

WHAT THE OTHER CRITICS SAID

HARD-FIGHTING TOWN NEARLY TOOK POINT

Twice Wiped Out Their Arrears At Bristol

By CHILTERN

BRISTOL ROVERS 3, LUTON TOWN 2

EVEN though a narrow defeat was their portion at Eastville, there was further evidence of the new determination and improved teamwork that has been achieved by the Town.

Indeed, they would not have been flattered if they had returned with a point, which would have been a welcome start to their Christmas programme, and so hard did they fight that the Rovers could never afford to relax for an instant.

To a certain extent, the Rovers adapted themselves better to the conditions presented by a frozen hard pitch because they had not much time for frills and concentrated on hitting the ball hard and hoping for mistakes to occur.

On the other hand, the better midfield football came from the Town who, however, tended to overdo it, and what might have worked in softer going just did not come off on the frozen turf.

There was a flying start by the Rovers, who scored in the second minute, before the Town defence had had a chance to settle down, and there was evidence of slack marking as HAMILTON met a hard centre by Jarman with his head.

Not that the Town were dismayed by any means because they fought back with commendable spirit, and one of the frequent defensive mistakes that occurred enabled them to draw level five minutes later.

Stone failed to clear just

in front of goal, and WHITTAKER nipped in to collect the ball and score easily.

Another centre by Jarman enabled the Rovers to regain their advantage after 17 minutes, and again HAMILTON was unattended as he drove the ball into the roof of the net.

WHITTAKER EQUALISED AGAIN

There was no suggestion of panic by the Town, and they shook the Rovers by drawing level again a minute from half-time when Pleat sent away Riddick, whose centre was headed into the far corner of the net by WHITTAKER, who previously has not been prolific so far as goals are concerned.

On the basis of their first half showing, it seemed at half-time that the Town were in with a real chance of forcing a draw, but the position changed in the 54th minute when a bad mistake by Pacey, who showed indecision in making a clearance near goal, enabled HAMILTON to complete a hat-trick.

Even then, the Town contrived to have quite a lot of the play, and there were two or three distinct occasions when the equaliser might have come.

On the other hand, there were one or two escapes and missed chances at their end, but, at the end, one was left with a feeling of disappointment that the recent improved results had not been continued.

The controversial decision to bring in Fincham could be called a success, because once he settled down he was difficult to pass, and his height was often invaluable with the ball so much in the air.

PACEY HAD A BAD DAY

There is evidence that Reid is settling in happily at left-half, and he was much more effective than was Pacey, who had a bad day and was inclined to leave unwanted gaps.

Both McBain and Bramwell battled away determinedly against a couple of dangerous wingers, and Baynham, with no earthly chance of preventing any of the goals, was always assured and confident.

Forward, there could have been more punch in the inside positions because although Riddick made a bright start, he tended to be a little too fanciful later and hard games of this nature are a test for Rioch who, of course, is still in the process of learning his trade, but who did some neat things.

There was always the possibility of something happening when Whittaker had possession of the ball and Pleat became more of a danger in the second half after having found some difficulty in beating the experienced Gwyn Jones earlier.

No one could have worked harder than McKechnie, who was willing to chase everything, but the openings did not crop up on this occasion and the strong Davis gave him little scope.

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

LUTON TOWN: Baynham; McBain, Bramwell; Pacey, Fincham, Reid; Pleat, Riddick, McKechnie, Rioch, Whittaker.

Referee: J. Lowry, Neath. Attendance: 10,624.

"Twice Luton pulled themselves back into the game, but slip-ups, plus a quick-silver performance from Rovers' inside-left Ian Hamilton were just too much for them." — "The People."

"Luton fought well on a hard, frosty pitch, which upset both teams, and Whittaker twice levelled the scoring after Hamilton's goals in the 2nd and 16th minutes.

"Fincham had a good game in defence for Luton, with McKechnie and Pleat their best in attack." — "Sunday Telegraph."

"Ian Hamilton's hat-trick, his second of the season, was sufficient to put Bristol Rovers back at the top of the table and boost the already substantial Christmas bonus in the players' wage packets.

"But there was hardly sufficient in hand wholly to satisfy manager Bert Tann. Both teams, meeting hard, frosty conditions for the first time this season, at times seemed ultra-cautious." — "Sunday Express."

"Long serving Luton wing-half Dave Pacey must be disgusted with himself this weekend. A blunder nine minutes after half-time gave Rovers the points which took them to the top of Division III.

"The visitors had matched Rovers' tearaway tactics with measured football belying their lowly position. And Whittaker scored twice." — "Sunday Mirror."