

FOOTBALL.

LUTON AND THE LEAGUE.

VICTORY AT WELLINGBOROUGH.

PLAYERS INJURED.

On December 19 the Lutonians created a record in the United League by thrashing Wellingborough by seven goals to none. This was at Luton, and it was not expected even by the most sanguine supporter of the local club that the "stripes" would find it possible to repeat the performance on the Northants. ground. The Luton players not only succeeded in doing this on Saturday, however, but they went one better and piled up no fewer than eight goals to none. The explanation for this very severe reverse is partly to be found in the fact that the Wellingburians were deprived of the services of one of their half-backs during the greater part of the game. It is satisfactory to be able to state that this was in no sense due to the Lutonians, for the mishap occurred through a collision between two of the home-sters. Of course the declension weakened the Northants. team; but even the absence of a useful player, and the consequent demoralisation, will not suffice to explain away the great defeat which the "stripes" found it possible to inflict upon their adversaries. The plain fact is that the Lutonians are a good deal better team than that at Wellingborough, and that, had the losing side been complete, the chances are that they would still have been three or four goals to the bad at the finish. The visits of the Lutonians to Northamptonshire are always provocative of a good deal of interest, and Saturday's attendance was no exception to the rule. The weather was superb, the sun shining as brilliantly as at the end of spring. The ground was in fairly good condition, one or two marshy spots having been treated with tan before the commencement of operations.

Mr. Saywell took charge of the following elevens:—

Wellingborough: Goal, Robinson; backs, Holmes and Steele; half-backs, Howe, Heapy, and Murrell; forwards, Walker and Drage (right wing), Murray (centre), Little and Mellor (left wing).

Luton: Goal, Williams; backs, McCartney and McEwen; half-backs, Davies, Stewart and Docherty; forwards, Gallacher and Coupar (right wing), Galbraith (centre), McInnes and Birch (left wing).

Luton linesman, Mr. H. T. Shackleton.

The visitors lost the toss, and faced the sun and a strong breeze. The home lot went off strongly, and in the first minute or two McEwen was called upon to clear. Stewart followed suit, and then Wellingborough forced a corner, Little sending over from this. Hands against Luton gave the locals another chance; but McEwen was in evidence, and a couple of excellent clearances were credited to him. Davies pulled up Mellor neatly, and Gallacher was observed to be stopped in questionable fashion by one of the home defenders, the forward apparently remonstrating with his assailant. There proved to be good cause for this, for Gallacher had to retire before the close of the game and it was announced that his left shoulder was injured. There was some doubt at the time as to whether his collar-bone had not snapped; but fortunately this was afterwards ascertained not to be the case. The determination with which the homesters charged was bound to produce a mishap, and as it happened this came—shortly after Gallacher had sustained his injury—to one of the "whites." Gallacher got away well along the line and Heapy dashed at him for the purpose of checking him. Steele rushed up with the evident intention of seconding the half-back's design; but at the moment the impact was expected to take place the Lutonian jumped aside. The result was that the two Wellingburians collided violently and Heapy was thrown to the ground. It was at once perceived that something serious was amiss and the half-back made his way to the pavilion, where it was ascertained that his right collar-bone was fractured. The injury was attended to and at the end of the game Heapy was able to get about with his arm in a sling. Those who can read between the lines will perceive that the chances are that by slipping aside Gallacher escaped a worse injury than he had already received. To supply the vacancy in the half-back line Mellor was withdrawn from the forward rank. No sooner had the game been re-started than Little was pulled up for fouling. Then the referee was lavishly applauded for reversing a decision of the Luton linesman, who was energetically "chipped" by the spectators during the remainder of the game, though with no visible effect. Hands against the homesters enabled the visitors to attack, though off-side spoiled what seemed an admirable chance of scoring. Gallacher sent in a long dropping shot which Robinson only cleared with difficulty, while Docherty immediately after steered over the line. A mis-kick by McEwen let the locals through; but McCartney came to the rescue and eventually cleared splendidly. Following a free-kick for a foul throw against the home team Gallacher tricked his backs neatly and scored a lovely goal. The home supporters were generous enough to applaud the right winger and he fully deserved it all. After the resumption Birch was stopped for lying off-side. Subsequently the strangers managed to work their way down and Stewart sent in a stinging shot which was finely dealt with. Galbraith was penalised for fouling and then Coupar was cheered for a splendid run. Gallacher

