

LUTON DROP TWO PLACES

West Ham Maintain their Unbeaten Record at Home.

West Ham draw the biggest average gate in the Southern League, but as is usually the case when a club are making a long stay in the Football Association Cup, interest to a great extent dies in the ordinary league games, and on Saturday the Luton visit drew the smallest crowd of the present season. Still, there would be well over 8,000 present, and this number of spectators had plenty of room, for since Luton last visited the Boleyn Castle ground the banking has been materially increased by transferring the offices and dressing rooms to other parts of the ground. By the way, the accommodation now provided for visiting teams is not in keeping with modern requirements, as far as space is concerned.

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During the week the Hammers have engaged a new inside right in Frost, of Southend, and he duly made his initial appearance, Shea standing down to enable him to do so. The only other change from their full cup side was caused through G. W. Webb representing his country in the Amateur International v. Wales, and Kennedy, who was tried several times earlier in the season, resumed at centre-forward. Luton had out their full side, R. Hawkes coming back after a week's absence. The teams were constituted as under:—

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

West Ham—Kitchen; Rothwell and Fairman; Whiteman, Piercy and Randall; Ashton, Frost, Kennedy, Butcher and Caldwell.

Referee, Mr. L. E. Swain, Northampton.

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The conditions were ideal so far as the playing pitch itself was concerned, but the wind played some curious pranks with the ball, and it was difficult to judge who it favoured at different periods. While the preliminary pencil sharpening was going on in the press seats, the writer was confidentially informed by one of the chief London critics that Luton would be the first team to win at West Ham this season, and he had scarcely finished this remark when his confident prophecy was materially discounted by West Ham notching the opening goal. Certainly it was a most unfortunate opening for Luton, and was right against the run of the play during the opening stages. As a matter of fact, it was less than a minute after the start when a pass out to Ashton was snapped up by that individual, and promptly returned into the goalmouth for Kennedy to head the ball right away from Naisby into the net. The whole movement was so sudden that there was very little cheering, and it is quite a question as to whether Ashton was not several yards offside when Kennedy first passed the ball out to him. But the point went down to the credit of the Hammers, and Luton were thus found with an uphill task.

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To the credit of the Luton players, let it be said they were not at all disheartened by this stroke of bad luck, and for twenty minutes they almost monopolised the game. The only obstacle they failed to overcome was Kitchen, and he proved to be in fine form. It was calculated that in less than ten minutes he saved at least half a score of promising attempts, and the majority of these were pretty sharp drives, too. Nearly all the forwards had a pop at goal, and Bob Hawkes and Bushell also joined in the shooting but it proved all unavailing, although there were more than the usual number of "near things." Several corners were forced, but with these Kitchen's height proved useful, and he managed to clear all except one first time. Once Moody did get his head to the ball first, but the sphere rose too quickly, and just went over the bar.

A centre from Stansfield gave Kitchen considerable trouble, for Quinn and Smith were both well on the spot, but the Hammers' custodian managed to block the passage effectively, although he was aided by a considerable element of luck, as the ball bounced right to his knee on the goal-line, when he was otherwise beaten. Again the equalising point looked pretty certain when Moody almost bundled Kitchen into the net with the ball, but it came out to Smith. The centre took a return shot before Kitchen could possibly recover his position, but it was a foot or so wide, and no goal came. A few minutes before the interval Brown slung in a fine centre which found the Hammers' backs at sea, and Stansfield, who had worked into the middle to receive the ball, easily netted. But the referee awarded a free kick to West Ham, giving Stansfield offside. It seemed to us that Brown was nearer the home goal line than Stansfield when he centred, and if this was the case, then the decision was a bad one, and Luton suffered an injustice. Anyway, there was quite as much doubt about the opening goal secured by West Ham, and taking the run of the game even the most rabid supporter of West Ham could not claim the lead won at all justified at this stage. As a matter of fact, Mr. King, the West Ham manager, at half-time gave expression to this by stating to the Luton officials that in his opinion they were unlucky to be a goal down. Half-time score:—

West Ham, 1; Luton, 0.

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Ashton did not come out with the other players on the restart, and it seemed as though the home team were to be one short, but he was only a few minutes away, and remained on the field till the close, although he limped badly most of the time. For some reason Potts came in for a regular "roasting" from the local crowd. He had only to go near Ashton to cause a terrific howl to go up. Lutonians know Jack better than the Hammers' supporters, and it would have been an utter surprise to his friends at Luton to have heard the remarks passed at Boleyn Castle as to his "dirty" play. Naturally, this unwelcome attention tended to unnerve Potts, and he played far from his usual game during the second half.

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second half, and the home side were seen to better advantage, and when they managed to get a second goal it seemed as if the Luton men gave up all hope of repeating last year's success on this ground. In a way this goal was an extremely lucky one. The Hammers enjoyed the advantage of a couple of corners in quick succession, and from the second of these Caldwell sent in a fine cross shot, which Naisby just as cleverly got away. The ball went well out on the right wing, and was re-passed into the centre of the field. Piency getting it some yards outside the penalty area tried a speculative drive which missed several players by inches only en route, and then came into contact with the upright and glanced through the goal to the surprise of everyone. Certainly, a goal was not expected to accrue from the movement, and the remark was made by someone that no one could have been more surprised than the actual scorer.

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Just before the close Luton again did better, and tried hard to get at least the satisfaction of reducing the lead. Hands against Whiteman a yard outside the penalty area threatened danger, but the home defenders lined up, and got the ball clear. Again Moody headed in finely from Brown's centre, but Kitchen just got his fist to the ball in the corner of the net, and the final whistle went with the score standing:—

West Ham, 2; Luton, 0.

COMMENTS ON THE PLAY AND PLAYERS.

The game was won for West Ham by Kitchen during the first half hour. His magnificent defence was worthy of the selected goalkeeper of the Southern League in representative matches. Next in point of honour, I should place the fine trio of half-backs who, particularly in the second half, would not allow the Luton forwards to settle down. Certainly they were the strongest intermediate line Luton have run up against recently. It was not until the game was well in hand that the Hammers' forwards were seen to advantage. Undoubtedly their left wing was the stronger, but of course Ashton's lameness had not a little to do with this. Certainly the trickiest customer was Butcher. This St. Albans lad has quite played himself into the good graces of the West Ham supporters.

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Luton's front string, aided by R. Hawkes in particular, was greatly admired in the first half. It was really delightful to watch their movements, and it is difficult even now to discover just why no goals resulted from their efforts at this stage. They come down the field time after time, and practically kept the ball among themselves for quite a long period, and even when they lost the ball temporarily their halves were backing them up so closely that it was promptly sent back into the danger zone, and they were once more weaving patterns through an overworked defence. Unfortunately, this could not be kept up in the second half, and if the truth be told the referee's decisions had more than a little to do with the change. His rulings on many occasions quite demoralised the Luton players, and R. Hawkes himself was evidently often upset by the serious mistakes made, judging by his attitude on several occasions.

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Naisby did all that could be expected from any goalkeeper, and although Wightman and Potts have been seen to more advantage neither goal could be put down to their mistakes. Two or three times Wightman completely missed his kick, and Potts was palpably upset by the spectators' barracking. R. Hawkes' display was in quite his old form. His anticipation by getting into position was wonderful at time, and proved a regular eye-opener to the crowd. Forward, chief honours must be awarded to Brown and the left-wing pair, although Smith was very unlucky with his shooting more than once.