

NORTHAMPTON v. LUTON.

A Great Performance.

Played at Northampton on Boxing Day.
Result:—

Luton	3 goals.
Northampton	nil.

Luton played the same team as the previous day, while Northampton had Lessons at centre-half instead of Manning. Lockett, who it is understood, has conscientious objections to playing on Christmas-day, resumed his position at centre-forward. The Northampton officials were pretty confident of beating the takings at Luton, and as the gates were pooled Luton were just as anxious they would prove correct prophets, but the wretched weather conditions upset calculations, and as a matter of fact the gross gate was over 30s. less than at Luton on Christmas-day. If the financial haul was therefore somewhat disappointing, it was not so with the result, for Luton brought off their best performance of the present season, and broke more than one record in doing so. In the first place the Cobblers have not been beaten at home for nearly two years, February, 1913, being the last occasion they lost on the County ground, and they certainly did not expect to lose this particular record against Luton. Therefore, the actual result was all the more surprising, and the spectators could scarcely realise the defeat even after beholding it with their own eyes. From a Luton point of view, another satisfactory feature was the fact that for the first time this season Mitchell and Co. had kept a clean sheet.

Until the final quarter of an hour no such gratifying result seemed possible, for Thorpe, as at Luton, seemed almost unbeatable, and in the first half it was only in the closing stages that he was at all puzzled with any attempt made by the visiting attack. It was a shot from Bob Hawkes which really beat him, but unfortunately the ball struck the upright and rebounded into play, and when Simms applied his head to it Thorpe was able to recover himself sufficiently to catch the ball as it was sailing nicely under the bar and get it away from danger. It was a very near thing indeed, and the home spectators were greatly relieved when they discovered the danger was averted. Both sides had missed some glorious chances previous to this, of course, and it must be confessed the Cobblers had a greater percentage of these gilt-edged openings, and under normal conditions would probably have taken the lead. But the ritch was very sticky, and it was very difficult to control the ball in the goal mouth. Still they should have done better with two or three openings when clean through, while they even made a mess of a penalty kick in the opening stages of the game. Clipstone had never failed to convert from the twelve yards mark, and it was quite a shock to the Northampton spectators when they beheld the ball just miss the upright and travel out of danger for a goal-kick. This incident happened in the first ten minutes of the game, but it undoubtedly had a deal to do with the ultimate result, although at the time this fact was not appreciated.

In the second half the game continued for some time to be stubbornly contested without any strong bias in favour of either side, although both sets of forwards failed to improve upon what appeared likely openings. However, midway in this half the Lutonians seemed to put more vim into their efforts, particularly in defence, and raised strong hopes of at least effecting a creditable division of points. The excursionists, congregated at one end of the stand, shouted encouragement, and the exchanges were altogether more lively amid the depressing surroundings, for the mist, which had hung about the ground, made it difficult to follow the ball on the far side of the field. Luton were certainly holding their own, and a goalless draw appeared the most probable result.

However, when there was scarcely more than a quarter of an hour to play, Rollinson managed to secure the ball from a free kick in the vicinity of the corner flag, and neatly placed it into the net. Having secured the lead, the Luton players meant keeping it, but for a few minutes the result hung in the balance, and Hughes made a couple of fine rushes, either of which might have brought about the equalising point if the final aim had been correct, but the ball was sent hard on the outside of the net on both occasions. These were the last despairing efforts of the Cobblers, and their defence practically collapsed altogether in the closing stages. It was simply a question of how many goals Luton would win by, so poor was the opposition put up. Including Rollinson's opening goal, the ball entered the net four times, but the referee gave the home side the benefit of the doubt when Thorpe, turning sharply round, fisted the ball out of the goal and gave

a corner kick from Simms' shot. There is little doubt the ball was well over the line when Thorpe picked it up, but Mr. Thompson failed to judge the distance properly, and the Cobblers' goal average reaps the advantage of his error of judgment. Otherwise, it matters little, for a three-goal victory away from home is quite good, especially against a team with the Cobblers' record.

