

Southern League.

LUTON v. BRENTFORD

Played at Brentford on Saturday. Result :—

Luton	1 goal.
Brentford	nil.

The teams were as under :—

Luton—Naisby; Smith and Potts; F. Hawkes, Bushell, and R. Hawkes; Brown, Walker, Shepherd, Lashbrooke, and Stansfield.

Brentford. — Ling; Rhodes and Cleverly; Richards, Hamilton, and Hickleton; Brawn, Sibbald, Rouse, Hendren, and Anderson.

Referee, Mr. A. Wilkes (Birmingham).

On Saturday morning there appeared quite an odds on chance that Luton would drop to the bottom place in the Southern League before night-fall, as their task on paper seemed, even at full strength, such that a successful result could not be reasonably hoped for. It was of course known all the week that Moody would be away in Ireland on behalf of the Southern League, and that Shepherd was down to figure at centre-forward in place of Stephenson, but it certainly came rather in the nature of a surprise to find Smith playing at full back. But it appears Wightman had a trial spin on Thursday, and found his knee was scarcely as sound as expected, and it was left until Friday morning for Lawson to pronounce his fitness or otherwise. Unfortunately the decision was not favourable, and finally it was decided to give Smith his chance in the Southern League, although naturally the claims of Ashton were also seriously considered.

Brentford were able to place in the field their strongest side, now that Reid has been transferred. Six of the team had previously played against Luton in the same colours, but with five newcomers there was only the present season's results to go by in weighing up the chances, and of course this could not raise the hopes of Luton's supporters, the consequence being that a much smaller number than usual accompanied the team to Griffin Park. The weather was more winterly than on any previous Saturday this season, and spectators were very slow in rolling up, although at the finish there would be about six thousand present.

Bob Hawkes lost the toss, and naturally the Bees' captain chose what was considered the best end, for there was a very strong wind blowing, and what advantage this gave the home side possessed, the Luton back division at times having to get the ball up the field against a regular hurricane.

There was little to choose between the sides during the opening five minutes, and neither goal-keeper was tested at this stage. Smith had evidently made up his mind Rouse was the most dangerous member of the Bees' attack, and he kept his eye on the centre-forward whenever he was observed to be settling down for a burst through. The Luton defender used his weight without being at all dirty, and as Rouse is quite a heavy chap, the encounters were pretty equal. Rouse got the worse of one impact, however, for he was badly winded, and the game was stopped for a couple of minutes to enable him to recover. Still, the home centre managed to slip through once, and passing the ball out to the left, Anderson appeared likely to open the score when the referee pulled him up for offside, a decision not at all to the liking of the crowd.

Luton's first really likely attempt at scoring was a punt up the field by Bushell, the ball dropping awkwardly in front of Ling and just clearing the crossbar from the rebound. This incident was quickly followed by what proved the critical moment of the game, for as a result of a combined movement, Lashbrooke was able to give Shepherd a neat pass midway between the halfway line and the penalty area. The Luton centre was immediately tackled by Hamilton, but he pushed his way through, and although both backs closed upon him he would not loose the ball, except to drive it finely into the far corner of the net. It was decidedly the finest shot of the day, and Shepherd deserves great credit for the effort. Luton were now much the better team, and appeared likely to increase their lead, but the home backs set up a stubborn defence and it was difficult to find openings.

Several strong rushes were put in at the other end, Rouse in particular trying to force his way through when it would probably have paid better to put the ball out to the wings, although of course if the home centre had managed to get a goal his individualism would have been excused. Cleverly stopped Shepherd rather heavily, and the referee cautioned the Brentford back, but the resulting free kick was badly placed, and Luton reaped no advantage from the award. Free kicks were rather frequent at this point, mostly for hands but none were improved upon.

In meeting a dangerous attack, Bob Hawkes got in the wars, and after limping about for a few minutes, went off the field, Lashbrooke dropping into his place temporarily. But Bob was not long away and came back during an attack on Naisby which, for a few moments, threatened danger. A long attempt from Hamilton was well saved by Naisby, and then Smith was penalised for a heavy charge on Anderson, but once more the free kick came to nothing.

Lashbrooke tried on a couple of occasions to put the ball into the goal, but the wind carried it too far across, and Walker was given offside on the second attempt. The game was, however, fairly even, and the spectators were rather amused at the manner in which the referee gave an award for a free kick against Luton on the advice of his linesman. Neither side stopped playing, but the old Villa half-back went for the ball, and robbing Bushell in the most approved style, kicked it away down the field. A fine shot from Rouse was splendidly saved at a second attempt by Naisby, while Smith did well to pull up Anderson when the home outside-left was making for goal in fine style.

The Bees attacked strongly immediately after the interval but they could not break down the resistance of Smith and Potts, to say nothing of Naisby. However, they did succeed in forcing a corner-kick after some five minutes in the second half. It was curious that with such a fitful wind prevalent no such award had been given during the opening half; indeed, the whole game saw only four corner-kicks taken, and not one of these by Luton.

Stansfield tricked Rhodes in fine style, but lost the ball, which travelled into touch too fast for the Luton winger to catch after rounding the burly back. Soon after this, Smith made one of the few mistakes of the game, and let in the Bees' forwards, but Potts came to the rescue and relieved the danger with a big kick down the field. On the whole the Bees were now doing more attacking than Luton, but their final efforts were very poor, and the Luton defence was not at all hardly pressed. Hendren, however, got one good drive in the right direction, only to find Naisby right on the spot.

At this point rain began to fall, and the wind dropped, but the rain did not last long, and as time approached the crowd urged the home side to make an effort, but the attack was too disjointed. Brawn, trying to do too much, quite spoilt two or three chances. He was observed near the corner-flag on the opposite side of the field to his proper position at least twice, but he only ran the ball out of play.

The referee came in for a round of hooting for one or two offside decisions against the Bees, but he appeared very firm in holding to his opinion, though he made a glaring error, which might have told against Luton, in awarding a corner-kick to the home side when it was evident Naisby was simply holding the man off and did not play the ball at all. The Luton goalkeeper tried his hardest to convince Mr. Wilkes he had made a mistake, but there was no alteration to be obtained once the referee had given an award, and a corner kick it was. The ball was never cleared from this, although at no time did it appear likely the home club would equalise, until a penalty was given against Potts for handling, though the ball appeared to touch his arm by accident rather than through any effort on his part to play it in that way. Cleverly was entrusted with the kick, and he sent in breast-high to Naisby, who managed to catch the ball and clear. This was the final incident of note, and Luton had fully earned their first victory in the Southern League this season.

It is points that count, but in fairness to the team, it should be said they have played quite as well as at Brentford without securing their proper reward—notably in the second half at Exeter, when only sheer bad luck prevented goals coming. Still, it is no mean feat to visit a team with the record of Brentford this season and walk off with the two points, and every credit must be given to the defence for maintaining a clean sheet. Some doubts were expressed as to how Smith would perform in his first big trial, and although naturally he has to gain experience, he came out on top as a rule. He possesses plenty of pluck, and when he uses a little judgment in his rushes, should prove a good defender. It is not necessary to say much as to the manner in which the more experienced defenders went about their work, for the score-sheet is ample evidence of their ability, and in this of course the middle line must bear their share of the honours.

Shepherd played a very good game in the centre, and held his wings together, inasmuch that as a line of forwards there was a deal more method about their attack than that of their opponents. Probably the left-wing pair were the more effective, for Walker appeared to have a liking for half back play at times, and did not keep up with his partner quite so much as usual with him. However, a win was secured, which was never more badly needed, and the whole side deserve credit.