

Southern League

LUTON v. BRISTOL ROVERS.

Played at Bristol on Saturday. Result:—

Luton 1 goal.

Bristol Rovers..... nil.

The teams were as under:—

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

Bristol Rovers — Cartlidge; Ovens and Doyle; Smart, Strang, and Handley; Clark, Gorrish, Smith, Roberts, and Savage.

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

Only one change was made in the Luton team, and this was a compulsory one, R. Hawkes being unable to get away from business the whole day, and his place was given to F. Albone, who thus made his initial Southern League appearance. The Rovers had Appleby and Buckle away, but were strongly represented notwithstanding. Until quite recently, Bristol Rovers were considered to have a chance for championship should Queen's Park Rangers make the slightest slip, but after maintaining an unbeaten home certificate up to the 14th March, they allowed the prospective champions to walk away with a couple of points, and thus practically wipe out any chance they possessed of earning the right to hold the Southern League shield for the second time in their history.

Up to Saturday, this was the only Southern League defeat the Rovers had sustained on their own ground, so that Luton's performance must be put down as the best of the present season, which seems likely to finish up much more creditably than appeared possible at one period. It is certainly curious that after trying in vain for many years to win a match at Bristol, Luton should do the trick three times in succession, for they also won the Western League match on the Stapleton-road ground this season, while it is within everyone's knowledge they started their upward march on the League table there last season.

McCurdy won the toss without gaining any material advantage, and the game opened rather quietly, the first incident of note being a burst-through by Smith, and the ball being splendidly passed out to Savage, the latter had a fine opportunity to lay the foundation of a victory, but he shot wildly, and only a goal-kick resulted. Rankin put in a long attempt, which Cartlidge easily disposed of, but a really good opportunity was given to Pearson by a punt up the field by Jones. This caused Cartlidge to run out to meet the ball, and if Luton's centre forward had followed up quickly he should have secured at least two steps before Cartlidge could reach it, but as it was he allowed the Bristol goalkeeper to get there first and clear the ball with comparative ease.

The Rovers just afterwards got very dangerous, chiefly through the cleverness of Clark, who proved at this stage to be quite as much as Albone could manage. He succeeded in getting one fine shot in, which Platt only disposed of by kicking out to Gerrish, who was well placed for a sharp return. He certainly returned the ball fast enough, but fortunately he put it yards over, and Luton's goal had an extremely lucky escape. Still the attention of Clark could not be entirely shaken for long, and he gave Platt a regular "teaser" from long range, the ball coming across the goal very awkwardly, but Platt punched away over the goal-line. The corner kick was beautifully placed, but Platt, dashing into a crowd of players, once more turned the ball for a second corner. McCurdy this time did the needful with a long kick from the goal-mouth.

Rigate now took up the running, and, holding the ball, drew the defence right into the corner, eventually centring to Pearson. The latter tipped the ball back to Albone, who, although a bit down the field, was unmarked. Albone tried to beat Cartlidge with a good attempt, but his aim was a yard or so wide, and nothing better than a goal kick resulted. It is seldom so many corner kicks are seen in one match as was the case on Saturday, and although they were not all on one side, the Rovers had the greater share, Platt being very liberal in giving them away, but he disposed of them in such a confident manner each time that his tactics were quite justified by results, at any rate.

On one occasion it seemed likely that Luton would improve upon one of such awards, Cartlidge only just preventing the ball going under the bar by tipping it a yard or so away, and it was quickly returned into the mouth of goal, but Pearson being given offside as he was about to touch through relieved the situation for Bristol. Hands against Latheron only about thirty yards away from his own goal almost led up to disaster, for Platt made a flukey save, and matters were decidedly ugly for Luton, but Roberts charged Platt and was pulled up for a foul in consequence. For the final ten minutes of the first half the Rovers pressed hard, and shots were rained in from all positions. One of the best attempts was from Handley, but Platt was more than equal to every one that came to hand and for the rest the wild shooting prevented full advantage being gained. The spectators did their utmost by loud shouts of encouragement to bring about the needed goal, but it was all of no avail, and the half-time score was represented by a blank sheet.

On the re-start the Rovers kept up the pressure, but Platt, as before, turned almost every dangerous attempt for a corner kick, and try as they would, the home side could not manage to break down the stubborn defence Luton set up in meeting these awards. Gradually, however, Luton once more took up a greater share in the attack, and a nice passing movement by Pearson and Rankin culminated in Rankin making a fine dart through the backs and letting drive with what was undoubtedly the

hardest shot of the day. It appeared certain to open the score, but it was a rising attempt and just shaved the top of the crossbar as it travelled over, to the evident relief of the spectators.

Not two minutes afterwards the actual goal, however, did arrive, and Rankin was the scorer. The ball was kicked off from goal, and landing on Jones' cranium, it was promptly headed to Rankin, who had plenty of time to make up his mind, and this time, instead of shooting with terrific force, he coolly glided the ball low and slow towards the right of Cartlidge, and it took the post low down and rebounded into the net. This happened after ten minutes' play in the second half, but although many times hard pressed, Luton always appeared likely to maintain their advantage.

Indeed, the only occasion when Platt seemed likely to be beaten was a burst through by Ovens, who came right from full back with the ball and worked his way almost to the corner flag, and then banging it well in the centre, Smith was given a splendid opportunity, for the Luton defence for once was caught napping, but, as so often is the case, Smith made a wild rush and ballooned the ball yards over the top of the goal. By this time Platt was prepared to take almost any risk in preventing a score, and once dashed into Roberts without attempting to get the ball away, seeing that if he could prevent the Rover from receiving, it would pass over the line about a yard wide. It was a questionable tackle and appeals were made for a penalty, but the referee evidently considered the charge a fair one, for he allowed Luton the goal kick.

Eight minutes before time Clark ran up against Jones just outside the penalty area, and the game was stopped for the Rovers' player to recover from the impact before the referee gave the home side a free kick. This did not at all suit the crowd, repeated calls being made for the turning off of Jones, and for a few minutes many pointed remarks were hurled at Mr. Muir. Indeed, he stopped the game a minute later to address the spectators in the enclosure, and this rather quieted matters, for the game proceeded without any exciting incident to the close, and Luton ran out winners by the only goal of a hard if not very scientific game.

It was, however, an interesting encounter, with the Rovers holding the upper hand in the first half, while in the second Luton could claim to be slightly the better team. Cartlidge did all that man could do for his side, and was quite helpless to deal with Rankin's goal. Ovens was the better back on the home side, but wandered over much at times. Probably the most effective player on their side was Clark, and his work always spelt danger.

For Luton, undoubtedly Platt was most in the picture, although all the defence played a solid game without being at all showy. Dimmock, now that he is getting experience, has a much better idea of tackling a man, and held his wing in good style, naturally receiving considerable help from F. Hawkes. No one in this department was more prominent than Jones, and he is certainly playing finely at present. F. Albone did not settle down at the start, but as the game progressed did many clever things, and it must not be overlooked that he had the best wing to operate against. Luton's right wing pair were in better form than the previous week, Rigate especially showing a better idea of a winger's duties, while Rankin was certainly the best individual forward. One more win will now put Luton absolutely safe, whatever New Brompton or Leyton may do, and it is quite likely neither of these teams will manage even the number of points now held by Luton, so that practically all danger of asking for re-election is now passed.