

MARDY v. LUTON.

Played at Mardy on Saturday. Result:—

Luton 3 goals.

Mardy 2 goals.

The teams were as follow:—

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

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

Referee, Mr. F. Curtis (Bristol).

The task set the Luton players this season is not so easy as many of their supporters imagine. In the first place, the Second Division, although possibly not so big as one would like, is a more evenly balanced competition than ever before. The weak clubs have almost entirely disappeared, and with one or two exceptions, all the teams are out for a place in the First Division. In former seasons it was evident from the start that promotion rested with three or four clubs at most, but it is quite different now. Another important factor is that although the Second Division is mainly composed of Welsh clubs, they have gained experience, and the new clubs having been able to profit by their compatriots' failures in former years, the same mistakes are not likely to occur.

It is not only the distance and therefore increased expenses that handicap the English clubs, but the ground difficulties, particularly in the mining districts, which tell against teams used to orthodox pitches. Mardy is one of the grounds about which strong complaints have been made, and in some quarters is looked upon as about the most difficult of the whole lot. Fortunately, on Saturday, Luton missed one of its unpleasant features, inasmuch as the surface was dry, and the players did not have to trudge through mud which is reported at times to reach the knees.

Although the team set out on Friday afternoon, it was not until four o'clock on Saturday that they reached the terminus of the Rhondda-fach Railway, when, although they had risen over 1,000 feet above sea level, they were surprised to find the ground was still a long way up, and the person who pointed it out was compelled to set his arm at an angle of 80 degrees when standing on the platform of Mardy Station. The present Luton team is composed of players who have had experience of all kinds of football pitches, but not one of them had ever seen a ground to be compared to Mardy. The surroundings are probably unique, for it is set in one of the wildest spots it is possible to imagine, although it cannot be called pretty in any sense. From the diminutive grand stand, there is little sign or semblance of a village, and, as a matter of fact, only four houses perched high up on the "hill" opposite give any indication of life, except that occasionally a puff of smoke appears to rise from the ground on the opposite side of the pitch when the train which travels between Mardy and Porth has to shunt before free-wheeling back towards the sea.

It would not be difficult to fill a column with interesting items, for everything connected with this match was quite a new experience to what Lutonians are accustomed to associate with Southern League football, but some account of the game itself is expected; therefore I must cut the descriptive narrative. Still, it is necessary to state that the ground is yards too small for a Football Association Cup tie, although I understand the Welsh Association allow their ties to be played on so small a pitch. The difficulty is that it is almost impossible to find a level stretch of ground big enough on which to play football in this wild area. In the case of Mardy it has only been made possible by levelling the tip heap of colliery refuse, and therefore, in a sense, it is entirely a manufactured pitch. I was informed that a new one is in course of formation, but although they have been tipping for more than a year, it will be another two years before it is possible to get sufficient area to make a full-sized ground.

The Mardy Club is run more as a source of recreation for the workers engaged in the mine than as a paying concern; indeed, I was assured there was never any chance of meeting expenses from the gate alone, although wages are kept down to the lowest possible point, and the players, with one exception, are employed at the local colliery, the proprietors of which are the financial backers of the Club. No team is expected to go to Mardy with great confidence of winning, and it would surprise Lutonians to hear the number of warnings that the players and officials were given after arrival at Cardiff on Friday night. To beat Mardy at Mardy is a much bigger thing than even the Luton directors imagined, and from what one learned last week-end it is fortunate this obstacle at any rate is successfully overcome.

The Mardy team this year is managed by our old friend Johnny Goodall, who has introduced five new players, and under his guidance it is expected the finer points of the game will be developed, but judging from Saturday's display there will be no lack of Welsh enthusiasm, and this combination should enable Mardy to take a big say in deciding who shall gain promotion, for I take it they scarcely expect to develop First Divi-

sion football at Mardy itself. I understand, however, that when the new ground is laid out, it will tap the more populous district of Ferndale, which is a station nearer civilisation on the same branch.

The wind was pretty strong at the start, and when Bob Hawkes won the toss, he naturally took advantage of its assistance. The opening movement was made by the home left wing, but Potts intercepted and sent the ball rolling down the precipice on the far side of the ground. Bob Hawkes receiving the ball a minute later, sent Worth through in most promising style, only to find Jones head the ball into touch. As it was only twenty-five yards from the centre of the field to the touch-line, naturally the ball was continually out of play, but a plentiful supply of balls kept the game going all the time, the spectators assisting in the game to the extent of sending a ball on the field immediately another went out of play. But this help was more often given in the second half when the home side were pressing.

