

Southern League.

LUTON v. QUEEN'S PARK RANGERS.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—

Queen's Park Rangers	3 goals.
Luton	1 goal.

The teams were as follow:—

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

Rangers—Shaw; Macdonald and Pullen; Ovens, Mitchell, and Wake; A. R. Smith, Revill, McKie, Thornton, and Barnes.

Referee, Mr. T. Garnar (Barnsley).

I daresay there are many who will say it was very hard luck on Luton that they should have lost on Saturday, and so in a sense it was, but this sort of luck has been experienced on so many occasions and so continuously, that it is time we recognised the fact that the misfortunes which persistently dog the Luton team are not due to some evil spirit, but wholly and solely to the inability of the forwards to shoot.

That the men are triers is evidenced by the large number of matches in which they have all the better of the play except in the one important particular. But when it comes to goal-getting, they are hopelessly out of it, and this was never more clearly demonstrated than on Saturday. The Rangers had perhaps half-a-dozen possible chances of scoring, and they turned three of them to account, whereas Luton were buzzing round the Rangers' goal scores of times and yet could only get through once.

It was a great misfortune for Luton that Johnson should have broken his leg just at the time when he was shaping so well at centre-forward, for if he had not met with his injury and had sustained and improved on the form he was showing, we might have had quite a different tale to tell.

Unfortunately, not one of the Luton forwards seems to be a goal-getter this season, but the chief reason for non-success is that the centre-forward position has never been adequately filled. Every game that is played makes it more and more apparent that Streeton is not up to Southern League requirements, and if the directors mean to save the Club from the danger of relegation, they must do something at once.

Saturday's game was played under ideal conditions, and the six or seven thousand spectators saw a very interesting match. From the first it was seen that the Rangers were all out for victory, and it was quite as apparent that the Luton defenders were determined that it should not be through any fault of theirs if the visitors did succeed. Consequently the play was as strenuous as could be wished.

When the game began, the Rangers were not long in settling down, and their forwards were well away in the first minute. The Luton defence played well, however, and the visitors were driven back. The next time they came down it was clearly seen that they meant danger, but, luckily for Luton, the centre-forward handled right in front of goal, and from the free kick resulting, the left wing got away, and Shaw had to leave his charge in checking a dangerous move on the part of Moody. Then the custodian only partially cleared, but the opportunity was spoiled by one of the forwards fouling him. Encouraged by this success, the home forwards forced matters much as they would, and Streeton was given a good opening, but his shot went a trifle wide. A minute or so later Luton had a splendid chance of opening the score, but the opportunity was thrown away. Brown, after some clever work on the right wing, sent in a fine centre to which Moody ailed but got his head, but the ball travelled out to Stephenson, who was well placed, but instead of taking his time, the winger shot hastily and skied the ball right over the bar.

Shaw was now being given a very busy time, and he had considerable difficulty in saving a well-judged header from Streeton. Not long afterwards Walker hit the upright with a shot, and Stephenson was about to follow up when the back kicked behind for a corner, which proved fruitless. There was a momentary lull in the energetic attack of the Luton forwards, and the Rangers seizing advantage of this, got away in really excellent style, the forwards combining together well, and as a result of this effort the Luton goal had a remarkably narrow escape. Barnes sent across a good centre, and the ball went to Revill, who was standing unmarked in front of goal, but the inside-right was evidently excited, and he shot the ball right over the bar.

After this the Luton forwards returned to their form of the previous quarter of an hour, but despite their continuous pressing they failed to get through, and it was in the last quarter of an hour that the Rangers scored the only goal of the first half as the result of a beautiful move on the left wing by Barnes, who, after beating Fred Hawkes and Wightman, sent in a centre from which McKie had no difficulty whatever in scoring. Luton then acted on the aggressive again, but without result, and the interval came with the Rangers somewhat luckily leading by the only goal of the half.

