

FOOTBALL.

LEAGUE DEFEAT AT BURTON.

LUTON HAVE HARD LUCK.

On Christmas Day the Luton players had another stiff League match on, having to meet the Burton Swifts on the latter's ground. It was thought by many that the visitors had an excellent chance of gaining two League points, but as it turned out they lost the game by a single goal after having done the bulk of the pressing. Luton were without Coupar and McInnes, their places being taken by Birch and Little. The weather was delightful for football, but the frost had made the ground very hard. The Luton men were shod with india-rubber soled boots to prevent them from slipping on the frozen surface, and this proved a wise precaution. There were about 3,000 spectators present when the following teams lined up;—

Luton Town: Goal, Williams; backs, McCartney and McEwen; half-backs, Davies, Stewart and Docherty; forwards, Gallacher and Birch (right), Donaldson (centre), Little and Ekins (left).

Burton Swifts: Goal, Gray; backs, Lowe and Ashby; half-backs, Waterson, Wyllie, and Rae; forwards, Goodchild and Fisher (right), Leigh (centre), Blackie and McClure (left).

Stewart winning the toss Leigh kicked off for the homesters who at once attacked, Goodchild and Fisher being prominent. This state of affairs did not, however, last very long, for the visitors quickly retaliated and the home defence was hard put to. Ashby, at back, was the most conspicuous defender, playing a fine game. After Stewart and Birch had let opportunities of scoring go by the Burton men broke away and McClure missed somewhat badly. Docherty then had a shy at Gray's charge and succeeded in opening the score after 15 minutes' play, the shot being a splendid one. Luton still pressing Gallacher shot well and only missed by inches, while Birch also severely tested the Swifts' custodian. This roused the Burtonians and they attacked strongly, Fisher striking the post with a good attempt to equalise. Williams and the backs for a time had no easy task, but they came well out of the ordeal. Donaldson then led an attack on the Burton goal. The pressure was maintained for some time, the right wing being especially prominent. Birch made a good attempt to increase the lead but was unsuccessful and then Goodchild, the Burton outside-right, raced away only to be stopped for off-side. Half-time shortly afterwards was called, when the scores read:

LUTON, 1; BURTON, 0.

Directly after the re-start disaster befell the Lutonians, a free-kick awarded to Burton bringing about the downfall of the Luton goal. Ashby was entrusted with the kick and his shot hit the cross-bar and went into the net, the referee awarding a goal to the Swifts on the ground that Williams appeared to touch the ball with his hand before it went through. This roused the visitors to greater efforts and they fiercely bombarded the Burton goal, being seen to much advantage. For nearly half-an-hour this attack was kept up and shots were rained in upon Gray, who, with Ashby, was playing a fine game. Try as they would the Luton men could not score. Donaldson and Ekins were very prominent in the attack and the Swifts' goal had one or two almost miraculous escapes. In the last quarter of an hour the Luton players appeared to tire a great deal, their severe exertions naturally telling greatly upon them. This enabled Burton to once more take up the running and a pass from McClure to Leigh gave the latter player an opportunity of scoring which was promptly accepted. Williams had no chance with this, and from this period up to the finish of the game he had plenty of work found him, the Burtonians having rather the best of matters. The Luton custodian, however, managed to keep down the score, and as Luton also failed to score the game ended thus:

BURTON, 2; LUTON, 1.

FOOTBALL FACTS AND FANCIES.

LUTON TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB, LIMITED,—The players' annual dinner and musical entertainment will be held in the Council Chamber, on Wednesday, January 5, 1898, at 6 o'clock. Shareholders cordially invited. Tickets, 2s. each, to be had of J. Staddon, Bute-street, also on the ground, Saturday, January 1. No tickets can be obtained after Monday, January 3. [Advt.]

Luton footballers have good reason to congratulate themselves on the results of the matches which formed the club's Christmas programme, even though one of the games was lost. Two wins and a loss, with a goal average of 15 to three, in three League games is not bad, especially when it is remembered that one of the encounters took place on foreign soil.

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The defeat at Burton on Christmas Day was naturally enough a great disappointment to many, but it is no new thing for the better team to lose on its opponents ground. When a Burton paper says "The Swifts were certainly very fortunate, upon the day's play, to secure two points" there is not much doubt but that the better side lost.

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The same writer also acknowledged that Gray, the Swift's custodian, "had much more to do than Williams," and concludes thus: "The Bedfordshire club have undoubtedly a splendid lot of men at their disposal, and if they never play any better than they did on Saturday they will occupy a very respectable position on the League chart at the close of the season."

