

FIRST WELSH VISITORS

Prove Successful Spoilers at Luton.

ONLY ONE GOAL IN A POOR GAME

Description of the Mardy Match.

The football following of Luton have at last made the acquaintance of the new Welsh element in Southern professional football, and if only the Town Club directors could feel persuaded that the novelty will not wear off they would be in a position to look forward to a season free from financial anxieties. From a financial point of view the first home match in the Second Division of the Southern League was an unquestionable success. The eagerness with which the novelty of this season's programme has been looked forward to was demonstrated by the presence of quite six thousand spectators to greet the first Welsh visitors to the Town ground, and their maintained interest in the Second Division campaign would mean gates which would bear favourable comparison with recent First Division gates at Luton.

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But will it last? Everything made for a good gate on Saturday. From the spectators' point of view the weather conditions were ideal, and the attractiveness of Mardy's visit was enhanced by the fact of their being the only team Luton had already met and defeated in the competition. Everyone was keen to see a team typical of the Welsh element which has sprung up, and is making inroads upon the Southern League football to which we have been accustomed for years past, and if there is one note which can be struck with absolute certainty it is that the first impression gained was entirely disappointing.

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Mardy have got a long way to go before they will make anything of a reputation in professional football. While the team is not devoid of good footballers one can well understand that it is not so much their playing strength as the strangeness of the conditions and surroundings under which they are accustomed to play which made them dangerous rivals when playing at home. In losing at Luton by the only goal scored they were distinctly flattered by the homesters, for their play was just in keeping with what they really are—in most part, a village team of more than usual native ability. Folks who saw the little group of players wending their way from the Luton station to the Town ground, carrying their tiny leather bags, may well have been pardoned if they made the mistake of mentally marking them down as a party from one of the villages in the locality who had come into Luton to play one of the local League teams. I chanced to come across them on the way to the ground, and had it not been for recognising the familiar features of John Goodall, the famous old International, who has now become the manager of the colliery village club, I should never have guessed them to be the representatives of one of the teams aspiring to make South Wales a hub of Association football. Goodall, of course, is no stranger to Luton, for he was for several years in charge of the Watford team, and his permanent home is still at Watford. He came up from Wales the day before his team

so as to be present at the wedding of one of his daughters at Watford on Saturday morning, the players leaving Mardy at seven o'clock in the morning and arriving at Luton about an hour before the match after doing over seven hours' travelling.

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They were exactly the same eleven as ran Luton so close at Mardy the previous week, the names of the players being: Thomas; Jones and Jenkins; Alden, Griffiths and J. Tebbett; Howard, R. Tebbett, Coates, Hopgood and Pinney. Luton had to make two changes, as will be seen from the constitution of their eleven:—Day; Henderson and Potts; Wilson, Thompson and F. Hawkes; E. Rogers, Wileman, Smith, Murphy, and Stephenson. Bob Hawkes played under difficulty since the opening week of the season owing to an injury to one of his thighs, and although he was ready to turn out the fact of the Directors having signed on Fred Hawkes enabled Bob to have the rest his injured limb requires. In his absence the captaincy devolved upon Henderson, and Fred Hawkes appeared before the Luton crowd in a new role—that of left half. Worth also had to rest with a wrenched knee, and with their supply of professionals exhausted thus early Luton had to fall back upon amateur aid, young Rogers, of the Clarence, being pressed into service as outside-right, and Stephenson crossing over to the wing on which he made his reputation last season. Billy Lawson is evidently having a worrying time of it already, for I learned that Henderson, Thompson and Day were all far from fit, and it would have been no surprise if at least two out of the three had been resting.

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The Mardy players were given quite a sporting reception, and almost the first thing one noticed about them was their sprightliness in spite of their long railway journey. When the game got going this became so pronounced in comparison to the homesters that a stranger not knowing which was Mardy and which was Luton, would certainly have hit upon the Luton players as the lot tired out by travelling. Even the matter of colours would not have helped him, because as Mardy plays in a deep, dazzling blue, Luton had to discard their "bonnie blues" and, to keep up the alliteration, become the "ruddy reds." In the first few minutes one might have given them the title of the "restless reds," but except for the defence this did not apply for long. Mardy, on the other hand, if not exactly bonnie in their style, could certainly be described as the "bustling blues."

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When Mr. G. J. Ross, of Aldershot, started the game it was with Luton having the no mean advantage of a fairly strong wind, and the no mean disadvantage of facing a glaring sun. This was the doing of the Mardy captain through winning the toss, and from a tactical move he unquestionably did the right thing for his side. To begin with, it did not look as if this would matter much, because Luton went right through from the kick-off, and Wileman forced a corner in the first minute. Nothing came of it, but Mardy could not resist the pressure, and Stephenson was within an ace of literally hewing his way through. His determination ought to have brought about a start in the scoring, because although Jimmy was knocked off before he could attempt anything in the shooting line, his work left Smith with the goal at his mercy. But the ball was not to the centre's liking, and instead of using his left he took such a time to get it as he wanted it that when he shot the defence had recovered and were in the way. Wileman pounced on the rebound and tried to make up for his colleague's hesitancy, but his effort was wide and a first-rate chance had slipped by for ever.

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So far Mardy had done nothing worthy of note except in defence, and the first time they did get to the Luton goal it was only through a misunderstanding between the home backs. This resulted in Mardy gaining a corner, and before it was finally cleared Day had to save a long drive from Griffiths. They were soon acting on the defensive again, and some fast work in front resulted in Smith getting through and shooting in low down. Though almost straight it was an awkward shot to deal with, and Smith seemed to think it was over the line before the goalkeeper got rid of it, but his appeal fell on deaf ears. Thomas, by the bye, was not long in justifying his reputation in South Wales, but he would have had no chance had a brilliant shot which Stephenson fired in as the ball came across from the right from Wilson been a little lower instead of skimming the bar.

At the other end the best shot for some time came from Rogers. It was about the first chance the amateur had, and it was not successful, but directly afterwards he had a hand in the scoring of the only goal of the game. Willeman initiated the movement by cleverly swinging the ball out to the wing with his left. At the moment it had little appearance of being a scoring movement, but Rogers dropped the ball beautifully at the feet of Smith. Again the centre's shot flashed straight at the goalkeeper, but this time it was high up and carrying plenty of driving power, and Thomas could do no more than half hit it out for the enterprising Stephenson to dash up and lead through.

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It had taken half-an-hour to open the scoring, and, aroused to a keen interest in the game, the crowd gave the home players any amount of encouragement. But it did not have the effect desired. Though the Luton men were instantly back to the attack there was still the same dallying and uncertainty near goal, and the defence were well on top. As a matter of fact Mardy came to have quite a fair share of the game, and from a free kick near the penalty area Jones hoodwinked the homesters so well that he was enabled to afford a capital chance to Pinney, who shot wide. A more promising effort was one by Hopwood, Day saving beautifully a fine first-time shot. Sandwiched between these incidents was a determined attempt by Fred Hawkes to force his way from a corner forced by Stephenson and emulate the feat of his namesake at Mardy, but the odds were too great. Still Luton ought to have gained another goal before crossing over, for when Thompson had a free kick shot beaten down Wilson drove through from the rebound, and the ball deflected from someone's foot and left Murphy and Smith a glorious chance. The old failing, hesitancy, crept in, however, and Thomas effected a brilliant save, thanks simply to being the speedier in action. Murphy also got well placed to steer the ball across the goal, and so the teams retired with the half-time score—Luton 1, Mardy 0.