

Southern League.

LUTON v. EXETER CITY.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—

Luton	4 goals.
Exeter City.....	2 goals.

The teams were as follow:—

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

Exeter—Whittaker Fort and Evans; Rigby, Bassett, and Prideaux; Parnell, Lockett, Watson, Cornan, and Garside.

Referee, Mr. F. G. A. Sharpe (Lichfield).

Things always fall a bit flat after the Cup-tie—that is, for the clubs which get knocked out—and therefore it was not surprising to see only some four thousand spectators at the Luton match on Saturday. The weather during the afternoon was quite fine, but the persistent rain previously had made the ground very, very soft, and before the game had been long in progress many of the players were in such a state as to remind one of Kipling's "muddied oafs."

Speaking generally, the match was not regarded as of much consequence, but to the clubs engaged it was a very important one indeed, for only a point separated the two, and they occupied the unenviable positions of third and fourth from the bottom. Luton were lucky enough to win—I use the word lucky advisedly—and their victory lifted them above Southampton, who lost to Bristol Rovers, so that they are now better off in that respect than they have been at any time since the opening of the season.

On the run of the play in the first half, the question of luck could not have been associated with Luton's success. With the wind behind them, they simply monopolised the play and ought to have scored many more than two goals. But, alas, as so often before, while they worked desperately hard, they showed very little judgment, indulged in tricky work and short passes when the state of the pitch rendered such play absolutely ineffective, and took the ball down to goal again and again, only to make a mess of it at the finish.

Of course, they had some hard luck—they were bound to have—such as when Walker headed the ball against the crossbar, but with a more open game they should have placed half-a-dozen goals to their credit instead of only two. Not a single success attended any one of the attacks made in close formation, for both the goals registered in this half came from long centres by Brown, headed through by Moody.

A few weeks since, Luton had a remarkable lesson in the effectiveness of open play, when, with only four forwards, they ran through one of the best defences in the Southern League—that of Northampton, and put up two goals against them in double-quick time. They had yet another lesson on Saturday. Exeter, whose five forwards had been been unable to make the slightest progress in the first half, had only four forwards after the interval, Parnell being unable to turn out owing to an old strain having re-asserted itself.

With their four forwards, Exeter simply reduced Luton to impotence. For half-an-hour Luton were penned in, and their attempts to break away, chiefly by close-passing tactics, were ludicrously inept. Of course, I know that Exeter had some assistance from the wind, but not nearly enough to account for the change which came over the play.

When the visitors scored their first goal, it was hoped it would give the needed stimulant to the home side, and when they scored the second, it looked as though Luton were in for another defeat. Then it was that the element of luck came in. Luton had a free kick, and this broke the spell. It enabled them to get away; Brown scored and with another soon added, the victory was won. But it might have been a disastrous loss.

The experience surely should cause the Luton players to ask themselves whether the open game, generally speaking, would not serve them infinitely better than tickling the ball about and working for dead certs. With a smart run and a good centre, taken first time, more ground is made than by any amount of close work, whilst it also has this advantage—that the centre finds the opponents unprepared, whereas the close attack allows the defence to concentrate.

In this connection, it may be said that Brown played one of his best games this season. He frequently centred on the run, put the ball where it was wanted—that is, not in the goalkeeper's hands, but where it gave the inside forwards a chance of getting at it. That is very much better than showy shots at goal, and a centre taken promptly is worth half-a-dozen delayed until the opposing halves have had time to go to the assistance of the backs.

Now for a few details of the game. "Bob" Hawkes won the toss, and Luton took advantage of a fairly strong wind. The Exeter forwards in the first minute of the game made a somewhat weak attack on the Luton goal, and the backs had no difficulty in frustrating the effort. The Luton forwards then got away, and following some close play in front of the goal, Fred Hawkes obtained possession and sent in a really brilliant shot, the ball just gliding over the bar. Luton almost immediately forced a corner, and Walker sent in a header which struck the bar.

The Exeter men made an ineffectual attempt to relieve matters, but Luton came along and Brown finished a fine run on the wing by sending in a beautiful centre, from which Moody headed the ball into the net past Whittaker. Luton continued to have matters almost their own way, and it was but a few minutes after the success of Moody that Walker sent in a shot which Whittaker only just managed to get to. Stansfield then came along, but when he had the goal almost at his mercy he shot weakly behind.

