

The Southern League.

EXETER CITY v. LUTON.

Played at Exeter on Saturday. Result:—

Exeter City..... 2 goals.

Luton 1 goal.

The teams lined up as under:—

Exeter City—Robinson; Craig and Bulcock; Ambler, Chadwick, and Johnson; White, Watson, McGuigan, Bell, and Copestake.

Luton—Platt; Folley and Gregory; F. Hawkes, White, and Jones; Brown, Haycock, Menzies, Moody, and Stansfield. Referee, Mr. T. W. Handford, London.

* * *

Luton were breaking fresh ground on Saturday, and they certainly played before the most enthusiastic crowd it has been their lot to meet this season. The ground itself is very peculiar, and practically only one side of the field is taken up to any extent by spectators. Indeed, at one end of the field there are no spectators whatever, and this is locally known as the "goalkeeper's paradise," for he quite escapes the remarks which as a rule are hurled by the home crowd at a visiting custodian.

The ground has been laid out to the best advantage undoubtedly, and the writer was informed that the terraces on the popular side would hold 8,500 comfortably.

* * *

It would not matter from a visiting club's point of view as to the spectators' accommodation, however, if the playing pitch was in good condition. But the Exeter City pitch on Saturday proved far from ideal, and the players complained strongly on this point after the match. It is difficult to describe, but at one end the ball many times literally stopped dead when it pitched, and it was almost impossible for a player to turn quickly, so great was the holding nature of the turf. Someone described it as resembling a farmyard in wet weather, and this is the nearest comparison I can think of. Curiously, all three goals were notted at this end of the field, and it speaks well for the defence that no more were scored, for their task was a most difficult one, it being almost impossible to judge exactly where the ball would finally rest. Mistakes on this point were constantly made, especially at the start before the players became a bit used to the pranks of the ball.

* * *

There were many expressions of regret that the Luton captain was not in the team, but from a playing point of view it is doubtful if they would have seen "Bob" at his best on that peculiar pitch. The home officials gave it out that they were quite at full strength, and after Robinson's fine show the previous Wednesday, the dropping of Fletcher met with approval. And long before the finish further confirmation of the wisdom of this action was forthcoming, for the old International certainly saved his latest club from a division of the points by his masterly saves.

* * *

Luton were called upon to defend the bad end as a result of losing the toss. Menzies kicked off, but McGuigan promptly intercepted the pass, and he and Bell burst through straight away, the latter putting in a stinging shot, which only just missed the target, in the first minute. Coming again, Johnson gave Bell a lovely pass, but Folley nipped in and cleared. Haycock and Menzies worked their way clean through the opposing backs, and Menzies put in a shot which Robinson easily gathered and threw away. Folley headed the ball for a corner when pressed by Bell, but Copestake placed this badly, and Luton were soon away through the agency of Brown, who showed Bulcock a clean pair of heels, and centring finely on the run, Luton appeared to have a chance, but Robinson once more secured the ball and placed out of danger.

* * *

On the whole however, the home side were seen to more advantage during the first ten minutes, and therefore it was no surprise to find them open the scoring. In a way, it was an unexpected point when it actually came about, for Bell, seizing the ball in the vicinity of the centre line, darted clean between the Luton backs, who were well up the field at the moment and holding the ball all the time he ran almost up to Platt before taking aim, and then simply steered it into the opposite corner to that in which Platt was standing. It was purely an individual goal, and Bell received no help from anyone in obtaining it.

* * *

At the other end Menzies cleverly wormed his way through the home defence, but he did not get really clear from their attentions, and Robinson dashing out, fell on the ball and saved in a marvellous manner, Menzies having some difficulty in not treading on the City goalkeeper's body as he ran right over him. A minute later it looked a certain goal for Luton when Moody and Menzies were observed to be bearing down on Robinson with Craig and Bulcock both well beaten, but at the critical moment the ball rose awkwardly, and Robinson once more saved in great style amid loud applause. Again Robinson saved when it appeared certain Luton would equalise through Brown, who, getting the better of Bulcock, worked in, and it was only by throwing himself full length that Robinson was able to just turn the ball round the upright for a corner.

