

LUTON'S FIRST TRIP TO WALES.

And their first Second Division win.

BOB HAWKES OPENS WITH TWO LOVELY GOALS AT MARDY.

Second half struggle against a hurricane.

Luton were fortunate in one respect at least in opening their new Welsh campaign, in that they were able to turn out their full strength at Mardy on Saturday. This was something to be thankful for, because what sort of a team would have been sent if two or three players had been seriously injured during the opening week is more than one dares to employ the imagination upon. Potts, who had a rest against Bedford, was able to resume, but Trainer Lawson was just a wee bit doubtful about Bob Hawkes, whose thigh was none too sound. As a matter of fact it did give way during the match at Mardy, and Bob will certainly have to stand down on Wednesday against Southampton, but with attention from "Billy" he expects to captain the team when Mardy pay their return visit on Saturday.

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Luton left by the 4.15 p.m. train to St. Pancras on Friday, and joined the South Wales express at Paddington, reaching Cardiff at 9.15 p.m. By the way, Cardiff is the "hub" of South Wales "Soccer" now, and while in that city you do not realise what Second Division means. The City Club is run on English lines, and most of the players are more or less known, and the usual comradeship between football professionals off the field is kept up. Every week-end two or three League teams make Cardiff their headquarters, and therefore players and officials fraternise together. For instance, Exeter City joined the train at Newport and travelled with the Luton players to Cardiff on their way to Merthyr. They, like Luton, stayed the night in Cardiff, resuming their journey after lunch on Saturday. Although in the big towns in South Wales the regulation time of kick-off is adhered to, the "Valley Clubs" have different ideas, and want to start much later. This is on account of the eight-hour system of working the mines, which means that the last shift do not get up from the pit until three or four o'clock. On Saturday a start was not made until five o'clock, but the light was not at all bad when the game finished at a quarter to seven.

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Mardy does not, perhaps, convey much danger to Lutonians, but on arrival at Cardiff the players were early warned against over-confidence. Indeed the boot was on the other leg altogether, for the Cardiff Press were unanimous in expressing the view that although Southend and Croydon both had a chance at Aberdare and Llanelli respectively, Luton was not at all likely to get even one point at Mardy. One paper went so far as to state that Luton themselves could not expect to have a chance at all, while another bluntly said that if they obtained one point they would have to earn it, with the evident expectation that such a result was altogether out of the question. The feeling in Cardiff was that Luton were faced with by far the hardest task on Saturday, so far as the three English clubs were concerned. It is not so much the playing strength of the Mardy club as the altogether different conditions of the ground and surroundings which make this fixture so difficult, but more of this feature will be gathered from subsequent notes.

The Mardy team themselves were quite an unknown quantity. Indeed, the only fact known to the outside football world is that Johnny Goodall has taken over the managership this season. With one exception all the players are working at the local colliery, though only three or four actually descend the shaft. The population of Mardy is about eight or nine thousand, so it will be seen that big wages are quite out of the question. The manager of the mine was present at the match, and in conversation stated that the club was practically subsidised by the owners to maintain sport in the district as a means of recreation for their workers. To tell the truth, it would only be sheer necessity which would induce anyone to permanently take up their abode at Mardy, for it is the "end of the world," to use the local expression. Johnny Goodall has, however, been instrumental in bringing five new players this season. The left wing pair come from Catford South End, while three others hail from the Burton-on-Trent district. Two of the last mentioned have spent a season in France with Goodall, and he has a high opinion of their abilities.

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It was remarked by someone on Saturday that should "Tam," one of the London football reporters, ever visit Mardy he would be able to devote a whole page of his paper to one of his characteristic reports without giving even a line of description of the actual game itself, and really this report promises to develop into something of that nature. Still Lutonians can have no idea whatever of what it means to play at Mardy without a little space is devoted to matters a bit removed from the usual description of the game. What it must mean to visit this spot in mid-winter is too awful to contemplate, and Luton must congratulate themselves on having made the journey under comparatively decent conditions. Mardy itself is over 1,000 feet above sea level, and the ground is encircled by what to Bedfordshire ideas must be regarded as mountains. Sitting in front of the small stand only four houses are visible, and they are perched high up the "hili" just opposite. The playing pitch is yards too small for an English cup-tie, but it is the only possible spot for miles round where football could be played. One is assured that the length of the pitch is 100 yards. This can scarcely be believed, but when it is stated that it is only 50 yards wide it will be understood how the players are crowded together. The penalty side lines almost cover the whole playing area for eighteen yards from goal. Within five or six yards of the pitch itself the railway runs along the valley some 100 feet down, and the ball is continually out of play on that side. Of course, this means quite a large number of balls are required to keep the game going at all.

