

FOOTBALL.

SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

LUTON v. BRISTOL ROVERS.

REDOUBTABLE ROVERS BEATEN.

Played at Bristol on Saturday. Result:—

LUTON ONE
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 Boyle; Smart, Strang and Handley; Clarke, Gerrish, Smith, Roberts and Savage.

Referee: Mr. G. H. Muir (Southampton).

It will be seen R. Hawkes was an absentee, and this made room for F. Albone, who has been playing a consistent game with the Reserves. The other ten positions have been exactly the same for the last five matches. On the Bristol side it had been expected A. E. Scothern would turn out, but he preferred to assist his own club (Oxford City). Of their regular players Buckle was engaged in the International at Aberdare, while Turner, who played a fine game at the Crystal Palace the previous week, was scarcely fit, and Smith came back to the team as pivot. Appleby, although his name figured on the match card, was also away on account of a severe cold.

Luton usually bring bad weather to Stapleton-road, and it was raining heavily just before the kick-off, which naturally kept the numbers down and not more than 5,000 spectators assembled. It will be remembered Luton won their first League point at Bristol last season, and curiously history repeated itself on this occasion and by a similar score. It was also singular that Mr. Muir should be the referee for both matches, although he only acted on Saturday because the appointed official was taking the Amateur Cup Final. As Luton won the Western League match at Bristol the tables have been turned completely and from three successive visits they have won by the odd goal.

At the start Luton did the major portion of the attacking, the ball being swung about very smartly, and they quite took the Rovers' defence by surprise. On the slippery turf it was rather difficult for the players to maintain their equilibrium, but Luton certainly kept their feet much better than the Rovers. Rankin very early sent in a very hard shot which went whizzing by the post at a terrific pace and just after, following clever work by Jones, Pearson had a glorious chance had he started a second earlier, but Cartlidge came out and just managed to reach the ball by a single step in front of Luton's centre, so as to get it away from danger. It was a very near thing and another yard would have made all the difference there is not the slightest doubt.

At the opposite end Platt also was compelled to advance quite twenty yards to meet a chance attempt from Roberts, following a breakaway, but it never looked so likely to score at the incident recorded above. Still it paved the way for better work from the Rovers' attack and Savage, getting away with the ball, promptly swung it right across the field to Clarke and the latter by clever tactics worked his way through, eventually finishing up with a pass to Gerrish, who was beautifully placed, but lifted the ball high over the bar.

Luton took a couple of corners, but neither seriously troubled Cartlidge and Clarke forced one for the Rovers, which Platt put behind over his head for another. This was placed so well that Peter had considerable difficulty in clearing, being surrounded by a host of players. He succeeded, however, in punching the leather over the heads of bunch in his immediate vicinity. Having tested this method of defending when hard pressed Platt repeatedly saved his charge by conceding corner kicks. Indeed, during the progress of the match he must have deliberately given quite a score, but every one of them was ably disposed of as the result proves.

Luton, although not having so much of the game after the opening half an hour had several promising movements spoilt through weak shooting. Moody, however, displayed great cleverness on one occasion with a fine screw shot which almost entered the goal low down near the upright, but unfortunately it was just the wrong side and struck the net with Cartlidge well beat. F. Hawkes also initiated a strong attack which only a smart save by Cartlidge prevented from developing into a goal. This he did by conceding

a corner, which Latheron placed finely, but the goalie got this away with a huge kick after a couple of players had made an attempt to clear.

Ovens, who has played in the front rank hereabouts made several individual attempts to break through, but usually finished up with a badly directed drive which was easily disposed of. But in one instance he put in a very good attempt which gave Platt another chance to exhibit his skill. Indeed just before the interval the visiting custodian was bombarded from all quarters, Handley putting in two or three "teasers" from the left half back position, but he held the fort against all comers and on leaving the field at half-time received a regular round of cheering as his reward.

The Rovers started the second half in a very determined style and the long procession of corners was early added to, but again Platt was too good, and the home side were placed on the defensive. Moody and Latheron were conspicuous for two or three well executed runs but the ball was charged down at the last minute except once when Rankin pounced upon the ball, came across and put in a delightful drive, which appeared a certain goal, but unfortunately the ball rose about a foot too high and sailed harmlessly over the bar. It was easily the best shot of the day up to this point and was deservedly cheered by a surprised crowd who could not understand this pressure from a team so lowly placed as Luton.

They were however soon to receive a regular shock for after ten minutes' play in the second period one of the most remarkable goals it is possible to imagine came about in this fashion. Platt kicked off from goal with one of his big lunges down the field and the ball falling on Jones' head he sent it forward to Rankin who was standing unmarked with both backs lying wide and he coolly walked through with the leather, finishing up with a gentle touch all along the ground, which sent the ball just out of Cartlidge's reach, so that it struck the inside of the upright and glanced off into the net. The Rovers' custodian was helpless to prevent what appeared such a very simple goal. It was a very clever point and Rankin is to be congratulated upon keeping his head and not attempting to "blind" the goalkeeper with a straight shot, as is so often the case when a forward is presented with such an opportunity in a rather unexpected manner.

Ovens made another effort to get on level terms, by a burst up among the forwards on the right wing, and centring hard landed the ball at the foot of Smith, who was running at full tilt and shot well over the bar. He could not be altogether blamed, for unless he had let drive at once the chance would have fled, for the ball was travelling at a tremendous pace across the goal. Still it looked a fine opening for he had no one but Platt to beat. The referee was not altogether pleasing the spectators, but he made very few mistakes and they were certainly not all in favour of Luton. Indeed, he pulled Rigate up on one occasion very badly and the ironical cheers which greeted this award evidently led up to some rather strong remarks for Mr. Muir stopped the game and addressed himself to that portion of the spectators assembled in the enclosure.

Luton were naturally content with their lead. They laid themselves out to maintain their advantage and as the score shows they ultimately succeeded. Taking the game through possibly the Rovers did not deserve to lose, but I fancy they would not have grumbled a lot if they had only drawn. They are not very partial to giving up points on their own ground and, indeed, only the probable champions have beaten them previously this season there, so Luton's latest performance is very creditable and will undoubtedly place them in a perfectly safe position on the League table. Platt was in one of his best moods and Luton spectators know what this means. Without being brilliant Dimmock and McCurdy played a safe game, while the middle line did their part in fine style, Jones being very energetic and naturally, under the circumstances, gave a certain amount of displeasure to the crowd. Rankin, besides scoring the only goal, proved the best forward and is just now playing better than at any previous time since he came to Luton.