

WELLINGBOROUGH v. LUTON TOWN.

Played at Wellingborough on Monday. Result:—

Luton Town	2 goals.
Wellingborough	nil.

The Luton team was the same as on Saturday, except that Ekins reappeared in his old place, and Stonebridge, of the Reserves, substituted Docherty, who had to stand out by reason of an injury to his ankle. The Wellingborough team was as follows:—Robinson, goal; Lewis and Gaiber, backs; A. J. Murrell, A. J. Martin and Elson, half-backs; Walker, Barker, Murray, Davis and Mellor, forwards. The referee was Mr. Rudkin, of Loughborough.

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Although Wellingborough were beaten at Luton by four goals to nil, there was a smartness about the eleven which I commented on, and commended at the time, and which I fully believed would make them exceedingly dangerous opponents on their own ground. But neither I nor anyone else was prepared for the wonderful game the Wellingborough men played on Monday.

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It was an ideal day for football, or any other form of outdoor sport—not too warm for the active participants in the game, and just about right for the spectators, of whom there was a good muster, notwithstanding the fact that a few miles away Rushden was celebrating its annual feast. But it takes fewer Northamptonshire men to make a crowd than any other class of people I know, for every man jack of them makes as much noise as a dozen ordinary folk. Therefore we had “quality,” if not quantity.

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The Luton men reached Wellingborough shortly after one o'clock, but it was not until half-past four that the proceedings commenced. Then for an hour and a half the two teams were at it ding-dong, the pace never slackening for a moment, and neither team willingly yielding an inch until the whistle sounded for a cessation of hostilities.

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I have seen a good many hardly-fought battles in my time, but never one in which such a deadly earnestness was displayed from beginning to end. From the way in which the Wellingborough men piled it on at the outset, I naturally thought they were going all out at the start as their only chance, and never for a moment imagined that they could keep it up for ninety minutes.

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This is certainly what would have been the case had they been playing at Luton, but—and here is where the advantage of playing at home comes in—they had the eyes of their supporters upon them, they had the tongues of those self-same people constantly urging them on to renewed efforts, and the consequence was that their powers of endurance were developed to the very utmost.

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Luton lost the toss, but there was not much in that, as the sun, which had been shining with great brilliancy up to the moment of starting, evidently would not condescend to take a mean advantage of a well-deserving team, and conveniently hid his face. Still, Wellingborough were the

first to attack, and after Mellor had sent wide, they had another go, Perrins stepping in and clearing when matters had assumed a very dangerous aspect.

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The visitors made a vigorous response, Clarke doing some good work, and from a centre by Gallacher, the ball came off Gaiter to Molnes, who was right in front of goal. Unfortunately, Tommy was obliged to take the ball as it came, and the result was that it bounced from his head over the bar. Then Clarke and Coupar showed up with some capital play, and the former just missed the mark with a smart shot.

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Replying to a further attack by Luton, in which the referee made a bad mistake in giving Clarke offside, Wellingborough got down from a foul against Perrins, and after Davies had headed away, Martin put in a lovely long shot which Williams just cleared as Barker went for him. Encouraged by the spectators, Wellingborough again went at it for all they were worth, and Williams kicked out a shot from Walker, and saved beautifully from a hot 'un from the left wing, although he was fouled just before the ball reached him.

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A miskick by Gaiter at the other end gave Luton the luxury of a corner, which Perrins placed well. This was cleared, but some very pretty passing by the whole of the Luton forwards brought them up again, and after Robinson had averted danger from a centre by Ekins, George had another try but shot wide.

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The speed with which the ball went up and down the field was simply astounding, and almost before Luton had had time to recover from their effort, the homesters were swarming to the attack. McEwen cleared a good centre from Mellor, and again from another quarter, whilst Williams saved grandly a clinking shot from Davis. Matters became even more sultry in this vicinity a moment later, and nothing but the most strenuous efforts on the part of Luton averted disaster.

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A couple of corners fell to Wellingborough, but try as they might the homesters could not break down the defence opposed to them, and at length they were beaten off and forced down the field. Then a strange thing happened. Stewart sent in a somewhat soft shot, which went through a crowd of players to Robinson. The latter kicked hard, and the ball rebounded off Gaiter into goal, thus giving Luton the lead after forty minutes' play.

