

THE UNITED LEAGUE.

LUTON TOWN v. WELLINGBOROUGH.

Played at Luton on Saturday. Result:—

Luton Town 7 goals.
Wellingborough nil.

The teams were as follow:—

RIGHT. LUTON TOWN. LEFT.

Williams (goal).

McCartney

McEwan.

Davies.

Stewart.

Docherty.

Gallagher.

McInnes.

Galbraith.

Coupar.

Elkins



Mellor.

Little

Murray.

Dray.

Walker

Murray.

Marcell.

Mow.

Sim.

Holmes.

Robinson (goal).

LEFT. WELLINGBOROUGH. RIGHT.

Referee, Mr. C. D. Crisp, R.A.; Luton linesman, Mr. H. Fryer.

So long had it elapsed since we had had a League match, that many a doubt was felt as to whether Luton be able to maintain the form exhibited in the last few matches. There have been times, we know, when comparatively unimportant matches have been brilliantly won, and when the important ones have been ignominiously lost, but, thank goodness, that day is past and over.

At least, there is every reason to suppose so. Wellingborough, of course, came to Luton with a tolerably good record in the United League matches. On their own ground, they had whacked both the Arsenal and Millwall. Besides, we know perfectly well that the men of leather have generally shown up pretty well in their tussles with the men of straw.

But whatever doubts may have afflicted the fifteen hundred or two thousand spectators as they wended their way to the Dunstable-road enclosure on Saturday, those doubts were speedily removed when once the play began. From the very first, Luton shaped like winners, and determination was writ large on the countenance of every one of the home players.

No sooner did the whistle give the signal for the commencement of hostilities than the Luton men ran through the Wellingborough defence like red-hot knives through slabs of butter, and they not only ran through, but they made excellent use of opportunities the moment the opportunities presented themselves.

I have seen Luton play quite as clever football as they did in that first half-hour on Saturday, but never have I seen them give so brilliant an exhibition. There was cleverness, dash, and sound common-sense, a combination of qualities sufficient to make the team well-nigh invincible.

Whenever their cleverness and dash took the men within shooting range they shot for all they were worth, and never once thought about giving up the chance they had for a possibly better chance to be obtained by a little more finessing. They banged away, right and left and centre, giving the Wellingborough custodian not a moment's rest.

It was grand football, and glorious fun for those who were looking on. At first, the success which was deserved did not come, and I was afraid the tremendous pace which the Luton men set would not last until the trick was done. Again and again very hard luck was experienced, but at last Galbraith, who was in marvellous shooting form, got in one which the custodian could not negotiate, and then the Wellingborough men were able to bid good-bye to whatever hope they might have had when they started.

Still, they did not slacken their efforts to keep Luton out, but their efforts were of as little avail as were those of Dame Partington when she tried to sweep back the Atlantic with a mop. Not only were Wellingborough quite unequal to the task, but I should like to see the team that could keep Luton out when they are in such a mood as they were on this occasion.

But though the homesters shot often they did not shoot wildly. They let fly immediately the opening presented itself, but not before. Now they have seen how well the system pays, I hope they will follow it up, for on the form displayed in the first thirty minutes of this game, I am convinced that Luton are equal to almost any task that could be set them.

Not at any time during the past two years have they suffered from lack of cleverness. When there have been shortcomings it has always been want of dash and inability to take advantage of openings when they have been made. But on Saturday, I don't know that there was a single point in which any improvement could have been effected or desired.

The day was not an ideal one, though happily the snow which had threatened so much did not descend, and the ground was in a great deal better condition than it was the previous week. The little snow that there was on the pitch did not in any way interfere with the play, and the men did not slip about nearly so much as might have been expected. Nevertheless the roads outside were in such a filthy condition, and the weather altogether so uninviting, that it required some amount of enthusiasm to tempt one from the fireside.

But in spite of all drawbacks, the crowd was a very respectable one, the dimensions to which it attained showing pretty clearly that lack of interest has had quite as much to do with the small attendances as lack of money. People who will not go to friendlies, will turn out fast enough for League matches and Cup-ties. Fortunately, we have many first-rate fixtures of this nature coming on, and I hope in the future the gates will be as gratifying as they have hitherto been disappointing.

It was half-past two when the teams lined up, Luton, who were playing in white, winning the toss and taking advantage of what wind there was. They went off in dashing style from the half-way line, Ekins showing our old friend Howe a clean pair of heels and putting in a good middle, from which Galbraith topped the bar. Galbraith directly afterwards had another, and this time Robinson saved.

McCartney pulled up the Wellingborough left wing in fine style, but Little and Mellow returning to the attack, Mellow got in a shot which Williams saved easily. A splendid run and a fine centre by Ekins next called for attention, but unfortunately Gallacher could not get round the ball, and it went behind.

Coupar and Galbraith then had a shot, and eventually Coupar receiving from Docherty, put the ball just by the upright, while a moment later Galbraith, taking a nice pass from McInnes, tested Robinson with a clinking shot. Gallacher followed with another, but had the misfortune to come to grief in a well-meant effort to convert a centre from Ekins.

Still Luton kept up the fusillade on the Wellingborough goal, and as the result of some first-rate work by all the front string, Galbraith sent in a lovely shot. "Goal!" shouted the spectators, and it certainly seemed for all the world as though it must be so, but the cry proved to be premature, for the ball had passed by the post on the wrong side.

Robinson brought off a good save from a grand shot by Galbraith by tipping the ball over the bar, and after Gallacher's corner-kick, McCartney returned, and Stewart worked desperately hard to bring about the downfall of the Wellingborough citadel. But it remained for Galbraith to have the honour of drawing first blood. He took a pass from Docherty, and catching the ball on the bounce, without waiting to steady it, he scored a magnificent goal, the ball sailing in at the corner.

