

SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

Luton v. Coventry City.

Disappointing Display by Luton

Brilliant weather favoured the meeting of Luton and Coventry City, at Luton, on Saturday, and a crowd of quite seven thousand assembled to witness what proved a remarkable, but disappointing game. The home team showed marked superiority in the first half, and at the interval led by a goal, but in the end they had to acknowledge defeat by four goals to two. Erratic shooting, and the absence of a proper understanding amongst their forwards were the principal reasons for their failure to get goals in the first half, and a general slackness in the second half resulted in Coventry completely overwhelming them, at any rate, for a period.

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Coventry assumed their aggressive tactics after Wightman had been temporarily placed out of action, and it was from the wing opposed to him that disaster to the homesters accrued. Time after time the burly right back was outwitted and outpaced by Alden, whose accurate centres were invariably improved upon, Naisby having but very little chance with the shots that took effect. It is only fair to say that for the greater part of the time Wightman was obviously suffering from the effect of injury. As it was, compared with the work accomplished by Evans, the Coventry goalie, Luton's custodian had very little to do, and the visitors must, in a large measure, attribute their surprising win to the clever work put in by the Welsh international in goal. Some of his saves were wonderfully smart, and he well merited the applause accorded him on leaving the arena.

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Stephenson re-appeared in the centre forward position for Luton, and the remainder of the team was constituted as usual. Bradley, who was a member of the Luton team for one season, captained the visitors, whilst Parton, who was making his first appearance for the City in the Southern League, displaced Juggins at right back. Punctually to time, the referee, Mr. C. J. Ross, Aldershot, called the teams together as follow:—

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

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

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"Bob" Hawkes won the toss. From the kick-off, the home players were soon away, and a judicious movement by "Bob" Hawkes resulted in Evans having to run out to save. Stansfield and Bushell afterwards missed a very promising opening by loose kicking, and Bob Hawkes put in a long shot which went wide. A break-away by Coventry saw Bradley send well forward to Brown, but Potts tackled him and effected a smart clearance. Luton quickly got to the other end, but a determined onslaught on the City's goal was spoiled through a slip by Brown in centring. Stephenson next looked like getting through, but was neatly robbed, and Fred Hawkes afterwards obtaining possession shot behind. Luton were now displaying the better form, but their forwards failed to combine well, and although innumerable centres were sent in, Stephenson and the inside wingers were often hopelessly out of it in their efforts to turn them to good account.

After acting on the defensive for some minutes, Coventry succeeded in transferring play, but a smart shot from Brown was intercepted. Moody was penalised, but Potts cleared, and Luton again made for the Coventry goal. A melee in front of Evans looked promising, but Parton succeeded in clearing. The home forwards continued to harass the visiting defence, and Bob Hawkes got in a straight drive, which Evans negotiated in fine style. Play, so far, had been of rather uninteresting description, the inability of the Luton forwards to accept the glorious opportunities which were presented to them being painfully apparent. Capital passing by Stansfield and Moody next saw the ball transferred to Stephenson, who failed to gather the ball, and another fine chance was missed. The crowd began to show some displeasure.

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Three times in a very brief space the visitors had free kicks given against them. Following some huge kicking by the Luton halves, the Coventry forwards got going, and Brown let drive at the Luton goal, but the ball just skimmed the bar. Luton quickly resumed their invasion of the visitors' territory, and Walker sent in a magnificent grounder, which looked an almost certain goal, but, as the crowd were preparing to shout, Evans stretched himself on the grass and brought off a splendid save on the line. Brown promptly returned the ball, which struck the post, and, amid much excitement, went behind. This incident had the effect of infusing some life into the game. Luton continued to press strongly, but the forwards shaped miserably near goal; their attempts at shooting were poorly judged, and Evans had little difficulty in clearing. Up to now, Naisby had had practically nothing to do, play being almost continuously confined to the visitors' half.

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A clever run by Alden, who outpaced Wightman, resulted in Jones being well placed, but he missed the ball, and Potts managed to set Luton's left wing going. Stephenson, who had been very much out of the picture, eventually received, and gave Evans a rare handful, which he just managed to divert. One or two fine situations were worked up by Luton's right wing, but they lacked finish, the pivot being greatly at fault in this respect. A terrific bombardment of Coventry's goal ensued, as the result of a long drive by Bob Hawkes, but Evans came out of the ordeal with flying colours. At this juncture there were strong appeals for two penalty kicks against one of the visiting defenders, but they were disregarded, although the referee had occasion to speak to Barnacle. At length, Coventry attacked strongly on the left, but Wightman was equal to the occasion, and Stansfield passed to Moody, who received the ball close in. The inside left mulled his shot in a very unsatisfactory way. Still Luton attacked, and Bushell sent in a well directed drive, which was turned by Barnacle, and a corner resulted. This, however, was not turned to account. Maintaining the pressure, the home team looked as though they must score, when Yates handled in the penalty area, and the referee promptly recognised the infringement. Bob Hawkes took the kick, and a mighty shout went up when the crowd saw the ball shoot into the net.

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This success came to the homesters about six minutes from the interval, and from the centre kick they were at work at once, and Barnacle and Parton experienced an anxious time in beating off the opposing forwards. Evans was loudly applauded for the brilliant manner in which he cleared shots in quick succession from Stephenson and Walker, the latter especially coming very near scoring. A burst by the City forwards was checked by Wightman, and Stansfield almost immediately forced a corner at the other end. The kick was well taken, but there was no result, and half-time was announced with the score:—

Luton, 1; Coventry City, 0.

