

SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

LUTON CHECKED.

BUSTLING WELSH TEAM SECURES A POINT.

NO NEED FOR PESSIMISM.

As the result of a long experience of Luton football, I have come to the conclusion that Luton supporters are like the weather, extremely changeable. After the victories over Treharris and Southend, everyone was remarking what a fine team Luton had got. On Saturday, they only drew with Pontypridd, and an alleged staunch supporter was heard to declare that he "would not give twopence for the whole blessed team." People are apt to lose sight of the fact that the treacherous ground was all against Luton's style of football that their opponents were a team whose one aim was to smash up all attempts at combination, and that in drawing level after being twice in arrears they succeeded by sheer grit in doing something in which many other teams would have failed through losing heart.

It is not the slightest use trying to disguise the fact that the loss of a valuable point is a serious thing for Luton in their efforts to gain promotion. By a goal in the very last minute, Cardiff City beat Treharris on the latter's ground, and they therefore have a lead of three points over Luton. As will be seen by the appended table, however, Luton also have a long lead over the rest of the teams, four points separating them from Southend United. It is notable that Mid-Rhondda, who have yet to win a game, drew at Mardy, and as the former are Luton's next Southern League opponents, it is evident that their lowly position must not breed that over-confidence which so often spells disaster.

To return to Saturday's game, however. It was a typical November afternoon, although we imagined that we had done with that month of gloom. A misty kind of rain fell or rather drifted down, and the atmosphere was thick and heavy. The ground, naturally, was on the soft side, but not so bad as many people thought. Luton were at full strength, and when the hefty, well-built Welshmen turned out, the general opinion was that Luton had not got exactly a walk-over. The visitors won the toss, gaining very little advantage thereby, and the game started with a dash towards the Luton goal. "A flash in the pan," thought the optimists, but when Fred Hawkes and Potts, disconcerted by the vigour of the Welshmen, lost the ball between them, it seemed all up with Luton. Abbott did the best thing under the circumstances and ran out, but one of the forwards reached the ball first and shot goalwards, only to find Henderson in the breach. With a hefty kick, the back cleared the danger, and a few minutes later, Stephenson was seen to begin one of his dashing runs. He had the ball well under control, and had just rounded the right back when that worthy saved a certain goal by one of the most deliberate trips we have ever seen.

As a result of the free kick, Luton were able to keep up an intermittent attack for a few minutes, but they were not allowed to get to close quarters by the bustling, spoiling, Pontypridd half-backs. At last, however, Streeton manœuvred the ball on to the goal line and sent in a perfect centre. The leather came straight to Stephenson, who was only a yard from goal, but it was travelling so quickly that he allowed it to slip past him and the chance was lost. Worth, who was not playing quite up to his reputation, was responsible for the next opening. He took a corner, and the ball was returned to him on the wing. Instead of centring this time, he simply passed back to Thompson, whose shot missed the goal by about a foot only. Up to this time, Abbott had not had a single shot to save, and it was hard luck for him when Stallworthy, the star of the visitors' forward line, broke away with the ball, tricked Henderson, and scored with an unstoppable shot just as he was tackled by Potts. The nearest Luton got to equalising before half-time was when Fred Hawkes put in a good dropping centre. Turner fisted away, but Fred shot in again only to see one of the backs get in the way. Worth missed a good opening by shooting past the post when well placed, and thus the interval found Luton a goal in arrear.

The spectators were hoping for a change in the fortunes of the game during the second half, but for some time it seemed that their hopes would be shattered. Pontypridd did most of the attacking at the start, and Morley nearly added another goal with a good shot. Stallworthy, who is one of the best centres seen at Luton this season, was also dangerous with his solo runs, and he was frequently able to get the better of Wilson owing to his advantage in height. After about twenty-five minutes, however, a dramatic change seemed to come over the game. Bob Hawkes was responsible for this, for after Morley had missed an open goal at the other end, he made two splendid efforts to score. The crowd saw signs of a revival, and at once began to urge the players on. The right wingers, Streeton and Worth, put in some fine work, and shot after shot was rained in. One of these was saved at the expense of a corner, which was well placed by Worth. The ball came to Fred Hawkes, and the goalkeeper having run out, Fred headed over his outstretched hands into the goal. Turner managed to reach back and pull the ball out, but it had already crossed the line.

It is not very often that Fred scores, but when he does the spectators make the most of it. They did so on this occasion, but they were soon in the dumps, for Knight caught the home defence napping and sent in a beautiful long shot, which beat Abbott all the way. Few goalkeepers would have saved the shot under ordinary conditions, but in the gathering darkness, it was almost impossible to see the ball, so swiftly did it travel into the net. Luton were not done with, however, and straight from the kick off they took the ball to the other end, and secured another corner. Wileman took this one, and dropped it so accurately in front of goal that an exciting melee at once ensued. It was too dark to see exactly what happened, but suddenly a great shout went up from the vicinity of the goal, Turner was seen making a frantic dive at what must have been the ball, and the Luton players were crowding round Fred Hawkes and shaking his hand enthusiastically. Freddie had scored again! How the crowd cheered. The half back's "feat" in the previous League match of scoring twice against his own side was at once forgotten and forgiven, and Fred was once more the idol of the team. It was hard lines on Pontypridd, for there is no gainsaying that they deserved to win. During the closing stages Luton looked like scoring again, but nothing further of note happened, except that a confident appeal for a penalty by the home team was ignored, and time came with the score:—

LUTON 2, PONTYPRIDD 2.