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And now for the game. The teams turned out as under:—

Luton:—Day; Henderson and Potts; Wilson, Thompson, and Hawkes; Stephenson, Wileman, Smith, Murphy, and Worth.

Mardy:—Thomas; Jones and Jenkins; Alden, Griffiths and Tebbutt (J.); Howard, Tebbutt (R.), Coates, Hopwood and Pinney.

Referee, Mr. F. Curtis, Bristol.

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Bob won the toss and naturally took advantage of the breeze which was pretty strong even then, but increased as the game progressed, and in the second half was almost in the nature of a hurricane. It took Luton a few minutes to get used to the unusual conditions, and for the opening ten minutes there was little to choose between the teams. But when Luton did settle down they were playing the smarter game, and as, of course, the halves were playing much nearer the goal than usual, it was no surprise to find Bob, when he saw a chance to get through, go forward and have a pop on his own. He caught the ball fair and with a clean shot drove it into the rigging at a tremendous pace, thus having the honour of netting the opening Southern League goal of the season.

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Although after this success Luton were by far the better team, their goal was often endangered by a big return from the home quarters. It looked as if an equaliser was coming when Pinney got clean away and centred, but Potts just managed to get his head to the ball as it came across, and it travelled just out of the reach of the home centre-forward. Two or three corners also fell to Mardy, but were not improved upon. At the end of half-an-hour only one goal had been scored, and that this was scarcely enough to win the match was pretty evident. But just after this Stephenson got across a nice centre, and Bob Hawkes simply crashed the ball through before Thomas had any idea it was within yards of his charge.

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This was quickly followed by a third. Stephenson was again the one to bring the ball through, and as he placed it square across Murphy completed the movement with a fine drive, Thomas standing helpless. A three-goal lead seemed good enough, but Luton were soon disillusioned, for Coates broke clean through and looked all over a scorer, but Day, throwing himself full length, brought off a fine save. Just on the interval Worth almost screwed the ball through from the corner flag, but it just travelled by the far upright over the line. Half-time: Luton 3, Mardy 0.

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In the second half the wind got up to an even greater force than when Luton held the advant-

age, and the game underwent a decided change. Mardy were all out to alter the state of affairs, but when a goal came it was an accident in a sense. The ball seemed to be going over for a goal kick when it broke back to the outside-left, and he dropped it well into goal. Day punched it away for the moment, but Hopwood met the return and opened the score for his side amid tremendous excitement. Worth then managed to get away and promised to finish up with an opening, but he got a shade too much power behind his toe and it only resulted in a goal kick.

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Twenty minutes off time Hopwood got a drive home with a crowd of players between himself and the goal. Day simply did not see the ball, and made no effort whatever, although it is quite doubtful if he would have been able to stop the shot even with a clear view, it sailing in low at a great pace. It was now a great fight to the finish, Luton being mainly on the defensive, and although at times they were hard pressed they managed to keep their opponents out. Indeed, the easiest looking chance fell to Stephenson at the top end of the field, but after getting right through he twisted his ankle, and the game was stopped for several minutes while Lawson attended to the injury. He did not come off the field and finished the game, although he limped badly and was of little use. Result: Luton 3, Mardy 2.

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COMMENT ON THE PLAY AND PLAYERS.

The first impression made by the visit to Mardy is that it is no walk-over to earn promotion. If Mardy are an average side points will be very difficult to obtain in Wales, whatever those clubs may do away from home. The crowd on the whole were a sporting lot, although Potts was a target for some abuse for being too deliberate in taking goal kicks. The general opinion in Wales is that Mardy is one of the three grounds which help the home side to a greater extent than should be possible, and therefore Luton must consider themselves fortunate in getting off with both points.

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Day once or twice punched the ball away when it seemed safer to catch it, but in the closing stages he did finely. The backs kept up their end in fine style, except that Potts was rather upset by the spectators for a time. He eventually got over this, and was playing for safety with fine judgment at the finish. Undoubtedly Luton's strongest line at Mardy was at half-back. All three men played a great game, with Bob Hawkes the outstanding player on the field. Forward work was greatly handicapped by the small ground. Still Stephenson and Worth managed to show to advantage, the inside trio being a bit overcrowded by the continual nearness of the opposing defenders.

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Mardy have several good players on Saturday's form. Coates, at centre-forward, would not disgrace a first-class side, and the fact that he is selected for Wales on Wednesday next at Cardiff, shows that his fame is pretty well known in that locality. Jones, the right full back, is also playing in the same match, and is a clever player, and in the first half when faced by the wind played a fine game. It will be as well to see Mardy on an average ground before expressing a definite opinion as to their capabilities, and as they visit Luton on Saturday it will be a good opportunity for taking a line as to the probability of Luton getting to the top of the League.