

The Southern League.

LUTON v. READING.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—

Luton 2 goals.

Reading 2 goals.

Teams:—

Luton—Jarvis; Gregory and McCurdy; F. Hawkes, Jones, and Dimmock; Brown, Haycock, Bradley, Moody, and Johnson.

Reading—Newbigging; Crump and Wilkes; Hancock, Boden, and Mainds; Burch, Leonard, Tarplin, Wheateroft, and Huggins.

Referee, Mr. G. H. Bromby (Portsmouth).

Although at times the weather was cloudy, fully seven thousand people assembled on the Town Ground on Saturday, and, after Luton's brilliant victory over Norwich, it was generally expected that the home team would win, for on Wednesday Reading had only been able to draw at home with Brentford, both sides scoring two goals.

Those hopes were doomed to disappointment, for although Luton twice gained the lead, Reading played forceful football all through the game, and, in the opinion of some of the spectators, they were the better team. The Luton right-wingers played well, but Brown found that he had a worthy opponent in Wilkes, who seemed to be always in the right place, even though his kicking was not of the best. Haycock, too, was well marked, and was rarely allowed to get dangerous.

Bradley was not so fortunate as against Norwich, although he sent in one or two hard shots which deserved to score. The selection of Dimmock to fill the place of Bob Hawkes, who, like Herbert Smith, left Hull on Saturday to play a match in Sweden this week, was not a happy one. Dimmock is one of the best "kicks" in Luton and has undoubtedly the makings of a good back, but on Saturday he was never certain that he was doing the right thing, and hesitation was his weak point. Consequently Johnson and Moody waited for passes which never came, and McCurdy had more work to do than is usually the case.

Reading made one change as compared with Wednesday, Tarplin, the old Netts County player, taking the centre-forward position. They adopted a vigorous style of play, and after they equalised in the second half, almost anything might have happened. Luton's supporters were somewhat reassured when Jones scored from a penalty a quarter of an hour from time, but in the closing minutes Leonard scored with the best shot of the day, thus placing Reading in a position which they thoroughly deserved.

The visitors won the toss, and the opening exchanges were rather in their favour. After a centre by Huggins had gone wide, Reading came again, and a good clearance by Gregory gave Bradley the ball, with the result that Newbigging was called upon. Then Jarvis saved a good shot from Burch, and at the other end Crump prevented Johnson from getting in a centre. A long kick by Huggins was allowed to go across the mouth of goal, nobody being there to meet it.

Then Johnson was stopped for being offside, and a minute later the whistle was blown again just as Bradley was heading the ball. The Luton centre-forward next tried a long grounder without success, and in an attack by Reading, Leonard essayed an attempt which was a trifle too wide. A centre from the Luton right-wing looked dangerous, but Moody was prevented from shooting.

Luton were now getting used to the style of play adopted by the visitors, and showed some improvement, but there was little difference between the teams in point of merit. Following a free kick taken by Gregory, Haycock tested Newbigging with a good shot. A smart clearance by Gregory gave Brown possession, but the close attentions of his opponents prevented him from getting in a centre.

Luton experienced a piece of good fortune a minute later. Leonard, the Reading inside-left, broke away, and after drawing the backs, passed out to Burch, who had only Jarvis to beat. The outside-right seemed certain to score, and he shot hard, but the ball hit Jarvis in the face. The goalkeeper was dazed for a minute or two, but stayed at his post.

A centre by Burch went across the mouth of goal without being met, and Jarvis saved from Boden, who took a free kick just outside the penalty area, Jones being the offender. Gregory then gave a corner, and after McCurdy had attempted to clear, Boden headed on to the bar. A good save by Jarvis led to play being transferred, and Bradley and Moody got very dangerous.

A forward pass by Dimmock was too fast for Johnson, but a minute later the outside-left got in a shot which was rather too high. Huggins, Reading's outside-left, sustained an injury to his left leg, and did not take any part in the game for a few minutes. He was Reading's best forward, and his comrades were very pleased when he came on again.

Play had been in progress just over half-an-hour when Moody gave Luton the lead. Following a throw-in on the other side of the field, Jones passed to Moody, who found himself twenty yards from goal and unmarked. He let fly, and the ball rose nicely, going into the top corner at such an angle that Newbigging was well beaten.

After this Luton played with more confidence, and showed up well in the exchanges prior to the interval. On one occasion a centre by Johnson was met by Brown, who headed just outside the goal, and later on Moody accepted a pass by Dimmock, but touched the ball too hard and Newbigging cleared. Reading were by no means dismayed, however, and Wheateroft came very near to scoring when he met a centre by Burch and headed over.

That Luton's lead was none too safe was shown early in the second half, when Reading gave the Luton defence a great deal of trouble. A couple of fouls on Brown led to nothing tangible, but from a throw-in Dimmock accomplished his best performance of the afternoon, putting across a high shot which forced Newbigging to give a corner. This was taken by Brown and Jones headed, the ball touching the bar as it went over.

