

O'ROURKE'S GOALS HELPED IN FIVE POINTS HAUL

By CHILTERN

EXPERIENCING their most successful Easter for a very long time, the Town gave a great boost to their hopes of avoiding relegation by collecting five points out of six and, at long last, got themselves out of the last four in the table.

A tough task still faces them, but, judging from the determination and fighting spirit they showed in all three games, they should be in with a good chance of escaping, especially if John O'Rourke can retain his scoring form.

Although he began the holiday by drawing a blank at Nottingham on Thursday, though he was twice fouled when in a scoring position without County suffering the award of a penalty, he hit the jackpot in the two home matches.

Against Bristol Rovers on Saturday, O'Rourke had the ball in the back of the net twice in the first four minutes to give the Town a flying start to what they regarded as their hardest match of the three.

This was a match fraught with interest until the end because although the Rovers were shaken visibly by their terrible beginning, they never gave up the fight and **BIGGS**, the man for whom the Town bid last season when he was with Preston North End, scored his 30th goal of the season with a tremendous drive from 30 yards.

At 2-1, the game was delicately in the balance, but **TURNER**, recalled for the injured **McKechie**, restored the two-goal margin seven minutes from half-time with a curious goal.

There was an indirect free-kick on the edge of the penalty area to the Town and Turner chipped the ball over the defensive wall. Had Hall let it go, there could have been no trouble for the Rovers, but instead he tried to save, got a hand to the ball, and helped it into the net.

So the position remained until the 73rd minute, when Bramwell was judged to have pulled down Hamilton, and **BIGGS** blasted the ball past Baynham, who took a chance and dived to his left, but guessed wrongly.

O'Rourke Ended The Tension

Crisis faced the Town squarely in the face then, but **O'ROURKE** came to their rescue again, when after Whittaker had taken a pass from Morton, he ran on to a through pass and firmly drove the ball past the diving Hall.

This was the completion of O'Rourke's first hat-trick before the home crowd and, no doubt, his scoring feat was responsible for a noticeable increase in the size of the crowd on Monday, when Notts County were here for the return match.

From 6,612 on Saturday, it rose to 8,387, the biggest attendance the Town have had for a League match since Coventry were here in September.

Of the three holiday games, this seemed to present the easiest task but in point of fact the Town made heavier weather of it than should have been the case.

In fact, for much of the first

half, the County played as if they had never heard of relegation worries, and with better shooting could well have established a lead.

After Reid had gone close a couple of times, Jones missed a near open goal when he found a yawning gap in the middle of the Town defence. Flower missed another opportunity, and Baynham made a fine one-handed save from a header by Astle.

Passes Intercepted

By and large, the Town's attempts to make progress were halted by the number of occasions on which their passes were intercepted, and they tended to make too many passes to achieve a minimum of territorial advantage.

Heavy pressure by them just before half-time raised hopes considerably, but as time went on without a goal coming, it began to look as if a valuable point was to be lost.

Early in the second half, the County were forced on to the defensive, but they came back into the game again, and it took all the Town's defensive resources to keep them out, though their own poor finishing was a big handicap to them.

Then **O'ROURKE** struck again with a well-timed header after McBain had placed well a free kick for a foul on Turner. O'Rourke just beat Gibson's leap for the ball, and both players had to receive attention for head injuries.

Even then, the Town could not be assured of victory, and for the second time during the holiday, McBain cleared off the goal-line when all seemed lost when he headed away a shot by Fry.

At this stage, there was much looking at watches until, five minutes from the end, **O'ROURKE** put an end to anxiety with another fine, opportunist goal, this time following a shrewd pass by Turner.

Both Missed Chances

The first meeting between these struggling teams at Nottingham on Thursday was another closely

FOR THE RECORDS— THURSDAY

NOTTS C 1 (Jones),
LUTON TOWN 1 (McKechie).

NOTTS C: Smith; Hampton, Agnew; Sheridan, Gibson, Carver; Fry, Jones, Bly, Tait, Flower.

LUTON TOWN: Baynham; McBain, Bramwell; Pacey, Caleb, Lownds; Walden, McKechie, O'Rourke, Reid, Whittaker.

Referee: R. Tinkler, Boston. Attendance: 4,046.

SATURDAY

LUTON T 4 (O'Rourke 3, Turner).

BRISTOL ROVERS 2 (Biggs 2).

LUTON T: Baynham, McBain, Bramwell; Morton, Pacey, Lownds; Walden, Turner, O'Rourke, Reid, Whittaker.

BRISTOL ROVERS: Hall; Hillard, Jones (G); Stone, Davis, Mabbutt; Jarman, Brown, Biggs, Hamilton, Jones (R).

Referee: G. D. Rooper, Cambridge. Attendance: 6,612.

MONDAY

LUTON T 2 (O'Rourke 2).

NOTTS C.: 0.

LUTON T.: Unchanged team.

NOTTS C.: Smith; Hampton, Agnew; Sheridan, Gibson, Carver; Fry, Astle, Jones, Edwards, Flower.

Referee: J. R. Loynton, Solihull. Attendance: 8,387.

fought affair, with both missing comparatively easy chances, and their anxiety about their respective positions plainly showing in their work in front of goal.

JONES gave the County the lead after 16 minutes when Caleb failed to intercept a pass from Bly and Baynham was left in an impossible position.

Twice McKechie, with a little more decision in his finishing, could have levelled matters and O'Rourke was a bit out of luck when he attempted to dribble around Smith but was foiled by the goalkeeper's dive.

McKECHIE obtained the equaliser two minutes after half-time after Pacey had headed on a corner from Whittaker and after that, there were escapes at either end.