

From the Football Field.

THE SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

WITH LUTON TOWN.

THREE POINTS OUT OF FOUR.

WIN AT READING.

FORWARD LINE REARRANGED,

By "VIGILANT."

Bravo, Blues! To be quite frank, no one was greatly enamoured of Luton Town's opening performance in the Southern League in drawing with Norwich City at home, but they have been quick to pick up the point they then lost. Last year's visit to Reading produced a two goals draw, and on Saturday Luton went one better and won by a goal to nothing. It was a very near thing—much too near, in fact, to be comfortable—but it will do to go on with. The Blues were not exactly adepts at winning away from home last season, and Saturday's success came as a very welcome piece of intelligence to Luton's supporters. Even the pessimists will allow that three points out of four is not at all a bad start.

Reading people will doubtless declare that their team were unlucky to lose. I am not disposed to quarrel with them if they do. There always will be luck in football, as in other games. Luton have had their fair share of bad luck in the past, and they will probably have some more of it before the season is far advanced, and it is only right they should have some of the other sort now and again. What luck the Blues had on Saturday was by no means undeserved, because for some portion of the game they had to play one short, and though Bert Moody came back in the second half, he was never again quite himself.

Last season Reading's first away match was with Luton, and on Saturday the "strawbatters" were providing the first match of the season at Elm Park. The "Biscuit" team had rather the better of the meetings between the two teams last season. Both Southern League games ended in a draw, one of the Western League matches resulted similarly, and the other was won by Reading. Curiously enough, in all four matches the goals scored numbered four.

Reading opened the season in disastrous fashion on Wednesday, succumbing to New Brompton by no fewer than seven clear goals, and as might have been expected, they made several changes in the team on Saturday. O'Donnell, a burly young amateur who has played for Hounslow and Middlesex County, and who is expected to assist Reading regularly, had charge of the goal in place of Caldwell, the ex-Spur, and the forward line was reconstituted. At inside-right Shephard, a well-built forward on trial, was played, and Wilson, from the St. Mirren Club, was removed to centre-forward in place of Kilby, late of Northampton, while Reynolds, from Coatbridge, superseded Craig at inside-left. Herbert Smith, the well-known amateur International back, has not turned out yet, and only two of the team, Bartholomew and Hancock, did duty against Luton last season.

Luton made one change from the team which drew with Norwich, Harold Stansfield displacing Johnson at outside-left. Ernie "Brown" again figured at outside-right, and if the negotiations at present in progress prove satisfactory it is likely that he will become a regular member of the team.

The weather conditions were again of the worst description. It began to rain soon after we left Luton, and, although it was fine when we arrived at Reading, the rain recommenced just as the spectators began to turn up, and never once abated during the game. With the unfortunate start made by Reading at New Brompton everything was against a big gathering of spectators, but umbrellas were very thick on the open terraces, and the attendance was not far short of 3,000.

Bob Hawkes had a cordial welcome as he led the Luton team on the field, and the men quickly lined up in charge of Mr. D. S. Moule, of West Ham, as follow:

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

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

Bob Hawkes did his side good service in winning the toss, for, with the rain beating down pretty heavily, there was a distinct advantage in having the wind behind. Reading were, however, the first to show up, and for a few minutes they had matters all their own way. But the Luton defence was as solid as a rock. Hedley figured in one or two exciting skirmishes, but he contentedly went on "munching" his quill as he drove the biscuit men back again and again. Once he missed Martin, and Shephard got to close quarters only to find Bob Hawkes waiting for him.

Luton's amateur eventually paved the way for the visitors' first raid. Moody and Stansfield took the ball down in pretty style, but Bartholomew barred the way. The left wing were on the move again in a minute or so, and this time Stansfield steered the ball across. It went to "Brown," but Ernie's shot was wide.

For a minute or two Reading were penned in.

Jones was backing up his forwards splendidly, and as a result of one of his passes Stansfield placed in the centre with admirable judgment. O'Donnell handed out, and, with Smith failing to trap the rebound, the goalkeeper darted out and cleared. A corner to Luton led to some exciting play in the goal mouth, and West dashed across just in time to head out a shot from Stansfield.

A breakaway by the Reading left was smartly stopped by Fred Hawkes, and, with Henderson mis-kicking, "Brown" sped away. He transferred to Smith, and the inside-right, getting clean through, smashed in a shot at close range which O'Donnell did well to save at the expense of a corner.

It was then Luton's turn to have a narrow escape. Hedley ran across the goal and attempted to kick away a fast shot from Shephard, and came within an ace of putting through his own goal, the ball dropping just over the bar. There was another piece of "jam" from the resultant corner kick. Jarvis failed to hand out the ball, and Martin was presented with an open goal, but he was completely taken by surprise, and before he could recover Bob Hawkes had it away.

