

Southern League.

PORTSMOUTH v. LUTON.

Played at Fratton Park on Saturday. Result:—

Portsmouth 2 goals.
Luton 1 goal.

The teams were as follow:—

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

Portsmouth -- Cope; Thomson and Warner; Yates, Buick, and A. E. Knight; Noble, Kirby, R. Turner, McMahon, and A. Turner.

Referee, Mr. J. Schumacher (London).

Previous to Saturday, Luton had paid ten visits to Portsmouth in search of Southern League points without reward, and the goal average worked out at 18 to 2 in favour of Portsmouth, and both Luton's goals were netted last season. The same team made the journey which met with defeat at Norwich the previous week, and they were expected to make history by earning one point at least, but again luck was against them, and Pompey once more secured full points, although it was the nearest shave possible, and, as at Norwich and New Brompton, it was right on time when the fatal goal came. At the commencement of the season Luton enjoyed these late rewards, but it appears Fortune's wheel has taken another turn, and soon they will have to seriously consider if it is not possible to shorten the time of each half by one or two minutes.

Portsmouth have been going none too well, and an experiment was made in placing R. Turner, who is a new left-wing forward from Leicester Fosse, at centre-forward, and thus allowing McMahon to take up his old position at inside-left. The only other fresh faces were the extreme wingers, Noble and A. Turner, the latter being a local who has just been induced to sign professional forms after one or two trials as an amateur. There was not a deal of local confidence in the team, and the match attracted about the smallest crowd which Luton have faced on this ground.

Bob Hawkes won the toss, but no advantage came from this, and the opening was pretty even, the backs on each side holding the attack at bay with comparative ease. Neither goalkeeper was called upon until a slip by Yates let in Moody, but Cope, coming out, intercepted the pass and cleared. Luton now attacked for some minutes, and Warner was so closely pressed that he was compelled to concede a corner. This was quickly followed by two other flag kicks, but in each case Cope was able to fist the ball clear. After this, the Luton attack fell away, and the ball was kept in the vicinity of Naisby, but the Luton goalie was not seriously troubled, and was able to clear the few attempts which came to hand with ease. But at last a hot drive from Kirby brought about a dangerous situation, although it was a palpable error on the part of the referee which led up to it. Naisby, after catching the ball, held it for a second or two, but did not move his feet, and ultimately threw the ball away down the field. When the whistle went, players and spectators were evidently surprised, and for the moment neither side seemed to know what position to take up, but at last the ball being placed a few yards out of goal, it was observed that the referee had awarded Portsmouth a free kick right in the goal-mouth, presumably for Naisby carrying the ball. However, it came to nothing, for A. Turner, with a flying kick, sent the ball yards over the goal.

Just here Portsmouth were having decidedly the better of the game, and twice Naisby did well to clear the ball from corner kicks. But Luton were not always on the defensive, and a fine burst through on the part of Quinn looked good business until Warner managed to block the way. Still, danger was not over, and Smith got in a good attempt, only to find Cope on the spot. Following this, Luton took up the running again, and the home defence was hard put to it to save their lines. Shots were put in by Smith and Quinn, but Cope was playing finely, and the whole Pompey defence were on the alert to prevent danger, and finally their worrying tactics were this onslaught down. Warner on one occasion brought Brown down badly when the Luton winger was well away, and this probably affected the latter's game all through the piece, for he never afterwards appeared in his usual form.

In the later stages of the first half, the game resumed its early character of quick end-to-end play, and on the whole was fairly even. But within a minute of the interval, a sudden dash through on the part of the home right wing finished with a centre from Noble, and R. Turner being right in goal, easily turned the ball through. Without a doubt, this should have been disallowed, for Noble was several yards from the goal-line when he muddled the ball, and the actual scorer had no one but Naisby to beat; indeed, he was practically on the goal-line, but the referee paid no heed to Luton's protests, and half-time coming immediately after, found Luton a goal down most undeservedly.

