

Southern League.

SWINDON v. LUTON.

Played at Swindon on Saturday. Result:—

Swindon	4 goals.
Luton	2 goals.

The players lined up as under:—

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

Swindon—Skinner; Kay and Walker; Tout, Bannister, and Silto; Bolland, Fleming, Wheatcroft, Brown, and Lamb.

Referee, Mr. W. Chadwick (Blackburn).

Luton have not won at Swindon for the last six seasons, and therefore little hope of victory could be entertained on Saturday, judging by this season's results. Still the players, at any rate, went into Wiltshire determined to put up a big fight for the honours, and but for some very faulty refereeing they felt after the match they fully deserved much more than they actually obtained. No change was made in the team which fell before Plymouth Argyle, and Swindon were quite at full strength bar Jefferson, in whose place Bolland appeared. It was Bannister's first appearance for three weeks, but naturally he wanted to play in his own benefit match. The actual cash taken at the gate was a little over £80, but there must have been a £200 gate, and with tickets and subscriptions he is expected to net £250, which is quite a large amount for Southern League players.

Bob won the toss, and with a fair breeze on of course took advantage of its assistance. In the opening stages Fleming got clean away, but Naisby ran out and booted the ball clear before Fleming could get in his final shot. After one or two attacks of this character, Luton got away through the efforts of Stansfield, who had a tussle with Tout on the goal-line, the ball eventually going over from the Swindon half-back, and Stansfield claimed for a corner. The referee, however, awarded a goal kick, and thus commenced badly for Luton, who right through the game felt they had cause for complaint against the decisions of the presiding official. Having now found their feet, Luton were, to the surprise of the crowd, mainly the attacking party, Bob Hawkes in particular doing his utmost to keep his forwards at work. He made one brilliant dribble after robbing Fleming, but his pass to Johnson came to nothing on account of the Luton centre being given offside.

Keeping up the pressure, Walker tried a long shot, getting the ball from Moody, but the leather went just over the bar. Still the effort was a really good one and deserved to score. A minute later Brown, who had considerable difficulty in shaking off the attentions of Walker (Swindon), eventually broke clear, and had the misfortune to strike the crossbar on the far corner with Skinner absolutely helpless to prevent a goal, being at the other side of his charge. Bob Hawkes on one occasion was going through when Bolland badly tripped him, and Bob himself taking the resulting free kick, sent in a hard drive, but Walker intervened and got the ball clear. Moody next had a try and his shot from twenty yards' range grazed the crossbar in its flight.

Brown sending across a good centre which Stansfield fastened on to in fine style and promptly returned into midfield, a goal was only averted through a barefaced punch by Walker, the home lot back. This was so apparent a penalty that how the referee missed it was remarkable. Certainly the majority of the crowd saw the incident, and congratulated themselves on their team's good fortune in escaping the legal consequences.

The game was just half an hour old when an attack upon the Swindon goal culminated in Walker (Swindon) elbowing his namesake right in the goal-mouth, and the referee gave his award in favour of Luton, with the result that

Bob Hawkes took upon himself the task of converting the penalty kick. The Luton captain sent in a swift drive towards the left side of Skinner which appeared to be beating him all the way, but the home custodian just managed to knock it down and finally clear his lines. This caused the spectators to set up a round of applause, in which, of course, relief was a prominent feature.

However, after putting in a lot of good work without result, Luton at last met with their reward, Johnson netting with a good shot after dashing clear of the backs as the ball came across from Stansfield. This success came about ten minutes before the interval, and the Luton centre almost repeated his effort immediately afterwards, but Brown got offside and spoilt the opening. The spectators, naturally, did not at all appreciate the way things were going, and shouted to the local players to buck up. Just on the interval much excitement was caused when Fleming, in attempting to break through, fell just inside the penalty area. It is true Potts was in close attendance, but, like the referee, I failed to observe any foul, but the crowd were decidedly of another opinion, and they roundly hooted Mr. Chadwick for failing to award a penalty kick.

Just on half-time Swindon secured a couple of corners, and in the tussle in the goal-mouth which resulted from the final one, Johnson was badly kicked on the side by Bannister. Apparently no Luton player but Naisby saw the mishap, for they trooped off the field when the whistle went, and left it to Tommy to pick up his comrade and carry him unaided to the dressing-room. At first it was thought Johnson was clean knocked out for the rest of the game, but after some attention from Lawson and a local doctor, he came round, and took up his position on the re-start. Very few of the spectators saw the incident, being taken up with the matter of booing the referee, and probably this was the reason so little notice was taken of Johnson lying on the ground, for there was quite a demonstration of protest as the referee came off the ground with the players, although taking the game through even up to this point Luton had certainly more cause for complaint.