For some minutes after this Luton pressed persistently. The referee spoiled a good chance for Ernie by whistling the outside-right offside and afterwards correcting a palpable mistake. Then Bob Hawkes, with characteristic footwork, was associated with Moody and Stansfield in some particularly effective work near the touchline. From Stansfield's centre Smith received, and was making tracks, when he found Chapple barring the way.

The eagerness of Luton to attack came near bringing about their downfall. Wilson sent Birch away, and, with Fred Hawkes roaming in the centre of the field, the outside-left had a clear run. Getting within shooting range he steadied himself and brought off a fine cross shot, but Jarvis had the goal well covered, and the ball passed outside.

In warding off another attack Hedley got somebody's knee in his abdomen, and there was a short stoppage for repairs. Billy Lawson soon had him right again, and he was able to resume.

Reading were now showing up well, and Jarvis once had to run out, while Hedley cleared thrice in quick succession, twice with finely-judged kicks. Eventually "Brown" broke away, and, from the centre, Quinn headed in. O'Donnell dallied with his clearance and came near being robbed. This appears to be a failing of the Reading goalkeeper. He repeated it a minute or two later, and thereby placed his goal in danger.

Generally, the Reading forwards were speedier and playing better together than the Luton men, but the visitors' halves were more than a match for them. Jones was nearly always in the picture, and Fred Hawkes was frequently prominent with spoiling tactics. A sharp attack by Moody and Stansfield had an unfortunate result for Luton, Bert being laid out. His head and shoulder came in violent collision with the ground, and he was taken off insensible.

This was about eight minutes before the interval, and the half-time whistle must have come as a relief to the Blues. A miskick by Hedley let in Martin, but his shot was wide. Then Bob Hawkes got amongst the forwards, and his assistance led to one of the prettiest pieces of work in the match. Quinn and Stansfield figured most prominently in it, and it was to Smith that the opportunity for shooting came, Henderson saving at the expense of a corner. A long shot by Fred Hawkes was not dealt with in very assuring style by O'Donnell, but he managed to get it out of danger.

For the remaining five minutes Reading attacked hotly. Birch was not to be denied in one of his efforts, but, being bowled over when in the act of shooting, his shot lacked accuracy. In the last minute there was much excitement. Jarvis came out to deal with a high shot, and as he headed the ball away Hedley, who was in attendance, flicked it down and caused Martin to send behind. There was a confident appeal for a penalty, and the crowd were very wroth when no signal came from either the referee or the linesman.

Half-time thus arrived with a blank score sheet. The referee had been coming in for a good deal of criticism, but it was not at all deserved. A Reading director who was sitting near me put it very fairly when he said, "I think he has done all right, but he ought to have seen the penalty." That's just it. Fortunately for Luton he did not appear to detect it.

The interval brought the glad news that Moody was not seriously hurt and would be able to resume. He had suffered some slight concussion, but soon came round, and he took the field two or three minutes after the resumption of the game, being loudly cheered. With his appearance, I was delighted to see my idea adopted in the re-organisation of the forward line, Smith and Quinn changing places.

The Blues were early prominent. Offside against Stansfield brought Reading some relief, but before play was transferred Ernie Brown essayed a splendid shot without success. A most unusual occurrence was associated with Reading's attack, a foul being given against Bob Hawkes, for a charge in the back, when he bowled over Bartholomew just outside the penalty area. An exciting scene followed the free kick. Jarvis caught a hot shot from Bartholomew, but was dispossessed by Martin, and danger was only averted by the concession of a corner.

This was cleared after more exciting play, and a speedy run to the other end was the forerunner of the only goal of the match eight minutes after the change of ends. Smith, with splendid resource, broke through, and the goalkeeper had all his work cut out to keep out the centre's shot. Henderson and Quinn went for the ball and the back was brought down. Reading evidently anticipated a free kick would be given, and the players made the mistake of ceasing play. Not so Luton. "Brown" sent the ball into the centre, and Smith deftly turned it into the goal. Without the slightest hesitation the referee pointed to the centre, and Luton had, it must be admitted, gained the lead with a lucky goal.

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The Reading spectators were very angry, and the players appeared to be in the same frame of mind, judging from the display of feeling which they subsequently imparted into the game. With the ground particularly greasy, one could not be surprised at the more or less technical sort of fouls being frequent, but the tactics of some of the Reading players were as bad as they could possibly be. The Luton men were hooked up in the most barefaced fashion, and in one or two instances unpleasant scenes seemed likely, but fortunately did not materialise.

There was absolutely no need for these tactics, for, without them, Reading were now playing much better than in the first half. A dropping centre from Birch provided danger, for while Jarvis was jumping up to save he was tackled by two of the forwards, and it was a relief to see the ball pass over the bar.

A breakaway by Luton's right led to Bob testing O'Donnell with a troublesome groundier, but the Reading forwards were soon back, and the crowd became very excited. Jarvis was dispossessed on coming out to intercept Wilson, but he managed to recover, with Reynolds on his track.

