HATS OFF TO LUTON —THEY'RE GOING UP!

LUTON HAVE done it! Bruce Rioch's 82nd-minute goal clinched victory at Halifax and promotion to the Third Division. The Hatters, who slipped from the First to the Fourth Division in six disastrous seasons from 1960-65, are on the way back.

They are virtually sure of the championship, but a point from Wednesday's home game with challenging Crewe will make absolutely certain. Crewe (43 games, 55 points) are in second place, seven points behind Luton.

It is a wonderful triumph for manager Allan Brown, who was in the Luton team beaten 2—1 by Forest in the 1959 Cup Final.

He has been confident of promotion for quite a spell, but he has always aimed at the championship. "It is so much better to finish top," he told me.

by JAMES CONNOLLY

TENSE

Luton can relax, but not the giants who battle in the tense struggles of the First and Second Divisions.

Plymouth are almost certain for relegation, after losing 1—0 to promotion-chasing Ipswich at Home Park. Even if Argyle win all four remaining Second Division matches, their goal average is against them.

Although Ipswich won, they surrendered the top spot to lively Q.P.R. by a mere 0.028 of a goal. Rangers, spurred by two-goal Rodney Marsh, beat Huddersfield 3—0.

Blackpool keep in the chase with a 2—1 victory at Norwich. They are a point behind the top pair.

The Ipswich-Q.P.R. clash on Saturday will almost surely decide the championship.

The remaining fixtures of the top three are: Q.P.R.—Ipswich and Villa (away), Birmingham (home); Ipswich—Q.P.R. and Blackburn (h), Palace and Portsmouth (a); Blackpool—Portsmouth (h), Derby and Huddersfield (a).

DUEL

With Manchester City fighting a goalless draw at Wolverhampton and Liverpool losing 1—0 at West Ham, the First Division championship becomes pretty much a straight fight between Manchester United and Leeds.

Leeds, League Cup winners and F.A. Cup and Fairs Cup semi-finalists, defeated weakened West Brom 3—1.

Matt Busby's Red Devils beat Sheffield United with a fifth minute Denis Law goal. They hold a point lead over Leeds, who have a game in hand.

Manchester United have home games remaining with Newcastle and Sunderland and an away date at West Brom. Leeds have a home game against Liverpool and three away matches, at Burnley, Arsenal, and Stoke.

Fulham are kicking against relegation. Allan Clarke, their much-wanted striker, grabbed both goals in the 2—0 Craven Cottage defeat of Newcastle. With Stoke and Sheffield United losing, Fulham can still avoid the drop.

Coventry, beaten 4—2 at Tottenham, and Wolves, despite that draw with Manchester City, are in trouble spots too.

Tommy Docherty's Rotherham, second from the bottom of the table, are still bucking against relegation from Division 2.

They beat Millwall 2—0, which leaves them in 21st position, three points behind Bristol City (39 games, 32 points) who were 2—1 winners at the Valley.

This victory leaves Charlton and Preston, who drew 0—0 with Middlesbrough, still in doubt.

Bury, after winning 1—0 against Orient on Friday night, had to sit back and wait for their challengers. But they are still Third Division leaders this morning.

Torquay, beaten 2—1 at Watford, slip from second to fourth. Oxford, 1—0 winners against Tranmere, move into second place. Shrewsbury dropped a point at Oldham, but they are a handily placed third.

It looks as though the promotion pair will come from the top four, but there are five other clubs who have at least a faint chance.

WAY BACK

Relegation? Scunthorpe, Grimsby, and Colchester seem destined to take the drop.

Bruce Rioch's 82nd-minute goal clinched Luton's victory at Halifax and promotion to the Third Division.