One or two very dangerous attacks were then made by Reading, and Jarvis did well to save from Mainds. A hard shot by Bradley went by the target, and Moody broke away a minute later, but Newbigging managed to throw the ball over the head of Luton's inside-left. Another aggressive movement by Reading gave Jarvis further trouble, and he stumbled in saving, but Jones managed to kick the ball away.

A really good hard shot by Bradley was well met by Newbigging. After Burch had headed over, Bradley again got going, but one of the backs tipped the ball to the goalkeeper. A centre by Moody was met by Bradley, who headed wide, and perhaps the result would have been more satisfactory if Haycock, who was waiting, had been allowed to get in a kick.

Twenty minutes after the re-start Jarvis went to the ground in saving from the Reading left wing, and did not retain possession of the ball. None of the other Luton defenders were near enough to kick it away, and Tarplin scored rather easily, standing almost on the goal-line. This success did not come before it was deserved, for since the interval Reading had repeatedly given the home defence a very warm time.

Brown almost scored for Luton with a shot which went across the mouth of goal, and at the other end Huggins was given offside when in a good position. Then Brown got dangerous again, and was fouled almost on the line at the side of the penalty area. He took the kick, and Wilkes foolishly put his hands up to touch the ball. Luton were awarded a penalty in consequence, and Jones scored with a low shot which could not very well have been harder.

It was now about a quarter of an hour from the finish, and everyone hoped that Luton would be able to prevent Reading from equalising. Earlier in the game the home players had been rather too sure of victory, but now that it was once more within their grasp, they showed a determination fully equal to that of their opponents. From now to the finish the play was watched with tense excitement, for while Luton might increase their lead, it was more probable that Reading would equalise.

A free kick for Reading, close in, was nullified by Gregory, and then Jarvis saved from Boden. Brown, when out on the wing, passed nicely to Bradley, taking plenty of time with his kick, and the centre-forward had a good chance. His shot was not hard enough, however, and Newbigging saved. Another attempt by Bradley was rather unexpected, but Newbigging was not to be caught napping.

Reading equalised four minutes from the finish. A centre by the left wing was met by Tarplin, but Jones relieved. Reading came again, and although Jarvis saved, the ball did not go many yards away from goal. Suddenly

Leonard fastened on to the sphere, and drove it into the net at such a pace and angle that no goalkeeper could have met it, except by extreme good fortune. It was a fitting if somewhat dramatic finale to a well-contested game.

Taking the game all through, I am afraid there was not much for Luton to brag about. On the run of the play in the first half, the home team were certainly fortunate to cross over with a one-goal lead, and they were lucky in the second half to again take the lead from a penalty kick, because it was just a toss-up whether Wilkes' handling of the ball was a deliberate offence, and if he had not touched it the likelihood of Luton's scoring from the free kick was not great.

The Reading team were more robust in their methods than Luton, and if they did not trouble themselves about the finer points of the game, they nevertheless preserved a tolerably good understanding. Their defence was a trifle erratic, but it was strong for all that, and the home forwards were not allowed a great deal of rope.

Of course, Luton sadly missed Bob Hawkes, for Dimmock was quite out of his element at half-back, and at the same time Dimmock's dash would have been of considerable value in the rear division.

Last season Dimmock was left out of his place at back for some time because it was thought he was not good enough at tackling, and now this season the first opportunity is taken of putting him in a position where the ability to tackle is the thing chiefly required. I hope too many experiments of this kind will not be made. The policy of fitting square pegs into round holes should not be adopted except under stress of dire necessity.

No doubt it is easy to be wise after the event, but anyone seeing Saturday's game would agree, I think, that it would have been better to have included Bradley among the halves and given Stansfield a place in the forward string. On the other hand, it must be admitted, in justice to the directors, that, after Bradley's success against Norwich, they would have been very severely criticised by the crowd had they ventured to take him from the centre-forward position.

Personally, however, I shall want to see many similar successes before I am convinced that Bradley is an ideal centre. That he is an indefatigable worker I will admit, and that he is the sort of man to "get there" if afforded the proper opportunities I am also free to confess, but I don't think he is the player to keep the forwards together or to make openings for them.

Still, apart from that, the other forwards have not yet settled down, and I shall expect better things from them, though they suffer somewhat from the disadvantage of being on the small side.

Time is young, and even that sterling half-back, Fred Hawkes, has not yet played himself into form. Jones, however, is quite "all there."

At full back, I am by no means satisfied that Gregory is a better man than Dimmock, and even if he has experience and judgment, I doubt if these qualities are as valuable, under the circumstances, as Dimmock's dash.

Gregory was too often allowing the left wing to get within shooting range, whereas Dimmock would have been into them before, and trusted to McCurdy to cover him in case of failure. You can't have a thoroughly effective pair of backs if they both stay at home, and McCurdy is much too valuable a man near goal to take undue risks himself.

Jarvis again gave a capital exhibition between the sticks, though he sometimes failed to clear at the first time of asking. I doubt, however, if he had any chance with either of the Reading goals.