

SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

Luton in the West Country.

Exeter Favoured by Fortune.

Last season Luton Town took four Southern League points out of Exeter City, winning by 3—1 at home and 2—1 away, but the most optimistic of the Club's followers could hardly have expected a repetition of the dose this year. There would have been a chance of last season's success in the West being repeated if the Blues visit to Exeter had been pre-dated by a couple of months or so, for earlier in the season the Westerners were doing even worse than last year, when they finished but five from the bottom. The possibilities of relegation have, however, now long since ceased to cause them any anxiety. A sensational victory at Swindon has been followed by a consistency of form which has given the City practically as good a record as that possessed by Luton, and, consequently, the comparatively small crowd who gathered to witness Saturday's match were confident about the ability of the Westerners to atone for last year's reverse. Their confidence was justified, so far, but it would not have been had not the homesters had all the luck there was going about.

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It is a pretty far cry from Luton to Exeter, and the party who set out on Saturday morning were minus two familiar figures. For once in a way the Club Secretary was an absentee, as Mr. Charles Green had left by an even earlier train for a much longer journey North, in search of that new centre forward everybody is getting anxious about, and Bob Hawkes found it inconvenient to accompany the team. Under these circumstances, Mr. Ernest Gibbs went to Exeter in charge of the team, and the captaincy of the side devolved upon Fred Hawkes. Lashbrooke was pressed into service in Bob Hawkes' place, and Johnson once again figured as the leader of the forward line. Exeter made a couple of changes in their team, both of them in the forward line. Watson came in at inside right, after a month's absence, and Smith was superseded by James in the centre. The teams who came out before about 4,000 spectators were:—

Exeter City:—Whittaker; Evans, Coates; Duffy, Pratt, Prideaux; Parnell, Watson, James, Bell, Garside.

Luton:—Naisby; Whiteman, Potts; F. Hawkes, Bushell, Lashbrooke; Brown, Walker, Johnson, Moody, Stansfield.

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Exeter experienced very little of the snow which came the way of Luton, but the lofty position of the ground caused the full force of the wind to be felt. It was a biting east wind, amounting at times to almost a gale, and it was evident from the kick-off that it would play havoc with the football. Exeter had the assistance of the wind in the first half, and the opening exchanges, as was only to be expected, ruled in their favour. Garside and Bell were early prominent, and Potts distinguished himself with a fine clearance from Parnell, but, though the homesters were often attacking, they hardly ever got really dangerous. As a matter of fact, it was Luton who first came near scoring, for, after a magnificent run by the forwards, Whittaker rushed out of goal and snapped up the ball from Johnson's toe, just as he was about to shoot.

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The Blues were really putting up a very fine opposition, so much so that the City never looked liked scoring until they were awarded a penalty a quarter of an hour or so after the start. This award was a rare stroke of bad luck for the Blues, and was very strongly protested against by the visiting players. Wightman was alleged to have handled the ball in order to assist him in clearing, but, as a matter of fact, the Luton players contended that it was one of the visitors' forwards who did the handling. In any case, there did not appear to those on the stand any suggestion of a deliberate act of handling, for it was one of those cases of the ball bouncing up sharply from the ground, and, so far as Wightman was concerned, there was absolutely no necessity for him to have recourse to the use of his hand. The visitors were very demonstrative in their appeals to the referee to consult his linesmen, but the man in charge turned a deaf ear to their representations, and Evans came up, from back, to take the kick, and easily scored. Even the Exeter folk regarded it as a very lucky start.

