

The Southern League.

READING v. LUTON.

Played at Reading on Saturday. Result:—

Luton	1 goal.
Reading	nil.

The teams were as under:—

Luton—Jarvis; Chapman and Hedley; F. Hawkes, Jones, and R. Hawkes; Brown, Smith, Quinn, Moody, and Stansfield.

Reading—O'Donnell; West and Henderson; Bartholomew, Hancock, and Chapple; Martin, Sheppard, Wilson, Reynolds, and Birch.

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

Luton made only one change from the team which opened the season, and that was in accord with popular opinion, for during the practice games it was generally considered Stansfield's move over to the right weakened the left, and with Brown again available, he naturally resumed his partnership with Moody. Reading made considerable changes in their attack, the whole line being shuffled up, although only two fresh players were introduced, Reynolds and Sheppard being the newcomers. A change was also made in goal, but it was understood this had nothing to do with the defeat at New Brompton, as Caldwell was voted the only player to do himself justice in the first match. O'Donnell, who took his place, is an amateur, and has played for Uxbridge and Middlesex County.

It will be remembered that last season Luton were seven months before they managed a Southern League victory away from home, and therefore a win on the earliest opportunity was most welcome, and should put confidence in the team for future engagements. It is true there was an element of luck about the goal, but Smith can be congratulated upon taking his chance, and the home players were to blame for not playing to the whistle. It might be mentioned that Smith was playing centre-forward at the time, and was in the right position for scoring, even if Reading had not eased up, and it was by no means certain they could have prevented his success.

The exchange of positions between Smith and Quinn was decided upon at the interval after a consultation between the captain and secretary. Bob won the toss, and with the rain falling pretty heavily, this gave a decided advantage at the first, but the wind dropped as the game progressed, although the conditions were never pleasant, and it was really wonderful more mistakes were not made in placing the ball, which was naturally soon very greasy, as was the turf, and the players were often in difficulties to maintain an upright position.

O'Donnell was the first to handle, but the attack was not sustained, and the home forwards were quickly on the job, Birch getting away in good style, but Chapman just managed to block his passage as he closed in, and the ball was returned to midfield, Wilson attempting a tame shot which gave Jarvis no anxiety. It was early apparent that Chapman had got the cleverer winger to deal with, for Birch was once more the cause of Luton's goal being in jeopardy, and but for Hedley dashing across and just getting his kick in, it was long odds on an opening goal. It was as much as Hedley could do to reach the ball but he saved the situation by kicking into touch.

Luton's left-wing pair were now seen to great advantage, and beating Bartholomew in the first instance, easily shook off the attentions of West. Matters certainly looked promising, when Bartholomew, falling back, just blocked the final shot, and the spectators breathed again, for there was an ominous hush round the ropes while Stansfield and Moody were in possession. Coming through once more, Stansfield put across a nice dropping centre, which almost curled under the bar in the extreme corner, but O'Donnell managed to get his hand to it just in time, and Smith could not control the ball as it came to him sufficiently to return it before the home goalie had recovered, and thus nothing came of the most dangerous effort up to this point of the game.

Luton were now having decidedly the better of the exchanges, and Stansfield forced a corner which he took himself, but although this was well placed, the home defenders managed to scramble the ball away. Henderson next clean missed the ball and let in Brown, who tipped it to Smith, and the latter drove in a good attempt which O'Donnell had great difficulty in disposing of, but he just succeeded, and is to be congratulated upon his save, although it was at the expense of a corner. For a change the Luton goal was endangered, but it was due to the slippery ball, for Hedley in attempting to clear his lines, had the misfortune to get his toe too far under, and the ball went flying about two feet over the bar at a terrific pace, Jarvis being quite unable to reach it. The resulting corner kick was well taken, the ball travelling all across the goal-mouth, but fortunately it did not touch a Reading player, and Bob Hawkes eventually cleared his goal. The game was stopped for two or three minutes through Hedley being badly shaken in a collision, but he did not leave the field, Lawson doing the needful on the call of the referee.

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Moody and West came into collision in mid-field, both making for the ball in the air, and Bert was observed to fall heavily. It was soon evident he had sustained a somewhat severe shaking. He just managed to get on to his feet by the help of his comrades, and then collapsed altogether. He was carried off insensible, and a doctor was called for, but as it happened one was not present, and Lawson took charge of matters in the dressing-room. It was several minutes before Moody recovered consciousness, and at first it was thought he had broken his collar-bone, but happily this was not the case, and although of course he did not return to the field until after the interval, he was not seriously injured. There was one exciting incident while Luton were a man short. Jarvis, in coming out, did not get the ball away, and before he could get back Hedley took upon himself the duties of goal-keeper, and the crowd were very persistent in appealing for a penalty, but neither linesmen nor referee took any notice and the game proceeded. From the stand it was difficult to see exactly what Hedley did, but it was understood he used his hands to get the ball away.

On the whole Luton were the better side up to the interval; still, their superiority was not very pronounced, and they had no cause to grumble at the blank score-sheet when they retired for refreshments. As mentioned above, Smith took up the position of pivot on resuming, but as Moody did not come on until quite five minutes after the other players, the change was not observed at first. Notwithstanding Luton's handicap, they were having an equal share of the play, and if Moody had been himself on his return, there is little doubt they would have secured an easy victory. But after such a shaking, the wonder was that he could do as well as he did, although naturally Stansfield did not get the feeding of the first half, and to some extent this wing was wasted. Still, it meant that Brown had more opportunities, and was more in evidence than during the first forty-five.

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It was during one of these right wing excursions that the deciding incident of the match took place. Quinn and Henderson came into contact, and the Reading player went down. It is, of course, a debatable point as to whether he slipped on the greasy turf or was illegally brought down, but the linesman on that side of the field apparently gave a foul, and many of the Reading players eased up. Brown, however, promptly planted the ball in the goal-mouth, and Smith dashing up, without hesitation touched it through. Mr. Moule at once pointed to the centre of the field, and Luton had as events turned out actually won the match. O'Donnell certainly made not the slightest effort to get the ball, but unless he had managed to reach it as it came across, I do not think he would have been able to stop Smith's shot, for he was not at that end of the goal. Still it did look a soft thing, and the spectators were completely taken by surprise.

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From this point Reading had a greater share of the game, but Jarvis did his little bit whenever called upon in great style, and one save from Birch was truly a magnificent effort. Indeed it is probable the clearance meant two points, for a goal at this stage would have put great heart into the home players, and there is quite a probability others might have followed. Moody was really more of a half-back during the closing stages, and try as they would the Biscuit Boys could not break down the stubborn defence now set up by Luton, who had victory in sight and intended to retain the advantage gained. Once Smith and afterwards Quinn were all but through, but were brought down badly from behind; otherwise, especially in the case of the first-named, a goal appeared a certainty. Therefore the local critics notwithstanding, it was not exactly the lucky victory the London papers make out, although naturally much is made of the "soft" goal with which Luton won.

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