

SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

Luton's Second Home Defeat.

Queen's Park Rangers Score the Only Goal.

By "Vigilant."

It is a long time since a game so barren of scoring chances has been witnessed on the Town ground at Luton as was the case in the Blues' match with Queen's Park Rangers on Saturday. There was any amount of spirited play—a little bit too spirited, perhaps, in some quarters—and a fair number of what are generally known as "near things," but there was only one of the real genuine article that counts. It took eighty minutes for that to materialise, and when it came it was a very poor specimen, but still it was sufficient to cause Luton's second home defeat of the season at the hands of a team who have not hitherto won a match on foreign soil in this season's League tournament. The result was a great disappointment to the supporters of the home club after the capital performances that have been achieved since the cup-tie defeat at Northampton, because the Rangers' position in the League table, and the fact that the Blues drew at Park Royal, made the game look a good thing for Luton.

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The green and whites have always been a popular team with Luton people, and the bright sunlight which flooded across the ground induced a crowd well above the average at this period of the season to roll up. The Rangers' team has been undergoing a good deal of chopping and changing since Luton met them at Park Royal in October, and among those who have been reduced to the Reserves is the old Luton favourite, Barnes, in spite of the fact that he used to be the captain of the side. As Bob Hawkes was resting from the home side with what he termed "a poor ankle," both lots of players were led by a different captain to those who officiated in the first match. Johnson was the substitute for the Amateur International, and with this exception the Blues had the team which has been doing so well lately. The full list of players is appended: Luton—Naisby; Wightman and Potts; F. Hawkes, Bushell and Johnson; Brown, Quinn, Smith, Moody and Stansfield.

Queen's Park Rangers—Shaw; Macdonald and Fidler; Butterworth, Mitchell and Wake; Whyman, W. H. O. Steer, McKie, Browning and Brindley

Referee—Mr. A. T. Randall, Coventry.

With a crisp, wintery atmosphere the conditions were ideal, except, perhaps, for the fact that the wind which blew towards the end was inclined to be troublesome. At any rate, the going was surprisingly favourable, considering the frost which had followed on the overnight rain, and from the start a lively pace was set. The Rangers lost no time in opening up the game, in spite of the fact that the loss of the toss compelled them to face the wind. The speedy amateur, Steer, early showed off his paces, and after Johnson had twice come into prominence in the first minute by baulking him in really brilliant style, the amateur was within an ace of being the means of setting the Blues the task of securing an equaliser. It was really a wonderful escape, and perhaps it is not too much to say that the late-comer missed one of the most thrilling incidents of the game. Potts was deceived by the wind holding up the ball and Steer seized on the opportunity, and, dashing off like a greyhound, sent the ball across the goal with an accuracy which threatened danger. Perceiving the situation Naisby dashed out to intercept McKie. Whether he or the centre-forward played the ball was not quite clear, but, at any rate, although the centre-forward was prevented from making effective use of the chance the ball rolled towards the unprotected goal. Someone tried to kick it and failed, and it struck the upright and came back into play. Still, it was not cleared, but Naisby had got back into goal, and Wightman had also got on the scene, and when Brindley endeavoured to put paid to the incident he struck the sprawling form of the lengthy Wightman, who—for a change—had got the worst of the scrimmage.

It was a tremendous relief when the ball was at last got away, and the home forwards improved the occasion by some sparkling play, which resulted in an anxious time for the Rangers' rear-guard. Johnson and Stansfield were the factors in the change made in the scene of operations, and after Smith had been about a foot out with a meritorious drive, no fewer than three corners resulted one upon the other. All the kicks were gems in the matter of accurate placing, and each time Shaw had to appear on the scene and save his side with some amount of difficulty. On the last occasion it was pure luck that saved the visitors, for when the ball came out Johnson crashed back a tremendous shot, such as deserved to score at any time. If it had reached Shaw it would undoubtedly have done so, but the goal had not been cleared from the corner kick, and one of the backs got the ball on his foot just nicely to get it away.

Steer and Whyman were frequently making good progress on the Rangers' right, and their pace and understanding made them a constant source of danger. The amateur gave Naisby trouble with a low oblique shot, and as the goalie was only able to flick the ball to the other wing it was rather fortunate the left wingers could not reach it in time. By the way, Tommy must have smiled up his sleeve when the referee gave a goal kick. He had not much time for smiling though, for while the Blues were often getting away they seemed unable to judge the wind, and their long passes were invariably going wrong. It was not so with the Rangers, and there were some who thought it was a near thing for them when Browning shot in. The shot was so high up that Naisby could only touch the ball in the air, and when it came down it must have been exactly on the line. It looked odds against the goalie with all the three inside forwards on his track, but Naisby scooped the ball up across the goal, and succeeded in eluding the attackers. He could do no more than throw away, and Bushell conceded a corner, but nothing accrued from it.

