

UNITED LEAGUE CHAMPIONSHIP.

LUTON DRAW AT PLUMSTEAD.

THE FLAG ALMOST A CERTAINTY FOR LUTON.

The Luton team proceeded to Plumstead on Monday in order to re-play their away game with the Arsenal in the United League competition. The event was of considerable importance so far as the championship question was concerned, for a win for Luton would have rendered it certain that they would be hailed as champions of the League at the end of the season. Instead of a victory the "stripes" secured the next best thing in the shape of a draw, so that their chances of securing the League flag were considerably improved. It will be remembered that when the elevens met at Woolwich a month ago "King Fog" thwarted the designs of the authorities and rendered it requisite for the contestants to meet again. On January 17 Luton for the first time in the history of their meetings with the "reds" had their best team engaged; but on Monday last they were by no means fully represented. Coupar was absent indisposed and Birch was unable to play, these abstentions letting in Little at inside right and Durrant (of the Luton Stanley) at outside left. It was further stated that Stewart was suffering from an injury to one of his feet and Perrins travelled to Woolwich as emergency man. The weather was bitterly cold but bright, the sun shining brilliantly during the afternoon. The "gate" was an excellent one, between 3 000 and 4,000 spectators being present.

It was about twenty minutes past 3 when the men faced the line thus:

Woolwich Arsenal: Goal, Ord; backs, McAuley and McConnell; half-backs, Haywood, Farrell and Anderson; forwards, Brock and McGeogh (right), Hunt (centre), Hannah and White (left).

Luton Town: Goal, Williams; backs, McCartney and McEwen; half-backs, Davis, Stewart (capt.) and Docherty; forwards, Gallacher and Coupar (right), Donaldson (centre), McInnes and Durrant (left).

Referee: Mr. Peters (Kettering); Luton linesman, Mr. H. Galbraith.