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This incident, naturally, had some effect on the game, for it gave the homesters an advantage which imbued them with any amount of confidence. Still, the Blues came within an ace of equalising just afterwards, for Walker and Brown simply left the opposition standing, with a delightful bout of passing, and Whittaker had all he could do to tip Brown's shot round the post for a corner. Nothing came of this, but play was kept round the Exeter goal for some time, in spite of the sturdy character of the home defence. Evans and Pratt both rendered their side splendid service, and eventually the latter got his centre forward away, and Parnell, with a sprightly run, changed the venue of operations. For a quarter of an hour, the Luton defence knew what it was to undergo severe pressure, and both Potts and Wightman came out of the ordeal with flying colours. The wind played pranks with many of their clearances, but they showed considerable skill in intercepting dangerous movements, and Naisby did not have a great deal to do. Garside once shot into his hands, and Bell was not far out with a hot drive, but, generally, the shooting was wide of the mark, though the left wing were frequently making likely openings.

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When, at last, the Blues raised the siege, Stansfield showed off his paces in fine style, but was unable to make an effective assault on the goal. Once the half back checked a promising run by the left wing, and, again, when Stansfield had beaten the half, Evans proved a check. But Luton were not to be forestalled. Brown did fine work on the other wing, and from a capital centre Bushell was only just out with his shot. The Blues were now holding their opponents well, but another misfortune occurred to them, for Lashbrooke was struck with the ball and so badly hurt that he had to leave the field. Under this handicap, Luton could not make much headway, and a quarter of an hour before the interval Pratt, taking a backward pass from Watson, scored with a great drive from about twenty yards' out.

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Even then, Luton were not done with, for, with scarcely more than a minute gone, Brown got away, and, from his centre, Bushell emulated the feat of the Exeter centre half, registering a fine goal. Considering all the circumstances, the Blues might have been well content for this to have been the state of things at the change of ends,

but just before the whistle sounded another bit of fortune came Exeter's way. Parnell shot hard for goal, and the wind carried the ball wide, but, perceiving that it would be reached by Garside before it crossed the line, Naisby dashed out. He reached the ball before Garside, and went to kick away, but the ball struck the inside left on the head with such force as to lay him out, and the ball rebounded into the net with the goalie quite helpless. This made the score at half-time: Exeter 3, Luton 1.

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Luton had their full complement of players when the teams came out after the interval, but Lashbrooke was obviously feeling the effects of his injury, and was not of much service. Still, for all that, with the wind now in their favour the Blues set up a lively attack, and it was really remarkable how the homesters warded off onslaught after onslaught. The goal had a very narrow escape when the inside men failed to make good use of a fine opening presented by an accurate centre from Brown. Bushell tried his hand at long range shooting, but without success, and then, after ten minutes or so, Moody took up a centre from Brown and, at close quarters, drove hard into the net.

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After this, the Blues frequently looked like equalising, but the desired point did not come, and they received an unexpected set back when, following a run by Garside, there was a mix up in the goal mouth, and Bell scored with a low shot, which entered the corner of the goal. Directly afterwards, Garside once more placed the Luton goal in danger, but for the rest of the game the City were busily engaged in resisting the thrustful attacks of the Lutonians. Time after time the Blues got to close quarters, and once Whittaker had to give a corner in order to save from Walker, but, although the attack was well sustained, it had no scoring result. Hence the end came with the score:—

EXETER 4, LUTON 2.

COMMENTS ON THE GAME.

The plucky display given by the Blues after a most unfortunate start won the sympathies of the bulk of the spectators, for, whether playing with or against the wind, they were quite the equals of the Grecians, except, perhaps, during the time Lashbrooke was off the field. Exeter were distinctly lucky with two of their goals, for, unquestionably, the first ought never to have come about, and the Blues would have had no more than their deserts if the result had been a draw. Neither team were seen at their best, for the wind had a disastrous effect on the football.

Brown and Moody were the pick of the Luton forwards, Walker not being nearly so successful as against Brighton, and, in the back division, Potts was entitled to great praise for a sterling display. Lashbrooke's injury gave him little chance of showing what he could do at left half, but it was rather surprising to find him tried in that position at all. Johnson is, without a doubt, better at left half than at centre, and Lashbrooke is essentially a forward. On the Exeter side, Gar-side and Bell were a very dangerous wing, and the backs and centre half served the side well.