

The Southern League.

PORTSMOUTH v. LUTON

Played at Fratton Park on Saturday. Result :—

Portsmouth 1 goal.

Luton nil.

The teams were as under :—

Portsmouth—McDonald; Thomson and Warner; Digweed, Buick, and Yates; Birtles, Kirby, Reid, McCafferty, and Dix.

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

Referee, Mr. D. S. Moule (West Ham).

Little fault could be found on the score of representation with the team which visited Portsmouth except that the Amateur International at Oxford prevented R. Hawkes captaining the side. Platt resumed his position after six weeks' absence from the first team, while Brown turned out for the first time for a month. Probably he would have had a week's further rest but for the fact that Johnson had an attack of quinsies; he only resumed training on Wednesday, and did not seem altogether fit, judging from appearances.

Luton have never made a great show at Portsmouth; indeed, this makes the ninth visit, and never yet have they had the satisfaction of so much as scoring a goal, while Pompey have netted the ball fifteen times in those encounters. It was a near thing to breaking this undesirable record on Saturday, but more of this anon. With the finances of the Club in such a desperate state, as given in the official appeal last week, the players expressed themselves as determined to make a supreme effort to alter this state of affairs by making this the first away victory, but luck was against them, and the usual result on this ground materialised, for this makes the fifth occasion that Luton have gone under by the only goal of the match.

At the start of the game the home left wing were a constant source of worry to the Luton de-

fenders, and from one of their attacks the goal which gave Pompey the victory came along. It happened eight minutes from the start, and in a way was somewhat in the nature of a surprise. Yates sent the ball forward from the vicinity of the half-way line with fine judgment, for Dix was standing unmarked well out on the wing when the ball came to him, and running it down, he put it right across the field to Kirby, and the latter, without stopping to steady himself, took pot luck with a first-time drive whilst standing on the edge of the penalty area, and the ball simply flashed by Platt's head before anyone realised a goal was possible. It was a grand shot, and naturally was well received by the crowd. On the play up to this point, little fault could be expressed at the home side getting ahead, for they had been playing much the better game, and indeed continued to do so for some little time longer.

But after twenty minutes Luton settled down better, and from this point to the interval were decidedly the stronger combination. For considerable stretches the only player remaining on the Luton half of the field was Platt, for both McCurdy and Gregory were well over the half-way line at times. As was the case in the early stages when Pompey were the aggressors, most of the attack came from the left wing, and Stansfield gave evidence that the changing over of wings had not affected his play, for he was continually getting through, and at least twice before the interval was unlucky in not scoring on his own. Once when beating all opposition he worked his way into the penalty area, and steadying himself to shoot, was tackled from the rear in such a manner that a penalty was risked, but the referee apparently judged it was a legitimate stop, and nothing came of it.

Moody put in several shots, but as a rule they lacked sting, and were easily disposed of, but this was not the case with one which brought McDonald to the ground, and Stansfield dashed to the spot to improve the opening if possible. But the home goalie was not willing to part with the ball, and kept it on the ground so that Stansfield could not get a proper kick at it. As McDonald was actually holding the ball, of course Stansfield had a perfect right to charge him, but the difficulty was to get at it, for it was completely covered by McDonald's body. Stansfield did his best to hustle his opponent, when all at once the referee stopped the game and awarded the home side a foul. At the same moment McDonald seized hold of Stansfield in proper wrestling style and badly threw him; the Lutonian being quite unprepared for this manœuvre, was rather shaken as a consequence. It was rather a puzzle at the moment to know what offence Stansfield had committed, but it was afterwards gleaned that the referee considered he caught hold of McDonald in his attempt to get the ball away from underneath. It was an exciting moment while it was happening, and naturally the spectators agreed with the official decision, for an equaliser might easily have happened.

The referee was usually fairly holding the balances in a game that did not call for a deal of exercise on the whistle, but he made a big mistake hereabouts when Kirby openly fouled Jones by "setting a back," and amid a roar of merriment he awarded the free kick to Portsmouth. It might not have been a laughing matter for Luton, for it happened perilously near the penalty area, but fortunately nothing came of it. Soon after this half-time was called, and on the run of the play Luton were quite equal to their opponents and should not have been a goal down, for they had been the better side for the last twenty minutes of a well-fought match.

The second half simply dragged along for more than half-an-hour, and was far from as bright a display as the former "forty-five." Portsmouth kept the ball chiefly in the Luton half, it is true, but they put little life into their work, and it badly wanted another goal to make matters interesting. Although the ball was never far away from Platt, I can only remember one occasion when he should have been beaten. This happened when Dix dropped across a centre which fell at Reid's too off Jones' body right in front of the Luton goal. It looked odds on a score when the champion scorer of the Southern League took aim, for no one but Platt stood between him and the goal. Platt throw up his hands to tip the ball over for a corner, but even this was not necessary, for the ball hit the bar and curled over on its own. This certainly was a let-off for Luton, and they apparently took heart from the incident, and for the closing five or ten minutes brought about a complete change in the game.

It was not now a question as to whether Portsmouth would increase their lead, but whether they could keep Luton out, for from now to the finish the visitors simply swarmed round McDonald, and for the first time he and his backs were hard pressed. This was not at all to the liking of the spectators, who urged their players to get the ball away, but it was to no purpose, and corners were pretty frequent. Stansfield dropped one of these splendidly, and two or three times it appeared that the ball must go through, but somehow it was kept out. At last, however, Warner made a deliberate punch at it, and this the referee noticed, promptly awarding Luton a penalty kick. Such a chance should have meant a division of points at least, but Jones, who was entrusted by McCurdy with the taking of this, had the misfortune to hit the bottom of the post with a swift grounder, and ultimately the ball was muddled away.

The game had scarcely been re-started when still another corner was forced, and again the ball hovered round the home goal for quite an appreciable space of time. Stansfield at last secured while standing a few yards wide of the upright, and although placed at a difficult angle, he made a fine effort to screw the ball through. He completely beat McDonald, and the ball appeared all but through in the extreme corner, when it came into contact with the upright, and although it struck the inside of the post it came back into play and was once more got away. The least shade of luck during the final minutes would have given Luton a valuable point if not actual victory, and, in the words of the "Portsmouth Football Mail" head line, "Pompey were lucky to beat Luton."

Coming to individual criticism, Platt made no mistake between the uprights, and his heavy fists out were a feature of the game. Gregory was probably a shade the better back, but no fault could be found with his partner. It speaks well for White that he kept Reid in check right through the game, and it was only very occasionally that the home centre got in his usual runs. But the chief improvement upon recent matches was the manner in which the Luton attack went about their work in the closing stages of each half. Menzies put considerable fire into his movements, and as a consequence was much more effective in attack near goal. Naturally the right wing were seen to less advantage than their comrades on the opposite side of the field, for Brown has scarcely got back into his old form right off, and Haycock did not combine with him so well as he has done on some occasions. But Moody and Stansfield were a fine wing, and the latter shared the honours of the game with the Pompey left-winger so far as forward work was concerned.