

The Southern League.

SOUTHEND v. LUTON.

Played at Roots Hall, Prittlewell, on Saturday.
Result :—

Southend 4 goals.
Luton 1 goal.

~~The teams turned out as under :—~~

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

Southend — Toone; Murray and Molyneux; Emery, Lavers, and McLellan; Brown, Frost, King, Sugden, and Crews.

Referee, Mr. G. W. Verge (Willesden).

It will be seen from the above names that Luton had what is looked upon as full strength, and consequently they were expected to bring back two points. Seeing Southend are lowly placed. The home team made two changes from the side which won their way into the second round of the F.A. Cup, Lavers and Frost taking the places of Cantor and Sutherland. Of course, in the first-named instance, it was simply playing one reserve instead of another, for Owens is the first choice in this position, but is on the injured list for the moment. Lavers has not been out much for the first team, but I believe came South on the recommendation of Norman Brown; anyhow, he hails from his district.

I was asked by one well-known football critic who was at the match just previous to the start, if Smith was quite sound, as Lavers would go all out in doing his best to stop Luton's centre-forward, and before the finish I quite understood the remark, although he was not a dirty player, but very clumsy and often made blunders. Frost partnered Brown, and this was considered to strengthen the team, for so far Sutherland and Norman have not fallen into each other's style.

The weather was bitterly cold, and the attendance was certainly not more than 3,000, although the sun was shining at the commencement. This was just sufficient to render the top surface greasy, but underneath the pitch was hard as iron. Bob won the toss and had the advantage of a strong breeze, but apparently this was not all one-sided, for the home players were the aggressors most of the opening half. Somehow, the Southend players appeared to be more at home on the hard pitch, and they maintained a pressure up to a certain point for the opening ten minutes. It was seldom the ball got nearer than a dozen yards to Jarvis, and considering it was nearly the whole time well in the Luton quarters, it was quite surprising the few shots Jarvis had to stop.

Crews and Sugden were the dangerous pair, and if their comrades had been as clever in taking advantage of all the left-wing runs, quite a large score would have surprised the football world. The inside player kept his speedy partner well employed with some beautiful passes, and Crews, for some reason, seemed allowed to get away time after time, but either his centres went wide or some Luton defender managed to somehow smother them before an opponent was able to settle down to the ball. The spectators were clamouring for a goal, but none appeared likely, notwithstanding the pressure. Indeed the nearest thing in this direction was at the opposite end, when Stansfield, getting through in fine style, landed the ball well in the centre of the field. Smith, in turning round to reach the ball, slipped right up a yard or so out of goal, or the opening point would surely have come along.

Finding little good came from the work of Crews and Sugden, the ball was afterwards put over to the opposite wing, and many were the tussles Norman had with Bob Hawkes, but it was seldom Brown could shake off the attentions of his old captain, and honours went decidedly to Robert. It is true one or two corners fell to Southend, but still Jarvis was practically unemployed, and the game was full twenty minutes old before a goal came along. It was the result of a good run and centre from Crews, and was placed through by King with a good drive.

For a time the exchanges were more even, and Ernie Brown appeared likely to bring about an equaliser, for he beat Molyneux in great style, but just as he was about to plant the ball in the goal-mouth Molyneux dashed in and kicked the ball into touch. Lavers twice fouled Smith, but the free kicks brought no result, and later Molyneux handled just outside the penalty area, but again Luton failed to reap any reward, Toone punching away the place-kick over the heads of a couple of Luton players right up in goal. Luton were now having more of the game than their opponents, and Bob tried to score on his own with a sharp drive. Smith, however, who dashed in to force this home, was judged to be offside—a rather doubtful decision, by the way.

Crews getting away once more, the play was for a time just inside the Luton penalty area, the ball never being properly cleared, and when someone in the crowd of players miskicked just in front of goal, the ball travelled over to Sugden, who had only to keep his head to score, and he beat Jarvis with a fine shot from close range. This meant a big uphill fight for Luton, but they went at it as if they meant to reduce the lead. F. Hawkes taking part in one attack; indeed, he all but put through himself, but just inside the penalty area he handled, and the referee saw the movement, and thus what looked a certain goal resulted in a free kick against Luton.

