

Smiles—but no pleasure

68/69

IN AN ACTION as piratically barefaced as any undertaken by the plunderers of the high seas, Luton last night stole one more promotion point in the old seaport of Bristol. And as a result of their 0-0 draw they swung, on the rigging of their effrontery, into second place over Swindon Town.

From the moment the first cannon was fired Town never had any ideas of winning. They were simply determined not to lose. They flung up a defensive barricade and peeked from behind it for most of the match. And who can blame them?

They employed tactics that so many teams try on at Kenilworth Road, and who usually do not play them so effectively. The cliché on everyone's lips last night was: "They came for a point and they got it."

Although unattractive to watch, this is football today. Points are more important than pleasure. At home you win; away you don't lose. And if you can do it effectively all season you win promotion.

Who am I to knock the system of success? I did not enjoy this match. Neither did any of the 8,112 spectators who paid anything from 5s upwards to watch it.

But the entire football population of Luton who waited with handkerchief-twisting tension for the result to come up on the telly loved it. "That's a good point," they would all smile.

Luton won it with professional cheek and hard work. They never pretended to possess an attack, although they created a couple of chances for front-runners Lewis and Sheffield in break-aways.

Stuck to it

For this pair the night was an ordeal. Their task was to pit their strength and skill against four or five members of an extremely sound defence. Understandably they did not get very far. It is to their credit that they stuck so manfully to their task.

They were helped out on occasions by Rioch who also worked hard in the No 7 shirt, but who was forced by circumstances to abandon the job of roaming attacker that had been given to him.

Luton's plan of campaign was formulated in a tactical talk in a centuries old hotel at Cirencester. After tea, manager Alec Stock took his men to one side and put to them his battle plan. And little did Luton know then how hard it was to be to carry out.

Without centre half Branston, hurt on Saturday, and right winger French, wounded last Wednesday, Luton had little choice but to play Fred Jardine as an extra defender in a No 11 shirt.

Mike Keen returned after a long lay off with an ankle injury and played mid-field with Jardine and the work-glutton Keith Allen.

Bristol Rovers 0 Luton Town 0 by ROGER DUCKWORTH

But more often than not Town's combat plan ended as 4-4-2 with only Sheffield and Lewis up field. And when things got really hot even they dropped back to help out.

Never has a ball been kicked so high, so far, and so blatantly into the terraces. Luton, at least, were open about their intention.

In the first half Town were driven back as Rovers powered forward on a swirling wind. Alan Slough, who looks more a centre half each match, had an outstanding night. Full backs Dougan and Bannister kept cool heads to work effectively under pressure.

Sandy Davie had a fine night in goal. One first half save from Wayne Jones bordered on the brilliant. Unsighted by defenders when the ball was hit, he moved late but somehow flew across his goal to push the fierce shot round for a corner.

Once Luton had held out until half time against the

wind, one felt they were always going to come home with a point in their bag.

With John Moore's hard clearances helping out, Luton found the second half easier. But the wind dropped a bit and Rovers still engineered chances and the Luton defence was kept at full stretch. Davie was called upon to pull off another magnificent save.

Sheffield hurt

Sheffield, playing on a pitch where he began his career, had bad luck in the 67th minute. Chasing a long pass towards the penalty box from Rioch, he was roughly tackled by Lloyd. All he got for his pains was a badly strained ankle and he had to leave the field eight minutes from the end, to be replaced by Billy McDerment.

Rioch had one real chance, in the 63rd minute, when the ball fell to his left foot from a Keen throw-in, but he shot wide.

As he did at Luton a fortnight



SANDY DAVIE
— in great form

ago the tall, fair-haired Ronaldson caused most of the trouble to Luton's defence. But like Wayne Jones and Bobby Brown he was unable to take his chances.

Last night's result means that Luton's current unbeaten record is stretched to 12 games. Let's hope 13 is lucky for some when they go to Torquay on Friday!

BRISTOL ROVERS: Taylor (L); Jones (B), Stanton; Taylor (S), Lloyd, Petts; Ronaldson, Barney, Jones (W), Brown, Jarman. Sub: Rhodes.

LUTON TOWN: Davie; Dougan, Bannister; Keen, Slough, Moore; Rioch, Allen, Sheffield, Lewis, Jardine. Sub: McDerment.

Referee: Mr K. Markham (Woking).

Attendance: 8,112.