

Southern League.

LUTON v. COVENTRY CITY.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—

Coventry City	4 goals.
Luton	2 goals.

The teams were as follow:—

Luton—Naisby; Wightman and Potts; F Hawkes, Bushell, and R. Hawkes; Brown, Walker, Stephenson, Moody, and Stansfield.

Coventry—Evans; Parton and Barnacle; Yates, Bradley, and Chaplin; Parkes, Turnbull, Brown, Jones, and Alden.

Referee, Mr. C. J. Ross (Aldershot).

The hopes entertained by the seven thousand spectators who wended their way to the Luton ground on Saturday that the home team would secure their first League victory this season were destined to be very rudely dispelled, though not the least suspicion of the fact crossed their mind during the first half. Last season Coventry were beaten by 4 goals to 2, and they ought to have been vanquished by more than that on this occasion, but as it happened the verdict was exactly reversed, and Luton it was who suffered defeat.

The game was played under ideal conditions, and as the home team were fully represented, there was every reason to expect them to give a good account of themselves. Why they didn't do so is something to marvel at. During the first half, they had not three-fourths but nine-tenths of the play, and then only managed to score once, that being from a penalty.

In that first forty-five minutes I think Naisby handled the ball only once, and he certainly never had a real shot to stop. Taken all round, Coventry seemed very poor stuff indeed, and Luton were able to do pretty much as they liked, except in the one essential of scoring. The home forwards, well supported by the halves, were constantly in the vicinity of the visitors' goal, and there their efforts petered out in the most disappointing fashion.

It was not because of the opposing backs—at least not by any brilliant display on their part—it was simply and solely because the forwards showed the most wretched judgment imaginable. Stephenson especially could not do anything right, and he always seemed to be trying to take the ball through an opponent instead of round him.

The fact of the matter is, however, that the forwards never will score until they learn to open out the game when occasion demands. Short passing is all very well in its way, and sometimes pays, but generally speaking the more open the play is kept, the greater the chances of scoring. Saturday's match proved this conclusively. All the first half Luton were keeping up a constant pressure, and yet seldom looked like scoring, whilst in the second half, the moment the Coventry forwards were able to make the running they at once became dangerous.

Curiously enough, Jack Sharp, the well-known International, was writing on this very subject in Saturday's "Evening News." Speaking of long and short passing, he said: "I do think that instead of the close exhibitions that one is accustomed to see in most of our big League matches the two styles might well be mixed up more than they are. I have seen, time after time, opportunities for one outside man to send the ball right across to the other outside who is absolutely unmarked, and yet those chances have been neglected for the stereotyped style of close passing which is in vogue. 'Slinging the ball about,' as it is termed by most players, often has the effect of opening up the game and baffling the defence when nothing else is likely to, and I do maintain that the extreme wingers frequently have glorious opportunities of going right through on their own, when, owing to some stupid pre-arranged method, they pass to another comrade who is as much marked, sometimes more so, as they are themselves... . Get up the other end should be the aim of the forwards, and they can get there quicker by long passing and fast runs up the touch-line than by the method of 'get the ball and then get rid of it as quickly as possible.'"

And now to begin at the beginning. Bob Hawkes, who has been much more successful with the coin since he turned pro., again won the toss, and Luton, starting with the advantage of breeze, at once commenced to force the pace. The visiting backs soon began to find themselves in a for a pretty warm time, and did not appear to be any too reliable, but their luck often served them in good stead when their judgment was at fault.

Time after time Luton took the ball up the field, and time after time they worked themselves to well within shooting range, but owing to the closeness of their work, they allowed themselves to be so hampered by the opposing defence that there were few chances of getting in a clean shot. Stephenson, who was working hard enough, had several opportunities, but made poor use of them, and when Stansfield gave him a good centre, he headed over.

The visitors, on the other hand, had a shot the first time they got away, the centre-forward sending over the bar. Luton then resumed the offensive, and maintained the attack with more or less spirit pretty well all through the first half, but their efforts for the most part were not of such a nature as to arouse the enthusiasm of the spectators. Stephenson had another splendid chance right in the mouth of goal, but Evans managed to push the ball out, and Brown shot just the wrong side of the upright.

A little later on Moody had a grand opening from a centre by Stansfield, but he shot high over. A corner proved fruitless, but subsequently, when the Luton forwards were somewhat more thrustful than usual, Yates conceded a penalty by handling the ball. Bob Hawkes took the kick, and easily placed in the net out of Evans' reach. There was now only six minutes to go before the interval, and during that time Walker almost scored again, but Evans made a brilliant save.

As soon as the second half was started, it was seen that Coventry were going to make a desperate effort to pull the game out of the fire, for they at once began swinging the ball from wing to wing and making more headway than at any previous time. Unfortunately, at this juncture, Wightman, in clearing with a big kick, hurt his knee, and though, after attention from Trainer Lawson, he was able to resume, he was never the same man again.

Alden, who had not been specially conspicuous before, now began making runs down the left wing, and it was not long before Coventry had equalised the scores. Naisby had just been called upon to make his first real save when the visitors renewed the attack, and Brown scored with a shot which, taken without a moment's hesitation, left Naisby helpless.

After this, Luton had a splendid chance of taking the lead again, a centre by Stansfield finding its way across the mouth of goal. Moody tried to get at it, but came down in a collision with Parton, and the ball going to Stephenson, that player seemed a certain scorer, but he missed it altogether.

This was practically Luton's last chance, for

Coventry took the game in hand and ran the home defence off its legs. Parkes scored their second goal, and a minute or so later Alden ran round Wightman, and placing the ball in the centre, Brown scored with a beautiful shot, once more taken without a moment's delay.

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These repeated successes were loudly cheered by the spectators, and the defeat looked like becoming a rout shortly afterwards, when Alden again sent the ball across the mouth of goal and Parkes beat Naisby as nicely and cleanly as possible. The home forwards, however, made much more strenuous efforts then, and there is little doubt that they scored a second goal when Evans, to escape a charge, turned round with the ball in his hand, but the referee, after consultation with a linesman, declined to allow it. Just on time, however, Moody did score one about which there could be no question, from a centre by Brown, and the game thus ended in a victory for the visitors by 4 goals to 2.

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As already indicated, the play of the forwards was very ineffective, and unless they can score goals as well as play tricky football, the gate receipts will speedily become a seriously diminishing quantity. They were a cleverer lot than the Coventry quintet, but the latter realised what they were playing for, and the moment they found the openings made the best use of them. Their extreme wing men had a share in all the goals, whereas the Luton outside men were often left unemployed for quite a long spell.

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Stephenson gave by far his worst display since he has worn the Luton colours, and the three inside men neutralised the greater part of their work by persistently hugging the ball. Bob Hawkes made heroic efforts, and was well supported by Bushell and Fred, but in spite of all that they could do, the Luton attack was miserably weak.

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In the first half, Wightman and Potts played splendidly and gave nothing away, but after the former had got hurt, Alden seemed to have little difficulty in getting round him, whilst Potts became too flurried to cope with the long-passing tactics of the visiting forwards. It was an unfortunate day for Naisby who had comparatively little to do and yet was beaten four times. He was so well beaten, too, that he could scarcely make any attempt to save.

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It is not too late for Luton to retrieve their character. The forwards have the ability, and the urgent need is for them to make the best use of it. They must drop their mechanical style of play and give a little thought to what they are doing. They must learn to shoot instead of indulging in unnecessary embroidery, and, above all, they must cease to allow themselves to be deluded by the idea that at all times and under all circumstances the close-passing game is the only one to play.

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