



Football League Second Division 1896-97

Winner	Notts County (1st title)
Runner-Up	Newton Heath
Wooden Spoon	Burton Wanderers
Failed re-election	Burton Wanderers
Matches played	240
Goals scored	907 (3.78 per match)
Top goalscorer	Tom Boucher (Notts County), 22 John Murphy (Notts County), 22
Biggest home win	Darwen–Walsall 12–0 (26 Dec 1896)
Biggest away win	Walsall – Small Heath 1–6 (24 Oct 1896)
Highest scoring	Darwen–Walsall 12–0 (26 Dec 1896)
Longest winning run	6 matches; Small Heath (13 Mar 1897 – 16 Apr 1897); Notts County (19 Dec 1896 – 27 Feb 1897)
Longest unbeaten run	10 matches; Newton Heath (9 Jan 1897 – 10 Apr 1897)
Longest losing run	12 matches; Lincoln City (21 Sep 1896 – 16 Jan 1897)

Football League Second Division 1896-97

		Pld	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Aver	Pts
1	Notts County	30	12	1	2	60	18	7	3	5	32	25	2.14	42
2	Newton Heath	30	11	4	0	37	10	6	1	8	19	24	1.65	39
3	Grimsby Town	30	12	2	1	44	15	5	2	8	22	30	1.47	38
4	Small Heath	30	8	3	4	36	23	8	2	5	33	24	1.47	37
5	Newcastle United	30	13	1	1	42	13	4	0	11	14	39	1.08	35
6	Manchester City	30	10	3	2	39	15	2	5	8	19	35	1.16	32
7	Gainsborough Trinity	30	10	2	3	35	16	2	5	8	15	31	1.06	31
8	Blackpool	30	11	3	1	39	16	2	2	11	20	40	1.05	31
9	Leicester Fosse	30	11	2	2	44	20	2	2	11	15	37	1.04	30
10	Woolwich Arsenal	30	10	1	4	42	20	3	3	9	26	50	0.97	30
11	Darwen	30	13	0	2	54	16	1	0	14	13	45	1.10	28
12	Walsall	30	8	2	5	37	25	3	2	10	17	44	0.78	26
13	Loughborough	30	10	0	5	37	14	2	1	12	13	50	0.78	25
14	Burton Swifts	30	7	4	4	33	20	2	2	11	13	41	0.75	24
15	Burton Wanderers	30	8	1	6	22	22	1	1	13	9	45	0.46	20
16	Lincoln City	30	4	2	9	17	27	1	0	14	10	58	0.32	12

Home \ Away	Blackpool	Burton Swifts	Burton Wanderers	Darwen	Gainsborough Trinity	Grimsby Town	Leicester Fosse	Lincoln City	Loughborough	Manchester City	Newcastle United	Newton Heath	Notts County	Small Heath	Walsall
Blackpool		3-0	5-0	1-0	1-1	1-0	3-0	3-1	4-1	2-2	4-1	4-2	3-2	1-3	3-2
Burton Swifts	2-0		1-1	2-0	4-0	0-0	2-1	4-0	3-1	5-0	3-0	3-5	1-4	1-1	1-3
Burton Wanderers	3-1	1-0		1-0	3-2	5-1	2-1	2-0	0-1	1-1	0-1	1-2	0-3	2-6	1-0
Darwen	2-3	5-1	3-0		3-2	3-1	4-1	4-1	5-1	3-1	2-1	0-2	2-1	2-0	12-0
Gainsborough Trinity	2-0	4-1	2-1	2-4		1-1	0-2	7-0	2-0	1-1	2-0	2-0	3-2	1-3	2-0
Grimsby Town	2-2	3-0	3-0	4-2	1-1		4-1	3-1	8-1	3-1	3-2	2-0	3-1	2-1	0-1
Leicester Fosse	2-1	3-0	2-1	4-1	0-0	4-2		4-1	4-2	3-3	5-0	1-0	2-3	0-1	4-1
Lincoln City	3-1	1-1	2-3	1-0	0-2	0-3	2-1		0-2	0-1	1-2	1-3	1-1	1-3	2-1
Loughborough	4-1	0-2	6-0	4-2	1-0	1-4	0-2	3-0		2-0	3-0	2-0	0-1	2-0	1-2
Manchester City	4-2	3-1	2-1	4-1	4-1	3-1	4-0	3-0	1-1		1-2	0-0	1-4	3-0	5-0