Luton were not long in settling down, and Murphy tested Thomas with a good shot from decent range, but the home goalkeeper was able to get it away, and for the moment danger was averted. A fine individual burst through on the part of Bob Hawkes, however, brought the desired goal. Bob worked himself into the inside-left position before driving the ball through, but Thomas never had a chance to get to it, and Luton secured what is usually an important point, namely, the leading goal, at an early stage of the match. For a time Luton monopolised the play, and Bob forced Jones to concede a corner, which Worth placed splendidly, but the defence crowded the goal-mouth and got the ball away.

The home left wing were dangerous once or twice, and eventually Hopgood sent in a fine drive, which Day apparently tipped over the bar for a corner, and the crowd were rather annoyed when the referee awarded a free kick in the goal-mouth. Apparently someone had got offside, but if the shot had found the net, I can imagine there would have been a fine noise, for the spectators were enthusiastic, and would have given the presiding official some trouble if properly roused. Murphy, who was lying a bit too far back at times, sent in two or three long shots, and one nearly accomplished its object, only missing by inches. At the opposite end Hopgood promised to improve upon a slip on the part of Smith, who dallied with the ball in midfield and eventually lost it altogether, but the home inside-left was just an inch or two out in his marksmanship.

Day saved in good style a free kick given against Henderson for handling, but as a rule Luton were well in the home quarters. Smith and Wilson forced their way through, and it seemed any odds on a goal when the defence crowded them out by rushing back into the penalty area. Indeed, the small ground made it a most difficult matter to get a clear opening, for the players were naturally close together. However, Stephenson managed to get a square centre right across the ground, and Bob taking the ball first time, gave Thomas no chance whatever, thus scoring his second goal of the match. It was a magnificent attempt, and naturally put heart into his comrades. Stephenson was not often able to utilise his speed, but a few minutes later he shook himself clear of all opposition, and working towards goal, seemed about to shoot on his own, but seeing the left wing well up, he squared the ball, and Murphy got in a fine goal. A three-goal lead was good business, but the home players were game even yet, and Day could only save from Coates by throwing himself full length at the ball. On another occasion Day came out and kicked the ball well down the field, and, as an example of the handbox character of the ground, Worth, who secured the ball, was given offside from a clearance from his own goal area.

Wilson shot just over from the touch-line, but an even nearer effort came from Worth, who almost screwed the ball through from the corner flag, but nothing tangible resulted up to the interval, and the remarks heard in the crowd were very favourable to Luton as the players pushed themselves towards the dressing-room, which, by the way, was not at all bad except that both teams, with the referee and linesmen, were in one room, and this might be awkward at some time or another. But on Saturday everyone was comfortable, and no unpleasantness took place.

It was evident it would be a more difficult matter to play against the wind in the second half, but no one was quite prepared for the great difference it made until the game was resumed. The wind, however, had gathered force during the interval, and seemed to increase every minute, until towards the end it was a perfect hurricane. Quite early on Mardy forced a couple of corners, and generally play went on round the Luton goal. Still, it was a quarter of an hour before Day was beaten. The ball was kicked down towards the left wing, and at one time seemed to be travelling well over the goal-line, but dropped to Pinney, who appeared offside, as he was almost in a line with the goal and the ball came from some distance up the field. However, the referee did not pull him up, and he lobbed the ball into the goal-mouth, the players crowding on Day at the same time. The Luton goalkeeper got the leather away temporarily, but Hopgood met the return and opened the score for his side with a good shot.

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It was now evident that Luton were not going to get off so easily as it appeared at the interval, and, encouraged by the crowd, the Mardy players went full tilt for goal. For a minute or so the Luton defence seemed likely to crack up, and it was no surprise to find the local's another goal up with twenty-one minutes to play. This goal was also netted by Hopgood, and Day had no chance to see the ball, several players being between the goal and the man who actually scored. It was rather a difficult matter to say who scored, as the players were all in a bunch, but I have the authority of Johnny Goodall in giving the honour to Hopgood, and he certainly should be a good judge.

It was a fight now in real good earnest, and it was fortunate that the Luton defenders kept their heads, for the crowd were getting very excited, and at one time certain players were visibly affected by the unwelcome attentions of the spectators. Of course, Luton were at times able to get the ball clear, and Stephenson was very unfortunate when, after getting almost into a position for shooting, he wrenched his ankle in twisting into goal. He received the attention of Lawson on the touch-line, but did not leave the field. He was, however, of little use for the rest of the game. It seemed a certain score just before the finish when Coates got a clear run into goal, but his shot travelled wide, and eventually the final whistle brought relief, Luton winning their first couple of points on Welsh soil.

