

SOUTHEND'S STIRRING STRUGGLE.

**Luton Score Six Goals out of
Seven.**

BUT ONLY WIN BY THE ODD GOAL.

Fred Hawkes' Unhappy Afternoon.

Great things were expected from Southend United's visit to Luton on Saturday afternoon, but even greater things were realized than were ever expected. The trend of events in the Second Division of the Southern League has pointed unmistakably to Southend proving one of, if not the most dangerous of Luton's rivals in the race for promotion, and the meetings of the two teams in the Southern Alliance in the first week of the season produced results so hopelessly contradictory that they served to heighten the interest in what everyone recognised as a very critical match for Luton. The keenness with which the contest was regarded at Southend was demonstrated by the fact that something like five or six hundred supporters of the Seaside came to show their enthusiasm for and belief in their team, and no better evidence of local interest could be wanted than that the attendance was the largest there has been on the Town ground this season. All four sides of the ground were so thickly populated that one could be pardoned for regarding the official estimate of between six and seven thousand as hardly doing justice to the attendance, but the gate returns bore out this estimate. And the crowd was not merely large; it was unusually demonstrative. The presence of the Southend contingent with their blue and white favours, their rattles and their bells, their lusty shouts, and even their cornet soloist—so self-confident that at the interval he matched himself for a minute or two against the combined efforts of the Red Cross Band—served to arouse the Luton supporters to a sense of feeling that they also had a part to play in the struggle, with the result that the hour and a half was simply crammed with an enthusiasm we are not often accustomed to at Luton matches.

The air seemed charged with cup-tie electricity. It dominated the crowd from the first, and the players were not slow to catch the infection. The conditions were in every respect favourable to a fast game, and on this fact the players fastened with such readiness that the game proved not only one of the fastest but also one of the most thrilling and exhilarating that has been seen at Luton for many a day. It was essentially of the

up-tie order, and the run of the scoring gave the impetus needed to bring out the mettle of twenty-two players stamped with grim determination in their whole demeanour, and incidentally to make the game of such a ding-dong order that the spectators were kept at a regular fever pitch of excitement. What the game lacked in science it made up for in incidents, and they came so fast upon one another that the play hardly ever seemed free from thrills. It was certainly the most magnificent struggle I have had the pleasure of chronicling at Luton, and I am told one would have to go back several years to recall its equal.

To get from impressions to actual facts, it was a considerable source of satisfaction to Lutonians to know that their side, which lined up under Leut. W. C. Glover, of Leicester, was the strongest the club can at present command. Southend were similarly situated with the notable exception of Bradshaw, their playing manager, who had his knee cap kicked off in the match with Millwall on Wednesday. His place at inside left was filled by Curry, the new amateur from Bronze Athletic, who led the forward line in place of Frost in the mid-week match and scored a couple of goals. The visitors sported their new royal blue jerseys, and Luton, in consequence, took to their red jerseys, the full list of players being:—

Luton:—Abbott; Henderson and Potts; Fred Hawkes, Wilson, and Thompson; Wileman, Bob Hawkes, Stephenson, Streeton and Worth.

Southend:—Kebbell; Thomson and Spencer; Emery, Moon and J. Axcell; Wilson, Wileman, Frost, G. Curry, and Parke.

For the first incidents of the game I have to fall back on "information received," because I was one of probably two thousand who missed the sensational start, with its early disaster for Luton. Because of the dulness of the afternoon it was decided to push the kick-off five minutes or so forward, and this proved an exceedingly wise move, because, as it was, the last few minutes of the game were fought out in a semi-darkness which might have had an important bearing on the result of such a closely contested match, but still it had the effect of causing a long line of eager folks on their way to the ground to break into a breathless trot when they heard first one and then a second big shout. They arrived on the ground to learn the startling and disconcerting news that Luton were already one down. The astounding part of it was that Fred Hawkes was the scorer, but it was Abbott and not Kebbell he beat.

What actually happened, according to my information, is that Luton dashed away from the kick-off. Wileman received from Stephenson as a result of a misunderstanding between the backs and centred admirably, and Bob Hawkes sent a fine shot sailing only an inch or two over the bar. In the second minute Southend retaliated. Potts was pulled up for a foul, and the ball was sent out to the right wing. As the ball came across from Emery Henderson jumped to head away and missed it. Abbott, it seems, could have got to the ball before any of the opposition, but Fred Hawkes, with his usual knack, was even more handy, and he essayed to enact a part he so often plays in defence. Facing the goal he endeavoured to make matters safe by heading outside for a corner, but instead of this he had the mortification of seeing the ball trickle through the goal, with Abbott quite powerless to stop it.

