noted for somewhat biased reports. It is true this critic at the same time comments upon Luton's luck in not having a bigger defeat against them, but he finishes up with the remark: "Luton showed promising form, and were seen to great advantage in the first half."

Although losing the game, the Luton players are to be congratulated upon a thoroughly sound display, the only point where it could be said the home side were superior being the two extreme wing men, for both Birtles and Dix