

FOOTBALL.

SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

PORTSMOUTH V. LUTON.

Played at Fratton Park on Saturday. Result:—

PORTSMOUTH, One Goal,
LUTON, NIL.

The following players turned out:—

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.

Seeing neither of the London amateurs could arrange to make the Portsmouth journey the strongest available side was taken with the exception of Hogg; while Portsmouth were represented by their best eleven, Cook in the opinion of many being a more reliable goalkeeper than Cameron, who was unwell. The conditions were ideal with practically no wind, while the turf looked in fine condition, notwithstanding the fact that on Luton's arrival they found a reserve match was in progress. Portsmouth runs three teams, and this means they often have to get in two home matches on one day.

Bob Hawkes once more lost the toss, but Luton were first dangerous from a punt up the field by Dimmock right into the mouth of goal, Rigate, Rankin, and Pearson each had a pot at goal, but their efforts lacked the necessary sting. It is true Cook did not clear Rankin's attempt, and tamely put the ball back to Pearson, but Luton's centre returned the ball direct to Cook, and it was ultimately got out of danger.

Birtles got away cleverly, and sent the ball right in from the corner flag, Platt having some difficulty in punching it from under the bar as it came across. Fortunately it went direct to Dimmock, who promptly sent into touch. Coming down again, Luton forced a corner off Thomson. Rigate placed this finely, and after two or three players had touched the ball Jones got his head to it and all but scored, the ball landing just over the bar.

The referee was pretty smart in his decisions, and pulled up Luton's forwards very frequently for off-side, Thomson lying well forward and bringing this about. But a most promising movement on the part of Luton's left wing was thrown away through Pearson failing to make a dash for the ball as it came across from Latheron. A minute later Pearson made amends by snapping up a place kick from Jones and letting fly at Cook with a fine attempt. In saving this Cook stumbled, but succeeded in getting the ball out of danger, the spectators giving him a special cheer for the effort.

McCafferty troubled the Luton defence, and after working his way through let drive from close range. Platt, however, caught the ball, notwithstanding both Louch and Kirby were in close attendance, and once again what promised to result in a certain goal was cleared. Louch soon after tried a chance shot, which Platt in saving apparently knocked into his face, for the game was stopped to allow Luton's custodian to recover. Platt gave a corner kick in getting the ball out of goal, and during the attack set up when this was taken Kirby injured his leg, but he did not leave the field. Naturally there were one or two minor injuries, but the game was being contested in the best of spirit, one reason undoubtedly being the firm manner Mr. Bamlett controlled the exchanges, although there was a little murmuring from the crowd when a Portsmouth player was pulled up for a slight offence.

Birtles was a lively customer to hold, and gave Bob Hawkes considerable anxiety, but the latter stuck to him and would seldom allow him to get clear. But the ex-Swindon winger was responsible for a couple of corners near the interval, and both these were rather difficult to get away. F. Hawkes finally placed his goal in safety with a big kick down the field. The last incident before half-time was a run down by Rigate, who put the ball over to Pearson, who was standing suspiciously like off-side, but to the surprise of the players (including Pearson himself from the hesitating way he started) the referee allowed Luton centre forward to go on, and it was a very near thing for a goal. Pearson however in trying to turn the ball away from Cook placed it a shade too wide and just missed the farther post.

Early in the second half Moody appeared likely to notch a goal. Cook coming out to meet the ball as it came across from Pearson almost missed it altogether, but just prevented Moody getting in his shot. At the opposite end Kirby broke clean through, but instead of shooting passed out to Birtles, and Jones falling back just managed to clear. But the relief was not for long, for after sixteen minutes' play a free kick was given against Jones in mid-field, and the ball was never really cleared, although two or three defenders had a try to get it away. McCafferty meeting a weak return drove the ball home with a high shot, which appeared to be going over, and thus scoring what proved the only goal of the match.

This success made a big difference to Portsmouth, and for the next quarter of an hour they were all over Luton. How Platt's charge escaped on at least two occasions cannot be explained. Once with no Lutonian near the ball rolled slowly right along the goal-mouth, certainly not more than a couple of feet off the line, and eventually kicked away several yards wide of the upright. Rankin made a temporary diversion with a dash through, with Buick close at his heels, and finished up with a fine shot, which Cook picked up in good style. Following this the "Pompey" right wing got going and clean left McCurdy, arriving in front of Platt with no one else to beat. It appeared nothing could prevent a goal, but somehow they badly muddled matters, and Platt got the ball away at a third attempt in rather a lucky manner.

Pearson attempted a long shot, which gave Cook considerable trouble to dispose of; indeed he only turned the ball out with his hands outstretched above his head after a rather faulty save. It appeared from the stand that the ball was well in goal, but although Pearson appealed for the point the referee was too far away to do other than give the defenders the benefit of the doubt. With time fast approaching Luton made a big effort to divide the honours, and forced a couple of corners without any tangible result. During a spell of pressure Buick appeared to push Moody off the ball well inside the penalty area, and naturally the Luton players set up a strong appeal for a penalty kick, but after consulting one linesman the referee once more sided with the defence, and Luton's last chance of earning a much needed point fled.

Without being a brilliant exhibition the game was interesting right through, the Luton attack being much more in evidence than in some of their mid-field advantages to account, and their away matches, but they once more failed more often than not made their final shot too quickly. Cook's task was thus easier than it otherwise could have been. Little fault could be found with the defence, and Dimmock made a very efficient substitute for Hogg. Louch was evidently off his game, for he was very ineffective. Possibly Jones had something to do with this, for he seemed to hold the Pompey amateur with comparative ease. The best part of the home attack was the wing men, both of whom were very speedy. Buick played a clever game as usual, but he did not get the ball so often as in previous seasons. It will be remembered he did not play at Luton this season, and undoubtedly Portsmouth are a vastly different team now he has returned.