Luton won the toss and necessarily took advantage of what wind there was, the Arsenal having the sun shining strongly in their faces. A heavy punt by one of the "reds" sent the ball well into the Luton quarters; but it rolled harmlessly over the line ultimately. Some extremely effective passing by the Luton right-wingers and Donaldson ended in the centre man getting clear and sending behind with a clever shot. Following a grand kick by McEwen Little secured and sent in at a great pace, the ball going plump into Ord's hands. Some laughter was caused by the referee overruling a decision by Galbraith, who had awarded a throw-in to the Arsenal when it should have been given to Luton. More long kicking by the home rearguard led to a strong attack by the "reds"; but Stewart was thereabouts, and the injury to his foot did not stop him from effecting a grand clearance. A foul on Donaldson escaped the notice of the referee, although it was palpable to most people present. The Luton left-wing pair gave a good display, Durrant doing especially well for a youngster; but McAuley was merciless in his charging, and he "bashed" the slim youth very badly. Durrant, however, did not seem to mind very much, but came up smiling with rare pluck. He and McInnes on one occasion just now threatened danger; but weight utilisation on the part of the Arsenal defenders had its inevitable effect, and so the attack was repelled. The first foul in the game—and this was not the last by any manner of means—was given against Little, whereupon cries arose of "Well played, Tottenham," and other like taunting expressions. McEwen saved neatly when the Arsenal attacked. The pace was a cracker considering that the ground was slippery after the thaw. Williams found it necessary to fist away smartly, and a further assault by the homesters was terminated by Stewart sending well up the field. Matters had for a minute or two looked very ugly for the "stripes," the home forwards playing an exceedingly good game at this stage. McCartney became prominent for some first-rate heading, while McInnes secured cleverly just afterwards. Haywood was punished for jumping and as the result of the free-kick the Lutonians were enabled to attack. Donaldson, however, pushed an opponent when quite close to goal, and the result of the free-kick was that the visitors were beaten back for the time being. White got off at a good pace and was encouraged by the cheers of the home sympathisers, these changing into groans of disappointment when the player sent weakly over the goal-line at the finish. Brock was neatly robbed by Docherty, and a foul thrown-in by Haywood was taken cognisance of in the usual way. Docherty centred finely; but some splendid head work by the Arsenal had the effect of clearing the lines. Forcing play by the strangers enabled them to again become dangerous, Little finishing up by sending behind. Durrant was somewhat too prone to getting off-side, and at one stage he was pulled up by the referee just before he succeeded in sending into the net. The same player followed up neat passing by dispatching a pretty shot at goal, while Donaldson and Gallacher were conspicuous for effective work. "Donny," as the Lutonians have dubbed their popular centre, failed with a long-range try. A foul against Little for jumping was sandwiched between a couple of grand displays by McCartney, one being an especially fine clearance. Again Durrant was checked by off-side, and then Gallacher and Donaldson burst through the halves and backs, the former sending tamely over the bar when the goal was absolutely at his mercy. "Hard luck" remarked a Lutonian; "very bad shooting" retorted an Arsenalite, an observation in which the visitor was impelled to concur. The right winger once more sent wide, following which Durrant gave a good display against Davis, sticking to the ball like a leech and eventually beating the Arsenal man. Little shot well and from the rebound he hoisted the ball just over the bar. A foul was awarded against McEwen; McAuley took the kick and sent the ball very high over the cross-bar. McConnell was conspicuous for useful defensive work later on, and when a good save had been credited to Ord Gallacher once again sent over the line. A foul against the Arsenal on Donaldson was given and McEwen sent up splendidly. Ord cleared and Stewart shot hard from the return whereupon McAuley deliberately handled the ball. The offence being committed within the 12 yards mark a penalty was granted, and Davies easily scored. This success fell to the Luton representatives when play had been in progress about half an hour, and it was thoroughly deserved, for the "stripes" had had by far the best of the exchanges. Soon after the re-start Anderson was heavily struck on the head by the ball and was so dazed as to find it requisite to retire for a few minutes. Donaldson shot feebly, following which the Arsenal pressed and McEwen relieved. A very soft effort came to Williams when the ball had rebounded from Stewart to one of the "reds," and immediately afterwards "Dick" effected a magnificent save from Hannah. A corner fell to the Woolwich "infants" off McInnes. Durrant was undeservedly stopped for alleged off-side by the referee and after the free-kick a corner was forced as the result of a hot tussle. More exciting moments came, McEwen winding up by kicking hard into touch, a performance which evoked jeers from that section of the crowd who failed to perceive that it was the correct game to play. Following a foul against Stewart the Arsenal indulged in further forcing play, and after a deal of heading and scrimmaging the ball was sent past Williams, McGeoch having the credit of scoring. Twice in rapid succession McCartney attracted attention by reason of brilliant clearances, while Docherty also became conspicuous. There was no more scoring before the interval, when honours were easy with these figures:

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The second half started auspiciously for the Lutonians. A centre by Durrant produced a corner, and when the kick had been excellently placed the left winger pounced upon the ball and beat Ord completely. This occurred within a couple of minutes of the re-start, and the success of the strangers was received very frigidly. A good exhibition on the part of McCartney was succeeded by a foul on McInnes, this leading to a further onslaught by Luton. This was terminated by the awarding of a foul against Donaldson. Hands against the "reds" brought the visitors up again and McInnes had a very easy chance right in front of goal ; but he dallied and was brought down. Donaldson showed up prominently and then McEwen cleared grandly from two or three of the Arsenal forwards. A corner was conceded by Stewart, and when this had produced a keen struggle Donaldson was fouled in front of goal, and so relief came. Durrant, who was nastily fouled at one stage, tried hard to score with a screw shot, while Little sent over the bar. The Lutonians were now having all the best of matters, the "reds" being confined to their own half for several minutes. It was a particularly warm period for the Arsenal defence, and was eventually put an end to by a foul against Gallacher. Next the Arsenal pressed and McCartney gave away a corner, Docherty having just previously sent the ball high over the grand-stand. Durrant gave a very plucky display hereabouts, and again Donaldson was the victim of illegal behaviour by the homesters. Durrant sent in prettily after the free-kick ; but the ball found its way over the bar. McCartney again distinguished himself, while Donaldson sent away with a good kick when the homesters looked threatening. More fouling was indulged in and once the Arsenal forced a corner, which was neatly disposed of. Docherty cleared when the home lot had obtained a foul against Stewart, while Williams threw away well shortly afterwards. The "stripes" retaliated and were once more seen attacking at the home end. Durrant was badly fouled when within the 12 yards mark ; but Mr. Peters took no notice of the infraction. The home outside right sent wide when he had managed to get in front of Williams with the ball at his toe. Docherty had been very leisurely strolling up when it was his duty to throw in from touch, and the attention of the referee was at length attracted, whereupon the left half was admonished in due form. A long one from Durrant was neatly dealt with by Ord and afterwards McEwen presented his adversaries with a corner, which proved useless. Time was now rapidly approaching, and it seemed likely that Luton would succeed in holding the lead. But it was not to be. Stewart gave away a corner when a long way from the goal-line, and in the scrimmage which ensued the ball was sent through by Hannah. This was four minutes before time arrived. Subsequently both sides tried hard to obtain the advantage ; but it was all fruitless endeavour, and the end arrived with the totals standing thus :

LUTON, 2 ; WOOLWICH, and

FOOTBALL FACTS AND FANCIES.

After the Newcastle match on Saturday I had a brief conversation with Mr. Watt, the United Secretary, and elicited the frank admission that the better side on the day's play had undoubtedly won. This concession ought to suffice to prove that the locals thoroughly deserved their victory.

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That the visitors tried their utmost to snatch a couple of points was unmistakeable, and when their position in the League table is borne in mind it will readily be understood why this should be. The "stripes" wanted the brace of chalks very badly; but they were not nearly so valuable to the locals as they would have been to the wearers of the "black and white."

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For a win would have meant that they would have headed Manchester City, who are now second on the list. The struggle between the two combinations for pride of place is being very keenly fought, and it was somewhat significant that the "coalies" should have been put out of the race—for the time being, at any rate—by the Southerners.

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It was only right that the Lutonians should do this good turn to the Manchester Club, for they had dashed the hopes of the Mancunians very severely on January 1st by piling up three goals to none against them. There would be great rejoicing in the Manchester camp on Saturday night when the intelligence arrived of this fresh achievement of the Luton Leaguers.

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A significant fact is that one of the three defeats sustained by Manchester was administered by Luton, and that prior to Saturday the players from "Coaly Tyne" had succumbed only four times, twice to Burnley. They had not dropped a point at home, except to the League leaders.

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The significance of Luton's performance will be recognised when these facts are pondered upon. It was in the natural order of things unlikely that Luton would succeed in beating the formidable lot from the North; but then the "stripes" are able to boast that they have only tasted the bitterness of defeat on one occasion in the League on their own ground.

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It was the fine victory of Southampton in the previous week that led many of us to think that the local champions would find it possible to secure the coveted League points. The argument used was that if So'ton found it possible to win, Luton—a superior side to the "seaside," as proved by the season's displays—ought not to be outlayed on their own pitch.

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A critic from the North attributed the failure of Newcastle to the weakness of the half-backs, observing that they were bad enough at Southampton but infinitely worse at Luton. We all knew that the half-backs were regarded as the backbone of the team and were surprised that they did not give a better account of themselves.

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At the same time it must not be forgotten that in the Luton quintette the Newcastle halves had to face one of the cleverest and trickiest front ranks in the Second Division. Any half-back might be pardoned for failing against a right wing such as was that of Luton on Saturday or against such a dashing centre forward.

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Let me confess, before proceeding to critically deal with the merits of the respective sides, that I was agreeably surprised with the comparative absence of roughness from the Newcastle display. There was plenty and to spare, one must admit, but nothing to seriously grumble at when one bears in mind the physique of the players and the importance of the game.