then Coupar was cheered for a splendid run, Galbraith being presented with a good opening as the result. The final effort was unproductive, though. The Northants. men next made their way up, only to be adjudged off-side, while hands against them further checked their progress. From the second of the free-kicks Davies placed so well that an addition to the Luton total appeared inevitable. At the crucial moment, however, the forwards impeded Robinson, and as a consequence of the free-kick operations were transferred to mid-field once more. Murrell incurred the customary penalty by tripping Davies, and from the kick Davies sent into the net, though with no result. Another foul on Galbraith led to the Luton right wingers getting away neatly, both indulging in some tricky tactics. The outcome was that Coupar sent over the bar. At the visitors' end McEwen saved at the expense of a corner, this being headed away by Davies. More pressure was put on by the homesters, Stewart ultimately clearing admirably. Docherty sent in a grand attempt which was capably dealt with by Robinson, following which a further foul throw was awarded against the Wellingburians. In an especially warm attack by Luton Birch failed when close in, the ball finding its way into the wrong side of the net. Galbraith sent wide on receiving from Gallacher, while Birch imitated the undesirable example. "Gally" atoned for his failure, though, just after, for he broke away and scored with a capital long shot. McCartney gave a corner which caused some anxiety to the Luton sympathisers, for Williams had trouble in clearing it. Robinson saved cleverly from Gallacher, while Little shot execrably, and just after Williams effected a fine save, this being the only time on which he had been very seriously tested. The homesters again troubled Williams and the "stripes" retaliated, a big struggle taking place close to Robinson's fortress. The only other point of interest prior to the interval was that Steele was spoken to by Mr. Saywell, who had won golden opinions by his control of the game. The half-time score was:

LUTON, 2; WELLINGBOROUGH, 0.

Immediately after the commencement of the second portion the leaders got down cleverly only to see Galbraith pulled up for lying off-side. A foul against Davies was not productive of danger, for in the next minute McInnes was observed to centre well, Gallacher kicking over the bar. Galbraith fouled Murrell, following which Howe centred well and the ball was sent soaring skyward from a Wellingborough toe. The locals were going strongly just now and it was not long before they returned to the charge, the check being applied close to goal. Birch sent through at the home end but was adjudged to have been off-side, and a corner to Luton was just as unfruitful. Wellingborough tried hard to score when they had made their way to the strangers' end and Williams cleared with a fine kick. More foul play by the locals enabled Luton to advance by means of free-kicks, and McInnes gave Robinson some trouble with a neat effort. The Lutonians continued to press, and it was not until a free-kick was awarded against them for some infraction of the regulations that they could be beaten back. The cessation was not long continued, though, for Gallacher at once burst away and scored with a magnificent shot from the line. The Wellingborough men had up to now been exhibiting capital style; but this new reverse served to extinguish their hopes, and the remainder of the game was a mere "procession" for the leaders. A couple of sturdy efforts on the part of the 10 men who constituted the local team were duly admired, while a foul did not escape the notice of the referee. A splendid attempt from a long range by Stewart was well dealt with by Robinson. "Gally" was responsible for an erratic kick when he seemed to have a good opportunity for scoring. The visiting centre was more sinned against than sinning when, in the next minute, he made his way into close proximity to Robinson, for he was extremely badly fouled. The affair escaped the attention of Mr. Saywell, though. Stewart pushed an opponent with the customary result, and then the home keeper cleared from Galbraith at the expense of a corner. From this the visitors' captain headed through, and then the Lutonians' position was secure. The locals were not quite done with, however, for a plucky burst by their forwards almost produced disaster to the visitors, McCartney interposing himself just in the nick of time. A corner to the Luton team was rendered unproductive by Coupar handling in front of goal. The little right winger made amends for this by tricking the defenders cleverly on receiving from McInnes and lowering Robinson's colours once more. From a centre by Birch (who was playing much better than in the first half) Galbraith managed to get off-side in front of goal, a feat which "Gally" and Gallacher followed up by shooting wide in turn. One of the home forwards got at loggerheads with McEwen, whom he charged in indefensible style. "Mac" retaliated, and Mr. Saywell cautioned them both. Soon after Gallacher rushed off at top speed and transferred to his inside man, who sent into the net. Following a good try by Walker Coupar put in the best run of the day. From a throw-in the left wingers put across the goal, and when Robinson had partially cleared Coupar dashed up and headed through. The homesters were by this time completely beaten, and before the end came Galbraith put on another from a centre by Birch. Towards the end the leaders had all the best of the exchanges, and the result of a very one-sided game was:

