

Southern League.

LUTON v. WEST HAM.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result :—

Luton	1 goal
West Ham	1 goal.

Teams :—

Luton—Naisby; Chapman and Potts; F. Hawkes, Bushell, and R. Hawkes; Brown, Quinn, Smith, Moody, and Stansfield.

West Ham—Kitchen; Lavery and Fairman; Whiteman, Woodards, and Randall; Ashton, Shea, G. W. Webb, Blackburn, and Caldwell.

Referee, Mr R. Marshall (Kettering).

At last Luton have lost their proud position at the top of the Southern League. By winning on Saturday, Luton would still have been a point ahead of Swindon and Brighton, but now all three clubs have the same number, and Luton's goal average is not so good as that of the others. Luton are easily top scorers with 21, but 11 have been notched against them.

All honour to the Luton players for having kept at the head of the table for the first seven weeks of the season. This in itself is a performance of no mean merit in days when so many clubs are about on a par. At the present time the first three clubs on the table have twelve points each, and the next four have ten. The Luton players have done their best, and they tried very hard on Saturday to retain their position.

But really it is a wonder that Luton were able to keep at the top so long. The forwards, regarded as a line, are as good if not better than any other quintette in the League, but there are certainly better balanced teams.

It is the forwards who have caused Luton to be the club of the moment, but they cannot do everything. On Saturday, when Smith equalised a quarter of an hour from the finish, it seemed that their whirlwind rushes might once more pull the game out of the fire, but Kitchen played up to his reputation and saved his charge, although it all but fell. Moreover, the West Ham forwards, of whom Caldwell was the shining light, worked hard right up to the end.

The game was well contested right through. There were times when the Luton halves did not support the forwards so well as they might have done, and I thought Caldwell was allowed far too much rope. The Luton backs were good at times, but they suffered somewhat from being overworked.

As in the previous games Luton have played at home this season, the most exciting incidents happened in the second half. West Ham took the lead seven minutes after the interval, Shea being presented with an open goal. No doubt Naisby was partly to blame, for he should have gone out sooner or stayed at home, but it should be remembered that he saved a penalty early in the game, and some of his other saves were of the highest class.

There was quite a demonstration when Kitchen partially saved a shot from Smith and then turned round to scoop the ball out. The spectators, of whom there were some eight thousand, shouted "Goal," but the referee decided that the ball had not gone over the line. He may have been right, for Kitchen stepped forward to save Smith's shot. The referee confirmed his decision after consulting both linesmen. At his next attempt Smith made no mistake, and towards the finish the Hammers' goal had some narrow escapes.

The penalty to which reference has already been made came as a great surprise to almost everyone. West Ham, who had won the toss and were playing with the wind in their favour, were the

first to get away, and Naisby saved from Blackburn. The visitors came again, and this time the referee awarded them a penalty, presumably for an offence by R. Hawkes. Shea's shot was saved by Naisby. Then Shea banged the ball on to the crossbar, and relief followed from a foul on Naisby.

West Ham had started in good style, but Luton's turn soon came, and Quinn forced a corner. In doing so the inside-right collided with one of the West Ham players, and limped for some time. Following a throw-in near the half-way line, Ashton got away, and Potts slipped when trying to intercept a pass. Webb rushed towards goal, but his shot went out by the far post.

Both sides attacked in turn after this, and Potts had to receive attention from the trainer. A good run on the part of the Luton forwards ended in Brown receiving from Smith, and Fairman could only kick behind. At the other end Fred Hawkes headed away a very dangerous centre, and a little later, Shea, being well marked, shot over. A centre from Brown gave Stansfield a chance, but Kitchen just managed to foil his attempt.

A free kick for a foul by Fairman led to hard shots being tried by R. Hawkes and Quinn, but someone was in the way both times. Then Moody endeavoured to improve the occasion, and Kitchen brought off a very smart save at the bottom of the post. Naisby was also playing very well, being very smart at catching and clearing centres before the inside forwards could get at them.

The Hammers had the better of the play for some time, and on at least one occasion came very near to scoring. Webb made tracks, and with the backs in difficulties, Naisby ran out. Potts skied the ball, and one of the West Ham forwards kicked it behind. The other goal had an equally narrow escape. Lavery fouled Moody, and R. Hawkes, who took the kick, shot across the mouth of goal. Kitchen seemed to think the ball was going in, for he threw himself down at it. At the interval there was no score.

Luton played in very determined fashion when the game was resumed, and Kitchen saved as Moody was trying to head through from a free kick. Following a very dangerous attack by West Ham, Luton got away and Moody headed over from a corner. Then West Ham came again, and this time they were successful. Caldwell got away on the left and beat Chapman. Potts rushed across, but could not prevent Caldwell drawing in towards goal. Naisby left his charge, but Caldwell parted with the ball, and Shea had no difficulty in kicking into the empty goal.

Shea, who had played well in the first half, was generally in the picture after this. Whenever he received the ball he took the quickest course to the goal, and he was by far the most dangerous man in the West Ham attack. On one occasion he eluded Potts, but Chapman relieved. A little later Naisby dropped a shot from Ashton, and Webb later on got the ball into the net, but was given offside.