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Of course Jackson and Stott were guilty of some very reprehensible offences. The former, however, improved vastly after a time and he played a magnificent game to the end, his kicking being superb. Stott was more deserving of censure, for he endeavoured to make up by brutality what he lacked in cleverness. Both he and Jackson had all their work cut out by the home right wing.

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Proceeding in a discursive fashion which may be excused for once in a way, let me say that I was disappointed at the comparative smallness of the "gate." Despite the excursions from London, the attractiveness of the fixture and the suitability of the weather there was only a very moderate attendance. Supporters ought to attend good matches much better than they are doing, for nobody is entitled to find fault with the recent performances of the team.

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Now for the game. I was delighted with the exposition given by the "stripes," who deserved to the full all the success they obtained—and a little more. It has been hinted to me that Newcastle had hard luck. They had, certainly; but then did not Luton?

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I cannot yet understand why the referee disallowed the goal scored by McInnes just before the interval. If it was on the ground of off-side—as I must suppose—the decision was manifestly incorrect, for McInnes was certainly on side when Davies played the ball.

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Talking about goals, let me present hearty congratulations to Donaldson on his magnificent play which led to the third notch being registered. His was a smart score at Small Heath; but this was smarter and every cheer that greeted it was thoroughly deserved. It was a superb triumph of individualism—and under the circumstances which applied nothing but a single-handed dash could have succeeded.

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Whilst alluding to Donaldson I must be permitted to make a digression and compliment him upon his pluck in turning out at all. It was stated to me that he was not by any means fit; and yet he gave a sterling show. More power to him, say I.

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We were all glad to see McCartney do himself justice on his resumption. "Mac" did quite the right thing by infusing plenty of dash into his play, and repeatedly he succeeded where many another back would have been beaten owing to over-cautiousness. Such exhibitions as Saturday's are of great value, no matter what some would-be clever people may opine.

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The splendid performance of the right wingers has already been touched upon; but amplification may be desirable. Gallacher's centres were infinitely more dangerous than in the previous week, and Coupar's tricky methods succeeded, despite some very heavy charging.

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The left wingers must be considered as having given a successful display. Birch worked untiringly and was ready to put up with hard knocks—and to return them—whilst Little "Tommy" was always to be relied upon. I am certain that the inside position is the right place for McInnes, and am hoping to see him played there often now that it has dawned upon the authorities that the previous occupant of the post is by no means a success.

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The halves were not to be found fault with. Stewart was in great form, and the way in which he shadowed Peddie was a treat. In Campbell he had a bigger handful; but he did not suffer the old Sunderland man to do much useful work. Stewart's supporters were also dependable, Docherty putting in some splendid centres.

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McCartney has had his meed of praise, and now a word is due to McEwen, who was almost impassable. Williams was in capital fettle, and one at least of his saves was good enough for an international.

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The Newcastle forwards were not so dangerous as were the opposing quintette; yet they were a useful lot. It will be admitted that they ought to be when it is stated that two had played for "the team of all the talents," one for 3rd Lanark and a fourth for Preston North End. Even with these credentials they did not frighten the home defenders, who paid no respect to their record but pulled them up without scruple.

The performance of the United halves has been inferentially referred to. Stott (the captain) is an old Grimsby player, and had it not been for his nasty fouls his game would have been admirable. The others were a burly pair; but they were unable to cope with the speedy front rankers opposed to them.



Apart from his proneness for attracting the attention of the referee by his reprehensible tactics, Jackson gave a very fine exposition indeed; and it is my judgment that he is one of the best left backs who have yet visited Luton. White was overshadowed. Watts did well in goal and effected some very smart clearances.



As to the refereeing I confess to having been agreeably disappointed. Mr. Stark gave what seemed to me the best exhibition that we have seen from him. I am glad to be in a position to say this, as it has in the past been my unfortunate lot to have to severely criticise him.



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By the way, I was glad to notice that Mr. Jackson, the Luton Secretary, was well enough to be present at the Newcastle match. He had been badly indisposed during the week.

