

LUTON v. TON PENTRE.

Played at Yns Park, Pentre, on Saturday,
Result:—

Ton Pentre	2 goals.
Luton	1 goal.

The teams turned out as under:—

Luton: T. Bateman; Henderson and Jarvie; Thompson, Wilson and R. Hawkes; Stephenson, Wileman, Smith, Murphy and Worth.

Ton Pentre: Green; J. Jones and Cannon; Hathaway, Simpson and A. Evans; Selig, Clarke, A. Williams, J. Williams and R. Jones.

Referee: Mr. E. Small (Bristol).

With practically no hope of promotion, comparatively little interest was taken in Luton in the final Southern League game of the present season, but the actual result was received with surprise. The changes made in the team taken down, notwithstanding the show put up by the locals, was certainly a bit different from that which even their own supporters anticipated, and it was stated they had never put so much heart into their efforts as they did against Luton on Saturday. For one thing they were encouraged by one of the biggest crowds of the season, although as it was there would be very few over a thousand spectators present. I was assured that several Southern League matches on this ground have been watched by not more than two or three hundred people.

During the season Lutonians have heard several times of the extraordinary pitches on which games are played in South Wales, but in some ways Yns Park is about the limit. It is almost as small as the Mardy ground, but it is in a far worse condition than that enclosure was when Luton opened their Second Division career. One half of the field would be considered unplayable in England, for it was waterlogged to a terrible extent, but in places it was bumpy and rough and caused the ball to play most extraordinary pranks. The following extracts from the report of the correspondent who accompanied Southend to this ground will show that Luton's experience was no exceptional circumstance and the Southend officials agreed they were extremely lucky to get both points when they visited this club a fortnight since.

The Southend correspondent says:—

“To say the encounter was as big a farce as was ever perpetrated on an alleged football ground is to put it mildly; it beggars description and at times the water and mud flew up to such a height that it was impossible to see what was going on. I am not in the least drawing upon my imagination when I say that to have played the game on the shore at Southend beach after the tide had gone out would have been ten times better. Though the many humorous incidents which occurred during the progress of the game forced a laugh at the expense of the twenty-two victims it made one's blood boil with indignation to think that teams like Southend had to come down to places like Ton and risk,

and perhaps sink, their chances of promotion on such a disreputable scrap heap. And then Mr. Fielding, the gentleman who viewed the ground on behalf of the Southern League, had the enrontery to tell the Southern League that the playing pitch was a good one. Oh, that he had been there on Saturday. All's well that ends well, it is said, and in the end Southend won by two goals to nil, but it was only after a magnificent fighting effort on the part of the Blues, who were at a terrible disadvantage under such conditions, while the nomesters were more or less at home in it.

"The mud at Ton Pentre is not of the common or garden dust; it is black coal dust mud, which clings to anyone like glue, and the condition of the players at the close presented a most ludicrous spectacle. Some of the Southend players—notably Bradshaw and Wileman—reminded one of little black boys. Two or three ploughs in the mud had left them as black as a miner coming from the pit, their white knickers were of the same hue, and so saturated with the black liquid did the jerseys of the players become that it was impossible to tell which was the Ton red or the Southend blue.

"Some idea of the state of the ground may be gathered when it can be recorded that upon the two captains tossing for choice of ends, the coin fell into a pool of slush and was lost, and the referee had to take the almost unprecedented action of tossing the coin in his hand and leaving one of the skippers call to it. Close to the corner flag where there was a vestige or two of grass and not so much mud were pools of water, and quite the funniest thing I have ever seen on a football field was after the players had fallen hands and face into the mud they went and washed themselves in these pools, which were also on the playing space. All these things are actual facts and not fairy tales."

Coming back to the Luton game, the players had scarcely got over the shock of the awful state of the pitch when a further surprise awaited them, for on asking for the ball it was suddenly discovered there was none available. This meant a wait of what eventually proved half an hour before a ball could be obtained and as the players had stripped at the club headquarters it was a very uncomfortable time and did not tend to improve their chances of winning. Probably such an incident is without parallel in the Southern League, but really Luton's experience this season has been full of surprises and it only added one more to the list. Luton attacked in the first half at the end of the field which presented the better chance of scoring, from the fact that the surface was of a less abnormal character than the bottom end, and taking things easily they appeared likely to get an early lead. As a matter of fact the ball was netted and the goal actually allowed in the first ten minutes, but after both teams had lined up to restart the game the spectators by their shouts induced the referee to consult one of his linesmen, the result being that offside was given and the point struck off. The movement was quite open, Worth getting away on the left and squared the ball for Smith to turn it into the net, and it is difficult to understand how the referee could be persuaded to alter his first decision, for if he considered it a fair goal he had quite as good a view of the whole movement as the linesman whom he consulted. It was simply the fact of the home spectators making a demonstration which caused him to take this step, for he had no hesitation in awarding the goal in the first case.

Neither goalkeeper was overworked and it was nearing half-time before a legitimate goal was scored, Smith once more beating Green with a dropping shot in the far corner of the net. This time there was no doubt about it. It looked as though this point would mean Luton taking a strong lead, but a sudden individual breakaway on the part of R. Jones brought about the equaliser just before half-time. He took the ball right into the goalmouth and then coolly hooked the ball right away from Bateman. It seemed quite a soft point, but Jones must be congratulated upon keeping his head, for one or two of the Luton players were close behind him by the time he arrived in front of Bateman.

This goal aroused the enthusiasm of the spectators surprisingly, and they encouraged the home players to go in and win. Before this it appeared that the crowd had made up their minds that Luton must win and they were very subdued except on the occasion of their protest against Smith's first goal. But after the interval every time the home attack got on the warpath they urged them on. This seemed to give the Pentre players great encouragement and the Luton defence was kept on the alert. To make matters worse from the Luton point of view Stephenson was badly kicked on the knee and was practically useless, for he could not run for the ball and eventually he retired from the field. Worth crossed over to the extreme right and Bob Hawkes acted more as a left wing forward than a half back for the remainder of the game.

The winning goal came ten minutes before the finish and it was purely a left wing effort. Bateman stood alone to repel the attack. He came out and by throwing himself full length fisted the first attempt away, but before he could recover J. Williams met the return and drove the ball through the empty goal. Being shorthanded it was almost impossible for Luton to win at this late stage, though Bob Hawkes in particular made several gallant efforts to bring about an equaliser, but the terrible state of the pitch at that end of the field handicapped every effort. It should be stated that before his injury, Stephenson did get the ball into the net but the referee gave offside against someone—probably Smith, for it could not be Stephenson as he brought the ball down the field. It was a very doubtful decision and possibly made all the difference to the result. Had it been allowed it would have given Luton the lead for the second time.

Naturally the unexpected win gave great delight to the faithful few who have supported "Ton," as the club is usually called in South Wales, and truly they can do with a little slice of luck. Whether the club will be able to continue is a very doubtful point. Mid Rhondda will prove a big rival. Their ground is much better situated in the centre of the same district and it is understood the new club have paid their way this season and intend to launch out with a view to promotion next season.

On reaching the dressing room Wilson collapsed in a very similar fashion to that recorded in the Southend report in the case of Wileman and Bradshaw. This will give some idea of the handicap such playing pitches present to players not accustomed to such conditions. Wilson had worked probably harder than any member of his side and his being in the centre of the field for the greater part of the game he had to kick the ball out of the mud oftener than his colleagues. Jarvie was the best back on the field, but the Luton forwards never adapted themselves to the muddy pitch and in this particular Ton Pentre possessed the better attack. Still it is not fair to expect football to be played under the conditions which prevail at Ton Pentre.