

STERN STRUGGLE AT SOUTHEND.

Luton Town Lose.

(By "CRUSADER.")

LUTON TOWN lost by two goals clear at Southend-on-Sea. Other teams will lose there if the "Seasiders" play as on Saturday. An early goal gave them a grip of the game, and did much to encourage their rather shaky defence, but it was only a grim struggle that enabled them to keep the Town from equalising in the second half. Had that occurred the probability is that Southend would have had to battle hard to avoid defeat.

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Both goals were scored by SHAW, the inside left; one coming after fifteen minutes' play, and the second three minutes before the end. The first goal was the result of skilful play by Bissett, who made the opening for Shaw; the second followed a weak punch by Purdy, who had shortly before that had a finger dislocated. The ball went straight from the goal-keeper's fists to the scorer, who returned it first time, and Purdy had not had time to recover.

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The score did not flatter the skill of the home forwards, but it misrepresented the efficiency of the Town defence. There was much to applaud in the work of the home attack, for they got on with the business at a rapid pace, the ball travelling quickly from wing to wing, and headway was made at a fast pace. This only served to bring out the best that the Town halves and backs could give, and it was reassuring to the few Lutonians present to find the defenders covering each other so well.

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Considering that Jim Thompson damaged his shoulder severely in the first half, the work of the left wing was nothing short of admirable, and with Thompson taking all the work that was given him, and Dennis foraging for it whenever he might reasonably get it, the Town had quite a good share of the attack, especially in the second half. They and Littlewood could stand up to the unceremonious tacklers of Southend far better than could the lighter Shankly and Moffat, who were knocked about a lot more than the referee appeared to think.

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It was Littlewood's aptitude of taking trials of physical strength that gave the Town the best chance they had of scoring. This was well on in the first half. The centre-forward accepted the invitation of Sayles, went into and knocked the latter off his balance, got the ball and fired in a lightning shot which Moore had no hope of saving, but the ball struck the underside of the bar, and came out again. There were other chances, Moffat once missing in the second half when the home defence was all in a tangle.

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Considering the rapidity with which the ball travelled from end to end, however, the work of the goalkeepers was not unduly severe. Good chances were missed because of the disinclination to shoot from favourable range, and each goalkeeper dealt with more centres than shots. The home forwards had the pull in this respect, and so Purdy had more to do than Moore. The superior combination of their forwards was the one department in which Southend could claim advantage. Elsewhere there was a balance in favour of the Town so far as each department was concerned.

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The most conspicuous player it would be difficult to select. Purdy made some very good saves, but once lost the ball after dodging two rushing opponents. He was at fault over the second goal, but shortly before he had made a save which dislocated a finger to such an extent that it was reversed and lay across the back of his hand. The referee, indeed, ordered Willie Barr to summon a doctor, but the Town trainer dispensed with extraneous aid, and within a few seconds of seeing the hand he had put the finger in its proper place, and Purdy was back in goal. Still that finger must have hurt quite a lot, and one could understand the goalkeeper flinching when a high shot came his way. Quite a feature of Purdy's play was his clever catching of high shots.

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Till and Graham get better and better, I think. They seem to take advance duty in turns, and they covered each other well. The most pleasing feature about their play of late is that they appear to have realised jointly that a forward lying well up the field, as does Littlewood, is an asset, and they are giving the ball more boot than is their wont. Till at his best is one of the most polished defenders in the game, but this strong kicking has improved his game immensely under the new conditions.

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Richards gave a fine exhibition. Some day I should like to see an exchange of places between him and Till. I can quite conceive of Richards being a good back, and, better still, of Till being a good half-back. As things are this is an experiment worth trying later in the season. On his game at Southend Richards is good enough as a half-back. His long reach and strong frame enable him to bar the progress of his opponents on many occasions, and he was prominent with forcing work during hot exchanges in the second half.

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Jennings was all out as usual, and against vigorous opponents he held his own, giving and taking blandly, though I think he wanted to get into closer touch with O'Rawe in the later stages, owing to the manner in which that gentleman had tackled Shankly and Moffat. Millar was better than in recent games, and in the second half he helped along the men in front of him. Perhaps he is coming back to his high level of the closing months of last season.

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The right wing found progress difficult, because both Andrews and Sayles, and occasionally O'Rawe, showed no desire to play the ball if they could get the man, as they often did when they were up against the diminutives of the Town front line. It was quite another thing on the other flank. The right wing did not do so well as the left, where Dennis and Thompson took a lot of holding. Both had frequent tussles, and got through a lot of good work. Thompson is inclined to hit the ball too hard when he passes in for Littlewood, and Dennis is not shooting so well as we expect.

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Littlewood did quite well, and his constant rushing of the backs often put them off their game. He needs to keep more directly in the centre line of the two goals, and not to run towards the player for whom he is expecting the pass, but to position himself to take the ball in his stride. When he does that and shoots more promptly he will "fill the bill" admirably. For one of such short experience he is developing splendidly.

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Southend's rearguard was grimly determined, and gave nothing away. The middle men fell away a good deal after the interval, but the forwards were always good, Bissett being the smartest forward on the field.

There were 7,000 spectators.

SOUTHEND UNITED	2
LUTON TOWN	0

SOUTHEND UNITED. — Moore; French, Sayles; Jewhurst, O'Rawe. Andrews; Morris, Bissett, Watkins, Shaw, Smith.

LUTON TOWN. — Purdy; Till, Graham; Richards, Jennings, Millar; Moffat, Shankly, Littlewood, Dennis, Thompson.

Referee: S. A. Donaldson, London.