

FOOTBALL.

LUTON v. EXETER CITY.

Played at Exeter on Saturday. Result:—

Luton	2 goals
Exeter City	1 goal

Luton.—Mitchell; Elvey and Dunn; F. Hawkes, Wilson and R. Hawkes; Roberts, Wilman, Simms, Rollinson and Lindley.

Exeter City.—Pym; Marshall and Strettle; Rigby, Lagan and Smith; Holt, Evans (W.), Goodwin, Lovett and Dockray.

Referee, Mr. E. E. Small (Bristol).

The Exeter trip is the farthest Luton have to undertake in the Southern League out and home the same day, and entails spending the greater portion of the sixteen hours the players are away from Luton in the train. Leaving Luton at 9.18 a.m., it was 2.40 before the party arrived at Exeter, and as the return train left at 6 o'clock it will be seen there was little margin left. The ground being a good distance from the station, it was a rush all the time. In ordinary circumstances such a journey takes a lot out of the men; therefore, Luton's performance under the severe handicaps of Saturday stand out more than usual. In the first place they were short of Frith and Hoar, of the regular team, and naturally the effectiveness of the side was to some extent lowered.

Like the previous Saturday at home, Luton were a goal down at half-time, and this might have discouraged them, particularly as the players considered the point was the direct result of a bad decision by the referee. Coming as it did just on the stroke of half-time, when Luton had been making such a gallant defence against extreme pressure and were hoping to reap the fruits of their hard work by keeping a clean sheet, it was the more irritating, and some strong words were said in the dressing-room at the interval.

However, the players were determined to make a real fight of it, and when Wilman equalised within ten minutes of the resumption they went all out for victory, and quite held their own in actual play. Therefore it was a real setback when, about a quarter of an hour before the finish, the referee surprised even the home spectators by ordering Dunn off the field for what was really a very mild foul (even if it was a foul) on Holt. Reduced to ten players the side was reconstructed, with Fred Hawkes at left back and Wilman taking his place at right half, leaving the attack to four forwards. But it was at once apparent that even this knockdown blow had not disheartened the Luton players, and they did not settle down to mere defensive tactics, but still were all out for a leading goal. Pym and his two backs being found more work than during any other fifteen minutes of the game. It was no surprise even to the home supporters, therefore, when Simms crashed a return from the crossbar into the net some three minutes off time and practically made the points safe for Luton. For so steady was the Luton defence as now constituted that little hope was entertained of retrieving the situation by the Exeter supporters.

It cannot be claimed the game was a high-class exhibition of football, but it was stubbornly contested from start to finish, and underwent a remarkable change. During the first half the Grecians were decidedly the more aggressive side, more particularly during the early stages, when Luton were evidently feeling the effects of their long journey. Not for a long time have Fred Hawkes and Elvey been so often beaten as they were at the start of the game by Dockray, who was apparently able to get away whenever he liked; and as he made good use of his opportunities the Luton goal was often in jeopardy, but the inside forwards failed badly, and Mitchell was not given near the work he should have been called upon to do.

This was the more remarkable seeing that Goodwin is the crack shot in the Southern League, and he had quite a number of good chances to exhibit his shooting abilities. As previously mentioned, Luton had a greater share of the game after the opening half-hour, and Dockray being kept more in subjection the prospect of a clean sheet at half-time became more likely than the earlier exchanges made out.

But the error of judgment on the part of the referee when he awarded the Grecians a corner kick almost on the stroke of half-time upset calculations, as it brought about the only goal of this portion of the game. It was a practical impossibility for the ruling to be correct, for Dunn, in tackling the City forward, turned the ball on to the home player, and it rebounded over the line, and could not have got there without coming into contact with the City forward. When Dunn kicked it, he naturally sent it away from the line, but his opponent was so close up that he could not clear from the rebound. The Luton captain made a strong protest, but it was no use, and the ball was dropped almost under the bar from the flag kick. It eventually fell near Holt, who was right up, and either rolled off his body or was fisted through. It was difficult to see from the stand exactly what happened, but the Luton players were emphatic in claiming that Holt handled the ball into the net. As the referee blew his whistle almost immediately after, the Luton players were full up when they retired to the dressing-room and expressed themselves very strongly indeed. But at the same time it was their unanimous opinion that if they had secured the chances which fell to their opponents they would have been leading by half a dozen goals.

