

FOOTBALL NOTES AND NEWS.

Luton Scrape Home at Last.

First Southern League Points on Town Ground for two months.

The last Southern League match of the season on the Luton Town ground was played on Saturday, and under brilliant weather conditions some four thousand spectators saw the Blues actually break their long sequence of failures to gain League points at home. It was their first League victory at home for exactly two months, during which period five visiting teams have carried off the spoils, and to a large extent the homesters lived up to their recent reputation on the Town ground, for they only just managed to scrape some against Croydon Common, from whom they wrested a point in the meeting at Selhurst before Christmas. The score of 2-1 was exactly the same as last season when the Robins wound up the League programme on the Town ground as Luton's companions in promotion from the Second Division, but except in this respect Saturday's game bore no comparison to that of a year ago. Croydon Common are this season but a shadow of last season's side, and there was nothing in the Blues' performance to get wildly enthusiastic about.

Luton were lacking the services of Fred Hawkes for the first time in a Southern League game since the early part of the season, and Wilson was his substitute, while Roe returned to the team in place of Wilman. Croydon had seven of the team which played in the match at Luton a year ago, the full list of players being:—

Luton: Mitchell; Elvey and Dunn; Wilson, Frith and Bob Hawkes; Roberts, Roe, Simms, Rollinson and Hoar.

Croydon: Williamson; Little and Hutchins; Allmann, Bushell and Ryder; Barnfather, G. Smith, Goodman, Chester and Dawson.

Referee, Mr. J. Lilley, Rushden.

It was Croydon Common's last game of the season in the Southern League, and they required a victory to remove them from the dread possibility of being once more relegated. There was never any doubt about the anxiety of the players on this score, and they showed themselves triers of the first order. Throughout the game they worked with the utmost keenness—at times there was a little too much keenness, and it resulted in one or two exhibitions of feeling—and the facility with which they swung the ball about made them altogether the more prominent team in the early stages. Mitchell once had to dash out very smartly to intercept Chester, but generally the forwards were very wild when they got anywhere near goal, and Luton, although slow starters, were far the more dangerous when they got under weigh. Williamson displayed splendid judgment and fielding ability in negotiating a great drive from Frith and also in saving a beauty from Hoar, but he was a trifle lucky to get the best of a terrific dust-up with Roe from a centre by Roberts which might easily have brought the opening goal.

The game was only a quarter of an hour old when Roe failed to utilise the easiest of chances of giving Luton the lead. From another centre by Roberts he beat down Little's clearance and was left with the ball in such a position that he could have run in and had the goal at his mercy, but he failed, quite excusably, to grasp the position and apparently thinking he was hard pressed he took a first-time half-volley which was nowhere near the mark. Only seven minutes elapsed, however, before Luton went ahead, and it was a really glorious goal. Roberts again directed the ball into the middle, Simms turned it on to Rollinson, and the inside-left transferred to Hoar who ran in to meet it and found the opposite corner of the goal with a low drive which was quite unstoppable. There were two occasions after this when the Robins threatened an equaliser, Barnfather going close with a brilliant piece of individualism, while Mitchell had the greatest difficulty in dealing with a high shot from Dawson that was held up by the wind, but the best of all the scoring attempts before the change of ends came from Simms. With consummate skill he dribbled in and out through a knot of three opponents and got through in magnificent fashion from what seemed an impossible position and drove over the bar a shot which Williamson would never have seen had it been a trifle lower. Interval—

Luton 2, Croydon 0.

A solitary goal lead was nothing to boast of considering the strength of the breeze Luton had had the advantage of, and this disappeared in the very first minute of the second half, as the indirect result of some bad blundering. Dunn, taking things rather leisurely, found himself beaten by the bounce of the ball and failed to clear, and play was carried across to the other wing where Elvey found himself hard-pressed by Goodman and Chester, and a corner resulted. This was admirably placed, and the ball was buffeted about from one to another in threatening fashion in the goalmouth until Bob Hawkes made the first serious effort to clear. From his kick, however, the ball cannoned on to one of the opposition and rebounded sharply back for Goodman to be afforded the easiest chance of smashing it into the net.

Play was naturally of a rousing character after this, although much of the football was not great, and Luton were indebted to their outside wingers for a stirring series of attacks which gave Williamson plenty of opportunities for showing his mettle. He displayed particularly fine judgment in darting out and taking low down a dangerous looking shot from Roberts, and his work on several other occasions was most praiseworthy, but Rollinson had the hardest of luck in not penetrating his charge from a corner which he headed on the wrong side of the post. Twice Luton vainly appealed, though with the strongest confidence, for penalties, one for a foul by Little which floored Simms clean in front of the goal, and another for handling during a scrimmage by Hutchins, which certainly did not suggest itself as being accidental, and Croydon also wanted a penalty when Elvey and Chester going very fast for the ball got their legs mixed up, and Chester came down.

There was only twenty minutes to run when Luton scored the goal which gave them victory, and it was again the result of a delightful bout of combination. It fell to Roberts this time to make the shot, and a hot low drive brought out Williamson with a dive to the ground, but although he saved the shot he could not hold on to the ball and Rollinson, following up, put paid to the account. The Robins were not lacking in opportunities of again equalising, but they continued to be less deadly in front of goal than the homesters. Little was once more lucky to escape a penalty award. Apparently the referee decided to let Hoar go on as the foul did not stop him from going through, but Williamson came out and made another great save. He was beaten in the last three minutes, but Simms, who netted from Roberts' pass, was ruled off-side, and so the result stood:—

Luton, 2; Croydon, 1.

Croydon's display would suggest that they occupy just about the position they deserve to. For dash was really the only merit they displayed in any marked degree. The forward work, while marked by plenty of pace, was poor in the extreme, with the exception that Barnfather showed a fine command over the ball and a good deal of skill

in outwitting the opposition. Chester, with his pace, had many opportunities of proving a thorn to the home defence, but his finish was of the wildest description. The halves were also a weak department, the way in which Busbell, the old Luton centre-half was outclassed, being most pronounced, but, as usual, the Robins were well served in the last lines of defence. Hutchins does not seem quite the dominating personality he used to be, but Little put up a very robust and effective opposition, and Williamson's goalkeeping was quite great.

Luton were easily value for victory, but to have done themselves justice should have made the margin much wider. Hoar was once again in sparkling form, and to him and Roberts the Blues owed practically all their success in attack. Apart from the forwards, the rest of the team displayed very sound form. The halves rendered excellent support, Frith performing much work of the very best standard, and the backs were, as a rule, thorough masters of the situation, Elvey being quite at his best.

Croydon, in spite of their defeat, appear to have a very good chance of keeping their place because Southend dropped a point at home against Queen's Park Rangers on Saturday, and have now to win their last two games to escape, one being at Millwall. Gillingham are, of course, doomed, and on Saturday, enabled Watford to win the championship. Watford were two goals down after twenty minutes, but carried off the points in the last few minutes. Reading, with a visit to whom Luton wind up their League programme next Saturday, are almost certain to be runners up. Luton are six from the bottom with 34 points, and a goal average of 61 against 69.

This evening, Luton are playing Plymouth Argyle on the Town ground, in the final for the Southern Charity Cup, and the cup and medals will be presented to the winners at the finish of the game. The Blues will probably have the same side as on Saturday, with the possible exception of Bob Hawkes, who hurt his side during the game.

Some efforts are being made to arrange an extra match on the Town ground for Saturday, May 1st, between the Town team and one drawn from the 2nd 1st North Midland Division.