

THE LEAGUE.—SECOND DIVISION.

WALSALL v. LUTON TOWN.

Played at Walsall on Saturday. Result:—

Walsall	5 goals.
Luton Town	nil.

The teams were as follow:—

Walsall—Bunyan, goal; Peers and C. L. Aston, backs; Taggart, Jenkyns, and Wilkes, half-backs; Griffin, Johnson, Devey, J. Aston, and Holmes, forwards.

Luton—Williams, goal; McEwen and McCartney, backs; Davies, Stewart, and Docherty, half-backs; Gallacher, Coupar, Donaldson, Little, and Molnes, forwards.

Referee, Mr. Hall (Derby).

McCartney's prophecy, uttered at the dinner on Wednesday night, that though the Luton footballers had failed a little at the beginning of the season, they would make the English football public listen to them yet, has been fulfilled earlier than even he anticipated. Owing to the sensational victories over Grimsby, Loughborough, and Manchester City, the football public listened to them on Saturday with a good deal of interest, and they heard something of a decidedly startling character.

Many of us expected that they would have all their work cut out to beat Walsall on the latter's ground, but we little thought that the boot would be so completely on the other leg, and that Luton would not only be beaten, but disgraced into the bargain. Yet so it was, if we may believe the reports emanating from different sources, and as they all seem to agree on this point, they may be taken as fairly accurate.

The Luton players, in order to be perfectly fit, travelled to Birmingham on Friday night, but Coupar, who came from Dundee, where he had been spending his honeymoon, arrived at Walsall just in time for the match.

Both teams were fully represented, and as the weather was favourable, a good game might reasonably have been looked for.

At first, it seemed that this was going to be the case, for play started very smartly, the Luton men showing particularly good form. For five minutes they were all over their opponents, the forwards attacking vigorously, and the backs and half-backs putting the stopper on every attempt of the Walsall men to get away.

Twice the Luton men became very dangerous, but each time the ball was sent wide of the goal. Then the homesters got away, and Holmes getting in a splendid centre from the corner flag, Devey, who was well up, met the ball and headed through. This was practically the first time the homesters had got a sight of the Luton goal.

Walsall's success caused immense enthusiasm among the spectators, but Luton, showing no sign of discouragement, again forced the pace. Bunyan was now called on several times, and the least mistake on his part would have been fatal. The visitors attacked, and were twice driven back by Jenkyns and Peers, and then McCartney, from a foul, lifted the ball into the goal-mouth, and a scrimmage ensued within a couple of yards of the goal-line, the ball being ultimately shot over. Luton had quite as much, if not more, of the play during nearly the first half-hour.

After this, the play favoured the home team, and at length they caught the visitors napping, and scored a curious sort of goal. Griffin made a long pass forward, and whilst Luton were appealing for offside against Aston and Holmes, both of whom were palpably out of play, Devey rushed through and banged the ball in the net.

Towards the interval, Luton made perhaps the most dashing attack in the match. They came up in a body, Jenkyns, in an effort to clear, placing the ball at Donaldson's feet. A goal looked inevitable. The ball, however, was partially cleared, and the attack finished by the ball being put outside. Luton still pressed, and Bunyan had his hands full for some time. Once he measured his full length in clearing, and frequently the Walsall backs were taxed to the utmost.

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The game, which up to now, had been a fairly good one, degenerated very rapidly, both sides indulging in foul tactics, Luton, however, being the chief offenders. The visitors, in fact, became completely disorganised, and Walsall, taking advantage of the opportunity, Holmes headed a third goal.

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Then a very unfortunate incident occurred. Coupar and Aston, the Walsall left back, came together, and the Walsall man struck Coupar, in consequence, as he alleged, of being kicked by the Lutonian. For the visitors, it is contended that what occurred was quite unintentional, but however that may have been, the result was deplorable, and Aston was ordered off the field. The Luton players appealed that he might be allowed to remain, but the referee, who had consulted the linesmen, considered he had no option in the matter.

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Half-time arrived, with the score remaining at three goals to nil in favour of the home team. The latter resumed with only ten men, Holmes taking Aston's place at back, but in spite of this, and in spite of the fact that Luton in the second half had the advantage of playing downhill, the bulk of the pressing was done by Walsall.

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The play continued to be very rough, and Luton were once again taught that honesty is the best policy even in football. The experience they have had this season should have been sufficient to have taught them that lesson. The matches in which they have shown to least advantage in goal-getting have been just the ones in which they have done most fouling, and the games in which they have exhibited a decided superiority to their opponents, have been those in which they have played the game and not played the fool.