It was a bad business for a team screwed up to the highest point of eagerness to meet with such a blow before they had had time to settle down, because it gave the visitors just the spice of encouragement that means so much in the early part of the game, and although Luton showed no signs of discouragement the optimism of the opposition wanted some breaking down. Both sets of forwards were exhibiting fast and clever movements, and though the defenders met them with such a stubborn resistance that the ball was bobbing up and down the field like a jack-in-the-box Southend were unquestionably the more dangerous. Wilson got across a centre which was accurately judged that it was only a matter of a second that stood between Parke and a certain goal—he got to it in such a position that he could only head on to the outside of the net. Then Curry tricked Fred Hawkes, and without giving the half time to recover drove in a grand rising shot, which Abbott brilliantly pushed over the

bar. Gradually, however, Luton improved, and though the Southend defence was as a rule very stolid, the game had not been going above ten minutes when they nearly paved the way for the downfall of their charge by a misunderstanding. The backs left a centre from Wileman to the goalkeeper, and the goalkeeper was not expecting it, and Streeton was only prevented by one of the backs from putting paid to it. Then from a free kick Potts sent Worth sailing through, and Kebbell saved a ground shot close against the post. Worth was off again in a moment or two, and once again the goalkeeper was misled by his backs. When he saw Thomson was taking the man and not the ball dashed across the goal and just got to Worth's centre in time to hit it on to the post and have the satisfaction of seeing it rebound outside.

In spite of these escapes, Southend lost their lead before the game had been in progress a quarter of an hour. The sudden change in the state of affairs seemed to be having a wavering effect on their defence, and during a close attack by the Luton inside forwards Moon handled so palpably that the referee instantly awarded a penalty. Thompson was called up to take it, and there were shouts of relief when he scored, because although he directed the ball on the goalkeeper's left, Kebbell managed to touch it. This touch was just what Luton wanted, and without once being able to break down their attack Southend found themselves in arrears five minutes later. Moon was proving costly to his side, for once more he gave the homesters a penalty, and this provided Thompson with the chance of registering his second goal in the Second Division. Before this penalty award Southend were distinctly fortunate—as a Southend Freeman by my side admitted—not to have had another given against them, because, on being cleverly sent through by the joint efforts of Thompson and Streeton, Worth centred so nicely out of the reach of the goalkeeper that Bob Hawkes must have scored if he had not been palpably fouled close against the post. It was again Bob Hawkes who was fouled when the referee gave the second penalty. Approaching from behind, Moon slid the Luton captain up under the very nose of the referee, and the offence was promptly whistled. It was only a yard and a half inside the penalty area, and the referee seemed a little dubious as to whether he would award the full penalty, or, as referees so often do, conveniently place the offence just outside the area. His finger pointed to the penalty spot, however. Thompson this time got the ball well clear of the goalkeeper, and with about eighteen minutes of the game gone Luton were able to feel a wee bit more comfortable.

Still there was plenty of room for uneasiness yet. Within a minute or two Wileman was allowed to go on from what seemed clearly an offside position, and he was so well placed that it would have meant disaster to Luton had it not been for a really clever piece of work by Potts. He watched the forward like a cat watching a mouse, and springing forward when the opportunity presented itself, literally swept the ball from Wileman's foot. This piece of work by Potts was deservedly recognized by the crowd, and Abbott met with a similar ovation about five minutes later when he brought off a magnificent save. Southend were awarded a free kick outside the penalty area on the right wing, and meeting Wilson's centre Curry headed in finely. It seemed a winner all the way, but Abbott managed to handle the ball out, though so weakly that Wilson was presented with a fine opening from the rebound and threw it away by wild shooting.

After this it was Luton's turn, and Streeton turned just over the bar a fast centre from Wileman, which he brilliantly met on the volley. Tommy was also prominent a minute or so later in association with Worth in some of the trickiest footwork imaginable. Hemmed in near the corner flag they forced an opening by a skilful series of rapid passes when it seemed impracticable to do anything, and Streeton got the ball across so well that if Wileman had shot in anything like his best form it would have meant an increase in Luton's lead. The homesters were not again dangerous before the change of ends, but it was rather a surprise to find Southend equalising after Luton had escaped the penalty of a terrible error of judgment on the part of the referee. Potts had driven back a rush by the opposing forwards when the ball was quickly returned into goal with a least two of the Southend men standing offside. They were, however, allowed to accept a chance which would have come off "trumps" in nineteen cases out of twenty, but Abbott with a masterly effort pushed the ball wide. There were still nearly ten minutes to go when Southend broke away on the right and a rapid movement beset Potts for pace. Thompson attempted to check Wilson, but was tricked, and centring with the left the outside right placed beautifully for Park to dash up and head just inside the post. It was a really fine goal, and in the absence of further scoring made the half-time score:—

Luton 2, Southend 2.