Newcastle United	4-1	2-1	3-0	5-1	1-2	3-0	3-1	2-1	4-1	3-0		2-0	2-2	4-3	2-0
Newton Heath	2-0	1-1	3-0	3-1	2-0	4-2	2-1	3-1	6-0	2-1	4-0		1-1	1-1	2-0
Notts County	3-1	6-1	5-0	4-0	2-0	1-3	6-0	8-0	3-1	3-3	3-1	3-0		1-2	5-2
Small Heath	1-3	1-2	3-2	5-1	2-2	0-1	2-2	1-2	3-0	3-1	3-1	1-0	3-1		3-3
Walsall	2-2	5-2	2-0	4-0	1-1	0-1	1-1	5-0	5-1	3-2	0-2	2-3	1-3	1-6	

Notts County were promoted.

Promotion and relegation between the two division was again decided by a series of Test Matches. As in the previous season the top two clubs in Division 2 and the bottom two in Division 1 met in a mini-league. Each club played four matches - home and away matches against the two sides from the other division. At the conclusion of the matches the first and second sides in the league played in Division 1 and the third and fourth sides in Division 2.

Sat Apr 17	Notts County	1	0	Sunderland
Mon Apr 19	Burnley	2	0	Newton Heath
Mon Apr 19	Sunderland	0	0	Notts County
Wed Apr 21	Newton Heath	2	0	Burnley
Sat Apr 24	Newton Heath	1	1	Sunderland
Sat Apr 24	Notts County	1	1	Burnley
Mon Apr 26	Burnley	0	1	Notts County
Mon Apr 26	Sunderland	2	0	Newton Heath

Football League Test Match Series Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Notts County	4	2	2	0	3	1	6
Sunderland	4	1	2	1	3	2	4
Burnley	4	1	1	2	3	4	3
Newton Heath	4	1	1	2	3	5	3

Woolwich Arsenal suffered a tragedy in November 1896 with the death of full-back Joe Powell. He had suffered a broken arm in a United League match at Kettering with dirt entering the wound causing blood poisoning and tetanus. His arm had to be amputated but six days after being injured the twenty-six year old died at his home in Plumstead.

Woolwich Arsenal (they became Arsenal in 1914) suffered what still ranks as their worst ever League defeat - 0-8 at Loughborough

Darwen became the last side to complete a League season without drawing a match.

Election for League Membership

The three League sides facing re-election came up against seven non-league clubs in the vote for League membership. Voting -

Votes	Club	End Result
21	Lincoln City	Re-Elected to the League
15	Burton Swifts	Re-Elected to the League
13	Luton Town	Elected to the League
11	Burslem Port Vale	Not Elected to the League
9	Burton Wanderers	Not Re-elected to the League
7	Nelson	Not Elected to the League
5	Glossop North End	Not Elected to the League
3	Fairfield Athletic	Not Elected to the League
2	Crewe Alexandra	Not Elected to the League
1	Millwall Athletic	Not Elected to the League