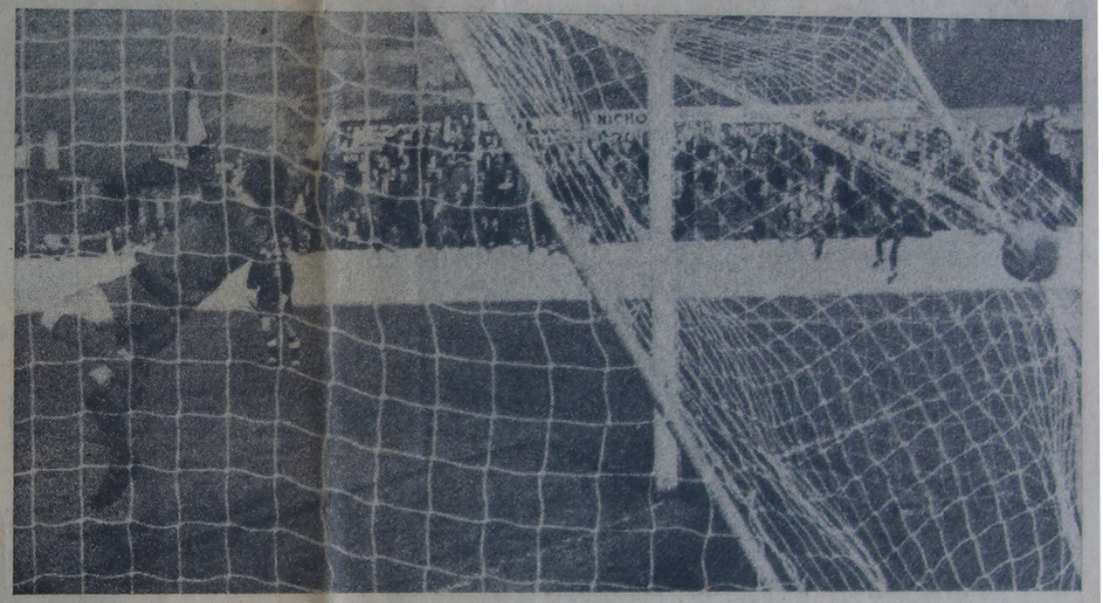
The Hatters, who slipped from Divisions I to IV in six disastrous seasons from 1960-65, are on the way back. They need only a point from Wednesday's home game with Crewe to lift the championship.

A wonderful triumph for manager Allan Brown, who was in Luton's 1959 Cup Final side.

Star casualty was Liverpool leader Tony Hateley. He crashed into a boundary wall at Upton Park and suffered a strained back.

Bolton referee Les Hamer threatened to abandon the Chester-Hartlepools game after a bottle had been flung into the Hartlepools goalmouth just before half-time.

At Roker, where Arsenal lost 2—0, the referee called the Sunderland and Arsenal skippers together when the game got tough.



● This is it—the goal that gives Luton promotion to Division Three. Halifax goalkeeper Smith has no chance as Bruce Rioch's power-drive sizzles past him.

Hot-shot Rioch hits champagne clincher

Halifax 0 Luton Town 1: by ROBERT WEST

THE JUBILANT ROAR from the massed Luton hordes confirmed what had looked a racing certainty for some weeks—Luton are going back to Division Three. But manager Alan Brown, who had had the foresight to have the champagne on order before coming to Halifax, couldn't have guessed that the promotion bottle was going to be so hard to open.

For Halifax rocked the champions with a second-half onslaught which deserved a somewhat better reward.

A draw would have taken Luton up anyway, but the goal that mattered only came eight minutes from time. Winger Graham French was racing clear when he was upended a few yards outside the Halifax area.

He slipped the free kick a couple of yards to hot-shot Bruce Rioch, who thundered a great drive past the defensive wall and into the net.

Guile

Earlier, however, it looked as though the stranglehold which both defences exerted would carry the day.

But it took all the guile of a Terry Branston-inspired defence to hold out when Halifax threatened to knock Luton's crown askew.

Les Massie and Hugh Ryden covered miles in an endeavour to find a way through, though in all fairness to Halifax Ian Buxton, Keith Allen, and Rioch were having similar difficulties against the tight 4-3-3 formation.

It was Halifax boss Alan Ball who gally cracked before the match: "Well, the pressure isn't going to be on us."

But it was Luton who started in a confident-looking canter. Halifax were in no mood to hurry them along and it was a quarter of an hour before Micky Brown fired the first shot in anger, which Smith grabbed easily on the line.

But by the end of the first half Luton had livened up considerably and were beginning to find openings.

John Moore had to hurriedly hook the ball for a corner when Read could only palm out a Tony Flower piledriver. Still Halifax came forward—all too often, however, falling for the offside trap — and it meant leaving a gap behind which could be exposed by the quick breakout.

And it was from such a move that Luton ensured their rise.

Said manager Brown: "Naturally we are elated. . . . It's just great, and believe me we are on the upsurge now.

"The crowds are coming back and I'm very confident about our chances next season. But I am especially proud of the way the boys have played this season, and though today's match might not have been great to watch, it meant a lot to us.

"We had the champagne ordered, but I don't think the boys care for it very much . . . they're settling for a drop of beer."