

# Last-gasp rally has fans reeling

By ROGER DUCKWORTH  
Luton Town 3, The Orient 2

WITH 16 MINUTES of this Third Division match left, Luton Town were trailing 2-0. Their poise was gone, their confidence battered and their 30-match undefeated home record was being well and truly shattered. But they pulled back with such courage, to eventually snatch a winner four minutes from the end, that even their most ardent fans were pinching themselves in disbelief as they left the ground.

They must have left weak-kneed, hoarse and with palpitating blood pressure. I doubt they will often see such a fighting revival again.

As coach Jimmy Andrews said after the excitement had died a little: "It takes a brave side to be able to pull it out of the bag when they are behind as far as that."

"It's easy to turn it on when you are winning, or not losing, but when you are trailing it's the most difficult thing in the world." Luton scored two good goals to equalise, and a point each might have been a fair result. But then the experienced Orient captain Terry Mancini, who should have known better, fell for the oldest trick in the book — he allowed himself to be drawn into a retaliatory foul against the wily Brian Lewis.

He tripped the Luton forward, who fell to the grass, clutching his face in apparent agony.

## Plucky

Referee Nicholson, not the best on the list, could do little but award the Town a free-kick from near the right touchline.

Mike Keen floated it over and there was plucky Malcolm MacDonald hurling himself into the tension-packed goal-mouth to head the winner.

He had previously had a dozen worthy attempts at goal. He had hit a post, the crossbar, the side netting, and gone so close on occasions that he must have been despairing of ever scoring again when he spotted his final opportunity.

This player is so sharp and eager that within 12 months many a club in the top bracket will be chasing him. That's a confident prediction. When his game becomes more calculated, to match his enthusiasm, he will be a deadly striker.

As it is, he's scored the winner for Luton in the past two League matches.

But let not this praise detract from the performance of another player who, I thought, turned the match Luton's way — Keith Allen.

## In a mess

Two goals behind, Luton looked in a real mess. Then Allen was pushed up front to help the attack. It was his hard work that made both the Town's previous goals.

He fought through magnificently in the 74th minute before slipping the ball inside to John Collins, who scored from close in.

Then he worked through, drew goalkeeper Goddard out of his goal, and slipped the ball to Graham French who floated a superb goal into the empty net over the heads of the panicking defence.

This was just reward for French who had done so much as the Town ran themselves silly against the massed defence of the Londoners.

But who can blame Orient for playing this way? They scored direct from a well-taken free kick in the 14th minute and then fell back to guard their lead. Luton would have done exactly the same.

Luton tried everything they knew as they attacked desperately. But Orient must take the credit for a cool defence, and good use of the short ball to get themselves out of trouble.

## Wilting

And when, against the run of things, they went further ahead through a Bullock header, it looked all over. Luton were wilting like summer flowers in autumn.

Luton were able to summon something extra at the right time, and that's what makes them a good bet this season. The crowd sensed it was possible, and roared them forward. It was a concerted effort between the players and the fans. And with that lot against them Orient did not stand a chance.

Now there are only two teams in the Football League with 100 per cent records. Luton are one of them, and Tranmere, who

lead them on goal average, the other.

What about individual performances? I felt there was a bit of something missing from the three half backs at times, but Keen, Branston and Slough get through so much work that they redeem themselves.

Backs Ryan and Bannister both did well. Ryan is looking better every week, and Bannister is a more than steady player. He did lapse once, when a weak tackle on Dyson led to the Orient scoring their second goal. Otherwise he had a good afternoon.

## Bad service

In goal Read did all that was asked of him, and made two brilliant saves, but he could have been positioned better for Bullock's goal which was headed in from under his nose.

On the right wing Collins did not look so zippy as in previous matches, but he suffered by not getting enough of the ball. Service to him from midfield was poor, and often he had to go off in search of the ball himself. He took the Town's first goal brilliantly. It was the goal that put Luton back in with a chance.

When he came on as second half substitute, Lewis contributed a lot. He knows every trick of his trade, and on Saturday he employed them to help Luton to victory, and himself to a nice bit of bonus.

That leaves Laurie Sheffield, the most controversial character at Kenilworth Road at the

moment. There are two factions, just about evenly divided on views about Sheffield's ability and worth.

On Saturday Sheffield gave a workmanlike performance, fighting as hard as he could for everything, and having some hard luck with shots at goal.

## Tactical

He was replaced late in the second half by Lewis, who had been called for by the crowd.

But what most people did not know was that this was a pre-arranged move. Sheffield was not "pulled off" because he was not doing well. He knew at half time that he would not finish the match.

Explained Jimmy Andrews: "Football is now a 12-man game, and we are a 12-man team. If we feel using the substitute will make a difference, we use him. Nobody creeps off the field here, hanging his head. There's no shame in being replaced — it's purely tactical and pre-planned. All the players at Luton understand this, and are happy about it."

On the Orient side, full backs Rofe and Jones impressed, as did Bullock, who had a running battle with Terry Branston. I lost count of the number of players needlessly booked by the referee, who probably finished with writer's cramp. Sheffield, Ryan and Read all ended in the book. So did Mancini.

There might have been more. You couldn't tell whether Mr Nicholson was writing or just threatening. He did plenty of both.

Luton Town: Read; Ryan, Bannister; Keen, Branston, Slough; Collins, MacDonald, Sheffield (Lewis), Allen, French.

Orient: Goddard; Jones, Rofe; Taylor, Mancini, Harper; Slater, Bullock, Allen, Dyson, Brabrook. Sub: Plume.

Referee — Mr F. M. Nicholson (Urmston).

Attendance: 13,761.