

FROM THE FOOTBALL FIELD

LUTON'S DRAW WITH SOUTHERN LEAGUE LEADERS.

After the game at Luton in October, when Portsmouth were defeated by two clear goals the visitors promised to extract full revenge in the return game, and the Luton players were rather expecting a warm ninety minutes at Fratton Park, for it will be remembered tempers were slightly ruffled in one or two directions at the Luton game. Pompey hold a most remarkable away record since Rutherford netted the two goals over four months ago, for their goal has not fallen since away from home in a Southern League fixture. Curiously enough Rutherford was an enforced absentee on Saturday on account of a strained back, and Brandham was called upon to fill the gap. Although he could scarcely do so in a physical sense it was known he would not fail for want of trying. Elvey came back after his foot rest, and the only other change in the team was Grimes in the place of Hoar, the latter not being quite sound. Since the early part of the season Grimes has not been seen at home in the Southern League, but this is the fourth away game he has played since Christmas, and he has really done very well in each game.

Although apparently firmly fixed at the top of the League, Portsmouth do not appear to be quite satisfied with their attack, and during the week Yeatman, of Thorneycrofts, had been secured for outside left. James was given him as a partner in the first half, but changed places with Budding after the change over. When Luton were successful last October the lapse was excused locally by the absence of Robson and Knight from the defence, but both were playing on Saturday, so there was no excuse from this source this time. The gates at Fratton Park have been almost the biggest in the League this season, but the wretched weather had its effect on Saturday, and the total attendance was estimated at 12,000. Prompt to time the teams turned out as follows:—

Luton: Summers; Elvey, Dunn; -rwin, Brandham, Parker; Grimes, Hill, Simms, Tomlinson, and Bookman.

Portsmouth.—Robson; Probert, Knight; Abbott, Harwood, Turner; Hogg, Strongfellow, Budding, James, Yeatman.

Referee, Mr. J. E. Head, London.

The opening exchanges were even, but the Luton goal had a very lucky escape when the referee allowed the game to go forward with two of the Luton defenders lying on their backs in midfield. Hogg was left with a clear run down the line, and it seemed odds on his centre being forced home, but Summers and Dunn managed to save the situation right on the goal-line. Seven minutes from the start Luton got well down and Tomlinson's pass came into the centre of the field for Simms to try a shot which Robson managed to stop, but could not clear. The Luton centre bustled the ball out of his reach and passed it over to Hill who had nothing to do, but touch it into the open goal, for Robson was right at the opposite side of the goal. Luton played up fairly for several minutes following their success, but did not manage to increase the lead, although Knight let in Hill rather badly once or twice.

Rain was now falling heavily, and it was very difficult for the players either to keep their feet or control the ball. The equalising point came in the nature of a surprise. At the moment there was no pressure on Summers, but James worked well over to the right wing and let drive from the inside right position when quite 25 yards out, the ball travelling at a tremendous pace, and entering the far corner of the net amid a great burst of cheering from the crowd. It was one of the most brilliant shots it is possible to imagine, and was practically unstoppable unless the goalie was directly in the line of fire. As a matter of fact Summers did just touch the ball, but he could not stay its flight. The remainder of the first half was well contested, and no one could complain at the level pegging at the interval.

In the second half Portsmouth enjoyed a bigger share of the game, and only twice did Luton really look like getting the lead. One was as a result of Bookman's clever work on the left, and just before time, when Grimes got well away on the opposite wing and planting the ball fairly in the centre Simms let drive at goal with a great shot, but the ball rose very quickly and sailed just a trifle too high. It was a let off for Pompey, for it would have certainly meant a defeat, for they never afterwards were able to threaten real danger to Summers.

Sandwiched between these two chances, however, the Luton defence had a warm time, and but for the steadiness of Elvey and Dunn a very different result might have materialised. Summers was often hard pressed and brought off two remarkable saves from shots taken at short range by James. During the game quite a score of corners were taken by Portsmouth, and several close shaves were the natural result. On the other hand Luton never had a single corner kick during the whole game, which would probably be a record. Still it was quite a good performance to get a point from Portsmouth, and incidentally it should be stated only one other team has booked three points at the expense of the leaders, this being Crystal Palace, who also drew at Fratton, and won by 2-1 at Selhurst early in the season. Result:—

Luton 1, Portsmouth 1.

The game was quite a pleasant one although there were several knocks, of course

The referee was rather inclined to whistle for trivial offences and time after time pulled the players up when they merely touched the ball with their hands on slipping up on the treacherous turf. Luton were fortunate to get out of one or two ugly corners, as a result of this mood of Mr. Head, who, it will be remembered, made quite a good impression the previous Saturday at Luton. At Portsmouth his offside ruling were often at fault, but in these he was quite impartial.

All the Luton players contributed to the partial success, and no real weak spot could be found. In defence, Elvey and Dunn were far more reliable than the Pompey pair, Knight, in particular, making slips that might have proved serious. Luton also quite held their own at half back, Brandham doing well in his second Southern League game, although his wing comrades undoubtedly helped more in the attack. Scarcely enough use was made of Bookman's speed, but Grimes again did good work, and Simms played quite a good game in the centre.

Yeatman, the Pompey recruit, was not altogether a success, and was well held by Urwin all through. James worked hard in both positions, and was the life of the home front line. Strongfellow was not quite so much in evidence as usual. Still it was the right wing that most danger came from, for Hogg is very fast and centres finely.