

Town still in with outside chance



The miss of the match! Tranmere's Alan King blazes wide with only Luton 'keeper Tony Read to beat. A goal would have put Tranmere one up a minute before half-time and probably a different complexion on the whole match last night

Attack earns both points at Tranmere

By ROGER DUCKWORTH
Tranmere Rovers 0, Luton Town 2

THEY SAY in Birkenhead that all the best teams win at Tranmere. Last night Luton emulated Watford and Swindon when they strolled to an easier-than-expected victory at Prenton Park.

After a first-half stalemate Luton had Rovers check-mate with two fine second-half goals that kept their interest in promotion alive.

Now Swindon need five points from four games to follow Watford into Division II — if Luton win their last two matches, both of which are at home, against Stockport and Watford.

Swindon were at Walsall today. Then they have home fixtures with Mansfield and Barrow and are away to Rotherham.

Town's win was easier than they expected against a side who looked too nervous to try anything special in front of a home crowd who seemed to be waiting for mistakes rather than success.

Afterwards the Luton team and manager Alec Stock sang all the way back to their hotel. Their win made earlier failures look pathetic.

And it could have been even bigger. Midway through the second half Bruce Rioch chased down a bad clearance and broke through alone. He had only goalkeeper Cumbe to beat but took one step too many as he tried to round the goalkeeper.

Hard pitch

The hard, dry pitch did not make the going easy. As one man in the crowd behind me said: "You'll need a couple of buckets of Mersey water on that before Tranmere will be able to do 'owt."

But Luton settled down nicely after a goalless first half and began to move well through the middle. Three minutes after half-time Rioch had a powerful shot turned round by Cumbe and from the corner the ball went out to Moore who drove it into goal from 25 yards.

The goal gave Luton time to take stock of the situation and they went all out for both points.

Seven minutes later Rioch took on an Allen pass and beat Cumbe for Luton's second goal.

As Mr Stock said: "It makes life interesting."

Luton looked full of confidence, and Tranmere's late rally came too late. They would have had trouble anyway beating Tony Read who shook off all his rustiness and played as well as ever in goal.

He had an outstanding night and made Tranmere's policy of trying high centres absolutely pointless.

Tranmere are an odd team. They had lost only two of their last 12 games before last night, yet they have just about the worst home record in the division.

They do better away from home, and that is not surprising when you see the reception they get. They are derided from the Kop to Cowshed, names given to the respective ends of their ground.

The first half was not exciting, though Lewis and Buxton worked well together. Keith Allen seemed to be enjoying his return and did his usual non-stop grafting.

Shot wide

Buxton worked hard as a front runner and gave 19-year-old Trevor Storton a busy time. But there was little attacking from Luton before the break. What was done always looked easy for Tranmere to clear. Luton's finishing was insipid.

Often it was the thinking that was wrong. People were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Early on Lewis and Rioch were getting nowhere with the best intentions. Allen was impressive all round and Moore and Bannister showed skill and cool heads in defence. A minute before half time Luton's offside trap failed to hold Alan King but he fluffed the chance of a life time. He was allowed through as Luton stood back, but with only Read left between him and his bonus, he shot hurriedly wide from close in.

The second half was a different kettle of fish. Luton's forwards came more into things, and after grabbing their two goals they were never going to lose.

With Read as solid as you like, and Dougan and Bannister soaking everything up at the back it was just a matter of playing till the final whistle.

Moore gave his best display of the season and Slough again gave a capable performance at centre half in place of the injured Branston.

With Keen linking defence and attack as effectively as the Mersey Tunnel links Liverpool and Birkenhead Luton were in no danger. French had a quieter night than usual but was up against one of the best full backs in the division in 18-year-old Stan Storton, brother of the centre half, and a real prospect.

Buxton and Lewis continued to try, and Rioch abandoned the left wing in search of richer pastures in the middle.

Read made the save of the night in the 75th minute when he hurled himself back to make a reflex save from Beamish, who had never been allowed to leave Moore's side until then.

TRANMERE ROVERS: Cumbe; Storton (S), Dempsey; Moorcroft, Storton (T), King; Rowland, Scott, Smith, Beamish, McNamee, Sub: Johnson.

LUTON TOWN: Read; Dougan, Bannister; Keen, Slough, Moore; French, Lewis, Buxton, Allen, Rioch, McDerment.

Ref G. Singleton (Preston)

Attendance: 6,723.