

THE LEAGUE.—SECOND DIVISION.

GRIMSBY TOWN v. LUTON TOWN.

Played at Grimsby on Saturday. Result:—

Luton Town	3 goals.
Grimsby Town	1 goal.

The teams were as follow:—

Grimsby: Whittaker, goal; Lindsay and Frith, backs; M'Lean, Bell and Chatburn, half-backs; Goldie, Robinson, M'Cairns, Fletcher and Gray, forwards.

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

Referee, Mr. Tomlinson, of Sheffield.

Except for the fact that, owing to the training for the Cup-tie, the Luton men were in the best of condition, there could have been no reasonable expectation that they would be victorious at Grimsby. The latter, no matter how indifferent their performances away, have generally proved invincible on their own ground, and, as the "Athletic News" remarks, it is years since any Club beat the Fishermen both at home and away, and that too, to the tune of nine goals to one.

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Luton made the journey over-night as far as Cleethorpes, in order to be perfectly fit, for they were able to reckon upon Grimsby, who are also training for the Cup-tie with Notts Forest, being in the best of condition. The Fishermen were represented by their Cup team, the half-back line being strengthened by the inclusion of Bell, of Dundee, who made his first appearance in a League match for his new Club.

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The "Eastern Daily Telegraph," whose representatives appear to be as clever as they are smart, gave in its Saturday evening edition a graphic description of the play. Indeed, the report is one of the very best that I have seen, bearing in mind the fact that it was published so soon after the conclusion of the match, and I therefore make no apology for giving it almost in its entirety.

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In its preliminary remarks, the "Telegraph" says:—"After a long series of friendly matches, Grimsby Town to-day turned their attention to the more serious work of improving their League record. Possibly a greater attraction could not have been provided than the visit of Luton. They, like Grimsby Town, have before them the shadow of a great Cup-tie. But even this fact, attractive enough in itself, did not lessen in any degree the grim earnestness with which they regarded their match with the Town. Before a great crowd at Luton on Boxing Day they succeeded in inflicting a severe defeat upon the Fishermen, and it was with the memory of such a pronounced victory—though their performances away from home have been poor, it we except their early success at Newton—that encouraged them to believe they would just snatch a close and exciting victory upon the return match at Grimsby. On the other hand, Grimsby Town have not forgotten the Christmas box, and feeling even yet the smarting influence of the Strawplainers' thrashing, they entered the field this afternoon amid the cheering of their supporters, with a pronounced feeling of confidence that they would soon wipe off the half-dozen deficit and chalk up something approaching it now that their turn had come, on the other side."

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Proceeding to a description of the game, the "Telegraph" reporter says:—Little time was lost in starting, and referee Tomlinson set the men off to the minute. A dashing piece of play by the visiting forwards speedily brought Lindsay and Frith into action, but all danger was cleared, and the next incident of note was a free kick about thirty yards from goal to the home team, Lindsay sending the ball well into the Luton quarters. It should be said that the Town had lost the toss, and were having to contend against a slight wind. After the preliminary burst on the part of the Strawplaiters, the Town appeared to be settling down, M'Lean doing some good work, while Lindsay laid well on to the home halves. It was pretty evident in the first five minutes that every inch of the ground would be sturdily fought.

The crowd, which numbered about 4,000, watched the varying stages of the game with excitement, and there was a mighty cheer whenever the Town got within shooting range. A corner forced by Fletcher, made things uncomfortable for the visitors, and a roar of laughter announced that the nether garments of one of the Luton men had burst under the too severe strain which was placed upon them. After a couple of minute delay the ball was again bobbing near the centre, and it was astonishing how little progress it made towards either of the defended citadels. At length Robinson got into excellent position for putting in a fine screw shot, but he failed to get at the right angle, and the ball was sent yards wide.

After eighteen minutes' play Luton suddenly smartened up, and gave their right wing, Gallacher and Coupar, all the possible chances they could. The result of this was some uncomfortable pressure near the Town goal. An exciting scrimmage under the bar followed a corner, and Whittaker was remarkably smart in getting the ball away on more than one occasion. Only two minutes after this, and whilst the crowd were silent to a painful degree, Gallacher tore down the wing like a stag, and after beating Frith in pace succeeded in screwing in from the goal line. McInnes was keenly alive to the situation, and whilst Whittaker was endeavouring to reach the oblique and curling shot, the visitors' inside left neatly headed the ball quite out of his reach.

This was after 20 minutes' play, and there was no possible doubt the score was the result of a fine and well-deserved effort. Nothing of great note occurred for the next five minutes, at the end of which, however, Fletcher made a fine movement in the direction of Williams, and a goal seemed certain. He was tackled, however, by the sturdy custodian, who very luckily got to the ball in the nick of time. The next moment it fell to the toe of Goldie, who had a magnificent chance of scoring, but, when there was only the goalkeeper to beat, he sent the ball some four or five yards wide. Having literally to contend for every yard of the ground, the play when near goal was very disappointing to the Town supporters.

