

SWANSEA v. LUTON.

Played at Swansea on Saturday. Result:—

Swansea	2 goals.
Luton	nil.

The teams were as follow:—

Luton—H. Bateman; Jarvie and Potts; F. Hawkes, Wilson, and R. Hawkes; Stephenson, Wileman, Smith, Holland, and Worth.

Swansea—Fisher; Nicholas and Cleverley; Duffy, Hamilton, and Jepp; Messer, Anderson, Ball, Fyfe, and Swarbrick.

Referee, Mr. F. Curtis (Bristol).

No visiting team had been able to beat Swansea at home in the Southern League, and therefore it was no light task that Luton were set on Saturday, and from that point of view the result could not be judged a bad one. But it was promotion for one side or the other which was at stake, for it appeared quite probable a win for either team would give them a commanding position in the struggle, for no one expects Southend to win all their away games, and apparently they will have to do that to gain promotion. By winning, Swansea have certainly the better chance of getting the position of runners-up to Cardiff City of any of the aspirants for that honour, and only a series of miracles can now give Luton a place in the First Division next season. Unfortunately, the Luton goal average is all against them, and unless Swansea and Southend lose at least five points each and Croydon drop one, it is hopeless to expect any chance for Luton, even if they win both their remaining matches.

The interest aroused in South Wales was very great, and both the Cardiff papers which cater for football were directly represented by their chief sporting writers at Swansea. The home officials were expecting a record gate, and they were very much upset by the unfortunate change in the weather an hour before the advertised time of kick-off. Undoubtedly the Swans suffered a big loss on account of the rain, which made matters very uncomfortable, as the Vetch Field does not possess anything in the way of shelter. The gate was quite a good one under the circumstances, and the takings were over £140. Among those present to welcome the Luton players was the Rev. H. Manders, who now occupies the pulpit at Mount Pleasant, Swansea, this being the most influential church in Swansea, so the writer was informed. Naturally he was pleased to renew acquaintance with the Luton captain, for Bob Hawkes was a member of his Sunday-school class at Park-street in the old days.

Like the majority of Welsh grounds, the Vetch Field presents an unusual appearance to strangers; indeed, it is perhaps unique, inasmuch as no attempt has been made to turf the playing area. It is simply composed of ashes rolled tight, and at first sight would never be taken for a football pitch, but with the torrential rain that fell an hour before the match and quite three-parts of the time that play was in progress, players on ordinary turf would have been more handicapped than was the case at Swansea. It reminded one of a well-kept school playground before asphalt was the order of the day. For one thing, all the water that lay about did not cause mud, and the players had a much firmer foothold than they would have had on a turfed pitch. One thing which struck a stranger was the enthusiasm shown by the spectators who braved the storm—for it was a storm—and pluckily faced it for two hours. But they were rewarded by seeing as bright and interesting a game as if the conditions had been ideal. Both teams were very keen, and right up to the finish played for all they were worth.

Luton were called upon to face the wind and rain for the first half as a result of losing the toss, but right away the defence settled down, and were evidently determined to keep a clean sheet if at all possible. Naturally, with the aid of the elements, the Swans, as the locals are known, were able to force the play into the Luton quarters for the greater portion of the first half, but only once

did they really have a good opening, and then Ball placed wide. On the other hand, Luton had two easy chances with Fisher out of goal, and might have been leading with the least bit of luck. It is true it would have been a slice of good fortune if these two opportunities had resulted in giving Luton the lead after Swansea had done the bulk of the pressing, but the fact remains it was the merest chance that saved the Swansea goal on each occasion.

The first opportunity arose when Worth got the ball well into the centre with all the Luton inside men well up. Fisher was by no means happy, as he could not be certain from which direction the shot would finally come, and in an endeavour to get the ball, left his charge, without, however, securing his object. Wileman, who had worked a trifle to the left, pounced on the ball only about six yards out of goal and let drive, and it seemed nothing could prevent the ball entering the net, but it struck the bottom of the upright with a thud and rebounded into the centre of the goal-mouth. It looked any odds on Smith getting in a return shot which must have scored if kept low, for there was no goalkeeper to stop him. Fisher being mixed up with his backs, could not get back in time, but Smith, apparently owing to the pool of shallow water in which the ball settled, failed with his shot, which went over, to the audible delight of the crowd, who were quite expecting the downfall of the goal.