Leicester Fosse Results

Date	Opposition	Result	Score	Scorers	Attendance
05.09.1896	Darwen (H)	W	4 - 1	McMillan, Lonie, Walker, Freebairn	4,000
12.09.1896	Notts County (H)	L	2 - 3	Manson (2)	6,000
19.09.1896	Burton Swifts (A)	L	1 - 2	Dorrell	4,000
26.09.1896	Loughborough (A)	W	2 - 0	McMillan (2)	5,000
03.10.1896	Blackpool (H)	W	2 - 1	McMillan, Carnelly	6,000
17.10.1896	Notts County (A)	L	0 - 6		5,000
24.10.1896	Darwen (A)	L	1 - 4	Lonie	2,000
07.11.1896	Lincoln City (H)	W	4 - 1	McMillan, Carnelly, Freebairn	2,000
14.11.1896	Newcastle United (A)	L	1 - 3	McMillan	6,000
28.11.1896	Walsall (H)	W	4 - 2	Freebairn, Carnelly (2), McDonald	4,000
05.12.1896	Grimsby Town (H)	W	4 - 2	McMillan (2), Dorrell, McDonal	8,000
19.12.1896	Burton Wanderers (A)	L	1 - 2	McDonald	3,000
25.12.1896	Loughborough (H)	W	4 - 2	McDonald, Dorrell, Freebairn (2)	11,000
28.12.1896	Newton Heath (H)	W	1 - 0	Dorrell	8,000
09.01.1897	Newcastle United (H)	W	5 - 0	Trainer, McDonald (2), Carnelly, Dorrell	3,000
16.01.1897	Burton Wanderers (H)	W	2 - 1	Brown, Trainer	8,000
23.01.1897	Grimsby Town (A)	L	1 - 4	Dorrell	3,000
06.02.1897	Gainsborough Trinity (A)	W	2 - 0	McMillan	7,000
13.02.1897	Woolwich Arsenal (H)	W	6 - 3	Dorrell (2), Carnelly (2), Freebairn, OG	6,000
20.02.1897	Newton Heath (A)	L	1 - 2	Carnelly	8,000
27.02.1897	Blackpool (A)	L	0 - 3		1,000
06.03.1897	Burton Swifts (H)	W	3 - 0	Carnelly, Dorrell, Freebairn	7,000
13.03.1897	Manchester City (A)	L	0 - 4		6,000
20.03.1897	Walsall (A)	D	1 - 1	Wood	2,500
27.03.1897	Small Heath (H)	L	0 - 1		5,500
30.03.1897	Loughborough (H)	D	0-0		
10.04.1897	Lincoln City (A)	L	1 - 2	Freebairn	1,400
12.04.1897	Manchester City (H)	D	3 - 3	McMillan, Carnelly, og	1,000
16.04.1897	Small Heath (A)	D	2 - 2	McDonald, Freebairn	2,000
17.04.1897	Woolwich Arsenal (A)	L	1 - 2	Dorrell	5,000
19.04.1897	Gainsborough Trinity (H)	D	0 - 0		2,000

Loughborough FC Results

Date	Opposition	Result	Score	Scorers	Attendance
02.09.1896	Grimsby Town (H)	L	1-4	McBride	2,000
05.09.1896	Notts County (A)*	L	1-3	Ward	1,000
12.09.1896	Burton Swifts (H)	L	0-2		2,000
19.09.1896	Woolwich Arsenal (A)	L	0-2		9,000
26.09.1896	Leicester Fosse (H)	L	0-2		5,000
03.10.1896	Lincoln City (A)	W	2-0	Blackett, Ward	2,000
10.10.1896	Walsall (H)	L	1-2	Blackett	2,000
17.10.1896	Grimsby Town (A)	L	1-8	Blackett	3,000
24.10.1896	Notts County (H)	L	0-1		2,000
31.10.1896	Walsall (A)	L	1-5	Jones	2,000
07.11.1896	Burton Swifts (A)	L	1-3	Andrews	500
14.11.1896	Gainsborough Trinity (H)	W	1-0	Gourlay	
28.11.1896	Newcastle United (A)	L	1-4	Mumford	7,000
05.12.1896	Gainsborough Trinity (A)	L	0-2		
12.12.1896	Woolwich Arsenal (H)	W	8-0	Jones (4), Ward (2), Brailsford	2,000
19.12.1896	Small Heath (H)	W	2-0	Jones, Ward	1,000
25.12.1896	Leicester Fosse (A)	L	2-4	Brailsford, Jones	11,000
02.01.1897	Darwen (H)	W	4-2	Ward (2), Jones, Brailsford	
30.01.1897	Blackpool (H)	W	4-1	Jones (3), Roulston	
06.02.1897	Newton Heath (A)	L	0-6		5,000
13.02.1897	Darwen (A)	L	1-5	Blackett	500
20.02.1897	Newcastle United (H)	W	3-0	Roulston (2), Blackett	2,000
06.03.1897	Lincoln City (H)	W	3-0	Blackett (2), Brailsford	4,000
17.03.1897	Manchester City (H)	W	2-0	Roulston, Ward	1,000
20.03.1897	Small Heath (A)	L	0-3		4,000
27.03.1897	Blackpool (A)	L	1-4	Roulston	2,000
30.03.1897	Leicester Fosse (A)	D	0-0		
10.04.1897	Newton Heath (H)	W	2-0	Ward, Jones	3,000
16.04.1897	Manchester City (A)	D	1-1	Andrews	2,000
17.04.1897	Burton Wanderers (H)	W	6-0	Andrews (3), Jones (2), Shelton	
19.04.1897	Burton Wanderers (A)	W	1-0	Blackett	

* Played at Nottingham Forest's Town Ground, as Trent Bridge was being used for cricket.