The Luton goal was again in peril a moment later. Hedley, in essaying to clear, drove the ball on to Chapman, and from the rebound Wilson was presented with a fine chance. His hesitancy was fatal, for Hedley quickly recovered and spoiled his opportunity. A fine run to the other end saw the goalkeeper come out and intercept Stansfield.

Smith essayed a shot while O'Donnell was away from his charge, but the backs were on guard. Directly afterwards Henderson brought Smith down in the most palpable manner, and was cautioned by the referee, and the free kick, taken by Fred Hawkes, was splendidly placed. Moody prevented O'Donnell making an effective clearance, but Smith could not quite get to the ball.

Jarvis, at the other end, was frequently called upon. He smartly gathered a beauty from Shephard just against the post, and, though immediately rushed by the forwards, managed to get the ball away. His most wonderful save, however, was from Birch. With that well-known dive of his, he just reached a remarkably fine shot, and before Shephard could snap up the ball off the line Hedley rushed across and conceded a corner.

A long shot from Wilson was dropped by Jarvis, but he quickly recovered. Luton only occasionally broke away, and whenever they did their forwards were the victims of most barefaced fouls. From one of the free kicks Jones gave the goalkeeper some trouble, and Bob Hawkes also tried a long ranger. Moody unfortunately got in the way of a stinger from Smith.

Reading continued to put in all they knew, but the Luton defence showed no signs of weakness, and in the last few minutes the play was mostly in midfield. Once Reading got dangerous, but Hedley broke up the movement in fine style, and Luton left the field winners, with the score;

LUTON	1 goal.
READING	Nil.

COMMENTS ON THE PLAY AND PLAYERS.

To say that the game reached a high level would be untrue, but it is nevertheless due to the players to add that the play was of a far better standard than one was justified in anticipating with the conditions so atrocious. I thought the greasy state of the turf and the deceptive tricks played by the slippery ball militated more against the Blues than against the biscuit men, because the latter adopted kick and rush tactics to an extent that is not cultivated in the Luton team. Their forwards were undoubtedly speedy, and the game throughout was pretty fast, especially so after Luton scored.

In the first half Luton were undoubtedly the superior side, but after the change of ends the balance of play was in favour of the homesters. That Luton is the better side of the two I have not the slightest doubt, and I confidently look forward to them taking four points from Reading this season. All the same, there was not a great deal to choose between them on Saturday, and I should have felt happier if the Blues had put on a second goal. As it was, two decisions of the referee undoubtedly played a large part in their victory. I was not in a position to see whether the incident which led to the scoring of the only goal of the match really did constitute a foul, but there can be no doubt that if Reading had had their due they would have been awarded a penalty kick earlier in the game.

The Luton players regard "Vigilant" as their mascot. May this be so!

The Blues undoubtedly showed up better than in the opening match, and when they get properly together should prove a very useful side. There is still room for improvement in the forward line, but this might not be long coming. In the second half on Saturday Smith and Quinn changed places, and I have no hesitation in saying that this is an experiment which should be repeated. I have all along thought Smith was the man for the middle position, and I do not think Quinn will deny that the change at Reading was for the better.

Smith is full of resource and absolutely fearless, and what I like most about him is that he loses no time in making tracks for goal. There is no dallying about; he finds the most direct way and is going to get there if there is half a chance. The only criticism I have to make is with regard to his tendency to lie offside, a fault which can easily be remedied. Quinn is gradually realising the value of getting rid of the ball promptly, and seems likely to show up better at inside right than at centre. He played very nicely with "Brown" in the second half. Ernie was not so prominent as against Norwich. Few chances came his way, and most of those he had were marred by the unscrupulous way in which he was tackled by the opposing wing half and back.

It was Stansfield's first time out on the left wing this season, and the directors are hardly likely to shift him if they can help it. There is a perfect understanding between Harold and Moody, and the outside-left did some of the best forward work on the Luton side. Up to the time Bert was hurt the wing was always dangerous, and I look to them for great things. Moody played with characteristic dash in the first half, but he was never himself after his accident.

For the defence there can be nothing but praise. Slippery though the ball was, miskicks were very rare, and the tackling was invariably sure. The halves were a splendid trio. Jones seemed to take the fancy of the Reading people most, but there was little to choose between them. Fred Hawkes rendered sterling service against Reading's most dangerous wing, and Bob returned to his accustomed form, his skill showing itself in attack as well as in defence.

Hedley at back gave another fine display, and was always a prominent figure. Nothing seemed to disturb him, and his kicking was almost faultless. Chapman also did well. He seems to make progress every time I see him. Jarvis in goal brought off some splendid work, and thoroughly deserved the encomiums showered upon him. One of his saves was really a marvel, and he never looked like being beaten.

Reading were not so strong in defence as Luton. Bartholomew was the best of the halves, and West showed up well at back, but Henderson was a long way from being a Herbert Smith. The new goalkeeper saved well, but is far too fond of running out to inspire confidence. The forwards were speedy, but the inside men were not of the same calibre as the outside wingers, Martin and Birch, both of whom were frequently dangerous.