The Luton forwards, especially the inside men, were exceedingly tricky, and so far neither of the Town half-backs had appeared to get their full measure, Bell at times displaying a somewhat surprising weakness, when contrasted with his excellent form in the recent friendlies. The crowd were very sympathetic, and overlooked some glaring mistakes by the whole of the Town forwards, and they were amply rewarded for their patience, as after a quarter of an hour following the Luton success, M'Cairns, leaning a little to the right, sped away towards Williams. The Luton halves were altogether in the wrong place for catching the wily "Tommy," who, steadying himself, struck the crossbar with a grand shot. As the ball came out, Gray dashed along, and, meeting the ball, safely deposited it in the desired haven.

This was just ten minutes before half-time, and needless to say, the equaliser was received with

terrific cheering. Just now Grimsby were certainly playing an improved game, while Luton showed evident signs of falling away. The pace, however, had been a cracker, and there was no wonder in this. Just before half-time the Town were additionally handicapped, for, though the wind had fallen, the sun burst out brilliantly, and it was with difficulty that the spectators looking into the Luton goal could follow the play. It must, therefore, have been increasingly difficult for the players. According to the clock the teams were now playing out the moments wasted in the early stages of the game, but they were exciting to a degree, the Luton men having, apparently, got their second wind, and giving the Town defence serious trouble. The danger was averted, however, and after the home forwards had smartly attacked, the referee sounded for the interval. Half-time score—Grimsby, 1; Luton, 1.

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The opening stages of the second half gave indication of further exciting incidents, for once more the Luton right wing rattled along at a terrific pace, and Coupar only missed the goal by inches. There was no mistaking the fact that Luton were playing up like tigers for the lead, nor could it be denied that they were having the best of the exchanges. It was some six minutes before the Town got into their swing, but there was a want of cohesion amongst the forwards, with the result that their stay in Luton territory was only of a few minutes' duration. An exciting incident was next witnessed in the Town goal-mouth, the Luton forwards appearing to smother Whittaker, though hardly, however, keeping to legitimate means, and though they almost netted the ball the referee promptly awarded the Town a free kick. Robinson and M'Cairns were a long way from understanding each other, and while both were hesitating, "Ginger" dashed in, the ball going to Goldie, who, however, was palpably offside, and ought not to have attempted to score.

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From the free kick Luton got down again, but Bell, coming across in fine style, saved in the nick of time. Play then became rather rough, but Mr. Tomlinson was very firm, and very impartial. There appeared to be no necessity for the teams to adopt these tactics, for it was so much time lost, and they had far better have been playing the game. The Town attacked very seldom, and there was every indication, with the fast setting sun and lowering clouds, of the game being finished in semi-darkness. The players were keeping up an excellent pace, and but for frequent tootling of the referee the game might have been more interesting. It was interesting enough, however, for the small, but enthusiastic band of Lutonians, who, after 25 minutes' play, witnessed a tame shot by Donaldson take effect. Whittaker appeared to be absolutely at sea with it, and though there was nothing whatever in the shot of a deadly character, he dived at an imaginary ball and missed the real one.

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The spectators were naturally much discouraged with such palpable weakness on the part of their custodian. This goal brought about a change in the home forwards, Robinson taking the place of Fletcher, who went outside-right, Goldie stepping inside. The change, however, was the reverse of successful, for a time, at any rate, for Coupar, with a lofty shot, quite out of the reach of Whittaker, put on the third goal for Luton.

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"Referee," the same journal's representative, in his comments on the play, says of the Luton men:—"Donaldson appeared to have his forwards together like so many marionettes, and his signal for a rapid advance was always responded to gallantly by the rest of the forwards. There was always plenty of life in the visitors' attack. The half-backs admirably supported their every movement, while McCartney, a massive specimen of football humanity, appeared to do pretty much as he liked with the home left. The visitors' play throughout, and especially after they had got the lead, was the snug confidence of a team who felt they were capable of pulling off the event. That they had every reason to take this flattering unction to their souls is amply proved by the result."

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The Lincolnshire correspondent of the "Athletic News," in speaking of the match, says:—"Scarcely once during the ninety minutes' display did the 'Fishermen' do themselves justice. Ragged combination, indiscriminate kicking, and general fooling with the ball stood in marked contrast to the clever exposition by Luton, who, in the second half especially, made rings round their opponents. The front line was streets in front of the Grimbarians, their tricky play and judicious passing keeping Lindsay, Frith and Whittaker incessantly busy. Except on two or three occasions, Grimsby never got within shooting range of the Luton goal, and even then the two clever backs on the 'Strawplaiters' side mulled their efforts. On Saturday's play, Luton fully deserved their victory as being the superior team, and if the exhibition is maintained next week the 'Trotters' have a tough job on hand."

