

Southern League.

LUTON v. CRYSTAL PALACE.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—

Crystal Palace..... 1 goal.

Luton nil.

The teams were as follow:—

Luton—Naisby; Wightman and J. Ashton; F. Hawkes, Busheil, and R. Hawkes; Brown, Walker, Stephenson, Lashbrooke, and Stansfield.

Crystal Palace—Johnson; Collyer and Bulcock; Spottiswood, Hughes, and Hanger; Garrett, Hewitt, Woodhouse, Williams, and Davies.

Referee, Mr. A. Adams (Nottingham).

It was unfortunate for Luton that they should have to take the field on Saturday without Potts and Moody, and with Walker only half fit, because it was recognised that they had a very tough job on hand in meeting the Palace, who had only lost one match this season. At back, J. Ashton was pressed into the service, and he thus made his initial appearance in the Southern League, while Moody's absence from the forward line let in Lashbrooke, who did such fine service when Moody was out of the team at the end of last season.

The weather was all that could be desired, a threatening morning giving place to a pleasant afternoon, and the ground was in excellent condition. Fully six thousand spectators assembled, and it may be said at once that they had very good value for their money, although deprived of the satisfaction of seeing a victory for Luton. The home team suffered defeat, but the case was very different from that of a fortnight previously, when they lost to Norwich as a result of rank bad play. On Saturday, they really performed very creditably, and were unlucky to lose.

In the first half Luton were slightly the superior team, although two or three of the players suffered badly from the very vigorous tactics of their opponents. They also began the second half extremely well, and when Brown was robbed of a certain goal by Bulcock's illegitimate effort, it only needed the conversion of the penalty to give Luton the additional spur to ensure success. Unluckily, the captain failed badly with the kick, and it was not altogether surprising, for he had seemed far from his usual sprightly self all the afternoon.

Even with this failure Luton seemed well able to make a draw, at any rate, but the spirit of mischief induced Wightman to give away a penalty when no particular danger threatened, and with this the Palace made victory secure. Perhaps it was a wonder that they did not add to their score subsequently, for Wightman, with feathers a little ruffled, is nothing like so safe as the usual Wightman, and the visitors several times seemed likely to turn opportunities to account.

Luton were early in settling down, and in the first minute of the game the right wing became prominent, Bulcock having to concede a corner as the result of some clever work on the part of Brown. The kick was well placed, and Fred Hawkes looked as if he was going to repeat the previous Saturday's performance, but the ball travelled just wide. The Palace failed to relieve effectively, and Brown again obtaining possession, made a good run along the wing, which was only frustrated by Bulcock resorting to a foul. The free kick was of little or no avail, but some good work on the Luton left wing took the ball towards the Palace goal again. This time, however, the defence was easily able to cope with matters, and the attack was repulsed.

The clearance afforded Garrett, the Palace right winger, an opportunity of showing his prowess. This he did in excellent style, and, beating Ashton with comparative ease, he sent in a shot which, had it beaten Naisby, would not have disgraced him. The custodian, however, saved in brilliant fashion, and the Palace's attack fell off in response to the persistence with which they were met and repulsed by the Luton defence. The home forwards were not slow in pressing home the advantage thus afforded, and with a cleverly worked movement, the ball was hurried into the vicinity of the Palace citadel, where Lashbrooke sent in a fine high drive which missed by inches only. In a further attack, the attitude adopted by Johnson, the goalkeeper, in taking Stephenson off the ball, met with general disapproval. Much indignation was expressed by the crowd, and there were loud demands for due punishment to be inflicted, but the referee apparently had not seen the incident, and permitted the game to proceed. It was some time, however, before Johnson was allowed by the spectators to forget the matter.

Luton continued to fully maintain their superiority, and the Palace defence was subject to a very harassing time. Eventually breaking through, however, Garrett forced a corner, which availed nothing. Play was immediately transferred to the other end of the field, where Stephenson made an unpardonable miss. The three inside forwards had each in turn had a "pot" at goal, and the ball finally returned to Stephenson whilst he was standing only three yards out. But, to the disappointment of the crowd, who thought a goal was inevitable, he kicked very hard and sent the ball clean out of the ground.

