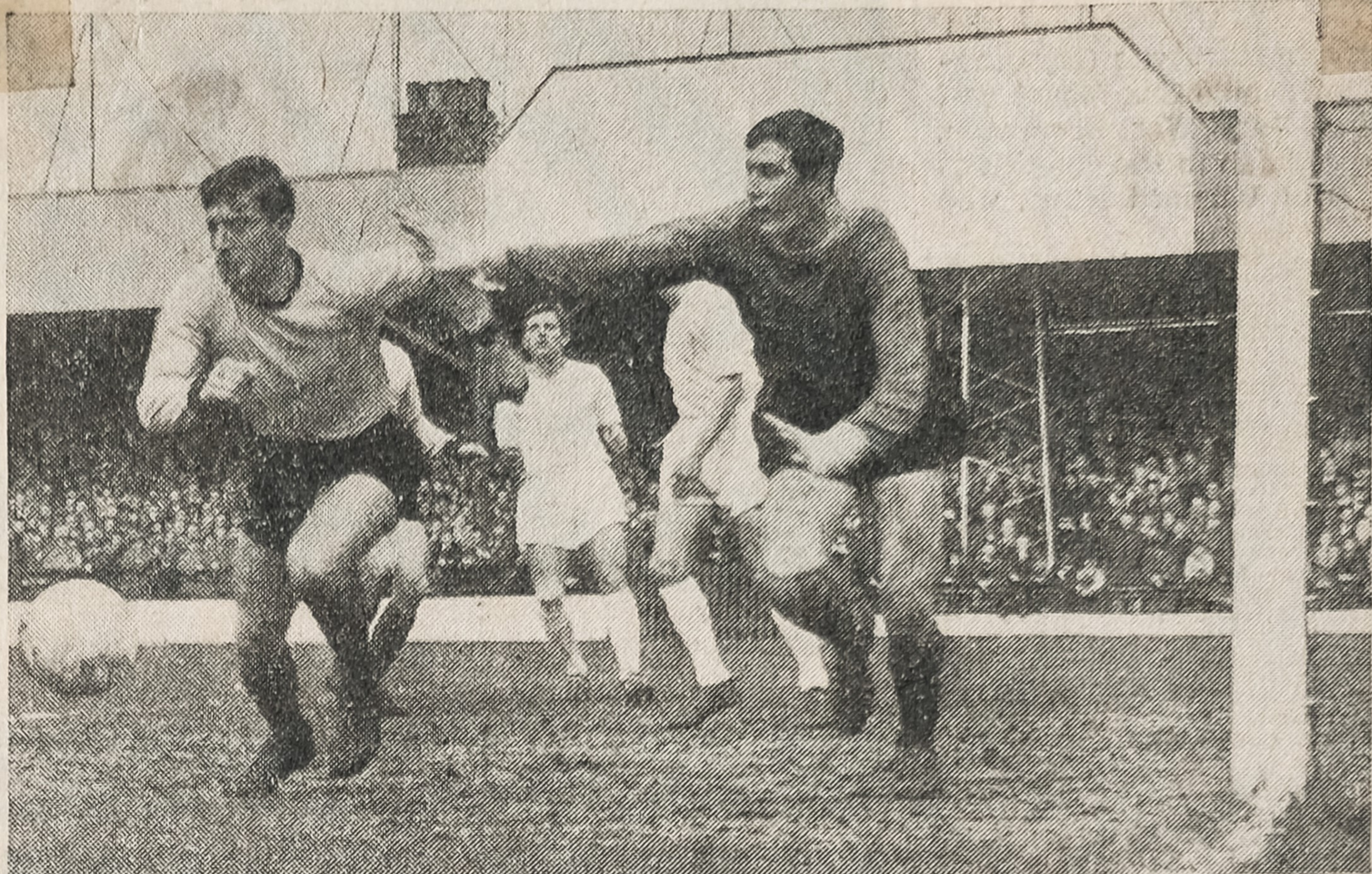




● Defence in depth for Watford at Kenilworth Road as 'keeper Pat Jennings and left back Bryn Jones scamper to halt a Luton raid.

SALUTE NON-STOP O'ROURKE —THE SAVIOUR OF LUTON

Luton Town 2 Watford 1: by ALAN HOBY 63/64

JOHN O'ROURKE, 19-year-old son of a Dagenham docker—the Englishman with the vintage Irish name—was the two-goal hero of this tense, over-anxious struggle which lifted relegation-fighting Luton Town to safety but smashed Watford's last slim promotion chance beyond repair.

O'Rourke has scored 21 goals in 22 games since Luton got him on a free transfer from Chelsea last December. What a wonderful signing.

Indeed, with 14 points gained out of 16 from their last eight games, the slim, spirited, perpetual motion O'Rourke is being called the saviour of Luton.

Watford, not surprisingly, were so upset after Luton had robbed them of their one-goal lead when O'Rourke scored twice through defensive hesitancy in the last nine minutes that they declined the champagne hospitable Luton sent to the visitors' dressing room.

Yet Watford must blame themselves for the way this edgy, exciting local derby turned against them. Towards the end the defence panicked. And despite the mid-field cleverness on and off the ball of centre forward Charlie Livesey, the worried Watford forwards seldom had a goal-hunger such an occasion demanded.

Not only was their inside right, Jim McAnearney, out of touch. The visitors' tactics were difficult to understand. Luton's goalkeeper Ron Baynham was none too happy in the air. But where were the high crosses and shots to test this weakness?

Many of the Watford passes too were inaccurate. Behind the forwards their rugged defence lacked wing-half power and was always stretched to snapping point against the sharp Luton forwards. Indeed, Luton could have had a

first-half penalty when the zippy O'Rourke was blatantly brought down by right back Ken Nicholas.

Watford goalkeeper Pat Jennings also made a fingertip save from a rasping cross-drive by that clever right winger Gordon Turner. And with centre half Gordon Fincham and left half Mark Lownds in command, Luton should have been in front by the half-time whistle.

Instead, Watford, who never shaped like a Second Division side, snatched a chancey sort of goal 10 minutes after half-time. The Watford fans among the 19,799 crowd—5,000 better than average—roared when Watford's left-winger George Harris managed to sidefoot Ron Spelman's low cross from the left into the net. But it was their last real cheer.

Incredibly, Watford funnelled back into a packed defence—and John O'Rourke struck. From a mis-hit Fincham free-kick right-half Dave Pacey hooked the ball forward to Reid, who headed into the goal-mouth. It ran loose. O'Rourke pounced, and slipped it into the net.

Two minutes from the end Luton burgled a hotly disputed winner. The ball seemed to hit Smith's hand. It rebounded to O'Rourke, who shot. Jennings blocked, but O'Rourke stabbed at the ball again to score the most exciting goal of his life.