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Walsall's fourth goal was scored soon after the interval, J. Aston doing the trick, with a grand shot, and the fifth was obtained from a penalty, given by McCartney. Walsall passed at the finish, but could not increase their score, though the beating, as it was, constituted the worst that Luton have ever received in an important match.

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The "Morning Leader," in its account of the match, says: "A rough and exciting game was played at Walsall, Luton being the visitors; and probably more shady tricks and foul play were crowded into this ninety minutes than in any match yet played—at least, this is the expression of opinion of two of the officials of the match, and of many old followers of the game. . . . McEwen was probably the best man in the Luton ranks, Davies, McCartney, and Docherty spoiling their display by paying more attention to their opponents' limbs than to the ball, and the fact that Walsall obtained two goals in the second half, with only ten men, and kicking uphill, while the visitors failed to score, points to the weakness of the Luton attack. Luton undoubtedly tarnished their reputation by the exhibition they gave on Saturday last."

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"Rover" observes: "And while on the subject of consistency, let me read a little lesson to Luton. They, too, have been trying our patience more than once, for no sooner do they do a brilliant thing and make us all clap our hands with glee than they come down flop again, and make all their well-wishers feel very foolish. Last week, they beat Manchester City by three to nil, yet that does not prevent them

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from going down at Burton (?) by five goals to love. When I read the wire announcing the fact on Saturday night, I could scarce believe my eyes. It was a faoer. Ah, well, better clubs have out more curious capers, and we must all e'er wait till 29th January, when Luton will wipe out all past blots on their 'scutcheon by giving the Wanderers from Bolton their go by. Was it the Luton supper on Wednesday night that upset the digestion of the team and brought them such a cropper? Or was it the 'mineral waters' at Burton (?). Perish the thought!"

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I am inclined to think the supper had a good deal to do with it. Certainly, up to that time Luton were showing surprisingly good form, and the reverse at Walsall wants a lot of explaining away. Personally, I think the dinner was a great mistake altogether, but the worst feature about it was its being given in the middle of the week.

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To give dinners to athletes when they have serious work on hand is a suicidal policy, and this function, taking place as it did on Wednesday, gave the players no time to get into condition for the Saturday's match. I am not insinuating for a moment that the players did not keep well within bounds in their eating and drinking, but spreads of this sort are apt to upset the most abstemious individual, and nothing could be devised to interfere more seriously with training.

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The "Athletic News" remarks: "Luton have done marvellous things at home, but they cut a sorry figure at Walsall, going down by as many as five to none. Donaldson, who has done so well for the 'straw-workers,' was now as ineffective as the rest. Walsall have lately been showing signs of improvement, and they no doubt opened the eyes of the Lutonians."

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The writer of the Midland notes in the same journal says: "Luton came down heavily at Walsall, as five to none shows. The game, it appears, was exceedingly rough and unpleasant, one of the Walsall players being ordered off the field. Speaking with "Swin" Jackson, the Luton secretary, on Friday, he expressed the opinion that his team might extend the Bolton Wanderers in the English Cup tie, but after the Walsall collapse, the Wanderers will perhaps take heart of grace. Mr. Jackson has not a team like the 'Throstles' to conjure with now, and I am afraid Luton will be amongst the slain after the first skirmish."

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The following is from the "Birmingham Daily Mail": "Luton, who have been going very strongly of late, failed at Walsall, where the locals, although only playing ten men for half the game, won hands down. Walsall opened with brilliant football, and the visitors, finding themselves out-played, resorted to rough play. C. Aston was sent off the field for striking Coupar. The latter, however, was alleged to have deliberately kicked Aston, so that the Walsall man had much provocation. In the second half, Luton quite went to pieces, and seemed all at sea. They had a number of good chances, but shot wretchedly, and Walsall further increased their total. Towards the end, some disgraceful tactics were indulged in by the visitors. The referee stopped the game almost every minute, and eventually gave a penalty kick to Walsall."

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A Walsall writer says: "The vast improvement in the Walsall ranks is making itself manifest. Devey, the new centre, played a grand game. It must not be forgotten either that Walsall played ten men during the second half, yet managed to increase their score by two goals, so that the great improvement in the Walsall team is a proved fact. After winning two matches by 17 to 0 (Blackpool and Wreckwardine Wood), they only lost by one goal each in their matches with Newcastle and Manchester City, away from home. Now to beat Luton under such circumstances by five goals (and Luton a week ago defeated Manchester City by three goals) proves that they mean business."

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In the other League matches, the most surprising result was obtained at Bolton.

The writer of "Mancunian Murmurings" in the "Athletic News," says: "Talking of the Luton match, I hear on very good authority that one of the 'neutral' linesmen actually jumped up and waved his arms in ecstasies of joy when the Strawplaiters scored their first goal. He may be asked by the League how he reconciles this with his position as an impartial official."