

'UNLUCKY LOSERS' TAG NOT CONSOLING

Late goals came as bitter blows

by CHILTERN

66/67
(FAC)

BRISTOL ROVERS 3, LUTON TOWN 2

THAT their Cup-tie at Eastville on Saturday was ranked as perhaps the best of the round, and that they would undoubtedly have qualified for the title of the day's unluckiest losers, is of small consolation to the Town.

What they could not forget was that, at one time, they had played a team from a higher division into the ground, held the lead for 65 thrilling minutes, and then lost their chance of a plum third-round Cup tie with a bare four minutes left.

Any more bitter, more frustrating, more galling experience it is impossible to imagine, and even after the match, the Town players were still finding difficulty in believing that it had happened.

Some supporters I spoke to afterwards were inclined to describe the game as "thrown away," and pinpoint the reason as the Town falling back on defence in the second half when they were enjoying a two goals lead.

Most times it is difficult to differentiate between a team falling back on defence and one being forced into it. On this occasion, I feel that the second description applies, because of the ferocity with which the Rovers hurled themselves into the attack right from the start of the second half.

TWO HEADED GOALS BY KEVAN

That was a natural reaction to a first half in which they had been largely outplayed by a better footballing team who not only deserved the goals headed by Kevan in the 19th and 23rd minutes, but would not have been flattered had their lead been considerably more.

And it was nearly built up to dimensions that would have put out of court any suggestions of a Bristol rally, because both Kevan and Whittaker hit the woodwork.

Having survived the initial fury of the Rovers' pressure soon after the interval, the Town began to swing back into their early confident frame of mind, but were jolted by a goal that came out of the blue in the 60th minute when WILLIAMS swung at a cross by Jarman and the ball flew just inside the angle of the woodwork.

GAVE THEM A SPRINGBOARD

There is no doubt that it was a slice of luck, but it gave the Rovers the springboard they needed. Yet with minutes going, the odds were definitely on the Town winning through, and then came the first of the two goals in three minutes shock that they had to endure.

The clock had ticked to 84 minutes when Thomson, under pressure, had to concede a corner. This sort of award had not caused the Town much concern previously but, this time, Mabbutt's kick was missed by everybody, to land, plop, at the feet of DAVIS.

If he was justifiably surprised he did not show it, but belted the ball into the back

of the net, a process made easier by the fact that he was unchallenged.

Before the Town had really had time to digest the unpalatable fact that their lead had gone, the ultimate disaster occurred, with just four minutes left.

Somehow or other, JARMAN found a gap as he came through on the dead-line to squeeze in the winner, to send the Rovers' supporters wild with enthusiasm and put those of the Town into the depths of dejection.

There is no doubt that for much of the second half, the Town were swept out of their former smooth stride, with the setting up of attacks out of defence largely disappearing.

JARMAN LOST HIS SHACKLES

Much of the trouble stemmed from the fact that Jarman threw off the shackles that had been imposed on him by Jardine, who was not helped by the fact that Rioch and Whittaker rather faded in the closing stages.

Plan of setting Riddick to mark Biggs, and giving Dougan the sweeper-up role, paid off handsomely and these two players, along with Moore, were outstanding. Pleat did an effective job, as did Thomson, and blame for the third goal was the only blot on Read's display.

Kevan did a great job as leader of the attack and, with French, who was in top form, shared the forward honours, though Rioch and Whittaker did their part in the first half.

BRISTOL ROVERS: Taylor; Hillard, Parsons; Williams, Davis, Stone; Jarman, Brown, Biggs, Plumb, Mabbutt. Substitute: Munro.

LUTON TOWN: Read; Thomson, Jardine; Riddick, Dougan, Moore; French, Kevan, Pleat, Rioch, Whittaker. Substitute: Conboy.

Referee: H. G. New, Portsmouth.

Attendance: 8,480.