FOOTBALL FACTS AND FANCIES.

I suppose there was nobody hereabouts who imagined that the "stripes" stood a chance of being defeated at Wellingborough on Saturday—that is, among those who bore in mind the heaviness of the defeat which the Northampton men sustained at Luton in the first half of the season. At that time the extraordinary collapse of the visitors was surprising to us all and we had fully expected that the men would perform better at home.

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Judging from what we saw on Saturday I should say that Luton would have won in any case with ease. If we lop half the Luton goals off as an allowance for the loss by Wellingborough of a player and the consequent dislocation of the team, we still have a good balance, and the fact that the homesters did not once succeed in finding the net is extremely significant in this connection.

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A fair spectator observed in my hearing on Saturday that the "stripes" were not nearly so good a side as Woolwich Arsenal. Well, all I can say is that if the "reds" gave nearly so good a display at the Northants. town as did the Lutonians they played in vastly better style than I have seen them exhibit during the last season or two. Few teams in the country would have smothered the Wellingburians more completely than did the Luton men on Saturday.

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It has mystified me to account for the comparatively poor shows which Millwall and the Arsenal have given in Northants since the institution of the United League. Perhaps it would be well not to draw comparisons, however, as both the sides mentioned have the retort courteous at command in regard to Luton.

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The most gratifying point in connection with the last two matches of Luton in the League is that the team has jumped from near the bottom of the League to a respectable place. I do not believe that they will be deposed from that position; but I have a feeling, on the other hand, that when the tourney closes the name of Luton will be found still nearer the top than now.

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There are still some stiff tussles to be engaged in. Neither Loughboro', Tottenham Hotspur nor Kettering can be looked upon as being gifts for Luton, for all play a hard game at home. The only one of the three about which I am perturbed very greatly, though, is the first-named, for the "Luffs" have been playing capitally in the United League.

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Of course we shall beat the Arsenal, Hotspur, Kettering, Loughborough and Rushden at home. It is a big order, my critical friend, but it ought to come off. If we do not we shall scarcely depose one or two other teams from the pride of place which is now theirs. My opinion is that the games mentioned ought to yield 10 points—providing the home side is all right.

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To resume consideration of the Wellingborough game, let me say that we were all sorry for the accident to Heapy. I would add that had the homesters been a little less vigorous the mishap would never have occurred. Some of the men went for the Lutonians as though they meant to stop them at all costs, and it was lucky for Gallacher that he managed to jump out of the way when Heapy and Steele collided.

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Had he been shut in between them the consequences must have been very serious, and as it was he escaped by the skin of his teeth. He had, indeed, experienced the rough and tumble tactics of his opponents just previously, for one of the rearguard charged him so heavily as to damage his left shoulder and not only lead to his departure from the field before the end of the game but to prevent him playing at Eastbourne on Monday.