For a minute or so afterwards the Exeter men were pressing, and a shot from the left wing brought Naisby out of his citadel, but the goalie was successful and cleared the situation. Play quickly being transferred to the other end, Streeton had hard luck with a good shot. Luton were not long in increasing their lead, and this time the success came as the result of another clever run on the wing by Brown, whose centre was again taken by Moody and headed into the net.

Towards the interval, the visiting forwards got away, but a centre from the right wing was effectively cleared by Potts, who kicked well away, and at half-time Luton were leading by 2 goals to nil.

Upon the teams turning out again, it was found that Parnell was missing, and it transpired that an old injury had re-asserted itself, and he would not be able to resume. Despite the seeming disadvantage, the visiting forwards played up remarkably well, and before many minutes had elapsed they had reduced Luton's lead, the goal being scored by Lockett, following a well-combined attack on the Luton goal. The Luton team were making the mistake of adopting the close inside passing game, with the result that

practically all their attempts to make headway, were easily frustrated by the opposing defence, and it was not long before the City scored an equalising goal, Garside succeeding with a cross shot from the right wing. For some time afterwards, it appeared that Luton were going to suffer defeat, and they probably would have done had the game not been opened for them by a free kick. It was only in the last ten minutes of the game that Luton won, and then they scored two goals in quick succession. Their first was obtained by Brown, who followed up a free kick taken by Wightman, and beat Whittaker with a good shot. Almost on time the right winger got away again, and it was from one of his many clever centres that Streeton scored, the centre getting his head to the ball and turning it past the custodian into the net. The game thus ended in a win for the local team by four goals to two.

Only one home team was beaten in the Southern League matches on Saturday, and that was West Ham, who were unable to reply to two goals scored by Plymouth Argyle. Watford did well to make a draw at Park Royal, where they shared a couple of goals with the Rangers, though the visitors' equalising goal only came in the last minute. The other results were: Millwall 3, Reading 0; Swindon 2, Crystal Palace 1; Bristol Rovers 2, Southampton 0; Northampton 1, Norwich City 0; Brighton 4, Leyton 0; Stoke 3, Coventry City 1; Brentford 7, New Brompton 1.

The following is the League table:—

					Goals		PTS
	P	W	L	D	A		
Swindon.....	23	17	4	2	63	29	36
Queen's Park Rangers	22	14	4	4	89	19	32
Northampton.....	22	12	4	6	45	25	30
Plymouth Argyle.....	22	12	5	5	36	18	29
Crystal Palace.....	20	10	5	5	45	20	25
Millwall.....	22	9	6	7	41	30	25
Brighton and Hove.....	22	9	8	5	44	24	23
Watford.....	21	7	6	8	31	32	22
Bristol Rovers.....	21	7	6	8	22	26	22
Coventry City.....	22	10	10	2	39	33	22
Reading.....	22	7	7	8	23	26	22
Norwich City.....	22	8	10	4	22	36	20
West Ham.....	21	7	9	5	35	37	19
Brentford.....	22	7	10	5	37	44	19
Stoke.....	20	7	9	4	24	37	18
Luton.....	21	5	9	7	26	33	17
Souhampton.....	23	5	11	7	27	41	17
Exeter City.....	22	4	12	6	29	45	14
New Brompton.....	21	3	13	5	13	52	11
Leyton.....	21	2	14	5	13	46	9

Several of the Luton players were injured on Saturday, Stansfield being the worst sufferer. He wrenched his knee and received a nasty kick as well, so that he will be unable to go to Coventry. His place will be taken by Stephenson. Bob Hawkes and Naisby also sustained strains, but it is hoped they will be able to turn out this week.

Saturday's receipts amounted to only £73, being the smallest Southern League gate for three seasons.

Luton are due at Coventry on Saturday, and if they could only secure a victory there it might possibly give them another lift in the League table. At any rate, a win away from home just now would do the Club a lot of good.

The Reserves will be at home on Saturday to Coventry City Reserves, but prior to their match the game between Luton and Northampton school-boys in the English Schools Shield Competition will be played. The kick-off for the boys is at 1.45, and 35 minutes each way will be played. Sixpence admission will include both matches, but for the Reserves' match alone the charge will be as usual.