

Southern League.

WEST HAM v. LUTON.

Played at West Ham on Saturday. Result :—

West Ham	2 goals.
Luton	nil.

The teams were as follow :—

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).

West Ham are one of two clubs who have yet to be beaten on their own ground this season in the Southern League. Therefore, Luton were faced with a big proposition, and it is not altogether surprising they lost their first League match away since Boxing Day. With R. Hawkes back, the team was at full strength. West Ham were two short of their Cup team, Webb being on International duty, and Shea was rested to give their latest acquisition a run. Kennedy, who made a few appearances early on in the season, acted as centre-forward, and Frost took the inside-right position.

There would be 8,000 spectators present, and the majority of those were put on good terms with themselves when the first burst through brought along a goal for the Hammers. This point, however, was fortunate in more ways than one, for when the ball came out to Ashton, he was standing quite alone, Potts having run in to tackle the inside player, and it is difficult to understand why he was not given offside. But he was allowed to centre the ball to Kennedy, who was a few yards from goal and promptly headed the ball through. An early goal, especially with such a big doubt as to its legitimacy, might have taken the heart out of many teams, but for the next twenty minutes my notes reveal nothing but a series of attacks on Kitchen and brilliant saves from that worthy.

The re-start found Luton promptly down at the West Ham goal, and Quinn forced a corner right away. Moody almost netted from this, the ball only just going about a yard over the bar. The next item was a very pretty individual effort from Smith, who cleverly tricked a couple of the defenders and then sent in a sharp drive. R. Hawkes was the next Lutonian to trouble Kitchen by attempting to improve upon a neat pass from Moody and bursting through on his own. Still another corner fell to Luton, and Bushell made a good attempt from the first return from the goal-mouth. A minute later Smith had real hard lines with a grand shot following a run and centre on the part of Stansfield. Again another centre from the same quarter was almost touched through by Quinn, but Kitchen was just a mere second too quick and managed to get the ball away.

If Luton had netted a couple of goals at this stage, the run of the game might have been entirely different, and without question they fully deserved at least this measure of reward. But towards the close of the first half West Ham did begin to make a better show, and the exchanges were more even, although still Luton were the better side, the Hammers' attack being more of the breakaway order and certainly not sustained for any length of time. One or two corners were forced, but never did Naisby appear likely to be beaten again. Just on the interval Luton were once more giving Kitchen and Co. considerable trouble, and Moody almost charged him into the net with the ball, while Smith just failed to return it between the uprights before Kitchen could get back to his place, the ball travelling a trifle the wrong side of the upright.

Eventually Stansfield did find an opening from

a grand centre by Brown, the ball coming beautifully across the mouth of goal and just missing Moody, fell practically at Stansfield's toe, who promptly placed it through. But the referee struck this off, apparently giving Stansfield off-side, although he appeared to be behind Brown when the ball was centred, and if this was the case then he must have been on-side and the goal a good one. But the referee's decisions were not altogether in favour of Luton, this being not the only instance when the players consider they were hardly done by in the official rulings. Anyway, half-time found Luton most undeservedly a goal in arrears.

Apparently the spectators did not at all appreciate the way Luton had overplayed their favourites, and by the time the second half started were literally putting more than one player off his proper game, and the referee to a great extent was responsible for this, as he made several bad blunders in awarding fouls against certain of the Luton players. At times we have had complaints of the conduct of the crowd at Luton, but even at their worst I cannot recall anything so general and sustained in the way of "barracking" as was seen and heard at West Ham on Saturday. The chief victim appeared to be Potts, of all players in the world, and the many remarks as to his "dirty" play would surprise Lutonians not present, and most of them are unprintable. Naturally, he fell off in his play, as he is not an old hand, although so pronounced was the demonstration against him at times that even the most experienced player would have been affected.

A great change came over the game in the second half, and the Luton forwards never monopolised the ball as they did in the first half. The chief factor, in my opinion, was the decided improvement which set in about this time in the home trio of half-backs. During the second half all three worked as if the task of winning this particular match was placed upon their shoulders, and they tackled with grim determination and their feeding was masterly. Instead of Luton attacking, they were now forced on the defensive, and as a consequence their own intermediate division could not give the help to their forwards which they were able to do in the first half, and as a line they fell away. The extra work thrown upon Wightman and Potts also told its tale, and they were not quite so steady under pressure as recently; still, on the whole, they put up a stubborn defence, and Naisby was not at all overworked, having nothing like the number of shots Kitchen was called upon to face before change of ends.