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Wellingborough, despite their hard luck, retaliated with great spirit, and certainly had the best of the remaining five minutes, Walker getting in a couple of very smart shots, the first of which Williams tipped over the bar, and the second he punted out. When half-time arrived Luton were still in possession of their lead.

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The spectators, or those of them in my neighbourhood, utilised the interval to dilate upon the prowess of the Luton backs. "Grand backs; safe as a house," was the verdict, and certainly it was quite in accordance with the evidence the players concerned had given. Davies' head work had been superb, while McEwen was as irrepressible as ever. And they played with such confidence too, that no matter how tight the fix, one never despaired of them.

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The second half was very much like the first, only more so. The pace increased rather than diminished, and Wellingborough fully held their own. Both ends were visited in turn, and while from a throw-in the battle for a time raged very fiercely round the Luton goal, the hardest lines were experienced by the Lutonians, Clarke, from a centre by Ekins, hitting the cross-bar with a good shot.

A minute or two afterwards, however, the Luton forwards showed up with a beautiful passing run, and Ekins, putting in a middle, McInnes shot, and Robinson punted out to Gallacher, who promptly took the opportunity and scored with a lightning shot. This second success rather took the homesters by surprise, and for a time Luton had very much the best of matters.

Clarke particularly performed in first-rate style, and followed on a shot by Ekins with a regular beauty, which missed the upright by inches. Coupar, after having a foul given against him, took his revenge in a long shot, which required all the skill of Robinson to keep out, and a corner for Luton was not turned to account, McInnes placing on the net. Gallacher next got round Gaiter in beautiful style, and centred right along the goal-line, but unfortunately there was no one there to take it.

Good combined work by Coupar and Clarke again placed the Wellingborough goal in jeopardy, Clarke's shot being a clipper, but after that the homesters had considerably the better of the exchanges, and kept the pressure up to the finish. Williams saved from two long ones from Lewis and one from Walker in less time than it takes to mention. Half-a-dozen corners were given to Wellingborough—two of them, I think, without good reason—but the Luton defence was impregnable, and when the whistle blew the score remained unaltered, two to nil in favour of Luton.

The spectators were very disappointed with the result, and as they left the ground freely gave it as their opinion that the better team had lost. But in that they were not quite correct. The homesters certainly played a grand game—admittedly the best they have played this year—but the superior skill was on the side of Luton. Williams, no matter how much he was tested, was never in a fix, and Davies and McEwen were like giants among pigmies—fierce and tenacious as those pigmies were.

Mac was considerably handicapped in the second half by having to fill practically two places, Stonebridge being completely out of the running. It was very unfortunate for the reserve that he should have to take part in so big a battle on his first appearance with the seniors, for it was much too hot an affair for anyone who was not in the very pink of condition. Stonebridge undoubtedly possesses good ability, and with a little attention will develop into a sound player, but it was too much to expect him to hold his own in a game like that of Monday's.

Stewart, as usual, did any amount of good and effective work, and Perrins was quite as energetic, if not quite as successful, George's weakness—owing probably to want of practice—being in the placing of the ball. Clarke showed wonderfully improved form, and did much to justify the opinion I expressed a week ago.

He was as good as any of the forwards, his play being smart, his shooting ditto, and his pace nearly all that could be desired. The only thing that he lacked was dash in front of goal. A little more bustling there would have made him practically all that a centre-forward should be. Coupar and McInnes, as usual, rendered a first-rate account of themselves, being always to the fore when possible, and always assisting the defence when needed. Gallacher, too, showed that he is coming on all right, doing some very effective work, and Ekins, although still limping and greatly missing the services of Docherty, performed very fairly.

As to Wellingborough, the men were triers every one of them, and perhaps one was not a great deal better than another. Robinson did all that a man could do in goal, and the backs played up very strongly, whilst the halves made almost as smart a trio as could be wished. Of the forwards, the right wing was the most dangerous, Walker getting in some very effective work. Towards the finish he was also guilty of some very dirty business, which unhappily escaped the referee's eye. The whistle-holder, however, gave a creditable exhibition on the whole, his decisions, as a rule, leaving very little room for complaint.

Wellingborough, it should be stated, had played a United League match at Southampton on Saturday, and were only beaten after a hard game by three goals to one. In the first half they fully held their own, scoring one goal against one obtained by their opponents.

Saturday next will be a red-letter day for Luton, the occasion being the great struggle with the Arsenal, first of all for League points, and secondly for the title.