

In the Southern League.

BLUES FAIL TO BREAK THE RANGERS' RECORD.

A Brilliant First Half yields No Goals.

When Luton visited Brentford a fortnight since, very few of their supporters took the trouble to make the journey, but the recent victories have caused a tremendous alteration in this respect, and the excursion trains on Saturday were literally packed with Lutonians who were on their way to Park Royal. No change was necessary in the constitution of the side which opposed Queen's Park Rangers, and the fine record set up by the present League leaders did not deter many Lutonians from expectations of a draw at least. The Rangers had out their strongest available team, for Fidler and Butterworth are not likely to turn out for a week or so, but Ovens and Whyman, who were in their places the previous week, quite fulfilled expectations, and it was given out that the side was not weakened in any way. Therefore, the only change from the previous week was the substitution of H. V. Thornton in place of Browning, the home officials considering this to be an improvement, the amateur being left out against Brentford through illness.

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The outlook on arrival in town was not too promising, as there were unmistakable signs of fog, and there were some misgivings as to whether the match would be played. On the journey down from Paddington, many expressed doubts as to whether it would be possible for the game to finish, but on arrival at Park Royal the conditions were found to be more favourable, although it was decided to bring forward the kick-off by five minutes, as it was rightly concluded the light would fail towards the finish. As a matter of fact, the final quarter of an hour was played in a very bad light, and from the stand it was a bit difficult to follow the play when it took place on the far side of the field. Still, with all these drawbacks, the crowd was estimated to be about 14,000, and most of these compelled, by the out-of-the-way situation of the ground, to travel by train, which means a tax on the pockets of practically everyone who follow the Green and Whites.

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The teams turned out as below:—

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

Queen's Park Rangers.—Shaw; Macdonald and Ovens; Whyman, Mitchell, and Wake; A. R. Smith, Revill, McKie, H. V. Thornton, and Barnes.

Referee.—Mr. A. Green, West Bromwich.

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Luton started off with a rush, and Shaw was kept busy with several hot attacks on the home goal. Indeed, the way the Luton forwards monopolised the play was a regular eye-opener to the local spectators, who had not bargained for such a bombardment. The first attack came from Stansfield, who put across a beautiful centre, only to see Shaw punch the ball away. It was promptly returned into the goal mouth by Walker, and Shaw brought off a clever save just under the bar. But the most daring save of the match came a couple of minutes later, when Shepherd, splendidly placed, looked all over a scorer, but Shaw, taking a big risk of injury, literally threw himself at Shepherd's foot when the Luton centre was taking aim, and thus smothered the shot effectually. The home goalie came in for a round of applause, but for the moment could not appreciate the enthusiasm, as it was seen he had hurt himself, and the game was stopped for a couple of minutes while he received the attention of his trainer.

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So far all the attacking had come from Luton, but, naturally, this could not last, and the home forwards made a diversion through the agency of Barnes, who got away on the left, and, dropping the ball into the centre, gave Thornton a fine chance to open the score. The inside left got his head to the ball nicely, but Naisby caught it as it was entering the top corner of the goal, and cleared in the nick of time. The play was most exciting at this stage, although no goals came. Neither set of defenders were kept long unemployed. Walker, in particular, was a big trouble to Wake and Ovens, and he had very hard lines in not converting after a desperate encounter with the two players mentioned, but he was compelled to take his shot before he had recovered his equilibrium after coming into contact with the back. Brown got through in good style, with the result that Moody caught the ball on his head, but placed it a trifle wide, with a hard attempt to direct it by Shaw. Once Wightman let in Thornton, and matters looked ominous, but Potts managed to clear the danger when the referee called a half, Wightman having fouled one of the home players just outside the penalty area. Mitchell made a terrific drive at goal with the place kick, but his aim was at fault, and the ball struck the outside of the net.