Re-starting, Luton got down via Johnson, Walker, and Brown, and Skinner had to save a splendid cross shot from Stansfield, whilst Walker almost netted a minute later with a finely-judged attempt, and it really appeared that Luton were in for a sensational victory, when the fortunes of the game underwent a sudden change, and inside seven minutes from the re-start Luton were actually two goals behind. The first goal will always be a source of complaint against the referee on the part of the Luton players, who will never be convinced that the ball actually passed over the line, while the second, which came a minute afterwards, was almost as bad, for Fleming was well offside when he shot in. But for these decisions it is probable there would never have been a third, for the Luton players were very much upset at the awarding of the two goals in question, and this naturally affected their play, whilst it at the same time put a deal of heart into the efforts of the home players.

But to come to details. The equalising goal came as a result of a corner kick which was in the first instance cleared, but it was not really got away, and Lamb pouncing on a return from the goal-mouth, sent in a curling centre, which Naisby, in attempting to push over the top, only managed to hit against the under side of the bar, and the ball bounced down sharply to the ground. Wightman dashed back and kicked the leather right down the field, and it appeared the situation was retrieved, when it was observed that the referee was pointing to the centre of the field. He was at once surrounded by the Luton players in strong protest, but notwithstanding he made his way to the centre. The ball was left near the goal, and it was quite a couple of minutes before the game was resumed, for Naisby, among others, was keeping the referee company in midfield and he had to return to kick the ball into the centre.

The second goal was brought about by a centre rush by Wheatcroft, with Fleming in attendance. Naisby, finding both these players clean through, dashed out to force a shot from the centre-forward, who, however, passed the ball to Fleming, and the latter sent through the open goal. As Fleming had no one but Naisby in front of him when Wheatcroft put the ball forward to him, it is apparent the goal should not have been allowed, but the referee was of a different opinion, and Luton were a goal down. Before the visitors recovered themselves, Bown netted a third goal for his side with a well-judged cross shot, and therefore the team which, except for the five minutes which brought these three goals, had been playing the better game, were actually forced to play an uphill battle.

It was felt the task would prove too much for them, especially when, midway in the second half, Wheatcroft netted still another goal in a rather remarkable manner, the ball striking both Naisby and the upright in its passage into the net. The margin was reduced some ten minutes later by Walker, who converted a centre from Brown, who brought the ball back when it appeared certain to go for a goal kick from a shot by Fred Hawkes. The movement came really through an individual burst through on the part of Fred Hawkes, but his work appeared to be quite thrown away by his final shot until Brown just prevented it travelling out, and then putting in a nice centre, which Johnson first met and then transferred the ball to Walker, who scored. Just on time Luton almost reduced the margin to the smallest dimensions with a determined attack which ended with a couple of corners, but neither was turned to account.

It is a pity there is not some tangible reward for such a clever exhibition as that given by Luton on Saturday. It is true they get considerable credit for their performance, but unfortunately it does not help them on the League table. It is certain the single goal lead at the interval was not a just reward for their magnificent display against what is recognised as the finest team in the Southern League, while it is also fairly certain that if they had enjoyed a three-goal lead at this stage, as with ordinary luck they should have done, it would have gone far to actually winning the game.

In the first half it was difficult to imagine that Swindon possessed the most dangerous attack in the competition, for Luton were the superior five, and looked all over easy winners. Everyone on the side was out for a win, and but for a big share of bad luck and the worse of the referee's decisions, must have set up a winning advantage. Naisby had comparatively little to do, so well did Wightman and Potts defend. On the day's play, Wightman was the better of the two, but his partner played by no means badly for all that. In the middle line Bob Hawkes once more proved himself one of the cleverest half-backs in the country, and the Swindon officials were generous in their praises of his display. Fred Hawkes was also very much in evidence in defence, whilst Bushell on the whole shone more in attack. The forward line was ably led by Johnson, who is certainly the best centre Luton have at their disposal on current form. Indeed, in every department, with equal luck, Luton would compare favourably with their opponents, and yet they lost.

It must not be concluded Swindon played badly, and Skinner kept a magnificent goal, Kay was the better of the backs, and Bannister the weakest of the middle division. The most danger on Saturday came from Lamb and Bown; possibly Fleming missed his usual partner, although Bolland is a regular flier and takes a lot of catching. Wheatcroft in the centre does a lot of useful work, but is scarcely up to the standard of his wing comrades.

No Southern League visiting team was victorious on Saturday. Plymouth drew at Reading (one goal all), and Crystal Palace at New Brompton, the scores being the same, while three matches did not yield a solitary goal, viz., Bristol Rovers