When Luton next attacked, they obtained a corner which resulted in Brown shooting on to the side of the net. Luton came again, and Smith looked a certain scorer. Kitchen got at the ball, but did not catch it properly, and had to turn round before he could clear. Meanwhile Moody had tried hard to score, but found himself in the net without the ball. Most of the spectators thought it had gone over the line, and there was much shouting, but the referee gave a goal kick, and confirmed his decision after consulting the linesmen.

Luton were not long in scoring, however. West Ham had been attacking, and R. Hawkes had prevented Ashton from getting in a kick. Then the Luton forwards went down the field, and one or two shots were put in before Stansfield tipped the ball to Smith, who scored with a low swift shot. After this Luton forced a corner without result. Naisby brought off a clever save from Caldwell. A centre from this player gave Shea a chance, but he shot over.

The finish was of a most exciting nature. A few minutes before the end West Ham attacked on the left, and Naisby went out of his goal. A shot was put in, but Chapman reached it practically on the goal-line and cleared with an overhead kick. A little later Naisby saved cleverly from Shea, and at the other end Kitchen tipped over a shot from Brown. The corner kick was taken by Stansfield, and F. Hawkes hit the upright with a cross shot. Brown tried to lift the ball into the mouth of goal, but the attack was cleared, and when the end came the teams were still on an equality.

COMMENTS ON THE PLAY.

The game all through was a remarkably good one, and the result just about represented the merits of the teams. The Luton men did not play as brilliantly as on some previous occasions this season, but they were up against one of the smartest sides in the League, and perhaps that made all the difference. A team cannot show its best form if the other men won't let them get together.

Some fault was again found with the Luton backs, but I should think they were the hardest worked men on the field, and backs cannot be expected to show a lot of clean kicking if they are all the time surrounded by a nippy set of forwards. The Hammers' front string was not sufficiently held in check by the home halves to allow Chapman and Potts to stand on ceremony. They had to get the ball away, and as to whether they did it in the most polished manner was quite another matter.

We have not had a faster or smarter outside-left on the ground this season than Caldwell, who was brilliance itself, whilst G. W. Webb proved himself to be a remarkably good centre-forward. Shea's capabilities are well known, and Ashton and Blackburn are quite above the average run of forwards. Therefore, if a forward line like this, well supported by halves, could only score a solitary goal, I think it proves that the Luton backs are a little more effective than some people imagine. Of course, I am not forgetting that Naisby gave a wonderfully good display, marred only by two mistakes, one of which made the getting of West Ham's goal a very easy matter. The Luton halves did not play a bad game by any means, but all the same if there was any weakness, I think it was there rather than in the rear division.

The home forwards did not display the best of judgment. They sometimes essayed long shots when little short of a miracle could have made the shots effective, and Brown, who was perhaps the best of the five, threw away two or three good openings by placing the ball behind.

For the visitors, Kitchen gave a great display in goal, but whether he was not beaten more than once is a point upon which there is a difference of opinion. The ball seemed to be well in goal from Smith's shot, and how Kitchen recovered it is a mystery.

The referee did not do badly on the whole, but he made a sad mistake when he gave a penalty against Bob Hawkes almost as soon as the game began. Bob had actually got his back to the ball, which bounced up and hit his hand, and to give a penalty under such circumstances was an extraordinary thing.

Luton's chances of retaining their present position on the League table are not of the brightest, up to Christmas at any rate, as they have only two more matches at home before the 27th December, namely, Northampton on Nov. 5th and Brentford on Dec. 17th, whilst they have to visit Norwich City, Portsmouth, Brighton, Swindon, Crystal Palace, and Leyton. This is a pretty formidable programme, and one which can hardly inspire the greatest amount of confidence.

During the same period Brighton have to visit Millwall, West Ham, Portsmouth, Norwich, Exeter, and Bristol, and they play at home against Queen's Park Rangers, Luton, Northampton, Swindon, and Crystal Palace. Swindon's away engagements are Coventry, Millwall, West Ham, Portsmouth, Brighton, and Norwich, and at home they meet New Brompton, Queen's Park Rangers, Luton, Northampton, and Exeter. Norwich will visit Watford, Plymouth, Southampton, Southend, Exeter, and Coventry, whilst they will receive Luton, Portsmouth, Northampton, Brighton, Coventry, and Swindon.

So far as out engagements are concerned, it will be seen that Norwich have much the easiest programme to negotiate during the period mentioned, and it is not at all unlikely that the end of the year may find them where Luton have been until now. Still, one never knows, and it sometimes happens that the stiffer the task the more brilliant are the achievements. Let us hope that will be the case with Luton.

Swindon and Brighton were both victorious on Saturday, the former beating Southend by 4 goals to nil, and Brighton accounting for New Brompton by 2 to nil, and they therefore displace Luton at the head of the League table by reason of better goal averages, besides which they each have a game in hand as compared with Luton. At Leyton, Norwich City were successful by 2 goals to nil, and the Luton forwards may be interested in the fact that the Norwich defence has given away only three goals in seven matches.

Exeter City lost at home to Coventry by 3 goals to 2, Queen's Park Rangers drew at Portsmouth at 1 goal all, and Southampton made a goalless draw at Bristol, whilst Millwall accomplished a similar performance at Northampton. Crystal Palace, who had previously lost more goals than they had scored, beat Plymouth Argyle by 6 goals to 1, and Brentford beat Watford by 2 to nil.

Luton are due at Norwich on Saturday next, and will probably be represented by the same team as against West Ham.