1896-97 Top Goal Scorers

Leicester Fosse	
Billy Dorrell	13
Willie Fairbairn	12
Albert Carnelly	10

Loughborough	
William Jones	14
Ward	9
Joseph Blackett	8
William Andrews	6
Arthur Roulston	5
J Brailsford	4

The big news in the summer of 1896 was the £100 transfer of left back George Swift from Loughborough to Leicester Fosse. Although legitimate the transfer caused a huge row between the two clubs over the size of the fee. The Football League did not help the situation by refusing to arbitrate. The Loughborough press did not take the loss of their influential captain well, remarking, "this sort of thing savours of white slavery." Swift was a great signing for the Fosse, an ever present in 4 of his 6 seasons as captain. As a full back he had an impressive kick and scored a number of spectacular goals, including one from the halfway line for Leicester against Walsall in 1901. For several seasons he was also Fosse's penalty taker. He was awarded a benefit game, before moving to Notts County. On retirement from professional football, he became a trainer. Other new Fosse summer signings included John Leighton (Hibernian), John Freebairn (Abercorn), Thomas Lonie (Stoke), John McMillan (Derby County) and Albert Carnelly. The last-named player if you remember scored hat-trick against the Fosse in a Midland League for Loughborough in November 1891. Another former Luff, John Jackson was appointed trainer after Joe Newton took up a similar role in Dundee. In the search for quality players the Fosse Executive arranged for amateur trial matches to be played against scratch teams of men anxious to play in Fosse colours. About 30 applications had been received in response to the invitation to take part. The first part of each session was devoted to ball practice with the professionals, whilst trial matches commenced at 4 o'clock. Several players were identified and two signed professional forms. A week before the season started, Walnut Street staged a match between mixed teams of the club's 1896-97 squad: "A" team: Thraves, goal, Davy and Bailey, backs; Jones, Lord and Bevans, half-backs; Curtis, Manson, Harris, Trainer and Bishop, forwards. "B" team: Howe, goal; Thompson and A N Other, backs; Brow, Walker, and Leighton, half-backs' Dorrell, Freebairn, Lonie, Carnelly and McMillan, forwards.

Of last season's players Loughborough retained nine for the 1896-97 campaign, two goalkeepers, one back, two half backs and four forwards. They secured six other players, including Robert Thompson from Tow Lane, and Joseph Blackett from Willington Athletic. Due to the lack of photographs in newspapers, the age, height, and weight of new players were listed. Joseph Blackett, was 21 years old, standing 5ft 9 inch and weighed 11st 4lb! His sprinting abilities were reputedly exceptional and could run 100 yards in 11 seconds. McBride was signed from Ayr and Mumford from Sheffield Wednesday. In addition, two trialists – full back Harry Whitehead from Barlestone and Robert Miller, a forward, a former Bolton player who moved to Loughborough having obtained work in the town – were signed. The players who had signed League forms prior to the start of the season were: Hugh Monteith and Fred Fould, goalkeepers; Jack Berry, Robert Thompson and Harry Whitehead, backs; Walter Hardy, Jack Hamilton, and Henry Middleton, half-backs; Arthur Roulston, William Andrews, Robert McBride, William Jones, Walter Ward, Robert Miller, and Joseph Blackett. Jack Berry was appointed captain. The signings met the approval of the local press, who commented that, "the clubs outlook appears considerably better than it did this time last year."

Leicestershire football fans did not have long to wait for the first Football League derby of the season, on 26 September 1896. Loughborough went into the game pointless on the back of four consecutive defeats. No less than six players had made their debut in Leicester's opening game of the season against Darwen, with three of them scoring in an impressive 4-1 win. This was followed by defeats against Notts County and Burton Swifts. George Swift was cordially cheered as he led the Fosse men on to the field against his old club at the Nottingham Road ground in bright sunshine and the Luffs were equally well received. Fosse won the toss and chose to attack the entrance end, kick off taking place punctually. Billed by the press as "the fight for the wooden spoon" rather than the Championship of Leicestershire, the game opened in a "spirited and exciting manner", both sides playing the combined passing game. If anything, Loughborough started better, the right wing being especially effective, Roulston twice causing the Fosse defence some anxiety in the opening few minutes. Fosse opened the scoring on 15 minutes against the run of play with McMillan placing a shot beyond the reach of Monteith. Fosse piled on the pressure with an impressive display of attacking football, and within a minute Blackett had the hardest of luck in not scoring, with a beautiful long range effort just going wide. Then McMillan beat Monteith again in precisely the same manner as his first goal, doubling Fosse's lead. Played waged evenly between the two goal mouths, but Loughborough were let down by poor shooting, and Blackett and Andrews played an individual game much to the detriment of their teammates. The second half by comparison was poor, characterized by robust play and excessive fouling predominantly by the Loughborough team, who had clearly decided to adopt a more physical approach. Fosse were by far the better side and it was clear to all that witnessed the game that Loughborough would need to significantly invest in new players to stand any chance of avoiding the

