

A WEEK IN WALES.

First Points away from Home.

Luton open Abertillery ground as "Soccer" centre.

Luton started on the most extended trip they have yet undertaken, to South Wales, on Wednesday morning. It was contrary to their usual custom of making an overnight journey, and it meant travelling right up to the kick-off, but as the major portion of the journey was made by the non-stop Great Western from Paddington to Newport, it was not so tiring as might be expected. The last seventeen miles was a very slow business, however, as this part of the journey took just on an hour and a quarter.

The first visit of an ex-First Division club to Abertillery must have been well boomed, and quite a good crowd welcomed the Luton players. It was estimated that at least three thousand spectators ranged themselves on the natural banks surrounding the pitch, and almost another thousand had a fine view from the mountains overlooking the park. The situation of the Abertillery ground is delightful, and quite unlike any other football ground I have ever seen anywhere. Certainly no South Wales playing pitch can compare with it. The park, of which the football pitch is only a small part, stretches through the valley for about half a mile, and it makes quite a change to approach a football ground between beautifully laid-out flower beds and graceful grassed slopes, while towering several hundred feet high are mountains which, except from the town side, quite encircle the park. Even now the park is not quite finished, and by next season the approach will be still more beautiful. To anyone making its first acquaintance it will be an eye-opener indeed.

The playing pitch itself is used jointly with the Rugby Club, and on one side there is quite a good grand-stand such as no club in South Wales, except Cardiff City, can boast of. The two clubs share the rent of £80 between them, but the conditions prevent any practice on the pitch, and Wednesday was the first time the home team had been allowed to kick a ball on the beautiful green sward as it appears from the slopes. A closer acquaintance revealed one great disadvantage to a clever team, inasmuch as the grass was extremely long and quite prevented ground passes. This will spoil many sides unused to this peculiarity. On Wednesday, as both teams were equally new to the handicap, matters were somewhat equalised, but as the home players get the strength of the passes required I can see a surprise in store for some fancied club. The reason for the grass not being cut was understood to be on account of the Rugby football, as the thick covering of grass protects the playing surface in frosty weather, while, of course, it is not so dangerous for falls in any weather. Still, it is a big handicap to a side used to fast pitches.

The changes were once more rung upon the Luton forward line, Brewis being given his chance at centre, while Wileman was given an opportunity to show that his form against Croydon was all wrong. As Donaghy was unable to get off from school, Stevens once more figured on the extreme right. Otherwise the team was the same as against Mardy, Simms accompanying the team as the reserve. The players who lined out were:—

Luton: Mitchell; Elvey and Jarvie; F. Hawkes, Frith and R. Hawkes; Stevens, Wileman, Brewis, Rollinson and Wilkie.

Abertillery: Hurst; Adams and Jamison; Wilmot, Hornby and Craig; Songster, Gordon, Baddeley, Griffiths and Bridgett.

Referee: Mr. A. E. Farrant (Bristol).

The game opened at a great pace, it being evident that the home players were anxious to prove that they were at least equal to the visitors. Songster, at outside-right, is very fast, and once or twice he got away in a most threatening style, but either Jarvie or Elvey managed to block his final centres, and Mitchell was not troubled. It was laughable at times to find the ball stopping in the long grass, while the outside winger, for whom the pass was intended, was waiting for a chance to get a kick at it.

It was not long before Wileman opened the score with a splendidly judged shot into the top far corner, after some pretty work on the part of Rollinson and Brewis in the centre of the field. It struck certain occupants of the stand who are evidently new to "soccer" as a very tame affair, for Hurst was beaten to the world, but the fact was that Wileman made a "cert" of it by deliberately aiming at the vacant end of the goal, and Hurst was quite helpless. From a Luton point

of view a leading goal so early was good business, and before twenty minutes a second fell to Rollinson. Hurst ran out to meet Luton's inside-left, who, however, was not to be flurried, and simply placed the ball into the open net. "Another soft 'un" sang out someone behind the front seats, but again it was judgment in playing which brought about the goal.