The Luton team played different football altogether than that shown at Southend, and as Mardy is one of the most difficult places at which to obtain points, the win promises well for future visits. Still, it will be no easy thing to maintain a position at the head of affairs in the Second Division this season. Mardy, on Saturday's form, are a team of triers all the while, and although they may not show up so well on bigger pitches, they will take a lot of whacking on the classical slopes of the Rhondda-fach. Undoubtedly their two star artistes are Jones at right back and Coates at centre-forward, and either of those players would keep his position in a First Division side if Saturday's form is anything by which to judge. But as the Luton spectators will have an early opportunity of seeing for themselves, it is not necessary to say a deal about the team as a whole.

Coming to the Luton players, Day had several difficult shots to stop, and on the whole did very well. Henderson was possibly the safer back of the two, but Potts held his own at the finish in good style. While it almost goes without saying that Bob Hawkes was the most brilliant member of the middle line, both Wilson and Thompson played finely; indeed, this division was the mainstay of the team's success. Forward, it was really a matter of two halves, for in the concluding "45" it was seldom they got a chance. Stephenson and Worth were most in evidence, but this was possibly because they had a little more room to get away, for it was a most difficult matter to shake off the attentions of the home halves and backs, who were naturally used to playing on such a small area, and adopted suitable tactics for the occasion.

Fred Hawkes signed for Luton on Tuesday, and played at Southampton on Wednesday in place of Bob Hawkes, who was injured at Mardy (leg strain).

It must be pleasing news to the Luton Club to know that the Southern League Management Committee, in view of the retirement of Leyton, have decided to increase the subsidies to the three English clubs in the Second Division to £15 for each match in Wales. This means that the full amount which was to be allotted to the four clubs will be devoted to the remaining three.

Mr. F. J. H. ... of the Luton Town

A capital drive by Rogers showed what he was capable of and prepared the spectators for something better. That "something better" came shortly afterwards, when the youthful amateur passed to Wileman, who quickly centred. Smith shot straight at Thomas, who knocked the ball upwards, and Stephenson, who had rushed up, rose in the air, got his head to the ball, and put it into the net. It was a fine goal, and looked very promising for Luton. There was no doubt that the Welshmen were being harried, a fact which did not help to steady them into improving their control of the ball. They certainly tried very hard, but their advance was swept back by the determined Henderson and the agile Potts, both of whom were giving nothing away. The halves were also very much on the alert. That was the reason, no doubt, why Coates, the speedy centre-forward for Mardy—one of the fastest players in Wales—did a good deal of running about, only to find the ball snapped up and passed forward before he could get to it. Pinney, however, sent in a fine shot which looked dangerous for Luton, but Day cleared. The home team were nearly always at the Mardy end, and the backs and Thomas made a valiant fight for the visitors. Hopgood did test Day just before the whistle blew, but the game was easily Luton's at half-time, when the score was 1-0.

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On returning, the game was still pressed by Luton. Smith's shot was a really good one, but Thomas was in fine form and seemed equal to anything. Jones and Jenkins, too, were very resourceful. After Wilson had paid a call on behalf of the halves, and sent his visiting card over the lintel, so to speak, the Mardy men returned the call, and host Day, at the request of Henderson, ran out to meet them, incidentally removing from their pathway a rolling "stone" over which all might have tripped. Presently, at the other end, Smith had a capital chance, but sent the ball over. The Welshman made several vigorous attacks, and it looked a "near thing" once when Day fisted out weakly and the ball rebounded from Henderson's back for a corner. For the most part, however, it was Mardy on the defence—and a very good defence they set up too. Thomas was a brilliant goalkeeper, with plenty of pluck and good judgment, which enabled him to deal with some critical situations. The two men immediately in front of him were also very reliable. In fact, their defence was better than their attack, which, though possessing some good points, did not run together enough. Not hanging together, they were therefore hanged separately, to speak metaphorically.

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As to Luton, well, they must not expect to get into the First Division of the Southern League if they do not improve on last Saturday's play. The weakness was not of the whole team, but of the man who should weld together the front line and smartly turn to advantage the chances received from the wing men. That's where the improvement was needed. Stephenson played very briskly, and so did Wileman, who, however, was inclined to be an individualist. Sometimes, though, he was blamed when he ought not to have been, as, for instance, when many called upon him to pass to Rogers, and he swerved inwards and took the ball to the centre, quite upsetting the calculations of the opponents, who fully expected to have only Rogers to hem in. The amateur centred finely, and though not a very robust player, he was well worth his place on Saturday. Murphy was not a great deal in the picture; he still overdoes the dribbling. The halves were good, particularly Wilson, and the solidity of the backs has already been referred to. Day's display in goal was varied—sometimes good, sometimes weak. Without doubt, Luton should have had more goals to their credit. None can say what the absence of Bob Hawkes meant to them, but I fancy that his generalship would have improved things considerably.

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