

TOWN OPEN THAT GAP AT THE TOP

69/70

LUTON TOWN added more authority to their outspoken bid for the Second Division last night when they roared into a three-point lead at the top of the Third Division with yet another fine away win.

Their victory was signed and sealed in the second half, but the Town showed they meant business right from the kick off, when they scored one of the fastest goals I have seen.

About 25 seconds had gone when goalkeeper Parkes was penalised under the "steps" rule in the left hand corner of his penalty box. Macdonald dummed, Collins swirled in the free kick and Matt Tees jumped high to glance in a neat header.

But with little more than a minute gone Walsall were on terms. The retreating Nicholl fouled Woodward on the edge of the box and Taylor smashed in a short free kick from Train.

This whirlwind start set the pattern for the rest of the first half. Seldom can there have been two quicker goals, one by each side, and both teams ferried and scurried to keep it up.

As a result the first half suffered as far as good football was concerned. It was entertaining enough but both teams tended to over-run themselves.

Cool head

Walsall began to take the edge and Nicholl, in the middle, needed a cool head on a couple of occasions to blunt dangerous probes.

But Walsall were not allowed another goal and Luton emerged worthy winners to stretch their unbeaten run to 17 League matches. With two fairly easy — on paper anyway — home matches looming, Luton will have to be careful they don't get over-confident and underestimate Stockport and

Walsall 1	Luton Town 3									
by ROGER DUCKWORTH										
TOP FIVE										
LUTON	11	8	3	0	26	8	19			
Orient	11	6	4	1	17	9	16			
Barnsley	11	7	2	2	18	11	16			
Torquay	11	6	3	2	20	9	15			
Doncaster	11	6	3	2	12	6	15			

Bournemouth, their next two opponents.

Again Luton had a noisy following last night and it must be gratifying for the players to hear this sort of support after long trips away from home.

Walsall ran really well in the first half. On occasions it would have been hard to tell which side were division leaders, their right back, Gregg, was doing a good job in marking out French — the first time the Luton winger has been properly handcuffed all season — and the experienced Jones, coming in as a late choice, did well against Tees in the air.

Best match

Where Luton benefited was from the form of Collins and Allen. I would say Collins had his best match since joining the club. He was a tireless worker and showed some clever close work and good moving in possession.

Tees and Jones tied when it came to footwork and speed, and Slough and Nicholl were outstanding in the air at the back of Luton's defence.

Chances were few and far between — real openings, that is. But in the 37th minute Luton had a scare when Walsall were awarded another free kick in exactly the same position from which they had scored earlier. Taylor hammered the ball at the wall, hoping to get a deflection, but it crashed painfully off a red Luton shirt and was cleared.

Three minutes before the break Dougan was hurt in a tackle on Taylor and no-nonsense ref Mr Mike Kerkhof ordered that he be treated on the touchline and that the game continue. Dougan returned, limping badly, but

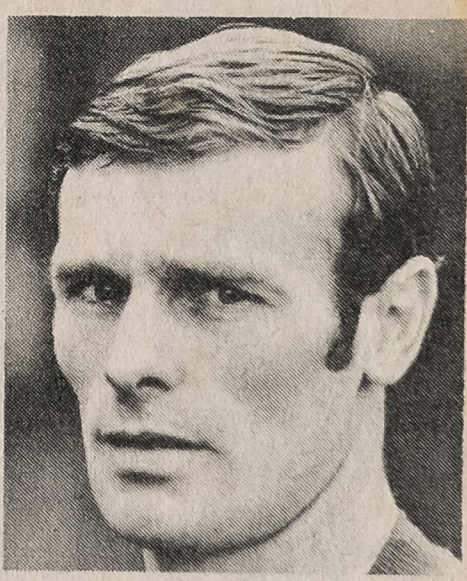
failed to show up after the interval. He has a knee injury, the extent of which is not yet known.

Walsall took the first-half honours for aggression and purpose but the Luton defence looked in good nick. Right on half time Macdonald, whose goal grabbing potential had been hampered, was lucky to get off without even a warning for a "scissors" foul on Taylor.

Slough was not so lucky, and was booked for kicking the ball away before a free kick.

Dangerous

Fred Jardine took Dougan's place after the interval, and gets my bouquet for guts and class. The full back who has been out of the reckoning for so long took over right where he had left off and quickly showed that he is still one of the best tacklers around.



MATT TEES

In the 59th minute Tees scored his second goal (his fourth in four days) when he nodded in Keen's accurate free kick. Then Luton began to buzz. Bannister was having another splendid match, and Allen was outstanding when helping out at the back.

In the 69th minute Collins beat Jones all ends up to collect a Bannister free kick with a bit of help from Tees and swept a left-footer confidently past Parkes.

Referee Kerkhof deserves praise. A sergeant major PTI in the Army, he kept the match on an even keel. Without being a bottom-slapper he kept a firm grip on proceedings throughout. We could do with more like him.

Luton now have 11 points from a possible 12 away from home. Surely that's promotion form?

Walsall: Parkes; Gregg, Harrison, Atthey, Jones, Trevis, Morris, Crowe, Woodward, Train, Taylor. Sub: Stephens.

Luton Town: Davie; Dougan (Jardine), Bannister, Keen, Nicholl, Slough, Collins, Macdonald, Tees, Allen, French.

Referee: M. Kerkhof (Bicester). Attendance: 7,557.