The second half opened somewhat sensationally. The Luton forwards went away in a style that clearly showed they meant business, and as the result of a clever piece of work on the right wing, Shaw had to run out from his charge. Walker, however, was determined to have a good try to reach the ball first, and he almost succeeded in tapping the ball past the custodian, but in doing so he strained himself, and he was unable to follow up his advantage and Shaw was able to clear. Not to be outdone, the forwards again came along, but they were too weak to follow up their openings, and although they forced corner after corner they failed to turn anything to account. About a quarter of an hour after the re-start the visitors had increased their lead, Smith scoring from a centre from the left wing, although the position in which the inside-right stood when he scored the goal was very doubtful. There was apparently no doubt in the mind of the referee, and the point was allowed without hesitation.

The Luton forwards were not disheartened, however, and still continued to give the Rangers' defence a very busy time, their efforts eventually being rewarded. As the result of some clever work amongst the whole of the forwards, Stephenson was given a grand opportunity of which he took full advantage and scored with a shot that gave Shaw no chance. The winger was standing well in when a centre came across from the right. Moody was hampered by one of the backs, and he very wisely allowed the ball to go out to Stephenson, with the result mentioned.

The Luton forwards, encouraged by this success, continued to do well, and play centred round the visitors' goal for some time, but Luton failed to improve their position, and the Rangers added another goal as the result of a breakaway. Barnes and Thornton, following a good clearance by the defence, got well away, and drawing out both the backs, Thornton sent in a shot, but the ball struck the bar and rebounded to Smith, who easily tapped the ball into the net. The Luton players made an appeal for offside, but the referee allowed the point. After this play lacked in interest. The forwards seemed to have lost heart, and the Rangers were apparently content with their lead. The game accordingly fell somewhat flat afterwards, and give-and-take style followed until the finish.

It can only be said that on the run of the game the Rangers were very fortunate to win. Apart from the matter of goal-getting, they were practically outplayed in every department, but the fact that Luton were so often acting on the aggressive was chiefly due to the very fine display given by the halves and backs.

One has so often had to say recently that Bob Hawkes was the best man on the field that the distinction may have lost its savour, but on Saturday he played a marvellous game, whilst Bushell and Fred Hawkes were also in great form. But a special word of praise is due to Wightman and Potts, who has never given a better exhibition, and thanks to their efforts Naisby had very little to do.

Of the forwards, Walker was probably the most effective, but I think Luton made a mistake in keeping the ball too much on the right wing. Stephenson at times had very little to do, and it was rather a pity, for if he had been given more opportunities of putting centres across, Walker's dash might have proved very useful.

Of the visitors, Macdonald played a great game at back, and the Rangers owed a lot to him, for he saved the goal on three occasions when there was no chance of Shaw getting to the ball. The halves played very well, and the forwards were pretty good without being brilliant, Barnes being as smart and effective as any of them. Billy is getting on in years now, but he plays as well as ever.

The refereeing was very good, but the Rangers ought certainly to have been pulled up for offside before they got their third goal. Still, the referee who never makes a mistake has yet to be found.

So far as results are concerned, the other Southern League matches went pretty much as expected, but it was somewhat of a surprise to find Southampton winning at Stoke by 3 goals to 2, and New Brompton's victory at Bristol (1-0) was also a little out of the reckoning. Northampton were expected to account for Reading, even though the latter did beat Aston Villa in the Cup-tie, but that the Cobblers should gain the verdict by a goals to nil was certainly not anticipated. It is only fair to say, however, that Reading were without several of their best players. Swindon fully avenged their defeat at Watford by beating the Hertfordshire club by 4 goals to nil.

The other results were:—Millwall 2, Brentford 0; West Ham 3, Exeter City 2; Brighton 1, Plymouth 0; Coventry City 3, Crystal Palace 2; Leyton 1, Norwich 0. The victories of New Brompton and Leyton show how necessary it is that Luton should gain more points.