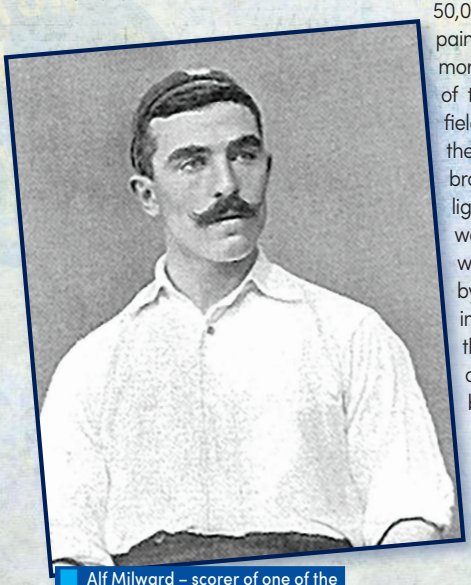
Words: By Richie Gillham

When the Toffees outshone the Blades

The year 1878 saw not only the foundation of the football team that would become Everton, but also, in October that year, the experiments of playing artificially-illuminated matches.

At Sheffield United's Bramhall Lane ground, dynamo-powered lamps were mounted on timber gantries to provide the light for a game contested by teams made up of representatives from local clubs.

But it was here on Merseyside, on 8 January 1890, that one of the most significant trials of this nascent technology occurred. Paraffin-fuelled lamps, manufactured by A.C. Wells & Co. of Manchester, and normally were deployed as the Blades visited Everton's Anfield ground for the 7pm kick-off.



Alf Milward – scorer of one of the illuminated goals!

According to the *Liverpool Courier*: 'Anfield is perhaps the best arena in the county for such experiments as the high stands serve to contain the light within the required area.'

The novelty of this innovation drew a crowd in the region of 8,000. Everton won 5-2, thanks to goals from Johnny Holt, Alf Milward, Dickie Doyle, Alec Brady and James Weir, and the *Liverpool Courier* reported thus: 'Fifteen of Wells' patent lights were placed on the margin of the field of play at an elevation of about twenty-five feet, and these cast a brilliant radiance over the greater part of the ground – a glow that equated to 50,000 candle power...The ball was painted white in order that it might more easily be discerned. The sight of the players sprinting about the field, somewhat phantom-like, and the sea of faces round the barriers, brought into strong relief by the lights, formed a most curious and weirdly picture when the start was made at the signal given by the referee with a foghorn instead of a whistle...Considering the drawbacks in the shapes of reflections cast by players' bodies, and the somewhat high wind that was blowing, a very nice passing game was witnessed and altogether there were but few inaccuracies.'

Two days later, 3,000 spectators watched a second demonstration of the Wells lamps at Anfield. The home team, described as 'only a scratch affair', lost 2-0 to Lancashire Nomads.

It would be 68 years later that Everton's permanent floodlights at Goodison Park came into use – in a match against the second incumbents of Anfield – Liverpool FC.

Sources:
Sheffield Football: A History, Volume 1
Liverpool Courier on bluecorrespondent.co.uk