

Rioch roars in—then Luton take it easy

Luton 3 Aldershot 1: by PETER GILL

HAD ALDERSHOT shown more know-how in front of goal they could have caused a major upset and at the same time retained some slim chance of remaining among the promotion contenders. However, with chief marksman Jack Howarth well held, they were unable to cash in on some unusual indecision in the Luton defence.

At one time this looked like being a goal riot in Luton's favour because, making the sort of tearaway start to which their supporters have become accustomed, they were two up in 19 minutes and there might have been at least two more.

Bruce Rioch, their talented 20-year-old inside left and a target for many big clubs, was the architect of the early dominance.

In the first minute he waltzed through a hesitant defence and his low cross was deflected inadvertently into the net off the legs of Len Walker. Rioch scored a more clear-cut goal after 19 minutes. Then Luton seemed to have secured a launching pad for a runaway victory.

That was changed dramatically in the 28th minute when, with three Luton defenders, including goalkeeper Tony Read, standing still, Peter Gowans was able to blast the ball through from pointblank range.

For some time after this Luton were groping. Had Aldershot really been on target they could have taken the lead.

Much the same pattern emerged at the start of the second half with Aldershot still doing most of the attacking, but not able to accept a variety of half chances that came their way.

Things were still evenly balanced until Mickey Brown, brought in at outside right only at the last minute, made a drive from 20 yards. Keeper Tony Godfrey seemed to have the ball well covered, but he allowed it to slither out of his hands and it rolled over the line.

It was a grievous blow from which Aldershot never recovered. With more steadiness Ian Buxton and Rioch would have added to the lead and Brown, bidding for a regular place, missed by inches after a solo run over half the length of the field.

This was an uneven Luton display, possibly due to the difficult greasy conditions, and they never regained their flair of the first 20 minutes.