

Town heroes win nightmare match

DEFIANT as London in the Blitz, Luton Town held out for an hour one man short after Bruce Rioch, idol of the fans, was sent off in the third minute of this tension-packed thriller in which Luton eventually maintained their 100 per cent home record.

Playing with 10 men virtually from the start, every Luton player had to play above himself.

All 10 fought like tigers; like men possessed with the anger of injustice. Luton will never find it tougher going than this. And if there is anyone now who believes that this side has not got what it takes to climb up off its knees, they

certainly need some persuading.

Referee M. Sinclair of Guildford was, in my opinion, to blame for the rugged, tight-lipped manner in which the match was played.

Just three minutes after the initial whistle, Luton mounted a tremendous siege on the Mansfield goal. At least five shots were blocked and scrambled away by a panicking defence.

There was a lot of pushing and shoving; arms and legs swung as players scrummaged desperately for a clear look at the ball.

Suddenly the scene turned ugly, with players swinging at each other, and Mr Sinclair came out of the melee talking to Rioch, waving his notebook,

and then pointed to the tunnel.

You could have cut the atmosphere with a knife as Rioch walked, head held high, off the field.

Angry

He was given all the sympathy the crowd could produce. It is a toss-up who was most angry — the fans or the Luton players.

Mr Sinclair said afterwards that Rioch was dismissed for striking another player. He wouldn't say which one.

Later there were several versions. But everyone concerned insisted that Bruce hit no-one. Alan Slough was struck down, and Rioch was involved in the mix-up. I honestly did not see him commit an offence.

Luton were suddenly faced

with a stupendous task — 87 minutes to go, and a man short.

Led from the back by Terry Branston and up front by Brian Lewis, they knuckled down to the job. Cold with anger and with the determination of underdogs, they held off the threat of lively Mansfield.

And you could have heard the roar from Dunstable Downs when Mr Sinclair awarded Luton a penalty.

Penalty

Mike Harrison, thrust unenviably into the hot seat, took the kick cool-headedly, and put Luton one up.

That they held out until the interval is a great credit to their strength, skill and will to survive. The fans kept up the roar of "Rioch, Rioch, Rioch."

With Quigley, Boam and Waller all playing well in midfield, and Partridge, Frude and Goodfellow sparkling in attack, it looked only a matter of time before the Midlands would score.

They did three minutes after the break, and their goal was netted by Doug Jones from a Frude pass following a repeated attack on the Luton goal.

Both goalkeepers were kept busy. Both did well. Somehow Hollins blocked a close-range header from French; somehow Read pushed round a rising shot from Ledger.

Moore was hurt following a tackle by Frude, and at the same time Branston had to have treatment for a leg injury. Moore went off for a time, leaving Luton with nine men against Mansfield's 11.

Moore came back, and Branston had to submit unwillingly to more treatment on the touchline before being taken to the dressing room and replaced by Billy McDerment.

Luton were beginning to look a sorry sight. Mansfield were becoming more cocky. But they had reckoned without one thing — Luton's fight.

Sent off

In the 65th minute Mansfield's Phil Waller was sent off for a nebulous sort of foul on Lewis. All at once Luton were on even terms. Waller walked off to a series of boos, and he must take credit for refusing the safety barrier of a steward, and insisting on walking off on the side nearest the crowd.

Luton's biggest League crowd for years erupted in a roar of excitement and relief when Laurie Sheffield was rewarded, in the 69th minute, for his tireless struggle, when he headed home a Harrison centre.

Four minutes later arch-tantaliser, trier-supreme Lewis scored his eighth League goal in eight matches to put the issue beyond doubt.

Cool as a cucumber, Lewis chased a Harrison pass, dribbled round two men, pulled the goalkeeper out of position, and scored Luton's third.

And five minutes later Graham French took over the Rioch role to score the most fantastic goal of a fantastic evening. Collecting the ball in his own penalty area, he loped the length of the field, showing the ball to three defenders, and then beating them all, before beating Welsh international Hollins with a low shot.

Luton's fans went wild. Their team had certainly pulled itself off the deck under an appalling handicap. Every single man had played his heart out. It is difficult to single out the stars. Alan Slough was magnificent. So were full-backs Max Dougan and Fred Jardine.

The back pair have never played better. Slough took over from Branston in the middle later on, having already been deprived of his midfield mate Rioch.

Up front Lewis was the cheeky, impudent worker. Sheffield, solid as the mountains of his Welsh homeland, never knew when he'd had enough. He plugged away incessantly at the Mansfield defence.

Wingers Harrison and French, both big, strong men, never shirked a tackle, and more often than not beat their men before heading for goal.

John Moore defended determinedly and attacked with passion. In goal Read was faultless, and was not to blame for either of the Mansfield goals.

In fact nobody cared very much at all when Mansfield scored their second goal through Partridge eight minutes from the end.

Most of the players — of both sides — will be black and blue tonight. Had Mr Sinclair not made his strange decision in the third minute it would never have happened.

Luton must insist on a personal hearing for Rioch. I even heard a Mansfield player say that the Luton inside-left did not strike anybody. Teams:

Luton Town: Read; Dougan, Jardine; Slough, Branston, (McDerment), Moore; French, Lewis, Sheffield, Rioch, Harrison.

Mansfield Town: Hollins; Roberts, Hopkinson; Quigley, Boam, Waller; Frude, Partridge, Ledger, Goodfellow, Jones. Sub. Keeley.

Referee Mr M. Sinclair (Guildford).

Attendance 19,315.

MOORE MISSES BRIGHTON TRIP

LUTON TOWN left half John Moore, who injured an ankle in last night's tough Third Division match against Mansfield, is unlikely to play in the Town's match at Brighton on Saturday.

Moore's injury had worsened overnight, and he did not leave for Brighton with the Luton party this morning.

Keith Allen out of the side in recent matches, was included in the party.

Luton are still hoping to go ahead with the scheme for closed-circuit television coverage of Luton's League Cup tie from Everton on Tuesday.

This morning secretary Bob Readhead said: "There are obstacles, but we hope to overcome them."