Wilman's goal soon after the restart was as clean a point as could be desired, for he met a sharp middle from Roberts, which came a trifle awkwardly, and sent it flying into the net before Pym had any idea of taking up a defensive position. If Wilman had stopped to set the ball, he would probably have failed to score, but taking it first time he completely surprised the City defender. More life was afterwards infused into the Luton attack, and it was the home side who were acting more on the defensive. Still they were by on means beaten, and put up any number of counter attacks, but by this time the Luton defence was playing steadily, Elvey having taken the measure of Dockray. A draw was the probable result, judging from the way the two sets of defenders were playing towards the close of the second half, when the incident happened which reduced Luton's ranks by one.

In the early part of the game Dunn had evidently set himself the task of preventing Goodwin scoring, if at all possible, and once or twice brought him down very forcibly. The crowd naturally resented such tactics, and the referee was cheered when he administered a word of caution to Dunn. After this, whenever Luton's left back tackled one of the City forwards he was roundly hooted and cries of "Send him off" were heard several times. But he kept himself more in hand, and during the second half had settled down into quite a steady game.

The actual incident which led up to his retirement was quite an ordinary affair, and when the referee put his powers in action the players were quietly taking up their positions for the free kick which had been awarded. The spectators who had called for extreme measures more than once did not even make the slightest protest, and Dunn was evidently taken completely by surprise when, after placing the ball, the referee walked up to him and pointed to the dressing-room. The players of both teams pleaded with Mr. Small to reconsider his decision, and when he walked over with Dunn towards Holt, who was standing on the touch-line, and the two players shook hands, it was concluded the incident had closed in the happiest manner, but Dunn was observed to leave the field, and the game continued without him. Soon after the match, the referee was quite frank in stating that if the offence which Dunn, in his opinion, had committed stood alone he should never have exercised his powers by turning him off the field, but in view of the warning in the first half, he felt bound, having given the foul, to order Dunn off.

A few minutes before Dunn left Goodwin put in his best effort of the match, and Mitchell is to be congratulated upon making a really brilliant save. The home centre deliberately side-tapped the ball right away from Mitchell, and it seemed a certain goal, but the Luton goalkeeper, throwing himself full length, just touched the ball wide and it passed over the line on the safe side of the upright. Undoubtedly this save won the points for Luton, for it is quite possible if they had been a goal down when their ranks were reduced by Dunn's dismissal they would have been discouraged, and with ten men only could never have drawn level again, much less taken the lead. As it was, they showed such real determination,

that they were going stronger at the finish than at any other period. Roberts, although on his own, was giving the home defenders considerable anxiety, and he forced the corner which led up to Simms getting the winning goal. Taking the corner himself, Roberts dropped it a trifle farther back than usual, and Simms made a desperate rush at the ball. Pushing aside the City player who was attempting to prevent him getting his head to the leather he drove it hard against the crossbar, and then meeting the rebound sent the ball flying into the net. There was scarcely three more minutes left, and the point took all heart out of the City players, Luton finishing altogether the stronger team.

Mitchell, except for the one save mentioned, did nothing more than an ordinary goalkeeper should do, but this was because he was not called upon to tackle any other difficult shots. His one save deserves every praise. Elvey was certainly shaky at the start, but he recovered finely, and in the second half was in quite his best form. Dunn rather spoilt himself by one or two ugly rushes that the crowd resented, but, as recorded above, he had settled down in the second half, and scarcely deserved such extreme measures at this stage of the proceedings.

One of the surprises of a remarkable game was the steadiness of Fred Hawkes, when suddenly called upon to undertake a new task at left back. It would have been quite excusable if he had made a slip, but he was steadiness itself, and not at all handicapped by being placed on the opposite side of the field to that to which he is accustomed. His tackling, of course, was perfect, but his clearances were also well timed and of good length.

Forward, Roberts and Simms were most in evidence, but the whole line did quite well in the second half. Lindley was scarcely the equal of his other comrades, but, of course, he to some extent was strange. Wileman, after playing a good game forward, fell into quite an effective defender when called back, while Wilson, as usual, got in a lot of hard work, and as Goodwin was held in subjection to the extent that he failed to increase his bag of goals. Wilson must take a share of the credit for this. Bob Hawkes was in good form, and must be congratulated upon the way he handled the team when faced with Dunn's enforced retirement. Undoubtedly his tactics at this juncture led up to the fine performance of bringing back both points when the odds against were so great.