* * *

Exeter appealed strongly for a penalty when McGuigan slipped up in the mud, but the referee rightly judged it was an accidental occurrence. The Luton goal had a lucky escape just afterwards when McGuigan sent in a cannon-like drive, which Bell tried his best to turn through, and fell right into the goal-net in the attempt. From a corner kick conceded by White, the ball hung round Platt for some time, the ground being chiefly responsible for many miskicks, and once or twice it seemed that Luton's goal must fall again. Still the game proved very fast, and Brown was always dangerous when the ball came to his side of the field, and after a time Copestake and Johnson changed positions in order that the former's pace would prevent Brown getting clear so often.

* * *

Eight minutes before half-time McGuigan sent the ball out to Bell, and Platt coming out, failed to reach it before Bell shot into goal. It seemed that his shot must score, but it struck a Lutonian who had fallen back, and for the moment it looked as though the situation was saved, but on account of the mud the ball did not travel far away, and McGuigan rushing in, drove it home, thus giving his side their second goal.

* * *

The ball was put through once more before crossing over, but the referee's decision negatived the point, greatly to the surprise of the Exeter players, who claimed that the ball came off a Luton defender before it reached Bell, who was standing almost under the bar when White put up a long shot. It is true the ball touched a Luton player in its flight, but the referee explained afterwards that he had already made up his mind Bell was obstructing Platt by standing where he did, and therefore he gave him offside and thus struck off the goal.

* * *

In the second half Luton were seen to greater advantage, and quite deserved to share the points for the plucky manner in which they contested the game after the hard time they had in defending their goal in the mud during the first half. From a free kick against Ambler for handling, the three Luton inside forwards pounced upon Robinson while he held the ball and brought him to earth. However, he stuck to the ball, and after what seemed

quite a long time he was observed to crawl from underneath, and although desperate attempts were still made to dispossess him, he managed eventually to get clear and thus save an ugly situation. It was some minutes before he was able to resume his position, having apparently been kicked on the head during the melee, but his subsequent display proved that little serious harm was done. At the opposite end we saw another stoppage caused by the impetuous Bell coming into violent contact with the upright when attempting to score from a swift drive from the home right-winger.

* * *

Stansfield was now more in the picture, and he was the chief cause of Luton's goal. He cleverly raced down from just over the half-way line and placed the ball to Menzies, who netted with a cross drive from the inside-right position, Robinson being completely beaten for the first and only time during the match. Naturally this tardy success put more heart into Luton, and they made desperate efforts to equalise at least. They compelled the home team to play on the defensive almost the whole time afterwards, but Robinson held the fort bravely. Still, some of the chances should have been turned to account, especially on the occasion when Menzies found himself clear of all opposition except the goalkeeper after a clever individual dribble, but somehow Robinson managed to get to the ball before it passed through, and undoubtedly this save gave his side the victory. Luton were pressing hard at the finish, but they could not manage the equaliser, and thus suffered defeat by the barest of margins.

* * *

The game was one of the stiffest of the present season, and it was hard lines such a good fight should have ended with a defeat, for Luton fully merited a point. The home officials expressed themselves quite relieved at the finish, and congratulated Luton upon their forward work, which they voted the finest seen on the ground. Platt certainly had fewer shots to stop than Robinson, but the defeat must not be put upon his shoulders, for he made no real mistakes. Indeed, the team held up their end in fine style, and but for the brilliant display by Robinson would have earned fame by walking off with a victory where Southampton only have been successful.

* * *

The Exeter correspondent of the "Morning Leader" says he must admit "that Luton's forwards as a line are about the smartest yet produced by visitors to St. James's-park."

* * *