It was rather a damper to the home spectators, particularly when within five minutes play found Stevens in possession after a clever pass by Wileman, and the outside man ran on and, screwing in the ball from a difficult angle, again beat Hurst. The referee made what might have proved a very serious mistake by giving Stevens offside, for a three goal lead must have meant a winning advantage, and would have taken the steam out of a new team of untried players. It was, therefore, a serious set-back when, following a well-placed corner by Sangster, the Abertillery manager who played at centre-forward, headed the ball into the net. From this point, what had appeared a "walkover" developed into a real struggle for final victory, and Luton were often on the defensive. Fortunately, the defence stood the storm finely, and no further scoring took place up to the interval.

It was quite a climb of the mountain side to the dressing-room from the playing pitch. As the spectators line the winding path this might lead to serious trouble, and the home officials will be well advised to make more provision on the stand side, which is on the lower side of the playing area. Another reason for this alteration of the interval arrangements is that it takes over a quarter of an hour to get up and back again if the players are to get a rub down at all.

The second half was devoid of goals, but it did not lack incident, and the crowd were kept on tenterhooks right up to the final whistle. Once or twice the home side appeared likely to notch the equaliser, but Luton were always just a shade the cleverer combination, and but for the long grass must have added to their score. The ball just failed to reach the destination intended at least half-a-dozen times, and the goalkeeper did not impress one by his judgment in taking up position. He appeared to be in a very nervy state, and a well-directed attempt would evidently have beaten him.

About five minutes before the close Wileman looked like repeating his first-half goal, but just as he was in the act of shooting Hurst dashed out and caught Wileman on the jaw with one hand and at the same time got in a body blow. Both players went down like logs, and it took some time before either could be raised from the ground. Wileman was completely "knocked out" for a minute or so, and knew nothing about what was taking place, but Lawson and a bunch of ambulance men managed to pull him round, and he ultimately finished the game. The referee allowed full time for the stoppages, but the home side could not shake off the handicap, and Luton secured two good away points. Result:

day's enthusiasm they will make most of the team go all out on their own ground. They have several old League players on their side, and if they can steer clear of accidents they will settle down into a very serviceable team. But at present they are relying upon a bare team, and when the final rough and tumble develops, this, of course, will tell its tale. Hurst, the goalkeeper, may prove the weak spot, for he "shapes" very poorly, although he made no actual slip which meant a goal. Both backs played a fine defensive game, and after the opening twenty minutes, kept a good length in their clearances from goal. Without being brilliant, the half-back trio worked well, and the forwards should make a dangerous quintette when they fall into each other's ways. Baddeley made a dangerous, if somewhat impetuous centre, and the two wing men are quite up to the average Second Division players.

To give every Luton player their due it is only right that Frith should be given the palm for his splendid work at half-back. He has not satisfied himself in certain of the opening matches, but at Abertillery he was about the most effective player on the field. His pace enabled him to cover up any temporary slip by either full back, while his tackling was far in advance of anything he has shown at Luton. On the long grass Fred Hawkes played the correct game by booting the ball well up the field at every opportunity. Bob Hawkes was naturally handicapped by the fact that it was quite impossible to work the ball along the ground, but he used his judgment on many occasions with telling result. It was in a great measure his work which caused the opening that led up to the first goal. Mitchell was not overworked between the sticks, so well did Elvey and Jarvie keep the attack in check. Probably the Clarence player was the steadier of the two, but once he let in his wing opponent, and but for a dash across from Jarvie the result might have been quite different.

The change at centre-forward was not a decided success. Although Brewis played good football, it would probably have helped the goal average if he had been a trifle quicker in getting at the ball. Stevens and Wileman were the better wing pair, for Wilkie did not shine nearly so well as he has done previously. He was rather hesitant in getting off with the ball, and several times the full back was allowed to get in his kick when the Luton outside-left should have been away on his own. Rollinson, as usual, played a clever mid-field game, without any particular flourish, and his goal was a very cool piece of work.

The local papers give Abertillery all the credit possible for running Luton so close, but undoubtedly the various correspondents are anxious to buck up the prospective spectators in the Abertillery valley, when it is reported another club is likely to come along next season at Ebbw Vale which, it is understood, is an even more promising centre than Abertillery itself. Several of the leading local people were at the match, and although undoubtedly some came out of curiosity the fine exhibition they witnessed should give them a good impression of "Soccer," and Abertillery may even become one of the aspirants for promotion next season. At present, of course, they are only expecting to make a good show, and there is little fear of them getting into the "bottom two."