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This importation of unnecessary vigour led to one or two unhappy incidents, and one of these was when one of the forwards charged McEwen in such a way as to lead the gallant little back to retaliate. The intervention of Mr. Saywell sufficed to prevent further unpleasantness.

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The spectators, little as they liked it, were compelled to admit the overwhelming superiority of the Lutonians.

"If we only had our full team" was the burden of the cry which came from all parts of the ground. I wish they had, for the drubbing which the Wellingborough champions would inevitably have received would have been all the more creditable to the visitors. There were some who did not at all relish the defeat, and who exemplified the truth of the saying that there are fools in every crowd.



It should not be forgotten that the weather was delightfully fine and that the surroundings were altogether enjoyable. The pitch was in excellent condition, though rather on the soft side, and this was naturally in favour of the Luton players.



At the commencement of the game the home lot went off at a rare rate; but then they had the wind and sun in their favour, both being strong. When the time came for ends to be changed and the visitors crossed over with the lead I opined that we were to win easily, and events proved this obvious conclusion well warranted.



It may be deduced from what I have already said that the winners played a capital game. That is exactly what it is intended to convey. There was weakness manifest at certain points at times; but on the whole the Lutonians displayed admirable form, their play being characterised by that confidence and brilliancy which was to some extent lacking in the previous week.



Before going on the ground it was whispered to me that the Luton men had made up their minds to score all the goals they could. This meant that they had resolved to play in their best style, and they fully redeemed the promise thus made. I am always ready to pat the team on the back metaphorically when they have done well and just as ready to "slate" them when they have failed. The present is a case where the men are to be complimented, and I congratulate them accordingly.



I know not where to bestow the palm of excellence, for all the lines were in good form. The forwards combined well on the whole and shot hard and straight, the halves stemmed many ugly rushes, the backs were for the most part impassable, and the keeper—well, his record was not stained.



One was delighted to see Galbraith at his accustomed post and to know that he was not seriously hurt at Rushden. He was in capital fettle, and the manner in which he kept his wings going pleased even the home spectators. His first goal was a beauty.



Gallacher, though mentioned second, was not a bit inferior to his comrade. Considering that he was injured at the outset he must be said to have played a great game. His runs gave as much trouble to the opposing defence as ever, while his goals were all superb efforts. We were all intensely sorry to see him leave before the finish, for we all set a high value upon the right winger.



Coupar was another player who compelled the admiration of the locals. He was in splendid form, and the eel-like way in which he made sinuous progress towards the goal delighted everybody. There was no mistake about any of his notches, for all resulted from first-rate play.



The men on the other wing were not so conspicuous. Birch was not very prominent before the interval, but in the second half he showed greatly improved style and some of his centres towards the close could scarcely have been improved upon. McInnes was not very hard-worked; but that which he had to do was carried out excellently.



Stewart completely bottled up Murray, the centre forward of whom we have heard so much. In addition he found time to perform heaps of other useful work. Docherty was once more able to be thoroughly depended upon, some of his centres being admirable. Davies, too, was a thorn in the side of the men on his wing and was responsible for some useful work.



McEwen was as reliable as ever, and if he once in a way made an erratic kick it did not detract from the excellence of his show. The same remark precisely applies to his companion, for McCartney occasionally kicked into touch when he had intended to place the ball well down the field, the leather skidding off his foot.



Williams managed to preserve his charge from capture, though this was not because he had not work to do. Two or three attacks threatened danger, and it was only "Dick's" alertness and skill that prevented disastrous results accruing.

On the other side I was pleased with Robinson as a custodian, especially before the interval. He was extremely hard pressed at times, and that he managed to prevent the tricky Luton forwards from scoring more than twice under the circumstances reflects great credit upon him. I do not blame him for what occurred after the re-start, for fate and a superior team were against him.