The second goal scored was also netted by Rollinson after a clever run and centre on the part of Roberts, who certainly deserves to share the honour of scoring this point, for he made it comparatively easy for Rollinson by putting the ball squarely across the goal mouth after clearing all opposition. Two or three minutes before the finish, Wilman worked his way through, and making certain of his aim, drove the ball right out of Thorpe's reach into the net. This goal concluded the scoring, but if the game had been continued a few more minutes, it is pretty certain other goals would have gone to Luton's credit, for the Cobblers were played to a standstill. Among the interested spectators was Luton's old half-back of their Second League days, Docherty, and he remarked to Mr. Smart, who was the Director in charge, that if there was another ten minutes to play Luton would have scored half-a-dozen goals at least. It was indeed a remarkable collapse, and the home spectators were simply dumbfounded.

So far as individual honours are concerned, Mitchell was not called upon to unduly exert himself, but he must be congratulated on maintaining a clean sheet for the first time in the Southern League, and this at what appeared the most difficult spot in the competition. Both backs played magnificently on the treacherous pitch. Elvey was probably the safer of the two, but Dunn's rushes were generally well timed, and he put a wholesome respect into the home forward line, while his clearances were very effective as a rule, the ball being sent well away from Mitchell. Frith was the hardest worked half-back in consequence of his propensity of falling back to help his backs, and he never let his side down. He was a distinct success in his self-appointed role of a third back when pressed, while he opened out the game better than on some former occasions, and on the whole must be considered the pick of a good half-back line. Bob Hawkes' work was much admired, and he played one of his best games of the season, while Fred got through a lot of hard plugging work in his usual effective style.

Forward, the most noticeable players were the extreme wingers, Roberts and Hear, one reason for this being the better condition of that portion of the pitch they were called upon to carry out their operations on. In the centre of the field, particularly near goal, it was a matter of considerable difficulty to control the ball, while in certain places it was almost as difficult to lift the ball out of the mud as it used to be in South Wales, of unhappy memory. But in the glorious final quarter of an hour the Luton five forwards played surprising football, and all must equally share the honours. Thorpe cannot be blamed in any way for the heavy defeat, although probably he did not have as much work to get through as in the first half at Luton on Christmas-day. Still, he made no mistake whatever right through the game. But at full back the Cobblers must take second place, for Clipstone and Davis were not to be compared to the Luton pair under pressure. Clipstone at the finish could not raise a gallop, while Lloyd Davies' kicking was none too safe at any period. Lessons also was dead beat at the finish, and the only member of the Cobblers' defence who played consistently all through was Tull. Of the forwards, Hughes was certainly the most dangerous customer, but he finished badly, and as a line they were very disappointing.

SOUTHERN LEAGUE.

(Up to and including Monday).

	P.	W.	L.	D.	F.	A.	Pts
Reading	20	12	4	4	40	22	28
Millwall	19	11	3	5	27	15	27
Cardiff City	19	11	6	2	35	15	24
Brighton and Hove..	20	10	6	4	27	22	24
West Ham	20	10	6	4	29	26	24
Portsmouth	20	9	6	5	28	22	23
Watford	19	8	5	6	25	18	22
Exeter City	20	9	7	4	34	23	22
Northampton	20	7	6	7	27	29	21
Southampton	20	9	8	3	35	41	21
Swindon	20	7	7	6	38	34	20
Queen's Park R'gers	19	6	7	6	26	29	18
Crystal Palace	20	6	8	6	24	27	18
Norwich City	20	4	7	9	25	29	17
Luton Town	20	6	9	5	30	37	17
Plymouth Argyle ..	20	4	8	8	27	31	16
Southend United ..	19	5	8	6	19	26	16
Bristol Rovers	20	7	11	2	35	46	16
Croydon Common ..	19	3	11	5	23	36	11
Gillingham	20	2	13	5	21	46	9