The Palace then took up the running again, and in a tussle for the ball just outside the penalty area, Wightman was injured and had to be assisted to the side of the field, where he received attention from the trainer. He was not absent long, but the Palace, although slightly benefiting by his absence, from the point of view of play did not gain any material advantage, and towards the close of the half, play again turned in Luton's favour, and the Palace goal had a most remarkable escape. In saving a shot from Walker, Johnson measured his length, but then only succeeded in partially saving the shot, and the ball rolled out to Stephenson, who returned it with a lightning shot, but, striking the goalkeeper, the ball flew harmlessly over the bar. Immediately after the corner kick had been taken, half-time was called.

The second half, with the exception of the penalties, was without any exciting incident. Luton commenced just as strongly as they did in the previous half, and Lashbrooke sent a little wide with a good first-time shot. After the game had been in progress about fifteen minutes in this period, Luton were awarded a penalty. Brown, who, by the way, had changed places with Walker owing to the latter's injury, was presented with a good opening, and working his way in, he was about to shoot when he was fouled by one of the backs, who was following close upon his heels. Bob took upon himself the responsibility of the kick, and, to the surprise of everyone, he shot weakly and quite wide of the mark.

Luton, disheartened somewhat by the failure of their efforts, lacked the keenness which had previously marked them, and the Palace were soon again to the front. Naisby, however, played brilliantly, and saved in great style a shot from Hughes, which he tipped over the bar for a fruitless corner. But a minute or so later he was again called upon to save from the inside-right. It was about this point that Wightman conceded the penalty by which the Palace won the game. Finding the inside-left beating him, he brought him to the ground, and the referee promptly awarded the much-coveted kick, with which Woodhouse beat Naisby quite easily.

After this reverse play became less interesting, and although Luton greatly improved towards the close, their efforts, from point of goals, were of no avail, and the Palace somewhat luckily won by the only goal of the match.

Speaking of individual players, I am afraid it must be confessed that neither Stephenson nor Shepherd properly fills the bill at centre-forward. They are both triers, but their lack of experience is a very serious drawback. But Lashbrooke proved once again, as he proved last season, that he is much too good a man to be left out of the team, and he should either be experimented with at centre-forward, or else let Moody go there with Lashbrooke on his left.

Brown showed very good form on the right wing, and it was a pity that he had to change places with Walker in the second half, for he is more or less lost at inside. The left wing was not given too much to do, and this was rather a pity, as both Lashbrooke and Stansfield showed themselves well able to cope with the defence.

Bushell and Fred Hawkes rendered excellent service at half-back, but Bob played with a tired-out sort of look almost from the beginning—a very rare occurrence with him. For the most part Wightman played splendidly, and Ashton did very well, though in the early part of the game he was scarcely able to deal effectively with the rushes of Hewitt and Garrett. Naisby gave a capital display in goal, and two or three of his saves were very smart indeed.

The visitors proved themselves a well-balanced team, and in smartness and dash were certainly superior to Luton. They were a far cleverer lot than Norwich, and if they were lucky to win, they were yet better value for a victory than were the Canaries.

Luton seem unable to find a safe man for a penalty kick. Why not try Wightman? He has more practice in kicking a stationary ball than any other member of the team, and with a little preliminary private work in goal-kicking he might do well.

Queen's Park Rangers scored another success on Saturday, winning at Bristol by 2 goals to nil, and can thus still claim the honour of being the only undefeated League team in the country. Their goal record of 24 to 3 is also very remarkable. Watford suffered their first defeat since Sept 23rd, being beaten at Stoke by a goal to nil. Leyton and New Brompton still fared badly, the Londoners being beaten on their own ground to the tune of 4 goals to nil by Plymouth, and New Brompton being routed at Brighton by 7 goals to nil. Millwall lost at West Ham, scoring only one goal against two, and the other results were:—Coventry City 3, Reading 0; Northampton 2, Exeter 1; Swindon 2, Brentford 0; Norwich 0, Southampton 0.

For the match at West Ham next Saturday, the defence will probably be as usual—that is with Potts back in his customary place. Shepherd will partner Brown on the right wing, Moody, it is hoped will be able to turn out and take the centre-forward position, with Lashbrooke inside-left and Johnside outside. Even with all these alterations, I think the team will be such as to render a very good account of itself.

The Luton Reserves will entertain West Ham Reserves.

The gate last Saturday realised £126.