

Southern League.

READING v. LUTON.

Played at Reading on Saturday. Result :—

Luton 1 goal.

Reading 1 goal.

The teams were as follow :—

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

Reading—Caldwell; Smith and Bartholomew; H. P. Slatter, E. Hanney, and Bradley; Lee, W. G. Bailey, Foster, Andrews, and Greer.

Referee, Mr. R. Horrocks (Bolton).

Reading and Luton did not meet in the Southern League last season, so that no comparison can be made as to whether the teams have advanced or otherwise. But in the year that Reading went down, Luton managed to win at Reading by a very doubtful goal, so that on that comparison Luton lose a point. But if it is true that on the former occasion fortune favoured Luton, it is much more true that Reading were the favoured party this journey. If the result had come over the wires last Saturday evening—Luton 3, Reading 0, it might have caused some sensation, but, in the opinion of the Luton players it would nevertheless have been the proper one, and they would only have enjoyed their real deserts, for it was openly admitted they were the better team, and, as indicated, they claim that they actually won the game.

The weather was by no means inviting when the teams turned out, and the match was played to a £59 gate. Luton winning the toss, appeared to start with a decided advantage. But, curiously enough, it was during the first ten minutes that Reading were seen at their best. If they had secured a lead at this stage, then it might have been a different tale, but they were held at bay, and Naisby was not beaten. Two or three corners were forced by Reading, but either the placing was bad or the shooting was wild, and Naisby had very little real anxiety.

Indeed, the first real likely shot was put in at the opposite end from the foot of Bob Hawkes, and Caldwell was heartily cheered for his fine clearance. After the opening stages, Luton's attack smartened up considerably, and were ever afterwards the more dangerous line. Johnson getting the ball from Stansfield, neatly headed the ball into the net, but to the surprise of even some local officials the referee considered him offside and no score resulted. Still the Lutonians were not dismayed, and set about their task again in such earnest that it seemed only a question of time before they would take a commanding lead.

Then the unexpected happened, for a centre from one of the Reading men struck Bob Hawkes' arm, and the Luton captain is quite positive he made no effort to stop the ball. On the line, however, one of the flag-holders furiously waved his flag, and apparently convinced the referee that Bob must have deliberately handled, and the fatal ruling was given. The kick was entrusted to Bartholomew, and with a sharp drive he placed the ball in the net, Naisby just touching it without being able to stop its flight.

Soon after this incident a long kick down the field found Lee in possession of the ball, but before he could take aim, the referee had whistled for offside, and Naisby made no effort to stop the ball entering the net. Then Luton got away again, and a fine centre from Stansfield was taken by Moody, who dodged the backs and placed the ball in the net, only to find himself given offside. As a matter of fact, it appeared to be a very fine goal, and even the Reading supporters were willing to admit at half-time that Luton had been very hardly used, to be a goal behind after playing such a fine game.

Before the interval the home goal had a marvellous escape when Caldwell came out to meet a combined onslaught by the whole Luton front string and missed the ball altogether, only to find Smith had dropped behind and just succeeded in clearing what seemed a certain goal. Again, Caldwell, in fielding a sharp drive from Brown, was almost bundled through his own goal with the ball in his arms, but the referee eventually awarded a free kick to Reading for some offence that was not apparent from the ropes.

When the players turned out for the second half the rain had stopped, but the wind was still in evidence, and the local crowd were anxious to see if this would help the home players to take a bigger share of the game. For a minute or so it appeared likely this would be the case, and Naisby had to pick the ball up once or twice, but in neither case was there any sting in the shot, and it always seemed an easy matter to save. The best effort at this stage came from Foster, who, snapping up a centre from Lee, placed the ball a foot or so over the bar. From a free kick against Luton, Foster did get the ball into the net, but he was obviously offside, and the crowd were not prone to criticise this decision, so we may rest assured it was no goal. This, however, proved to be the fourth time during the match that goals were struck off on account of the referee thinking the scorer was offside, which is quite a remarkable number for a single game.

Towards the close the players were inclined to get out of hand, and when Hanney was injured, the spectators were rather demonstrative. But the Reading player quickly resumed, although he did not appear quite himself afterwards, and this threw more work upon the back division, for Luton were still all out for a win if possible, and were giving no quarter. At last this determined play had its result, for Brown, shaking off the attentions of Bartholomew, got clear away, and planting the ball nicely in the centre to Johnson, the last-mentioned player turned it neatly into the net clear of Caldwell, who was helpless in the matter.

Having now brought matters level, the exchanges became even more lively than before, and many minor injuries came about, but the only serious one was sustained by Potts, who had to be carried to the touch-line in a state of collapse. Bailey made one fine effort from an acute angle, but just failed, and Caldwell at the other end of the field had two or three shots to stop. Most of the play, however, took place in midfield, the defence on both sides managing to hold in check the now desperate forwards, and the final whistle found matters level officially.

There was no comparison between the two lines of forwards, for as a combination Luton were streets in front of their opponents, and this is true both so far as midfield work was concerned and actual shooting for goal. The Luton front string were well balanced, and neither wing could claim superiority over the other, while Johnson is settling down well in the centre. At half-back also Luton played much better football than the home trio, who were overworked by the brilliant methods of the Luton attacking brigade, and in consequence were not able to back up their own forwards in the same way as R. Hawkes and his comrades. Naisby had comparatively little to do in goal, which fact, of course, reflects credit upon Wightman and Potts.

The best part of the Reading team on Saturday was their defence; and in Smith they probably possessed the finest player on the field. Caldwell, however, did well, and Bartholomew, if not so brilliant as his partner, played a stubborn game and never gave up. The attack was mainly carried on by Lee and Foster, for Bailey was little seen, while the left-wing pair were decidedly weak. Indeed, on Saturday's form, it is difficult to understand Reading's unbeaten home record, and they have played no fewer than ten games at home, against seven at Luton. But from this stage Luton will be having a larger proportion of home matches, and should now take a few steps up the ladder.