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One of the finest attempts of the first half came from F. Hawkes, who let drive with a ground attempt, the ball scarcely rising at all, but Shaw threw himself at it, and turned it round the post for a corner, thus bringing down the applause of his admirers once more. Luton had two or three corners hereabouts, but none of them could be turned to advantage. A break-away by the Rangers' left wing resulted in the ball being sent right across the goal, and Naisby rather weakly punched the ball to Smith, who was standing, quite clear, a few yards out. It seemed the easiest of openings, but evidently the Rangers' winger was taken by surprise, and he lamely put the ball by for a goal kick. At the opposite end, Shaw was equally as fortunate when he ran out almost to the corner flag without gathering the ball, which was returned into the centre of the field. Shepherd, who made an attempt to improve upon the slip, failed to control the ball sufficiently to get in his shot before Shaw could get back, and the chance slipped away, the interval coming with the score:—

Rangers 3, Luton 0.

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The second half opened with a regular bombardment of the same goal as the first half, but, of course, this time Naisby was the defending party, and after three minutes his charge fell. Mitchell pushed the ball through to Revill, who drove it through with a fine shot. This success seemed to inspire the Rangers, and Luton never afterwards took the same share of the exchanges. It is true during the remainder of the game they made attempts to redeem the situation, but most of the sustained efforts came from the Rangers. Bushell, in heading away a hot shot from the left, hurt himself, and it took some minutes for him to recover himself at all, while it was patent he was not up to the task of holding McKie and Co. in subjection in the same manner as in the first half for quite twenty minutes. As a matter of fact, it was only in the last few minutes he was himself again.

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The result was settled after twenty minutes' play in the second half, when McKie neatly headed a centre from Barnes through, and thus put the Rangers two goals ahead. Luton were not playing with anything like the vim of the first half, and their only chance of glory appeared to rest on their chance of being the first side to score a goal at Park Royal against the Rangers, for the most optimistic Lutonian present could not imagine them getting sufficient goals to win the match. The run of the game went in favour of the home side, but, still, there were several times when it appeared as though Luton had a chance. Shepherd had hard lines with a fine individual burst right through the middle, but Shaw knocked down his first attempt, and he could not quite get control from the rebound. As previously mentioned, the light was now very bad, and it was just as well for the reputation of either set of defenders that no real teasers

were put in in the closing stages, the final whistle sounding with the result:—

QUEEN'S PARK RANGERS 2, LUTON 0.

COMMENT ON THE PLAY AND PLAYERS.

It was universally conceded by the Rangers' officials that Luton were very unlucky in not getting a goal for all their work in the first half, and, naturally, a little encouragement of this nature might have made all the difference in the actual result. At the close of the game the home Directors frankly admitted their team had never previously this season been so hard pressed to earn the points.

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Notwithstanding the fact that no goals resulted, it must be stated that in no game this season have Luton played such fine football as they did in the first half on Saturday. Indeed, it was one of the finest forty-five minutes it has been the lot of the writer to witness. Both teams were at full stretch the whole time, and although, undoubtedly, Luton had the greater number of opportunities, the Rangers' defence deserve every praise for maintaining a clean sheet.

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Nasby could not be blamed for the two goals in the second half, but the Luton backs were scarcely so reliable in the second stage as they were previously. Still, the pressure put upon them was very heavy. Possibly, Potts was the safer of the two, Wightman making one or two bad slips. In the first half, the work of the Luton halves was brilliant in the extreme, and they gave great assistance to their forwards, but, as was the case with the backs, they were a bit overworked in the concluding stages, and could not render the same help, and the attack suffered in consequence. In the first half, no forward line could have played finer football up to the point of not scoring. Walker was the star artiste, while Shepherd opened out the game in good style.

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Shaw was the most prominent figure on the Rangers' side, and his daring was magnificent. He did more towards winning the points than the score would seem to indicate, for a break-up of the home defence would probably have had serious consequences, and many times it was only Shaw that stood between the Rangers and a big defeat. The Rangers, at the present time, however, possess a finely balanced team, and the three halves have not a little to do with their success. Wake in the second half being seen to great advantage, while Mitchell was untiring in his efforts all through. Revill is a great acquisition, and proved the Rangers' most effective forward, while our old friend Billy Barnes is still a powerful winger, and was more effective than his colleague on the opposite wing.