

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 gaily 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 break-out.

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."