As to the other defenders Steele played a good game, though inclined to be rough at times. Howe was most noticeable in the half-back line, some of his centres being very useful, if the forwards had been able to turn them to account.

Amongst the forwards the only one who showed anything approaching excellence was Little, who played on the whole well. Murray was always overplayed by Stewart, and the other members of the front string were unfortunate in having formidable halves against them.

At the commencement of the game nobody seemed to know who the referee was. "Who's Saywell anyway?" was the query. At the interval this sort of saying had given place to expressions of respect, and when the end came everybody was bubbling over with admiration. You should have heard the delighted yell which went up when he overruled a decision of the Luton linesman.

The unfortunate official last-named was mercilessly chaffed by the spectators all and sundry. He did not deserve it, for his decisions were fair enough, and I am not sure that it was not the referee who was wrong when he reversed the linesman's decision.

Mr. Shackleton was in his element when he presided over the substantial tea which the players enjoyed after the match. It is said also that the cigars which were handed round freely in the saloon were of excellent quality. One can understand why the players like to have this gentleman in charge.

Descending to matters of prose, let me say that the League table on Monday stood thus:—

	Played.	Won.	Drn.	Lost.	Goals For.	Goals Agst.	Pts
Millwall.....	8	6	1	1	25	16	13
Arsenal	9	5	2	2	20	19	12
Rushden.....	10	5	1	4	21	24	11
Luton.....	6	3	1	2	23	9	7
Loughboro'..	6	3	1	2	18	12	7
Wellingboro'	10	2	2	6	14	32	6
Kettering ...	8	1	3	4	12	15	5
Tottenham...	4	0	1	3	8	12	1

The alteration in the records of Millwall and Kettering is explained by the fact that these sides met on Saturday at Millwall and that the homesters won by three to one.

To-morrow Kettering are due at Luton in a League match. The ease with which the locals defeated the visitors in the Kettering Cup match should engender confidence as to the outcome of the present encounter. With a full team I have no doubt of the ability of the Luton men to win.

Our friend "Rover" writes: "That was a splendid performance of Luton's at Rushden last week, and those who think the Bedford men out of the running for United League honours had better pause and consider before committing themselves. If Luton win at Wellingborough to-day they ought to come out very near the top of the tree." Luton did win at Wellingborough and I am hoping that the prediction contained in the last line will come true.

The visit to Eastbourne on Monday produced a welcome addition to the Luton funds as well as a draw and a keenly fought game. Gallacher was unable to be present, so that there was another sorting up of the forwards. Under the circumstances it is not surprising that the visitors only succeeded in drawing, though it should be said that they had a good deal the best of the exchanges. The referee was not altogether admired by the Lutonians.

The Luton record after the Eastbourne visit was: Played, 48; won, 33; lost, 8; drawn 7; goals for 169, against 49. This in point of results is a shade inferior to the Millwall record; but in point of goal average it beats the performance of any of the prominent teams in the country.

I am sorry to learn that the committee of the Town Council have concluded that they must adhere to their resolution rejecting the grand stand plan. The football authorities tried hard to obtain a slight concession, but without result, and the outcome is that not only to-morrow but for some time to come those who attend the matches will have to suffer inconvenience and discomfort.

It seems to me that there are very good reasons why the stand might have been passed in its old form and that the objection to its erection by the roadside is more apparent than real. The finances of the Football Club are not in such a flourishing state as to admit of revenue being cut down, and that is the effect of the decision of the committee. My sympathies are altogether with the footballers.

It is said that the stand might be placed behind the terraces. That could scarcely be expected to be a profitable arrangement for the Club for very obvious reasons. Any other spot in the field is out of the question, and I very heartily regret that the Corporation Committee has taken such a course.

The arguments for the rejection are pretty much confined to a suggestion that the bye-laws must be complied with. On the other side it has been clearly