

Luton lose their hold on Southern Alliance Championship.

CROYDON REPEAT THEIR CUP-TIE VICTORY

After the experience at Newport, the Nest at Selhurst, which bears a bad reputation, was quite a decent pitch on Saturday. It is true it is uneven, and except for the corners almost bare of grass, but at least it had a fairly firm surface, and in some particulars was in even better condition than the Luton ground, for it was not so soft in the goal mouth. The match was advertised as a "Battle of the Leaders," and the crowd numbered about 4,000, which must be accounted pretty good for an Alliance match. Of course, with the Palace away it gave the home club a better chance of getting a paying gate. This was the reason of the change of date, and it is understood Luton received a financial consideration to bring the fixture forward.

Three changes were made in the Luton side from the previous week. H. Bateman, as usual in Alliance matches, played in goal, and as Stephenson was away home in preparation for his wedding, which takes place at Ashington to-day, Smith once more occupied the centre position, while Johnson figured at outside left in place of Worth. The regular outside left is indisposed, and the doctor on Saturday morning ordered him to remain indoors for a day or two. On the Croydon side Guy Watson was in goal, Newton meeting with an injury at Southampton on the Wednesday, and Page, a newly-signed pro., was in the centre, Upex moving to inside left, to the exclusion of Jex. Otherwise the teams were the same as in the recent cup-tie, the names of the players being as follow:—

Luton:—H. Bateman; Henderson and Potts; F. Hawkes, Thompson, Wilson; Wileman, Murphy, Smith, R. Hawkes and Johnson.

Croydon Common:—G. Watson; Little and Hutchins; Yenson, Bushell and Pace; Chester, Allman, Page, Upex, and Barnfather.

Referee, Mr. F. W. Barton, Ealing.

In the first minute Page shot in from long range, but Bateman was quite unhampered and easily cleared, and Johnson getting away from the half-way line ran through in fine style, beating all opposition before centring the ball. It was placed just far enough back to prevent Watson getting to it, and yet in a grand position for scoring. Murphy and Wileman were both on the spot to meet the centre, and the first-named let the ball go to Wileman, who placed it through with a clean drive. For some minutes after this Luton looked likely to increase their score and the crowd called upon the Robins to play up. Another centre from Johnson was spoilt through Smith being offside, while a miskick by Hutchins went direct to Smith. The centre should have improved the occasion, but he waited too long, and Little saved the situation with a big kick down the field. Johnson tried Watson with a clever cross drive, and the local goalkeeper pleased the spectators by the manner he cleared the danger.

The first corner of the match led up to the equalising goal. The ball being finely placed, Page headed towards the far corner of the net. Bateman, however, just got his hands to the ball, only to hit it on to the upright, and it rebounded into the net. It was unlucky in a way, for Bateman did well to get to it at all, and his work deserved a better fate. From this point Luton were never really likely winners, and Bateman was badly "tucked" up once or twice before the Robins got the lead. Once, however, Luton got the ball well into the home penalty area, but Smith made a silly foul, and the free kick, of course, negatived all the work which led up to the opening.

A few minutes before half-time Croydon took the lead, but it is doubtful if they would have done so at this stage if certain of the Luton players had not stopped to appeal for a foul. Chester and Wilson were both going for the ball, and the Croydon player deliberately pushed Wilson in the back, and thus prevented him getting the ball, Wilson going down. Chester gave Allman a fine chance to get clear, and the latter put the ball across for Upex to score, Bateman stand-

ing quite helpless. Just on the interval the referee cautioned Smith and Hutchins for foul play, the incidents following each other in quick succession. Half-time: Croydon Common 2, Luton Town 1.

Immediately after the restart Bob Hawkes tried to improve the situation with a long shot from thirty yards' range, but Watson was not to be caught with those sort. The Luton attack was shortlived, and most of the play took place in the Luton half of the field. A grand run and centre by Chester looked likely to lead up to a goal. Upex met the ball on his head, but got a trifle too far under it, deflecting it away from the goal. He went down like a log, and the game had to be stopped to enable him to recover from the effects of his contact with the ball. Luton had another chance from a free kick, Murphy putting in a hard drive which would have found the net only it struck Hutchins in transit and rebounded to Thompson, who however failed to live up to his reputation as a shot, and fired yards over.

About a quarter of an hour before the finish the referee made a terrible blunder by awarding Croydon a penalty kick when Henderson blocked the ball as Barnfather was running in. The little winger actually jumped at Henderson, but falling over just a foot or so inside the fatal area the referee, to the surprise of even the Croydon officials on the stand, pointed to the penalty spot. Upex was entrusted with the kick, and gave Bateman no chance, thus making the score 3-1 in favour of the Robins. All interest in the game was now over, and the only incidents worth noting were a succession of four corner kicks taken by Wileman without leaving the vicinity of the flag. But nothing came of them and the final whistle went with the score—Croydon Common 3, Luton 1.

COMMENT ON THE PLAY AND PLAYERS.

Victory undoubtedly went to the smarter side on the day's play, the Robins, with little or no chance of promotion in the Second Division being rather keen on the Alliance championship. Certainly their backs were much superior to the Luton pair on Saturday, and it was seldom the Luton forwards were allowed to get in a shot at Watson. Bushell was scarcely so prominent as in the cup-tie. Still he played a clever game, and fed his forwards nicely, and was the best player in this division. The newcomer, Page, justified his inclusion, and kept up his record of scoring a goal in every game in which he has taken part for Croydon, while Upex was quite as dangerous a customer at inside left as in the centre, and caused the Luton defence many anxious moments.

Luton were best served by Bateman, F. Hawkes, Wileman, R. Hawkes and Johnson, the others being only fair. Bateman was perhaps most in the picture, and it was no fault of his the game was lost. Henderson and Potts have both played sounder games, while the halves, with the exception of Fred Hawkes, were too prone to feed the home backs, who always appeared to be taking free kicks. Wileman was the most dangerous forward taking the game through, although no one worked harder than Bob Hawkes to retrieve the position. Johnson, in his old position, opened out in fine style, but he got very little to do afterwards, and was not so much in evidence in consequence. Still there is at least one consolation. A better fight was put up than in the cup-tie, and it is hoped this improvement will continue so that when Luton visit Selhurst in three weeks' time they may secure the more important