

ANOTHER UNLUCKY DEFEAT.

Last Five Minutes Fatal at Southampton.

Both Teams Complain of Unsatisfactory Refereeing.

The result at Southampton was bound to have an important bearing on the question of relegation, and therefore the inability of Bushell to take his usual position placed the local directors in a very serious difficulty, for with the unfortunate accident to Johnson they have not an experienced player to fill either of the half-back positions. It is pretty certain B. Rayment would have merited an early trial, from his recent displays in the reserve side, but he also is unfortunately unavailable through the serious injury he sustained at Bedford last Thursday. When Bushell was injured at Stoke, his place was filled by Moody dropping into the middle line, as he has done once or twice under similar circumstances, and so well did he fall into the place that but for the fact that it would have seriously weakened the front rank he would have figured at centre-half at Southampton. It was ultimately decided to let the forward line remain as last week, and bring in H. Clarke, of the Reserves.

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It was advertised that the Southampton directors had decided to play the entire reserve forward line, and leave out all the recognised first teamers, and to a certain extent this policy was carried out. One or two of those who figured in the line, however, must have played in any case for two of the first team forwards had already left the town after suspension. As a matter of fact, the five players who turned out against Luton had each previously assisted the Southern League team, and two of them have been pretty regular players, so that the experiment was scarcely so drastic as it appeared on paper. Still, the local officials were very anxious, and expressed themselves as quite resigned to their fate if this move failed to bring victory on Saturday. At the last minute a change was made in the defence. Robertson was unable to turn out, and Ireland, who had played several games earlier in the season, deputised. The weather was very bad all the morning, but cleared up for the match, and quite a respectable crowd turned up, although, of course, the pitch itself was in a terribly soft state.

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The teams were as follow:—

Luton. — Naisby; Wightman and Potts; F. Hawkes, H. Clarke and R. Hawkes; Brown, Streeton, Walden, Moody, and Stephenson.

Southampton.—Knight; Eastham and Ireland;

Denby, Lee and McAlpine; Kimpton, Small,

Christmas, Prince and Blake.

Referee: Mr. R. R. Hall, Birmingham.

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The opening stages went in favour of the Saints, and Small at once got through and tried a shot, which Potts cleared. Then Kimpton got nicely away, and, centring the ball, Christmas neatly tipped it on to Blake, who had worked in within three yards of the goal. It appeared as though a goal was pretty certain when the Saints' winger met the ball with his head, but, fortunately for Luton, he was not able to turn it through. It was a question of inches only, and many at the opposite end of the ground quite thought it was a goal and cheered loudly. For a time Naisby had quite a lot to do, and if the Saints' inside forwards had kept their heads they might have opened the score quite early in the game. Two or three corners were given, but the Luton defence stood its ground, and none of these were really dangerous. But it was quite another matter following a fine run and centre by Blake, for Small headed the ball just over the bar, with Naisby helpless if it had been a trifle lower in range.

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After a time Luton did much better, and their forward work was altogether neater than the wild rushes which the home players had attempted. Brown and Streeton developed a nice understanding, and they were well on top of their opponents for several minutes. The ball was invariably placed well in front with the final centre, and with ordinary luck one or two goals should have been secured. Somehow the ball ran unkindly at the critical moment, and it struck one of the defenders in its flight, and was muddled away rather than cleared. Bob Hawkes had hard lines with one pot shot following a return from the goal mouth, the ball passing just over. The Luton goal had rather a lucky escape through Naisby, in taking a goal kick, sending the ball direct to Christmas. But evidently the latter was taken by surprise, and he made a poor attempt.