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The outcome of Monday's match with Woolwich leaves the championship practically a certainty for Luton. Had they won it would have been impossible for the Arsenal to displace them from the head of the table; as the matter stands now it is just possible.

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If Luton lose their two remaining fixtures (Arsenal at home and Loughborough away) and the Arsenal win their six (including Luton, Southampton and the Spurs, all away) the "reds" will beat us by a couple of points at the finish. But they are not very likely to do so, and I shall be very greatly surprised if the Luton lead is not by several points when the end of the season comes.

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There is a story going the rounds that some faint-hearted persons tumbled out of the train at Luton when they learned of the alterations in the "stripes" team and declined to go to witness the slaughter which was to take place. These must have regretted their fearsomeness when they learned of the result.

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A well-known supporter of the Luton club whispered to me his idea that we were to be beaten by three goals. I did not agree with him, much as the team had been sifted up, though I confess I regarded the encounter with some apprehension.

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The fact that the men were robbed of victory just at the close is the more annoying to me in that I have persistently throughout this season declared my opinion that the "stripes" are a better side than the "reds." Even as it is, however, a draw at Woolwich points to a win at Luton, and if that should happen I shall feel justified in claiming that my contention has been borne out.

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The hero of the match was undoubtedly Durrant, who was given his opportunity and took full advantage of it. He played a splendid game, being consistently full of dash and absolutely fearless of the sturdy defenders who were opposed to him. His only fault was a tendency to get off-side too frequently.

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Durrant, who is worth retaining by the Town Club, is a Luton lad and is just over 18 years of age. He has played at outside right for the Luton Stanley, and has not previously appeared at outside left. He played at outside right for Bedfordshire recently against Leicestershire and scored the only goal which was obtained by his county.

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It would be absurd to reproduce the idea of the *Morning Leader* that the new outside left was the best forward on the field; but he certainly played in surprisingly good style and deserves the warmest congratulations. It would seem that we have discovered a useful outside left.

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Frankly speaking, I must say that the game was not a great one. Somehow or other teams like Luton and the Arsenal never meet without introducing unnecessary vigour, and that occurred on Monday. Some of the men "went for" each other as though the fate of the country depended upon the game. Mr. Peters was "down upon" this roughness for the most part, however.

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So far as the play was concerned my impression was that Luton were the better side, and that they deserved to win. They were engaged in attacking for almost two-thirds of the game. The Arsenal were tightly penned in during the opening 20 minutes of the second half.

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The "stripes" forwards were far the better lot. McInnes was to my mind the best of the bunch, with Donaldson and Gallacher well in the running. Durrant has had his meed of praise, while one ought to confess that Little shaped better than usual.

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Stewart was thought unfit to play, and it is a singular fact that both Arsenal goals were secured as the results of mistakes on his part. It was a thousand pities that he gave away a corner when the end was so near.

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Docherty was the best of the halves; but Davies performed some useful work. The backs were in fine form, McCartney's rushes succeeding again. Williams effected one grand save and at other times did well.

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My opinion of the Arsenal centre man was not very good; indeed, Hannah and Brock pleased me most in the front rank. The halves were not the equals of those opposed to them; but the backs proved themselves reliable. Ord was trustworthy, though this time he failed to stop the penalty kick.

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There was a good crowd present, and many spectators were to be heard shouting for Luton. I do not accept the statement, however, that those were supporters of the 'Spurs. Upwards of £70 was taken, so that the two meetings at Woolwich have yielded £140. If £100 is taken at Luton, the clubs will have a respectable sum for division.

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The referee was not altogether a success. He pulled Durrant up more than once for off-side when the player was in a perfectly legal position, while he passed several infractions of the other side. On the whole, however, his decisions were satisfactory.

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We shall watch the progress of the Arsenal now with redoubled interest, for a slip on their part means championship honours for Luton. They are pretty certain to come down at least once.

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On Saturday Rushden beat Loughborough, at Loughborough, 1-0; Woolwich and Millwall drew, at Plumstead, 2-2.

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