As in the first half, the goal, when it came, was an extremely lucky one, for Naisby had just cleared a hot cross shot from Caldwell, and for the moment danger seemed averted, when a pot-shot from Piercy found its way between a crowd of players, and, striking the upright, glanced off at an angle into the net. It was a surprise goal indeed, but it quite settled the issue, for Luton were not playing well enough to suggest they would get level with two goals against them. Although several gallant attempts were made towards the close to reduce the margin, they all failed to beat Kitchen, and West Ham's enviable record of being unbeaten on their own ground still stands, until the visit of Manchester United at least.

It will be seen the game resolved itself into two distinct phases, for Luton should have put themselves into an unassailable position at the interval with just the least trifle of fortune's favours, while afterwards it was more a question as to how much the Hammers would increase their lead. If the game had finished at half-time, I should have to praise every member of the Luton side in no unstinted fashion, but they rather spoiled this pleasant task by their work in the second portion. Although, even then, it is by no means a bad performance to run the side with almost the best home record in the competition to a couple of goals, and that after having the worse of the refereeing and the continued "barracking" of a hostile crowd.

Of all the players on the field, none did finer work than Bob Hawkes, but even he got into the bad graces of the spectators in the second half, while another player seen to great advantage was Bushell, particularly in the first half. All the forwards did well, as already stated, during the opening stages, but Brown, taking the game through, was most consistent. Smith, during the period of Luton's pressure, played one of his best

games, but did not seem so happy afterwards. As a pair, Stansfield and Moody were probably Luton's better wing.

I have already spoken of Kitchen and his halves as dominating the game, the former in the first half and the intermediate trio in the second. Next to them, I should place Caldwell and Butcher. The latter came into the side recently when Blackburn was injured, and the old stager, I understand, will not get back again while the St. Albans lad keeps up his present form. His dodging and clever manipulation of the ball was worthy of the highest praise, and the only drawback to his usefulness is a lack of scoring ability, although I understand he attributes this to being placed on the wrong wing, for until called upon to act as substitute for Blackburn, he always figured at inside-right.

The only surprises in the Southern League matches on Saturday were at Southampton, where Bristol Rovers were successful by no fewer than 5 goals to 1, and at Coventry, where Exeter City were victorious by 3 goals to 1. Plymouth, on their own ground, beat Crystal Palace by 5 goals to 1, but the game was a very unpleasant one, two of the visitors and one of the home team being sent off the field. Watford gratified their supporters by beating Brentford by a goal to nil, and the other results were:—Millwall 0, Northampton 0; Queen's Park Rangers 1, Portsmouth 0; New Brompton 1, Brighton 0; Norwich City 0, Leyton 0; Swindon 1, Southend 0.

The following is the League table up to and including Saturday's matches:—

	Goals										
	Plyd.	Won	Lost	Drn.	For	Agst	Pts				
Swindon Town ...	25	18	4	3	63	21	39				
Crystal Palace ...	28	13	6	9	44	37	25				
West Ham	26	13	5	8	46	25	34				
Brighton & Hove	25	14	6	5	46	23	32				
Brentford	15	12	7	6	32	24	30				
Northampton.....	25	10	6	9	28	20	29				
Exeter City	26	11	10	5	35	31	27				
Leyton	26	10	9	7	36	33	27				
Queen's Park R ..	16	9	10	7	39	31	25				
Plymouth Argyle	25	10	10	5	31	39	25				
Luton	25	9	10	6	41	41	24				
Southampton.....	24	10	12	4	31	41	24				
Norwich City	25	9	11	5	29	30	24				
Millwall Athletic	26	8	11	7	27	37	23				
Coventry City ...	25	9	12	4	45	49	22				
Portsmouth	27	7	14	6	25	38	20				
Watford	24	7	12	5	16	44	19				
New Brompton	25	8	14	3	20	46	19				
Southend United	24	5	13	6	27	46	16				
Bristol Rovers ...	26	5	15	6	26	42	16				