The other unaccountable miss arose when Stephenson got the better of the defence, and Fisher, who came out to get the ball, fell with it under him, about half-a-dozen yards out, and eventually lost control in the mace which ensued. Again the spectators were prepared for a goal, for several of the Luton players appeared to have a fine chance to touch through the open goal. But somehow no one could get control, and after a spell of pushing on both sides, the referee blew his whistle for a free kick against Luton, and once more the crowd were relieved.

With nothing scored at the interval, Luton seemed to have a really good chance to win, for they would have the advantage of the wind for the second half. The Luton players themselves were pretty confident, but they were faced by a team equally determined, and quite early after the restart it was evident the Swans were by no means done with. They gave the Luton defence quite as much trouble as before the change over, and for a time pressed pretty hard. But this burst was beaten back, and the game became more even in character. Bateman was taken a bit by surprise when Messer got away, and it appeared likely that a goal would be forthcoming, but the Luton goalkeeper threw himself on the ball and turned it round the post for a corner. In the struggle for possession Bateman got hurt, but after a little attention he resumed his place for the flag kick to be taken, and this was ultimately cleared. The game fluctuated, and Bob Hawkes tried to force matters by bursting through on his own, but Cleverley stuck to him and prevented Bob having a clear shot at goal, and he just missed the target with his final shot.

Ten minutes after the interval, however, the opening goal was scored, although the Luton players strongly protested against the point being allowed. It was difficult to see from the back exactly what took place in the goal-mouth when Messer landed the ball right in front from a corner kick. Bateman was seen to attempt to punch the ball clear, but did not appear to get to it properly, and it was forced into the net. No one was prepared to say who actually put it there, and at least three Swansea players were credited with the honour. Bateman himself states that the ball actually hit him on the face and glanced through. Anyway, he is confident he was fouled by Ball charging into him before he could get the ball, and this was the reason he did not clear the original flag kick. Certainly he never held the ball, and therefore he could not be charged according to the rules, with the result the goal should never have counted. But, as stated before, it was difficult to see what was taking place, for at least half the players of both teams were crowded under the bar when the ball dropped among them.

Following this reverse, Luton played up pluckily, and really pressed harder than at any other time during the game, but they could not manage to force a goal. Bob Hawkes was now playing as a sixth forward, and in this he was undoubtedly justified, for unless a goal could be obtained, promotion was practically out of the question, and that was the only object now. Several times Bob made big efforts to get a shot at goal himself, and as a matter of fact, he, with his namesake Fred, sent in the most likely scoring shots at this stage, but Fisher proved himself a safe custodian and kept out all attempts that came to hand. Still the game was anybody's even to within a quarter of an hour of time, when a sudden breakaway by Anderson settled Luton's chances. The Swans' inside-right slipped by Potts rather unexpectedly, and keeping the ball at his toe, took it to within a few yards of Bateman, who was helpless, and, as Anderson took deliberate aim, never had a chance to reach the ball as it flashed into the net.

This, of course, settled the issue, although even now Luton made gallant attempts to retrieve the situation, but it was practically hopeless to expect them to score three goals, and unless they did so it could be no advantage to them, considering the position of the two clubs on the table. At the finish, everyone was prepared to admit it was the brightest and hardest Soccer game seen at Swansea this season. Certainly no team tried harder than the Luton players did on Saturday. So far as the defence was concerned, they can congratulate themselves that they acquitted themselves well. Jarvie was the equal of any back on the field, and when it is considered the Swansea forwards were just that trifle quicker on the ball than the Luton front line, he should be awarded premier honours. Bateman had no chance whatever with either goal. It is only fair to include the Luton half-back line in awarding praise, for all three played a fine game. Wilson chiefly confined himself to defensive work, but Bob and Fred Hawkes both assisted in many attacks on the home goal, and quite the best scoring attempts of their side came from one or the other of the wing halves.

Swansea did not play so effective a game as when they visited Luton, but this was on account of the improvement on the part of the visitors on the present occasion rather than lack of ability by the home side. Messer is still their most brilliant forward, and on Saturday's form it is difficult to understand how it was that Anderson did not get a regular place in the Rangers' team. Ball, as usual, played a lot offside, and did not appreciate the referee's decisions. It was his last match for a short spell, as he was suspended from Saturday night for his remarks to a whistle-holder in a recent match.