

LUTON SUSTAIN THEIR WORST AWAY DEFEAT AT WEST HAM.

Forwards Again Fail to Score.

Weakened as they were by the absence of Potts, Walker and Stansfield, very few expected Luton to bring points from West Ham. It had been contemplated Potts would have been so far recovered from his Millwall injury that he would be in his place, but on giving him a trial run it was found this would be out of the question. It is more than probable that even with all the forwards fit, some change would have been made in an endeavour to improve the front string, but handicapped by injuries the Directors had very little choice. Still, as matters eventually turned out, only Brown was in the same position as the original selected for the earlier games. Moody was forced into the centre-forward position to allow Lashbrooke to retain his place at inside-left, and Johnson figured in the Southern League side in his old place on the outside after a trial spin at Colchester on Thursday.

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West Ham were more fortunate, inasmuch as they were able to put out the identical team which beat Millwall the previous Saturday, and except for Piercey were considered absolutely at full strength. In any case two or three injuries do not have such disastrous effects upon the strength of their side as is the case with Luton, for they have no less than twenty-eight professionals on their books, as well as G. Webb, who regularly assists as an amateur, and consequently they have practically three full teams. After the record gate of the previous week the crowd was reported as a small one, but the takings were only a pound or two short of £250, and as Tottenham and Millwall were both playing at home, to say nothing of the extra draw at Park Royal, no doubt the Hammers' officials were satisfied.

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The teams were constituted as follows:—

Luton:—Naisby; Wightman and J. Ashton; F. Hawkes, Bushell and R. Hawkes; Brown, Shepherd, Moody, Lashbrooke and Johnson.

West Ham:—Hughes; Rothwell and Glover; Whiteman, Woodards and Randall; Ashton, Shea, G. Webb, Harrison and Morrison.

Referee, Mr. A. Hargreaves, Blackpool.

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Luton were first dangerous, Brown getting clear on the right and dropping a fine centre right across the field. It appeared for the moment that Hughes would be called upon to exert his powers, but Rothwell just managed to nip in and get the ball before either of the Luton players could reach it. For a time the home players did more attacking, and several corners were forced without effect, and then Luton were again on the war-path. A centre from Johnson was well met by Moody, but he could do no more than force a corner kick. This was well placed, but R. Hawkes, in attempting a hard drive from a return from the goal mouth, was just a trifle too high in his marksmanship.

The game continued to be keenly contested, but little combination was seen on either side. A slip on the part of the Luton backs let in Shea, who appeared certain to score, but he over-ran the ball, and Naisby was able to pick up and clear. The Hammers' centre-forward was observed to be limping rather badly, and he went off for a few minutes. When he returned he took up his position at outside-right, but he did not stay there for long and eventually resumed at centre.

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The referee did not please the crowd with several offside decisions against the locals, but invariably he was correct, although Webb in particular seemed very argumentative whenever he was pulled up. Naisby, who had been playing a fine game, almost let his side down when Wightman rather unexpectedly passed the ball back, but the Luton goalie managed to recover himself in time, and finally got the ball clear. Ten minutes before the interval the referee made one of his few mistakes and, unfortunately for Luton, it was a fatal one. The ball was put up the field to Webb, who was undoubtedly well offside at the time, but the referee allowed him to go on, and after a short sprint he netted from twenty yards' range. Just after this Mr Hargreaves fell into another error, which might have altered the whole state of the game. Brown was getting nicely away, and worked just inside the penalty area with the ball. He had beaten Glover for pace, and everything pointed to a dangerous attack on the home goal when Glover, who could not otherwise reach the ball, deliberately pulled it aside with his hands. Naturally an appeal was made for a penalty, but the referee would not agree, and the interval came with the score standing:—

West Ham 1, Luton 0.

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The light was very bad when the teams came out after the interval, and it was the general opinion the game would not finish, and honestly it was not fair to either goalkeeper in the final ten minutes to keep on with the game. As a matter of fact the referee did stop the play and consult both linesmen about seven minutes before the close, but he struggled on and eventually played the full regulation time.

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It was quickly manifest Luton were not going to give up without a determined effort, and they worried the home defence no end without actually forcing a goal. One centre from Johnson in particular travelling right along the carpet within a foot of the goal line, but somehow all the Luton forwards missed the ball when a simple touch would have meant a goal. Bob Hawkes made two grand attempts after beating his man, but each time the ball just missed the cross-bar. It must be confessed Luton were not shining as marksmen, and when Harrison netted the Hammers' second goal towards the end of the second half little hope could be entertained of saving the game. It was a somewhat lucky point, for the moment before Luton were right up in the home goal, and it was partly in consequence of this the goal came, for the halves had not got back into a defensive position and thus gave Harrison his opportunity.

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In the failing light it was quite impossible to see the ball unless it was lifted in the air, and one could only follow the game from the movements of the players. Quite five minutes before the close the reporters closed their note-books, as it was too dark to see in the Press seats, but Shea was observed to be making tracks towards goal, and then a shout from that end of the field told us the Hammers were another goal up. After

this it was only a wait for the final whistle which came with Luton beaten pointless rather unluckily. Final score:—

WEST HAM 3, LUTON 0.

COMMENTS ON THE PLAY AND PLAYERS.

The final score was not expected at any point of the game up to the actual scoring of the third goal. Indeed, for quite twenty-five minutes of the second half appearances pointed to Luton getting one point at least. Then Harrison's goal came and dashed those hopes. The home officials were willing to admit quite frankly the actual score did not represent the play, and also that the opening goal was a rank offsider, but this does not help matters in the records, and Luton suffered their worst defeat of the present season.

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Naisby on the whole did well, but neither Wightman nor Ashton were too certain in their kicking at close quarters, and Potts was undoubtedly missed. The Luton halves were in good form, with R. Hawkes as the most dangerous in attack.

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The front string as constituted on Saturday was not altogether a failure except for the all-important matter of being unable to force home midfield advantages. Moody proved the best centre the club have had up-to-date, and until Stansfield is able to resume should be persevered with. Lashbrooke was scarcely as effective as the previous week, and although Johnson did not get many passes from his partner he put across several good centres which should have been improved upon. Shepherd was not seen a great deal when pressure was put on the home goal, while Brown did fairly well on the whole.

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West Ham on Saturday's form cannot claim to be a brilliant combination, but as individuals their three inside forwards must always be marked dangerous. Harrison is getting something of a veteran, and many supporters of the Hammers consider Butcher the better man, but the old Southampton centre manages to get what turn out to be important goals which turn the tide at a critical stage of the game, and consequently keeps his place. In defence, Hughes did all he had to do in convincing style, and looks likely to earn a reputation as one of the leading goalkeepers in the League. He has solved a problem which was troubling the Hammers since Kitchen left them at the close of last season. By the way, Kitchen was present at the match on Saturday, and in consequence rumours went round the ground that he was likely to again come to terms, but this was not confirmed by the officials.