Practically the only time during the match when Norman Brown succeeded in getting clear from Bob Hawkes, still another goal came along, for Luton's old player got in one of his best centres all along the ground, and King netted from Sugden's pass, making the score 3 to nil. From now to half-time Southend had the better of the play, but still Jarvis was comparatively idle, and Toone had at least one difficult shot to stop from the feet of Moody before the interval, but the score remained unchanged when the players retired for refreshments.

All the players complained of sore feet in the dressing-room, and there is little doubt the hard going was a decided handicap. Certainly it took a bit of pluck to let oneself go, for a nasty fall might have had serious consequences. The youngsters on the home side did not appear to consider this a great deal, and probably this was one reason why they were able to keep up the pressure against what must, on results, be considered the superior side. But in the second half no Lutonian could complain of the way the Light Blues set about the task of improving the position, for they felt it would never do to let the score remain as it was.

Toone was hard pressed right away, and could only clear by carrying the ball too long a distance, and a free kick was awarded Luton only a few yards from goal. It took quite a considerable time to take this, but when Jones advanced to get his kick, he was confronted by a wall of Southend players, who stretched themselves right across the mouth of goal. Abe lifted the ball just over the shoulders of this line of players, and it quite beat Toone, but unfortunately for Luton it did not touch a second player, and no goal resulted. At least the referee did not see it touch another player, although from the way the ball turned into the extreme corner of the net it seemed quite probable that it did, and after the match it was stated McLellan admitted it touched him.

Although, of course, Luton were now playing against the wind, they were seen to much greater advantage than before, and for most of the second half they were the attacking party. One of the best efforts of the entire match was an individual burst through by Brown, who finished up with a grand drive. Toone, however, got down to this in great style, and just prevented the ball entering the net inside the near upright. A very curious incident happened about this time. Jones and Lavers both went for the ball some thirty yards away from the Luton goal, and Jones was just a shade the quicker in getting in his kick, but the ball did not miss Lavers, and almost resulted in a goal against Luton, for the ball rebounded off Lavers right into the Luton goal, but Jarvis caught and threw away.

Luton had hard lines when Brown got in a high centre. Moody tried his hardest to reach the ball with his head, but it passed over him and went out to Stansfield, who promptly returned it to the right wing, only to find Quinn place it wide for a goal kick. Another really clever movement led up to Smith netting, but the Luton centre was just a shade offside, and the point was not allowed. Luton's luck was certainly out on Saturday, for although they were having quite as much of the game as their opponents did in the first half, they could not score, and it was really a fluke when Frost increased the Southend score a few minutes from time, the ball rebounding off the upright and going through, giving Jarvis not the slightest chance to stop. Just on time, however, Toone's charge was pierced, Brown getting in one of his famous runs after slipping Molyneux, and Quinn and Smith both being well up, the former had no difficulty in beating Toone, the whistle going for time immediately after the ball was again kicked off.

The score gives not the slightest idea of the game. Jarvis never had eight real shots to stop in goal, while Toone was troubled with more than double this number. It is quite true that up to the interval Southend were the more lively contingent, and kept Luton on the defensive practically two-thirds of the time, but except for the shots which resulted in goals they were very weak in front of the sticks. One reason, probably, was because it was rather a one-sided affair, for Bob Hawkes has seldom been such a sticker at one player as he proved on Saturday. Brown was given no rope whatever, and McCurdy was little more than a spectator for quite prolonged periods, so finely did Bob hold up his wing. On the other hand, Crews seemed always in the picture, and until he was marked in the same manner, was continually dropping the ball across, to the danger of Luton's record. I presume he is looked upon as second choice for this position, for Jack plays in the more important games if fit, but on the form shown by Crews in both matches against Luton he should never be left out. He was the most dangerous forward on both occasions.

Toone did all that could be expected of a young custodian and just a wee bit more, while Murray proved the best back on the field, and was always in the thick of the fight. He had a hard-working half in front of him in Emery, who was the best of the middle trio. Lavers is a regular rough diamond, but a whole-hearted player, and even when he made glaring mistakes never gave up, but lumbered into the first opponent that came in his direction. He many times got his side out of difficulties by sheer strength, and Smith consequently was not so effective as usual.

The Luton team will be at home to Leyton on the Town ground on Saturday. The kick-off will be at three o'clock, and a good game should be seen.