Someone I know was rather complimenting himself on this state of affairs at the interval. He had drawn five goals in a "sweep" as the total score in the match, and he was looking forward to the next game, and which would bring the

points for Luton and himself the proceeds of the "sweep." But he changed his tune when the second half was only a quarter of an hour old, for it was Southend who scored the fifth goal. However much they were deserving of their equaliser they certainly did not deserve to regain the lead, because right up to the time the point came Luton were the aggressors, and strong aggressors at that. From the kick-off Luton gained a couple of corners, one shot from Bob Hawkes being very luckily deflected wide of the post. From the second of these corners there was a regular fusillade on the Southend goal, and a lightning drive which was stopped by Worth left the homesters with an open goal which they were not allowed to take advantage of as hands was given against one of their number. Worth also gave Thompson the chance of doing the hat trick, but the half miskicked, to his chagrin, and though Stephenson shot and he was just off the target. Streeton was also an unsuccessful marksman, but it was one of the finest shots of the game that he sent whistling over the bar.

It was then that Southend broke away for about the second time in the half, and for the second time in the match they owed a lead to Fred Hawkes. Their attack found the defence in rather a tangle, and though Frost was partially put out of his stride once he managed to get clear again. In this process he had to work over to the right, and with Abbott angling him he aimed for the far post. It was a fine shot, and whether it would have passed inside or outside may very properly be a debatable point. Anyhow, Fred Hawkes dashed into the middle, and with the greater part of the goal open decided to take no risk. He made a lunge for the ball with the left, appeared to lose his footing, and sent the ball crashing into the net. The homesters were not quick to recover from this unexpected reverse, and it must be confessed that they were fortunate not to be further behind within a minute or two. With the defence still unsettled Frost again got to close quarters, and Abbott had to go full length to save a magnificent shot from the Southend centre. The left wing were left with a clear opening, but they muddled between them and eventually Parke shot on to his companion, and the ball passed wide.

As a result of this Southend only kept their lead about three minutes, and as was only fitting Fred Hawkes had a substantial share in equalising the scores. Evidently smarting under the misfortune which had been dogging him in defence he tried his hand at attack, and dribbling through to the forward line got into association with Streeton and Stephenson. The defence had, however, so closed in on them that though right in front of goal they did not appear to have much chance of going through, but Stephenson detected an opening, and simply hewed his way through. The goalkeeper was as surprised as anybody, so surprised indeed that he was quite unprepared for a shot which came straight for him, with the result that he let it get between his legs.

Ding-dong as the game had been all through, it was even more so with the teams once more fighting for the lead, and incidents abounded first at one end and then at the other. Henderson once let the opposition through with a weak kick, and Fred Hawkes placed the goal in danger with a miskick, but the situation was saved at the expense of a corner. This led to a sequence of corners which were not overcome without some anxiety, and when the siege was at last raised a fresh attack lay bare such a measure of misunderstanding that once more Luton enjoyed a distinct let off. It was a centre from Parke that caused all the trouble. The backs seemed all at sea, and Abbott stood helplessly in goal, not knowing what to expect, and Wilson completely over-ran the ball with the goal at his mercy.

the goal in the interval.

Fortunately, there was no more of this wavering, and during the latter part of the game Luton never looked back, though they had to fight hard all the way. They excelled in their dashing forward movements, and with more polish in front of goal would have scored more than once. There were, however, three exceptions following closely upon one another. First Stephenson was within an ace of getting through on his own, the only barrier to a score being that he sent the ball too far ahead at the critical moment. Then Worth, taking the ball as it came across, drove in at a terrific rate an oblique shot, which was going away from the goalkeeper, and was only just kept out by a wonderful save. Finally, from the resultant corner, Streeton sent in and completely beat the goalkeeper, only for the ball to strike the lower part of the bar, and drop into the goalkeeper's hands as he turned to see what had happened.

This last item was really a bad stroke of luck, but we could afford to overlook it when Stephenson sent the whole mass of Luton supporters wildly enthusiastic with a leading goal ten minutes from time. A free kick enabled Wilson and Bob Hawkes to outwit the Southend men and pave the way for Worth to get in a ground shot which the goalkeeper had to carry over the line in order to save. The corner kick was splendidly placed by Worth, and Stephenson headed a brilliant goal. Right to the end the game continued full of excitement. Directly after Luton took the lead Streeton led a splendid attack, which resulted in a series of shots, one of which from Bob Hawkes was only stopped on the line for one of the backs to clear. In the last few minutes Southend set up raids which gave rise to a deal of anxiety in a light which made it well-nigh impossible to follow the ball. The visiting Wileman once got away and led the field, but was put off his shot, and when he parted with the ball to the left Curry threatened considerable danger. Abbott gathered his shot, but had to carry the ball by the post, and though the corner was cleared Southend continued at intervals to threaten danger. It was a genuine relief to the homesters when at last the whistle sounded and left the final score—

Luton 4. Southend 3.