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Both teams were letting themselves go for all they were worth, and there was very little difference between them so far. Stansfield forced another corner for Luton, from which Fred Hawkes shot high over when close in. The Rangers' forwards were doing very clever work, and twice Naisby had to punch away awkward bouncing shots, while he happened to be just right for a pretty shot neatly made by Steer from his partner's centre. Luton were adepts in forcing corners, and the kicks were so admirably placed that Shaw invariably had to handle, and scrimmages in the goal mouth frequently resulted. A fine centre by Brown dropped just over the bar, and from another effort on the part of the outside right Smith blazed away rather wildly and scooped the ball into the crowd. Moody almost beat Shaw with a neat twist of the head from a lofty punt by Bushell. Smith was on the goalkeeper before he could get rid of the ball, and, to avoid being bundled through, Shaw hurriedly threw away. The ball cannoned off Quinn across the goal mouth, and dashing out the goalkeeper brought off a remarkable clearance. Brown and Smith brought the ball back with a really fine run, and, receiving from Smith's back-heal, Quinn only just missed the mark.

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The Luton defence had a warm time of it when the Rangers got to the other end, and Naisby had all his work cut out to clear from a scrimmage following on a corner. In the scrimmage Johnson sustained a nasty crack on the head, but he was able to resume after Trainer Lawson had refreshed him, and twice in quick succession Joe relieved the pressure. Fidler finely cleared a centre from Stansfield, but had to give away a corner, and from this most people thought Bushell

had done the trick with a really magnificent shot. It was quite too good for Shaw, but it was just the wrong side of the post. Another lucky escape enjoyed by the Rangers was when Brown centred with splendid judgment, following a great run by Smith and Quinn, and Stansfield headed on to the cross bar. It was very bad luck for Luton, for Moody was a little too well up to make any use of the rebound. The green and whites very determinedly worked to the other end, where both Wightman and Quinn shone in scrimmaging work. As a matter of fact Quinn with a brilliant run carried the ball from the home penalty area to the other end and gave over to Brown, who centred well. The ball went across the goal to Stansfield, and, sailing towards the right wing, Harold seemed to be favourably placed. But there was a misunderstanding between the outside left and Smith, and the chance was muddled away, with the result that half-time arrived with the score sheet showing—

Luton 0, Queen's Park Rangers 0.

Right from the restart Stansfield bore down on the Rangers' goal, and the visitors had a lucky escape from his centre, which Fidler cleared. But after this the Blues were on the defensive for some time, and Wightman was the most prominent man on the side, gaining the plaudits of the crowd time after time for the determination with which he broke up the Rangers' attacks. It was due to his fine play that although the visitors kept up a steady pressure they seldom got within the danger zone, preferring to rely on long shots which were seldom accurate. Whyman was doing particularly good work and nearly all the danger came from the right wing. Twice they forced corners, and Brindley sent wide of the mark when favourably placed. When the Blues at last had a look in Moody headed in from a corner, and Fred Hawkes, after neatly tricking a couple of opponents called upon Shaw with a clever shot. From a centre by Johnson, Shaw was rushed behind the line with the ball in his possession by Smith and Quinn, but the over-eagerness of the latter led to a free kick award against Luton.

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Steer's opportunism enabled him to seize upon an opening forty yards out, and his run threatened danger. Wighman saved at the expense of a corner, and from this Naisby saved finely with a crowd of players round him, Mitchell driving a hot return over the bar. Shaw at the other end was dispossessed by Quinn after he had caught a centre from Stansfield, but there was no one up to make use of the opportunity. Naisby was very smart in saving when Browning turned in from close in a long pot by Mitchell. Then Brown distinguished himself with a brilliant piece of work. Doubling round the half he dispatched a fine shot which Shaw had all he could do to keep out, and taking the rebound at an awkward angle Quinn made a most meritorious effort which the goalie tipped over the bar. Quinn was now showing up with a prominence which he has sadly lacked of late, and the Rangers once had to resort to foul tactics to keep him out. The free-kick was just outside the eighteen yards' line, and although Quinn's effort was a clever one it did not meet with success. After this he had a try at long potting, and Shaw was glad to get a hot drive over the bar.

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Shaw had had a pretty stiff time of it, but when the Rangers again took up the running they completely penned the Blues in. During this time Wightman was a hero. He dashed in at the feet of the forwards with faultless judgment time after time and hustled them off the ball with such success that goal scoring chances never came their way. Brown plied the Luton centre-forward with two good chances, but the first was missed through hesitancy and the second was saved in the luckiest manner possible. Smith went by the backs with the ball at his head, and was robbed by Shaw. The goalie lost the ball, but regained it, and harassed though he was he stuck to it until Quinn brought him over. A free kick was awarded against the goalie for carrying, but it is rare these awards are of any use, and this one was no exception to the rule.

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As a matter of fact, the match seemed quite unlikely to produce a single goal, when, following this incident, the Rangers made a sudden break-away on the left. The home defence were taken by surprise, and so fast did Brindley tear away that their recovery came too late. The outside man did not give Wightman a chance this time of baulking him, and his centre came just right for McKie, who managed to slip the ball into the net. It was quite a soft goal, as goals go, for the ball hardly reached the net, but it was turning all the time towards the corner, and Naisby was quite helpless. It was a reverse Luton hardly deserved to meet with, but in the remaining ten minutes they did not look like replying. The only time they got at all close was two or three minutes before the end when Moody was hemmed in and brought down in the goal mouth. Bert worried the referee for a penalty, but without avail. Apart from this the Rangers were the more dangerous, Browning striking the cross bar with a beauty, while Steer drove in a high one which Naisby finely took above his head. Thus the final score was—

Luton 0, Queen's Park 1.