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In Monday's issue, "Referee" wrote:—"After the very exhaustive comments which I indulged in on Saturday, I am not at all inclined to go into the defeat of the Town to any great extent to-day. At no time is it a very happy task to write up defeats. Besides, were I to thrash out the whole question again I should come back to the pith and kernel of it all—namely, that the Town team met a better lot than themselves, and suffered the inevitable knock-out, upon the old principle and philosophy of life—the survival of the fittest."

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The "Morning Leader" on Tuesday had the following:—"A correspondent from Grimsby sends a glowing account of the Luton victory last Saturday in Lincolnshire. He says that the men played a brilliant game throughout. They had beaten the Fishermen at every point, and, apparently stung with this unusual home defeat, the latter adopted tactics which have been far too prominent in their methods in the past. Fortunately, no one was seriously injured, though it must be said that the referee and linesmen had their hands very full, but they got through their work very satisfactorily. Upon the form displayed by Luton, he thinks, after having witnessed Bolton Wanderers perform upon several occasions, that Luton ought to stand a very good chance of dismissing the Trotters from the Cup competition next Saturday. The brilliant play of the right wing fairly electrified the crowd, and, try as they would, the home halves could not check the dashing and clever reprisals of Gallacher and Coupar. . . . Without exception, every member of the team knows his work, and brings to bear upon it a great amount of judgment. There were no two opinions on Saturday on the part of the crowd at the Abbey-park ground that the best team won, and that, too, by long chalks."

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"Enthusiast," writing in the "Grimsby News," says: "To my mind, Luton, after the first ten minutes or so, were gradually but surely getting the upper hand, and in the second half there was practically only one team in it." One occurrence of note, the writer says, in the second half, was the repeated fouling of each other by Gray and McCartney. "These two did little else but go for each other for the greater portion of the second moiety of the game, and I am sorry to have to record the fact that Gray was the chief sinner."

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"The Luton team," adds

"The Luton team," adds the writer, "owed their success principally to their weight, dash, and pluck, although the very mediocre form of Grimsby showed them up in a better light than they really deserved. At least, that is my opinion, and the annoying part of the whole business is that not only were Grimsby soundly thrashed on their own ground, but they received their thrashing from a team of 'old crooks.' I do not wish to say anything unfair about the Luton team, or to rob them of a single particle of credit for a splendid victory, but it cannot be contended that the Straw Plaiters are in any sense a juvenile team. One of them, Gray's friend, the right full back, acknowledges to the mature age of 39, whilst at least four or five of the others must be bearing him close company as to age. I wonder what Newton Heath think now of Donaldson and McCartney, or what is the opinion of Derby County re Docherty, or Notts re McInnes? Truly these men have got their second wind with a vengeance, and from what I saw of them at Luton and at Grimsby, I should not say it is strict training that has brought about their good displays. The only way of accounting for it, is, I presume, that the men have so much superior "class" on their side that they can afford to carry a stone or two more avoirdupois than is generally considered conducive to a good display of football!"

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There were only three other Second Division matches on Saturday. At Loughborough, the League leaders, Burnley, obtained a not very magnificent victory by two goals to nil, Gainsborough and Walsall made a draw at one goal each on the Trinity ground, and at Newcastle, Leicester Fosse were defeated by four goals to two. On Monday, at Manchester, the City beat Lincoln by three goals to one.

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The following is the League table up to date—

	Played.	Won.	Drn.	Lost.	Goals For.	Goals Agst.	Pts.
Burnley	21	16	4	1	56	12	36
Newcastle United	20	14	2	4	40	23	30
Manchester City	20	13	4	3	46	22	30
Small Heath	17	11	2	4	36	25	24
Woolwich Arsenal	19	10	3	6	42	33	23
Newton Heath ..	20	9	4	7	36	19	22
Luton Town	18	8	3	7	45	33	19
Leicester Fosse ..	18	7	4	7	28	26	18
Grimsby Town ..	20	7	3	10	35	43	17
Walsall	22	6	4	12	43	47	16
Gainsboro' Trinity	16	6	2	8	30	38	14
Darwen	18	5	2	11	21	48	12
Loughborough ..	19	5	1	13	18	49	11
Burton Swifts ..	17	4	2	11	23	38	10
Lincoln City	19	3	4	12	31	54	10
Blackpool	18	4	2	12	25	46	10

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It will be seen that Luton's victory over Grimsby has raised them to seventh place on the League table, putting them just a point ahead of Leicester Fosse. The Strawplaiters—I beg Mr. Staddon's pardon, the Straw-hatters, I mean—are only three points behind Newton Heath, and as they have a couple of matches in hand, it is quite possible for them to beat the Heathens, while an even higher place is not out of the question.