prospect of re-election. The football correspondent of the Leicester Daily Post stated, "a couple of years ago Loughborough people were mad on football and are now cynical and have entered on a downward course."

After winning their first League game of the season, against Lincoln, the Saturday after losing against the Fosse, Loughborough began another run of defeats. This included losses against Walsall home and away, Notts County, Burton Swifts and an 8-1 thrashing away at Grimsby Town. A humiliating defeat by Mansfield Town (1-2) in the third qualifying round of the English Challenge Cup in November, was claimed by the local press to be a "disgrace to both the club and players." Financially the weekly wage bill of £30 plus/week was slowly strangling the club. Just to make matters worse there was crowd trouble at the home game against Walsall on 10 October. A section of the 2,000 crowd were furious by a series of decisions by the referee, Mr Pennington and at the end of the game rushed towards him, with several blows aimed at his head. Luckily, they missed, and he left the ground badly shaken, but unharmed. A charge of disorderly conduct on the Athletic Grounds was bought by Mr Pennington. After an extensive investigation and hearing held at the Victoria Coffeehouse in Leicester, the Football Association committee unanimously arrived at the following decisions:

1. Whilst finding that disorderly proceedings did occur.... The executive are not of the opinion that it was of such character as to justify the extreme course being taken of closing the ground.
2. The executive finds that Loughborough F.C. have not taken all precaution necessary to carry out the game in an orderly manner.
3. That Loughborough F.C. be severely censured and cautioned and ordered to publish further bills of caution to be submitted to the association and that an assurance be given to this association of the extra precautions having been taken to prevent to reoccurrence.
4. That the whole of the expenses of the inquiry be borne by Loughborough F.C.
5. That Mr C. Larkin of the Loughborough Committee, be suspended from taking any official part in connection with football until May 1, 1897, for accusing the referee of dishonourable motives, and that he apologise forthwith in writing through this association to Mr Pennington.
6. That the Loughborough F.C. Committee be called upon as a committee to apologise to Mr Pennington for general misconduct towards him.

Athletic Grounds attendances dropped to around 1,000, generating receipts of around £15-16/game. Supporters were disgruntled and held a special meeting at the Corn Exchange in Loughborough on Christmas Eve 1896 to discuss the financial situation of the club. Much of the problem was down to the size of Loughborough and its inability to command the number of people at their matches as larger towns. Mr Thompson, a club Committee member not surprisingly wanted the Football League to change the rules so that home and away gates should be split equally between both competing clubs. This comment was greeted with rapturous applause. Clearly the Fosse based in a town of 200,000 had a huge advantage over Loughborough, with a population of 20,000. It is perhaps worth noting at this point that Loughborough attendances on a Saturday afternoon at the Athletic Grounds accounted for anything between 20 and 50% of the total population of the north Leicestershire town – a remarkable achievement! In a rallying cry to his team, many of whom were present at the meeting, Mr Thompson appealed to them never to "take up the wooden spoon again." Councillor Mato said it was a great pity that a town like Loughborough could not pay the debts of the club, whilst Councillor Wootton stated that it was a "disgrace to the town that such a debt had been allowed to accumulate." After much discussion it was agreed to raise money for the club through a bazaar and an organising committee was formed. A canvass of the audience was made for subscriptions resulted in promises of over £200, including from Mr Johnson-Ferguson MP, £50; Midland Brewery Company, £20; Messrs. H L Dormer £20, among many others. This additional income allowed Loughborough to sign two more players, Alfred Shelton, and J. Brailsford, who combined with devastating effect in perhaps the most famous fixture ever witnessed in Loughborough on 12 December 1896 – the 8-0 demolition of Arsenal – which is still stands as the Londoners record defeat in the Football League. The score could have been higher since Loughborough had two "good goals" disallowed for offside and several near misses. The Football Association had insisted that Woolwich Arsenal play Leyton in the English Challenge Cup on the same day, winning 5-0. But the first team were at Loughborough. The team had three changes from their previous League game on the 5 December. Two of these were regular first team players, but Carver made his debut at left back. The Luffs won the next match, also at home, to Small Heath. The mood of the Luffs faithful changed from downbeat to optimistic about their prospects against the Fosse.