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Donaldson favourably impressed the critics, playing a very fine game, and the same applies to Ekins, who gave his old club mates a taste of his quality. Birch, another old Burtonian, also played capitally, and the combination of the forwards did not suffer greatly through the absence of McInnes and Coupar.

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The defence, in the last quarter of an hour more especially, found plenty to do, but the men were in good trim and acquitted themselves well, Williams and Docherty being very prominent. The former had a sultry time after Burton obtained the winning goal, but he could not again be beaten.

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The goal by which the Swifts equalised was a somewhat doubtful one and certainly a curious one. A free-kick was taken by one of the Burton backs and he landed the ball on the crossbar, from whence it glanced into the net. The referee at once awarded a goal, saying that the ball touched Williams's hand. Whether it was really a goal or not it was a great stroke of luck for the home side.

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A more cheerful topic is the grand victory over Grimsby on Bank Holiday. It was, indeed, a splendid achievement to score six goals against such a powerful team as the renowned "Fishermen," even though the game was played before the Luton crowd.

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It was unfortunate that Grimsby had not a full team until half-time through Fletcher, one of their most prominent players, missing his train. That fact is sure to be advanced in certain quarters as a reason for the heavy score, but it should be remembered that for 85 out of the 90 minutes Luton had practically only ten men, through the unfortunate injury to Ekins.

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The outside-left started in his very best form, and it was probably this which caused Lindsay and Mountain (the right-back and right-half respectively) to pay such close attention to "George." It was the roughness of these men which was responsible for his incapacitation.

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The display of the winners soon aroused the most intense enthusiasm of the spectators, and this cannot be wondered at. The "stripes" were in their best mood and rarely have they put so much dash into their play. It is such rushes as those the forwards made on Monday which bring about heavy scores,

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The most pleasing part of the proceedings was the success of Donaldson. This was the ex-Newton Heathen's first appearance at Luton since he has become identified with the club, and he was the cynosure of all eyes.

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The new centre, judging by his performance up to date, is just the man who has so long been wanted. He is strongly built, covers the ground well, keeps his wings well in hand, and, what is of great importance, shoots hard and often. If Donaldson keeps up this form he will indeed be an acquisition. I was never more favourably impressed by a new man.

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The other forwards, too, were in great form and shot better than they do sometimes. McInnes was in his best form and it was hard luck for him to have three goals disallowed. The right wing pair were conspicuous by some very smart work and they gave the opposing half-back a lively time.

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The halves played a wonderfully good game and besides holding the opposing forwards in check did a great deal of attacking. All of them put in an immense amount of work and the trio on their present form are indeed formidable. Little or no fault was found with them by even the most exacting critic.

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The two "Macs" at back played in champion style, both kicking clean and tackling at the right moment. It was a treat to see McCartney block Fletcher's way when that player came on in the second half fresh and eager to make some atonement for his previous absence. McEwen effectually stopped the speedy Rogers on the Grimsby right.

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Williams did not have a great deal to do, but on several occasions he had to negotiate difficult shots.

and he is to be congratulated on preventing the "Fishermen" from scoring even a single goal.



Of the Grimsby team it may be said that the men in the rear were good and the forwards fairly so; but the half-back line was not up to the standard of the rest of the team and their display cannot be called anything but mediocre.



The leading characteristic of the losing team was roughness and foul play. Many of the men spoiled really good work by foul tactics and the number of free-kicks awarded against them must have reached a pretty high figure. Lindsay at back was at once the best and the roughest man on his side, and his methods quickly roused the ire of the spectators. A better place-kicker, however, has never been seen on the ground, and it was noticed that he took all the free-kicks for his side, no matter in what part of the field, corner-kicks only excepted.



Whittaker was a smart custodian and, although beaten ten times, no blame could fairly be attached to him. The left back (Frith) was not so noticeable as his partner, but he put in some useful work.



The half-backs have already been referred to, and they cannot be congratulated on their show. Mountain lost his temper early in the game, but before doing so he put in some clever work and was, perhaps, the pick of the line. The other men did not come into prominence much.



Rogers on the outside-right is not unknown in Luton, being an old Southampton "saint." He has the reputation of being a fast and dangerous man, and certainly made a good run or two; but McEwen and Docherty soon took his measure and little more was seen of him.



The three inside forwards were the pick of the bunch and occasionally they became dangerous, but lack of support from the halves prevented them from doing much damage. The outside-left was apparently a reserve, and he was not a great success.



