

The Southern League.

LUTON v PORTSMOUTH.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result :—

Portsmouth	1 goal.
Luton	nil.

Teams :—

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

Portsmouth—Cope; Thomson and Warner; Worthington, Buick, and Yates; Birtles, Hakin, Kirby, Haycock, and E. W. Williams.

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

As Luton had not lost a match since March 19th, it seemed probable that they would wind up the season with a win over Portsmouth. But fate decreed otherwise. The visitors gained a lucky goal in the first minute, and although Luton played with a splendid determination and had by far the better of the play, they could not pierce the Portsmouth defence, in which the most prominent figure was Cope.

The goalkeeper saved quite a number of shots that deserved to score, and on several occasions the goal had almost miraculous escapes. Playing with the wind behind them, Luton swarmed to the attack in the first half, and it seemed that they must equalise. It was not their fault that they did not. Early in the second half it was still possible that Luton might draw and even win, but as the time dragged on their chance of doing either gradually vanished, and at the finish Portsmouth had registered their luckiest win of the season.

With the weather cold and threatening, it was not surprising that there were not more than four thousand spectators at the start. Kirby kicked off, but Luton at once got to the town end, where Brown took a corner. This was cleared, and Portsmouth made the running. Haycock sent across, and the ball passed on to Birtles. Jarvis came out to fist the latter's centre, and before he could return to his charge Hakin had put through the empty goal.

For some time after this the Luton forwards were seen at their best. They played an open game, and kept the Portsmouth defence hard at work. Good play by Moody and Smith almost enabled the latter to get through, but one of the backs kept him off while Cope kicked down the field. A little later Moody sent in a long shot to which Cope was fully equal. Then the Portsmouth left wing became dangerous, but Potts met the centre and headed very nicely.

A really fine cross shot by Worthington might have beaten Jarvis, but it passed over the far corner of the goal. Another good attempt was made by Williams, the outside-left, who sprinted from near the half-way line and finished with an oblique shot which Jarvis was smart in saving. From a corner for Portsmouth Haycock seemed likely to score, but Jones got in the way, and another flag-kick resulted.

At the other end Moody received from Stansfield, and after beating the back, sent over with a lightning shot. This was a very near thing. Directly afterwards Smith headed over a fine centre from Brown. Then Luton made the first of several assaults which almost bewildered the resolute Portsmouth defence. Smith passed to Quinn, who headed in. Cope saved but Brown returned, and Moody shot over. It seemed that the ball could not be made to go through the goal.

Jones transferred to Stansfield with a big kick, and the outside-left headed across. Cope failed to get at the ball and Quinn shot. Cope fisted behind, but the corner was of no use to Luton. The scene then changed, and Haycock tried to score from twenty yards' range. His shot travelled towards the far post, but Jarvis got there in time to charge the ball down and save. When Luton returned to the attack Smith was given offside—a decision with which many of the spectators did not agree.

In the next movement both Luton wingers centred well, and Smith tried a low shot which Cope was clever enough to turn round the post. The goalkeeper also successfully dealt with a really hard drive from Stansfield and a well placed free kick taken by Johnson. Luton's next assault seemed to last quite a minute. Forwards and halves shot and headed while the spectators cheered, but it was all to no purpose. Just before the interval Cope brought off what might be termed a wonderful save. Stansfield shot hard, and the ball glanced off one of the Portsmouth men at a slightly different angle. Cope was not to be beaten, however. He threw himself at the ball and a fruitless corner resulted.

Cope was quickly prominent again after the resumption. Brown put across a good centre and Cope fisted away, practically taking the ball off Moody's head. The goalkeeper had some difficulty in dealing with a long attempt from Johnson, for Quinn was in close attendance. Cope was penalised for carrying the ball more than two steps. When the free kick was about to be taken, five or six Portsmouth players formed up in a line in front of goal. Smith, who took the free kick, sent wide.

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A creditable endeavour was made by Fred Hawkes, whose shot fell on top of the net. Fred was, as usual, playing a very sound game, and was practically a sixth forward. Shortly afterwards Stansfield seemed almost certain to score, but he did not put enough force in his kick and Cope saved. A long shot from Smith went by the upright, and a good cross-shot from Brown was headed out by Thomson, who was lucky enough to be in the way. Otherwise a goal must have resulted.

About this time Portsmouth made some brief incursions into the Luton territory. A centre from Birtles was headed away by Jones. Kirby shot from forty yards' range, the ball missing by inches. The next incident was an accident to Kirby, who seems to be singularly unfortunate when he comes to Luton. He and Johnson were trying for the ball when the Portsmouth centre-forward fell down, injuring his right elbow. He had to go off the field, and returned a few minutes later wearing a bandage.

The end was now fast approaching, and with it the hope that Luton would equalize was dying a very natural death. Football spectators are optimistic sometimes, but there are occasions when the things that ought to happen become improbable, and by now people were beginning to say that only a penalty could save Luton. That penalty was never obtained, and as the minutes went by defeat for the home team was all the more inevitable. They kept on trying, but even eleven earnest footballers cannot successfully battle against fate.

A corner was well taken by Brown, and once more Cope was conspicuous, fisting out over the heads of a group of players. From a free kick taken by Fred Hawkes, Brown centred, Stansfield headed into the mouth of goal, and Moody tried to add the finishing touch, but play was stopped because Smith fouled Cope. Undoubtedly the best chance in these concluding stages fell to Stansfield, who received from the right and shot high over. After this Smith put in a good shot, and Luton were awarded a free kick for a foul on Fred Hawkes just outside the penalty area, but the score remained unaltered.

Luton were distinctly unfortunate in losing. Jarvis was partly to blame when Portsmouth scored, but otherwise he rendered a good account of himself. Potts played a really fine game at back, and Chapman was smart, though he could not always cope with the speedy Williams. Fred Hawkes was the best half-back, but Johnson performed good work. Jones did not always do the right thing in the right way, and he has played many better games for Luton.

The home right wing was in good form, their passing and Brown's centres being up to the usual standard. Smith kept the line together well, but with such a capable centre-half as Buick opposed to him was not allowed time for much individual work. Moody tried hard with his neat headers, but not one of them was allowed to "come off." Stansfield had three or four "chances" during the game, but he did not have much time to control the ball, and his only really bad miss was the one late in the game. Haycock, who played at inside-left for Portsmouth, did nothing out of the ordinary. The two best men in the team were Cope and Thomson, who is a fine back.