Of course, he was loudly cheered for his performance, and well he deserved it. The return to the half-way line was a mere formality, Luton at once renewing their overtures, and Gallacher forcing a corner. The visitors cleared, but Docherty returned twice, and the second time Gallacher put just over the bar. From a return by McCartney Davies headed forward, and the front men taking up the running, there was another shout of "goal" as Ekins landed the ball outside the net.

A miss by the big Mac let in Little, but the little Mac ran back and cleared in the nick of time by kicking out. From the throw-in, however, Little got in a splendid shot, which Williams fisted out. Then Luton went up the field in gallant style, and from a shot by Gallacher, Robinson seemed to take the ball well into goal before he disposed of it. But he was not adjudged to have done so, and Ekins directly afterwards was unfortunate in having a well-merited goal disallowed for offside.

In less than a minute, however, Docherty placed the matter entirely beyond dispute by scoring the second goal with a marvellous shot, which, though taken at fully fifty yards range, went almost like a bullet and beat Robinson all over the shop. The outburst of cheering which followed was about the most enthusiastic I have heard this season, and was only equalled by that which occurred two minutes afterwards, when Stewart, taking a pass from Davies, worked his way to the front and put on the third goal with a spanking shot.

I don't know that I have ever before seen three such goals scored on the Luton ground, or anywhere else for the matter of that. They were simply superb, and Wellingborough must have wondered what manner of team this could be they were playing against. Luton continued to make rings round their opponents, who were solaced by one solitary corner.

About this time, Mr. Crisp had to speak to a spectator, who was saying what "he didn't oughter," and the referee's action was applauded from all parts of the field. This incident over, Luton went at it again ding-dong, and from a centre by Docherty, the ball was landed up against the crossbar just as the whistle sounded for a foul against the visitors. This really robbed Luton of a goal, as Galbraith had no difficulty in putting the ball in the net as it rebounded off the furniture.

After that, McEwen, almost from the half-way line, put in a beautiful shot which Robinson had all his work cut out to negotiate. The visitors then made an incursion, but were beaten back, and Luton were getting very dangerous when the whistle blew, and the players retired for a "breather." During their absence the Red Cross Band afforded further pleasure to the already delighted spectators by giving one or two selections.

The second half was not so good as the first. It

could not be. No team, on such a ground, could go the pace Luton had set for the whole ninety minutes. But the play was always interesting, and though now and then Wellingborough managed to act on the offensive, it was not a difficult matter to spot the better team.

* * *

From a splendid centre by Gallacher, Galbraith and another man came to earth together, each trying to take the ball in an opposite direction. Stewart then rushed up and put in a hot shot, which Robson saved, but the ball was brought to the front again, and after a very exciting time, Stewart put on the fourth goal with a regular clipper.

* * *

Still Luton pressed, and Stewart, who was in a dangerous mood, skimmed the bar with a beauty, while Galbraith actually netted the ball, but had the point disallowed for offside. After that, the visitors had their longest spell on Luton territory, but the homesters eventually made a grand rush, and from a throw-in Docherty centred, and Galbraith put through, McInnes making the opening for him.

* * *

The sixth goal soon followed, Luton getting down through the instrumentality of McInnes. Sims making a miss, McInnes went off at a rare bat, but was "downed" just as he was going to shoot. Wellingborough gained no advantage, however, from what certainly seemed an illegitimate bit of business, as Gallacher simply walked through and scored.

* * *

Towards the finish, Robinson was wonderfully lucky in saving from headers from Stewart and McInnes, at close quarters, and subsequently, when Ekins was making a bee-line for goal, the left winger was pushed over by Holmes, against whom a penalty was given, and Stewart, undertaking the kick, had little trouble in scoring the seventh goal.

* * *

Singularly enough, Mr. Crisp has never, in all the matches he has refereed, given but two penalty kicks, and both of them in favour of Luton. The first was at Reading, who didn't like it a bit. Wellingborough were quite as ungracious, and when the referee took the name of one of them on account of an uncomplimentary remark which he made, the others seemed inclined to sulk. Only two men were on the half-way line when the ball was kicked, but the others gradually fell into their places, and managed to avert further disaster.

* * *

In view of the fact that there was practically not a weak spot in the Luton team, it seems almost unnecessary to individualise. All are entitled to praise alike, though perhaps in different ways. Galbraith led the forwards in grand style, his exhibition altogether being a very fine one. His immediate supporters on the right and left—McInnes and Coupar—also played uncommonly well, differing from the others in that some of their best work was done in the second half, when McInnes put in several brilliant runs, while his passing was always marvellously accurate. Gallacher and Ekins also gave a first-rate account of themselves, though the latter tired in the second half.

* * *

The half-backs made an extraordinary good show. Docherty was in exceptionally fine fettle, and did great things; Stewart likewise was a tower of strength, completely smothering the men opposed to him; and Davies again proved himself worthy of the highest praise for the way in which he accommodated himself to the position of right half. I can say nothing better for McEwen than that he was in his very best form, and people who are accustomed to his displays will know what that means, while McCartney seems to play as strong a game as ever. Williams, of course, had very little to do, but he did that little well.

* * *

The visitors, I fully believe, would have proved themselves what we know them to be, a very clever team, had they had the least chance, but that chance was not vouchsafed them. Little, their captain, seems to be an unusually smart man, and he was the only one to be in any way successful, the other forwards always finding their efforts nipped in the bud. The half-backs and backs worked hard all the way through, and it is to the credit of the men that, until they sulked at the penalty, they never showed the least sign of demoralisation.

* * *

Mr. Crisp refereed well, his decisions generally being as prompt as they were correct. The United League table now reads as follows:—