The United League game with Loughborough on Tuesday furnished another easy win for Luton and greatly improved the already fine goal average the team possesses in the competition. The visitors played a very poor game in the first half and although they improved after the interval they never showed anything approaching class football.



The crushing defeat which the "Luffs." received makes Luton's loss at Loughborough in the English League all the more inexplicable. To watch the Leicestershire men on Tuesday would almost lead one to think that they were a village team strengthened by the inclusion of one or two good players.



The first half was terribly one-sided and Luton seemed to do almost as they pleased. With six goals in hand the men did not worry themselves much after the interval and allowed Loughborough to pay Williams a visit or two, with the result that they scored. The homesters, however, soon increased their lead after this.



Ekins was unable to take part in the game, and it was understood that he was not even able to walk, his right knee being severely strained. His place was filled by the inclusion of Little at inside-left, McInnes taking the outside berth.



The locals fully maintained their form of the previous day, and that, surely, is sufficient praise. McInnes makes a capital outside left and there is no doubt that he is the man for the place when Ekins is absent. Little was also a success and it is certain that when put in his proper place he can play a rare good game.



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Among the losers two men stood out prominently from the rest, and they were Beardsley, the goal-keeper, who gave a fine exhibition between the sticks, and Horace Pike, the old Notts. Forest man, who figured at outside-left. One or two others did not do badly, but the team, taken altogether, was a very moderate one.

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Mr. Kingscott has long been known in Luton as an excellent referee with one great failing—and that the offside rule. On Tuesday he gave several rather startling interpretations of the law, and disallowed three or four goals for alleged infringements. On two of these occasions his reasons for so doing were rather hard to guess, but it is only fair to state that on others there was no doubt as to his being correct.

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The *Daily Chronicle*, speaking of the defeat of the Arsenal by Tottenham in the United League on Christmas-Day says: "Tottenham Hotspur's rather surprising defeat of the Reds makes Luton's championship reasonably certain. It is high time the straw-plaiters won something."

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The following is the table compiled to date:—

							Goals		
	Plyd.	Won	Drn.	Lost	For	Agst.	Pts.		
Luton	10	9	0	1	36	5	18		
Woolwich	6	4	1	1	16	8	9		
Tottenham	6	4	1	1	12	9	9		
Kettering	6	3	1	2	11	12	7		
Millwall.....	8	2	2	4	13	11	6		
Wellingborough ...	10	2	1	7	10	31	5		
Southampton	5	2	1	2	7	5	5		
Rushden	5	2	0	3	7	11	4		
Loughborough	8	0	1	7	4	24	1		

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The officials for the great match on the 29th of January with Bolton Wanderers are announced as follows:—Referee, J. Tillotson (Birmingham); linesmen, J. Lovell (Leicester) and H. Whittaker (London). The choice of referee could hardly have been bettered for Mr. Tillotson is undoubtedly a fit man for the post. I wonder if "H." Whittaker will after all turn out to be "Nat."

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Luton have a stiff job on hand to-morrow with Manchester City, but if they maintain their form of the last week or two there is no reason why they should not win. Of course, the "Cits" are a formidable lot, but weaker teams than Luton have beaten them. There is sure to be a great crowd present and a good sixpennyworth is bound to be provided.

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The table for the Second Division of the League stands thus:—

							Goals.		
	Plyd.	Won	Drn.	Lost	For	Agst.	Pts.		
Burnley.....	16	13	2	1	46	9	28		
Manchester City..	15	11	2	2	37	13	24		
Newcastle United	15	10	1	4	28	18	21		
Small Heath	15	10	1	4	32	22	21		
Leicester Fosse ..	15	7	4	4	26	16	18		
Woolwich Arsenal	16	8	2	6	32	28	18		
Newton Heath ..	16	7	3	6	27	14	17		
Grimsby Town ..	19	7	3	9	34	40	17		
Luton	14	5	3	6	32	27	13		
Walsall.....	17	5	2	10	32	39	12		
Loughborough ..	15	5	1	9	17	36	11		
Gainsboro' Trinity	14	5	1	8	25	36	11		
Darwen	15	4	2	9	19	43	10		
Lincoln City	15	3	3	9	27	46	9		
Burton Swifts....	14	4	1	9	21	31	9		
Blackpool.....	15	3	1	11	20	38	7		

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Luton's record for the first four months of the season reads:—Played 31, won 18, drawn 4, lost 9, goals for 85, against 44.

FOOTER.