

FOOTBALL.

LUTON IMPROVE AWAY.

Two More Goals.

ANOTHER S.L. POINT.

Luton made the journey to Reading short of two regular players, R. Hawkes found it inconvenient to get away from business, while it was decided to give McCurdy a rest and try what Tildesley could do in a Southern League match. He has recently been getting more confidence with the reserve team, and consequently letting himself go to a greater extent than when he first came, and naturally wished for a serious trial in the best company. Reading have been going pretty strong and hold the record for drawn games. It will be remembered they divided the points at Luton on the opening Saturday of the season, thus being the only club except Millwall who have taken a Southern League point away from Luton. It is seldom now that their amateur International assists them. But Herbert Smith fell into the breach caused by Crump being injured, it being his first appearance for many weeks, and he received quite a popular welcome on taking the field.

The game can best be described as a hard, stubborn one, but contested in the finest of spirit, and the result was quite in keeping with the run of the game. Luton front rank were undoubtedly cleverer than the corresponding one of Reading, but they were unable to turn all their midfield advantages to good account. Matters looked rather ominous for Luton a couple of minutes after the start, when Tildesley fell, evidently seriously injured. It was quite an accident, and for a moment everyone appeared quite surprised how it had happened, there being no one near Tildesley when he fell. The Luton players however, feared the worst and quickly ran to his assistance, being naturally upset by the fact it probably meant playing a man short practically the whole game. "Billy" Lawson ran on the field, and promptly set to work to put matters right again, but at first it appeared he would not be able to do anything, and there would be nothing for it but that Tildesley would have to be carried off. After a struggle the Luton trainer succeeded in replacing the joint, and Tildesley was able to stand up. After testing his leg he resumed his position, and fortunately was able to finish the game. Considering the breakdown at such an early stage, Tildesley played a good game, for it must have shaken his confidence, but he often went right into danger, and many times tackled in great style when any hesitation on his part must have entailed the forward having a clear run into goal.

The teams were as follow:—

Reading.—Flowbigging; Wilkes and H. Smith; Bartholomew, Hancock and Boden; Birch, Leonard, Wheatcroft, Morley and Huggins.

Luton.—Platt; Tildesley and Gregory; F. Hawkes, White and Jones; Brown, Haycock, Menzies, Moody and Stansfield.

Referee, Mr. A. G. Steers, Brighton.

Reading quickly got down, Tildesley letting in Wheatcroft, but Gregory dashed up and cleared with a free kick, and Stansfield promptly raced the ball down to the opposite goal line, finishing up with a hard drive just under the bar. Newbigging, however, was equal to the occasion, and the ball was eventually cleared.

Brown next broke away, getting possession through Leonard failing to trap the ball properly, and the Luton right winger easily beat Herbert Smith and was making tracks for goal when Wilkes came across and forced Brown to run the ball over the line. Again Brown was in the picture, after showing a clean pair of heels to the Reading captain, but he was ruled offside, rather a doubtful decision by the way. The free kick enabled Reading to get within striking distance, Wheatcroft just scraping the upright with a swift shot, but Platt was fully alive to the danger and would have prevented a score even if the ball had been accurately directed. Twice did Brown again get through, the first shot going over the bar, while Newbigging managed to clear the second attempt. Each time Norman simply left H. Smith standing, and it was evident he was in better trim than at Norwich. Huggins raised Reading's hopes by a good run, and centring the ball it travelled right across the Luton goal mouth and over the goal line without either of his comrades being able to give it the necessary touch.

Birch was giving considerable trouble on the opposite wing, being splendidly fed by Leonard, but he finished badly, and it was seldom Platt was called upon. But after playing half an hour a grand run by Huggins resulting in Reading drawing first blood. It is true that Platt threw himself full length at the ball as it came across from the left, but he could not get it away, and Wheatcroft coming up had simply to touch through. It was not long, however, before matters were again balanced, Stansfield forcing a corner kick, and, taking it himself, placed the ball right into the goal mouth. Several of the Luton players seemed likely to put the ball through, but for a moment or two neither could quite control it, but eventually Haycock did the trick from close range.

White sent his forwards away with a well-judged ground pass, but Wilkes got among them and returned the ball well down the field. Without being brilliant, the game was pretty fast. Birch getting away, slung the ball well into the middle, Leonard transferred it to Huggins instead of having a shot on his own, and the latter, although standing at an awkward angle, let drive at goal, but, as might be expected, the ball travelled wide. Luton had a chance to be leading at the interval from some brilliant work by Stansfield and Moody, the latter putting in a tremendous drive which Newbigging just managed to stop, but could not hold, and the ball dropped dangerously about a yard away from goal. Brown was only a couple of yards off, but before he could get the ball Newbigging reached in, picking it up a second time and, dodging Brown as he came up, brought off a good clearance at the second attempt. Half-time arrived with the teams still level, the score being:—Reading one goal, Luton one goal.

In consequence of the first half's play the ground had become very heavy, and in some places was little better than a quagmire. But Luton were seen to greater advantage, and almost got through by the agency of Stansfield but Bartholomew fell back and relieved the danger with a big kick. By means of some pretty passing by the whole forward line, Luton made excellent progress, but their efforts were nullified by Brown, who took a throw in near the corner flag, being penalised for a foul throw. Norman did not relish this decision, and demonstrated to the official on the line exactly how he did it, but it was no use, and a grand opportunity was spoilt. Still Luton quickly returned to the attack, Wilkes just intercepting another good centre from Brown, and Bartholomew afterwards cleared with a big kick down the field.

Birch, who was well fed, got away on his own, but he finally overran the ball, and it passed easily into touch. The game was stopped for a couple of minutes through Bartholomew getting injured while heading the ball, and the Reading trainers services were required to bring him in. Haycock made an individual effort to get rough on his own, forcing Newbigging to leave goal in order to prevent its downfall. Reading

reshuffled their middle division, Boden taking the centre position, but it had little effect on the play, Luton having slightly the better of the exchanges. There was an exciting incident in one Reading goal mouth when Newbigging, besieged by the Luton inside men, sat on the ground with the ball in his possession, but the referee awarded the defending side a free kick, and danger was averted, thereby. Seventeen minutes from time Luton took the lead, the goal coming in a very similar manner to their first. Stansfield, with a brilliant run, forced a corner kick, and Haycock completed the movement by putting through. This time, however, it was from a direct range, and was a finely judged shot, the ball going into the net over the heads of several players. Thus for the first time this season Luton were leading in an away Southern League match and victory appeared well in sight. But within two minutes Reading drew level, Wheatcroft converting during a rush on Platt by the whole Reading attack. This goal put new life into the game, and the crowd encouraged the home players to go out for a win, and the Luton goal was in considerable danger for the next few minutes. Wheatcroft sent the spectators almost wild when he drove the ball through again, but the referee had already blown his whistle for offside against the home centre before he took the final kick. But Luton were even more lucky a minute later for a grand drive from Huggins appeared to be travelling through from the moment it left the Reading outside left's toe, and a triumphant shout of "Goal" was sent up, for Platt was completely beaten, and it appeared nothing could stop the ball going into the net. But the crowd were just a wee bit too previous, for the ball hit the extreme upright, and, rebounding to Gregory was easily cleared. Still, it was only occasionally Luton got away, being apparently content to retain the one point, and they laid themselves to defend, and they well carried out this intention. Just before the finish, however, a bold bid was made for victory, Menzies giving Moody a grand pass, and the latter dashed through with the ball, letting drive from a good position, but Newbigging just got his fist to the ball and cleared, the finish coming almost immediately with the score standing: Reading two goals, Luton two goals.