The second half opened with both teams going ding-dong, and the game was a fine one to watch. Just at first Portsmouth appeared likely to add to their lead, but it was only for a minute or two. Luton came again, and Brown gave Cope a warm handful to negotiate, which he did in splendid style, but twelve minutes from the restart Knight let in the Luton right wing, and the ball coming to Smith from a pass up by Bushell, the Luton centre beat Cope with a sharp rising shot in the far corner of the net. Luton played up in dashing style following this, and the Portsmouth defence was frequently hard pressed, but did some clever and effective work. Buick conceded a corner, from which nothing resulted, and two place kicks for fouls on Quinn also came to nothing. At this stage, the spectators were treated to a deal of whistle, for not only were fouls pretty frequent, but R. Turner, in particular, was very prone to lay offside, and was continually being pulled up. The crowd did not always appreciate the referee's rulings on this point, but certainly he was usually correct, for Turner kept between Bushell and the Luton backs, and if either Chapman or Potts went in to tackle one of the wing men, it invariably left Turner in an offside position. The Luton goal was endangered by a succession of corner kicks, but although these were more numerous than usual, not one resulted in a goal. About the nearest scoring effort came from a fine drive by R. Turner, but Naisby got to it and brought off a magnificent save. At the opposite end a centre from Brown almost brought about a leading goal for Luton, Cope falling with the attacking inside forwards well up, but the ball was somehow muddled away. Immediately after, probably the finest shot of the match came from Quinn, but it struck the cross-bar with Cope beaten to the world, and was finally cleared by one of the backs.

Ten minutes from the finish R. Turner was presented with the easiest chance of the game, but with no one but Naisby to beat, he tamely placed the ball wide. It was a terrible miss, and the only excuse for the failure can be that the home centre-forward must have thought Naisby would dash out and bowl him over before he could get his shot in and thus he took hurried aim when he could have walked the ball through. After this let-off, Luton certainly appeared likely to get one point, and five minutes before the close two appeared well on the way, for Moody was observed to be making a bee-line towards goal with the ball well under control, until he was badly brought down by Warner just outside the penalty area. The resulting free kick was really no punishment for such a flagrant offence, and without doubt this won the match for Portsmouth. Moody was rendered quite useless, and walked off the field a minute later. Even now the odds were that Luton would maintain their advantage, and draw the match. Indeed, a shot from F. Hawkes only missed by about a foot, but a breakaway by R. Turner dashed all their hopes. He went through, and made full amends for his previous miss by scoring a sensational goal right on time. The shot was a fine one and deserved the goal, but not to give his side such an advantage as winning the game.

It is really singular that Luton, almost without exception, have this season allowed their opponents to score first, and this means they have always to play an uphill game. To their credit be it said they have played under this handicap in fine style, but when their opponents have managed to get the lead and there only remains one minute to play, it is almost impossible to regain a point at so late a stage, and this has been the case on all three occasions when the match has been lost this season.

On Saturday, Luton were decidedly unlucky, for they fully deserved to come away with one point, and the critics were unanimous, as at Norwich, in voting the game the finest seen on the ground this season. Luton have not played more attractive football since their early Second League days, and are becoming one of the most welcome visitors to all the Southern League clubs. There was no pronounced weak spot in the side, Naisby having no chance with either goal. Both backs came out of a hard game with credit, if not quite so good as the previous week. The halves all did well, with Fred Hawkes the pick of the line, Bushell doing best in attacking work, although Bob was always to the fore and was only second to his namesake. The forward work was brilliant at times, but, as previously mentioned, Brown was put off his game by the vigorous attentions of Warner. Smith did better than recently, being quicker on the ball; indeed, with the possible exception of Brown, the whole five were right on top of their form, Quinn's shooting being more deadly than usual, but his luck in this direction was quite out.

Millwall were the only visiting team in the Southern League to win on Saturday, and they beat Exeter City by 2 goals to 1. Southend made a goalless draw at Crystal Palace, and Coventry City drew with the Rovers at Bristol at 1 goal all. Other results:—Brentford, 3; Southampton, 2; Brighton, 2. Queen's Park Rangers, 1; Swindon 5, New Brompton 0; Northampton 2, West Ham 0; Leyton 1, Plymouth Argyle 0; Watford 3 Norwich City 0.

The following is the League table up to and