Woolwich Arsenal got their revenge, four years later, inflicting Loughborough's worst defeat in the Football League, a 12-0 hammering on 12 March 1900 at the Manor Ground, Plumstead, London.

FOOTBALL LEAGUE DIVISION TWO LOUGHBOROUGH TOWN .

8 . WOOLWICH ARSENAL 0.

DECEMBER 12th, 1896. AT THE ATHLETIC GROUNDS

Came to show Loughborough a thing or two;
But the Luffs said nay,
It is our turn today,
And the reds returned thoroughly wursted.

Perhaps you wonder what the above medley refers to? Well, if you really have not heard the good news, I must tell you, Loughborough beat the powerful combination Woolwich Arsenal, by eight goals - whew! - to none. But that was not all; they had two goals disallowed, one as good a goal as ever was scored, but then we must not be too covetous, eight being pretty conclusive in all conscience. Although Arsenal commenced proceedings, in the most vile of conditions, with rain having fallen for most of the day, it was Loughborough who opened the scoring after just three minutes when Hamilton followed up a shot and kicked through the uprights. Whilst Arsenal forced a couple of corners it was Loughborough who scored a second when a move between Brailsford, Ward and Andrews led to Jones banging the ball into the net, two nil with just seven minutes gone. Arsenal came back and forced Monteith into a little strategy. With the combination of good work upon the part of the Arsenal forwards and the storm sweeping down from the Moor-land end of the ground towards the Loughborough goal, the home side found it almost impossible to get away, and it seemed every moment that the home goal would have to capitulate. The Loughborough half-backs were playing a cool game and the backs defending right nobly, all raids by the Reds were successfully checked. Although the storm kept up its force the tide turned and Loughborough scored a sensational third when Ward broke away, beat the half-backs, passed the ball in, ran between the backs, and scored a beautiful goal, Talbot not having the remotest chance with the shot. Loughborough forwards were now fairly irresistible, their smartness and speed being a thorough eye opener. Bearing down again, Jones, who had been a prominent figure, ran clean through the visitors' defence, and brought the score to 4-0 at the interval. With the elements now in their favour everybody expected Loughborough to pile on a few more but after an initial flurry the home side relaxed, allowing Arsenal back into the game, though without any success. As Loughborough picked themselves up Ward hit the framework and further chances, including a goal by Jones which was adjudged offside, were missed. During a period of intense pressure, the home side scored their fifth with a short and sharp passing game that resulted in Ward scoring. There was no holding the Loughborough forwards now and although Brailsford had what seemed a perfectly legitimate goal disallowed he was successful shortly after for the sixth home score. The enthusiasm of the spectators had now practically given way to merriment, for indeed it was only a question of what the total would be. Straight from the kick-off of the last goal Jones headed over from an Andrews cross when it seemed easier to score. A minute later he made up for the miss with a beautiful shot into the net that Talbot never moved an inch to check. In spite of these severe reverses the Woolwich forwards were game to the last and put the Loughborough defence to the test on several occasions only to see Jones score the eighth from a corner and Ward hit the bar during the last few moments.

TEAMS: LOUGHBOROUGH - Monteith, goal; Berry and Thompson, backs; Mumford, Hamilton and Shelton, half-backs; Roulston, Andrews, Brailsford, Jones and Ward, forwards. WOOLWICH ARSENAL - Talbot, goal; Buist and Carver, backs; Crawford, Boyle and Davis, half-backs; Haywood, Boyd, O'Brien and Russell, Brock, forwards.