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Whenever the Saints did threaten danger, the movement without exception was started by Kimpton, whose wing work was very fine, and Potts was often a trouble, although he stuck well to his post, and several times charged down very promising centres. Streeton on one occasion got very near, and pushed Knight out of his goal, and it appeared likely a goal was coming, but

Ireland fell back and just managed to turn the ball for a corner kick. This Stephenson placed well, and Fred Hawkes just missed the goal, following the punt out from Knight. Half-an-hour from the start disaster came to Luton, and most undeserved it was, for without the slightest doubt the goal allowed was a rank bad one. In the first place, Kimpton, when he got the ball, was well offside, but he was allowed to centre. Christmas, being behind Kimpton, was, of course, all right, but Prince was standing quite clear with only one Luton player nearer the goal line than himself, and that was Naisby, when Christmas pushed the ball up to him. Although Prince automatically shot it through, no one was prepared to find that the referee would allow it to count. But to the surprise of the Southampton officials, a goal it was. As showing how impossible a decision it was, it may be mentioned that one of their directors said, "Well, bad as we want to win, I cannot clap my hands at such an awful decision."

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Although the Saints were thus actually leading at this stage, Luton were much the superior team, and before half-time Brown succeeded in getting across what proved to be the equalising goal, although it was actually a pass from Moody which gave Stephenson the opportunity to score. The final shot was a clever drive quite clear of Knight into the far corner of the net. Certain of the home supporters questioned the legitimacy of the point, and were prepared to argue that it was "tit for tat," but the difference was that Stephenson was behind the ball when it was passed to him, and his speed made the opening, while in the previous case Prince was always well in front of Christmas, and simply waited for the pass.

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Both goals had some narrow escapes before the change of ends, but so far as mid-field work was concerned Luton always held the advantage. The game became a bit rough, and once Potts and McAlpine were laid out together, the referee awarding a foul against the Luton player just outside the penalty area, although it did not appear that one player was any more to blame than the other. Fortunately, the free kick came to nothing. Knight was extremely lucky two or three times when he left his charge in reaching the ball, and when he lost it in one of these excursions well out of his area, it appeared certain his charge would fall, but the ball was placed a trifle wide for a goal kick. Interval score:—

Luton 1, Southampton 1.

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The second half had a sensational opening, for on the first run down Walden netted in the simplest manner. Stephenson had made the initial run down the wing, and swung the ball over to Brown. He promptly returned it into the centre, and it came to Walden within a few feet of the goal, and he had simply to touch it through. At least three Southampton players, who were right in the mouth of the goal, looked on without being able to prevent the Luton centre scoring, although all of them were within a yard or so of the ball, and could almost have got to it with one stride. Having taken the lead for the first time during the match, Luton appeared to have the game well in hand, for the forward work of the home club had been far from impressive, and the crowd quite anticipated another defeat, but somehow Luton developed their old failing in front of goal.

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Then a corner kick led up to the Saints equalising, although the ball crossed the goal mouth two or three times before Prince headed it into the net. There was still twenty-five minutes to go, and even then Luton should have secured both points. Very soon they were on the attack, again without being able to engineer a real opening until twelve minutes off the finish. Brown, at this stage, got across a fine centre, and with all the inside players well up a goal appeared the most likely event, but neither of the inside forwards took advantage. It passed over to Stephenson, who also had worked himself into a position in the goal mouth, and he had simply to touch it through to put his side ahead, but in a most unaccountable manner he put it over the bar with a tremendous kick. It was, next to Walden's goal, the easiest chance of the match, and would undoubtedly have brought victory with its accomplishment.

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Five minutes off time the spectators were driven almost frantic with delight by a winning goal falling to the Saints. On the run of the play in the second half, nothing looked more unlikely, and they were congratulating themselves on making a draw, when Kimpton, getting the ball almost on the touch line, just managed to prevent it going out of play and put it across. A tussle just under the bar finished with the ball going out to Blake, who shot low towards the corner, the ball actually striking the far upright and rebounding into the net. It was a very unlucky finish for Luton, but, of course, a delightful change for the Saints, who had not won a match for three months. There was just one chance for Luton, following a centre by Brown, but Stephenson, although he made a decent attempt, just failed to score. On time, an even more unlucky incident happened, when the referee made what was probably his worst mistake of the match, by giving Streeton offside just as he was settling down to take a clear shot at goal. It is true there was no one but the goalkeeper in his actual line of fire at the target, but both backs were yards nearer the goal line than the Luton player, and how any referee could make such a terrible blunder is beyond comprehension. Result:—

Luton 2, Southampton 3.