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On resuming, Luton at once made tracks for goal, and Evans just managed to get to the ball when Fred Hawkes was getting dangerously close. A smart attack was then initiated by Coventry's left wing, and Alden outwitted Wightman. Potts came to the assistance of his partner, and succeeded in clearing when a score threatened. Bradley was penalised for handling, and the resultant kick enabled Luton to attack, but Moody was adjudged offside, a decision which did not meet with much favour. Parkes was similarly pulled up, and Alden, in endeavouring to escape the vigilance of Wightman, ran over the line and

came into collision with the railings. From the goal kick, Bradley handled, when intercepting a pass by Walker, but the free kick availed nothing. Two or three decisions by the referee in regard to infringements of the offside rule were evidently not relished by the crowd, and on one occasion at least there was good ground for dissatisfaction.

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Then a remarkable change came over the game, and Luton, who had been aggressors practically from the commencement, were in a few minutes placed in what seemed almost a hopeless position. The first incident leading to their downfall was an injury to Wightman, which necessitated the attention of Billy Lawson. The game was temporarily stopped in consequence, but Wightman resumed limping, and the throw-up saw Potts clear when hard pressed. Mid-field play ensued for a time, and Coventry then became dangerous. Parkes got in an accurate centre, which Naisby cleared, and the Luton forwards took up the attack. Parton emerged successfully from a combined rush, and Brown was pulled up for fouling Barnacle. Alden secured possession from the kick, and, passing Wightman, sent across to Turnbull, who transferred to Brown, who, without hesitation, scored a beautiful goal. Elated at this success, which came after fifteen minutes' play in the second half, the visitors again attacked, and Naisby had his capabilities tested by Alden. The play became very lively, each side making strenuous efforts to gain the lead, but the capital openings made by Luton were rendered ineffective through slackness in the forward five when near goal. Alden again showed a good turn of speed, and tried a cross shot, which went wide. Naisby afterwards had to rush out as the opposing left wing were bearing down on his charge, and a thrill was caused when he failed to successfully gather the ball, which, however, went over for a goal kick.

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Coventry showed up to advantage at this juncture, and several bright dashes by their left wing spelt danger. Naisby did well to fust out a splendid drive by Brown. Turnbull, meeting the ball on the rebound, just headed over the bar. A brief incursion into Coventry's territory saw Stansfield put in a grand centre, from which Stephenson missed an easy chance of scoring. There were some sarcastic comments from the crowd, but there were other matters to claim attention, for Coventry got going again, and Alden, slipping by Wightman, put in a fine centre, which Bob Hawkes unsuccessfully attempted to clear. The ball then went between Potts' legs, and Parkes, who was well up, pounced upon it and beat Naisby with a smart shot. Having gained the lead, the visitors immediately swept down on the Luton goal, and a fine centre by Alden was converted by Brown, who promptly took advantage of an entanglement in which the home defence found themselves.

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Nothing daunted by these rapid and unexpected reverses, Luton put up a strong move on the right, but offside nullified a smart individual effort by Walker. Potts and Brown, the visiting centre, came into collision, to the evident discomfort of the latter, and, play being transferred to the other end, Luton's outside right came very near scoring with an oblique shot, the ball striking the cross-bar and upright at the corner and going over. From a subsequent corner, Evans made a brilliant clearance. Wightman afterwards got in a huge kick, which went over. The end was fast approaching, when Brown, for Luton, centred in fine style, and the ball was promptly headed into the net, but the whistle had gone in response to the linesman's signal, Brown having got out of play before he made his centre. Forty minutes had elapsed when Alden again got the better of Wightman and centred, and Parkes, in the easiest possible manner, steered the ball by Naisby for a fourth goal.

The issue was now practically beyond doubt, but Luton made a vigorous attack. Evans received from the right wing, and was rushed, and as he twisted round an appeal was made for a goal, on the ground that he had carried the ball over the line. After consultation with one of the linesmen, the referee disallowed it, but a moment later a swift movement by the home forwards resulted in Moody scoring from a pass by Brown. Coventry made a final burst. Potts, however, brought his weight into use, and cleared, after "flooring" one or two forwards. Moody put in a shot which tested Evans, but, although the Coventry custodian had plenty to do in the closing stages, he succeeded in staving off a fierce onslaught on his charge, and when the whistle went for the close of play the score read:—

COVENTRY CITY, 4; LUTON, 2.

COMMENTS ON THE GAME.

Naisby was not to be blamed for the shots that beat him. They were both surprising and smart. The Luton goalkeeper, in fact, had very little opportunity of displaying his abilities. In the first half the play was all in Coventry quarters, and he was rarely called upon to handle the ball, whereas Evans, the Coventry goalkeeper, was continually on the go, and, it must be said, he gave a brilliant exposition. The home backs gave a moderate display, and it was quite an "off day" with the forwards. The result of the game was exactly the reverse of last season's meeting of the teams at Luton. A year ago the first three League matches furnished Luton with 11 goals; now they have only three to show for four games, and there are not many who would be bold enough to suggest that they may register their first victory as the result of the visit to Brentford next Saturday.

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Coventry City did not impress one as a very formidable eleven. Their goalkeeper was the most successful player on the field, and Alden, at outside left, put in some good work. The backs were bustling, but not over reliable, whilst, at times, the halves performed indifferently. Bradley was the most conspicuous worker of the trio. The forwards did not shine in the first half, but a pronounced improvement was witnessed in their movements after the interval, and they eagerly seized upon every opportunity to have a "pot" at goal.