There was a huge turnout for Leicester Fosse's first Christmas Day home fixture, against Loughborough. Officially 11,000 people passed through the turnstiles, including season ticket holders, with the receipts of about £220 which accounted for 10% of that season's gate revenue. The actual attendance, however, was significantly higher, as the gatesmen were overwhelmed with hundreds gaining admission without paying. Football became an integral part of Christmas for many - tickets for Christmas Day games were often given to children as presents. Festive double headers developed with local rivals playing each other twice in 48 hours, in front of bumper Christmas crowds. Attitudes began to change, and as public transport declined

on Christmas Day, so did attendances and the fixtures eventually disappeared from the football calendar. The final 25 December programme of games in England was in the 1957/58 season, when Leicester lost 5-1 at Blackpool. Leicester went into 1896 festive battle with their arch-rival without McMillan, and Leighton who had been out through a knee injury, replaced Lord on the right wing. The visitors fielded their full-strength team. Although the ground was heavy after persistent rain, the game was played in cold dry weather. Loughborough won the toss just before 2:30 and elected to attack the town end. McDonald opened the scored with a header for Leicester from a cross by Trainer in the first five minutes. Fosse totally dominated, forwards passing between themselves creating space for Dorrell and then Freebairn to score. Brailsford pulled one back for the Luffs before half-time, with a low shot that beat Thraves for pace. Fosse were by far the "cleverer" side and were 3-1 up at half-time. Fosse domination continued into the second half. Within minutes of the restart Dorrell centred after a "grand sprint", the remaining Fosse forwards went for the goal as a unit, the ball eventually being bundled through, with Freebairn very prominent in the rush. The Loughborough crossbar and the upright were rattled three times in quick succession as Fosse pressed for a fifth. Loughborough reduced the lead to two goals after 70 minutes. After a passing movement on the left wing, the ball went to Swift, who struggled to clear the ball as he got stuck in the mud, Jones pouncing to hit the ball into the net. Although Thraves was at fault for the first Luffs goal, he certainly wasn't for the second. Fosse were worthy winners at 4-2 and could rightly claim to be the "Champions of Leicestershire".

The Luffs performed much better in the second half of the season, finishing 13th in the 16-team league on 25 points, winning 12, losing 17 and drawing just 1. Thanks to a combination of a 'gift' from Mr Johnson-Ferguson, the local MP and committee member, and that year's sports subscriptions and bazaar, the previous debt of £652 was cleared. However, they still posted a loss of £301 for the season!

In the League, Fosse accumulated 30 points, winning 13, losing 13, and drawing four, scoring 59 goals, and having 57 scored against them. Overall, in all competitions and friendlies, they played 54, won 20, lost 20, drew nine; goals for 110, against 95, the chief goal getters being Dorrell 25, McMillan 20, Freebairn 9, Carnelley 17, McDonald 9, Trainer 5, and Walker 4. In the 1895-6 season they had gates, which realised an average of £55; compared to £46 per game the previous season. The deficit increased to over £900. Apart from the kindness of the club's vice-presidents, who each paid £25 each, and the new committee men to pay £10 on election, the club would have folded before the 1896-967 season even started. Fosse had two defections during the season – Tom Lonie (released) and David Manson (to Lincoln City) – and no less than six key players were laid on their backs at the time when their services were most required. During the AGM in May 1897 members commented that the club's "want of success, financially and otherwise", was due to nothing else than bad play. The annual report presented was scathing, pointing out that there were men in the team, without naming them, who "did not know how to play away from home, and another season these men would not be found in the ranks of the players. Another case of failure was the exceptionally wet season which they had experienced. That did not of course account for the bad play, because the players seemed to thrive on the worst grounds..." A proposal was made to form the club into a limited company. It was stated that if the committee decided not to form a limited company two things would happen – first bankruptcy, and the second finding £719 to clear past deficits, and something like £200 a year to ensure the continuance of the club. Not surprisingly the membership voted strongly in favour of the motion and initiated the necessary financial and legal registration processes. Several well-known Fossils sought pastures new at the end of the season - Harry Trainer (Sheppey United), Harry Davy (Bristol City), David McDonald (Dundee), Albert Carnelley (Bristol City), John Leighton (destination unknown) and Jimmy Thraves (Long Eaton Rangers). In addition to the old professionals engaged – Cecil Wood, Bob Thompson, and Harry Bailey, only three new players – Roderick McLeod (West Bromwich Albion), Dick Jones (South Shore) and Alf Ball (Kettering Town)– had been signed by the end of May.