

THIS COULD START A DECISIVE 69/70 RUN-IN

LUTON TOWN 2, TRANMERE ROVERS 0

FRANKLY, I find it difficult to evaluate the true worth of this victory over relegation-conscious Tranmere at Kenilworth Road on Tuesday, writes ERIC PUGH.

In the first place, of course, anything else but a win would not have been so much a disaster, but a catastrophe, so there is the danger of damning the success with faint praise.

The main conclusion which we must try to reach is whether this indicates that the Town are on the way back to a consistent, winning spell that will completely revive their promotion hopes.

In this context, I would say that, in the pre-Christmas period, the Town confronted with this sort of moderate opposition, would have rampaged to a sweeping victory.

As it was, they again had to struggle for goals, and this is probably the most worrying part of their form at the moment.

Tearaway start

After a tearaway start in which there could have been early goals, mainly from MacDonald, who kept Lane fully employed for a time, there was a period when the Town seemed to lose control in midfield.

They tended to become somewhat flat, or square, in defence, with the result that some unexpected chances cropped up for the Rovers, two of which were attributable to the Town looking for an offside decision that never came.

Beamish, twice, and Pritchard, might have given Rovers a shock lead, but it was always the Town who were stronger and more assertive, though there remained the doubt about their ability to finish.

That existed, in fact, until three minutes from half-time, when Tees headed down a free-kick to the feet of MacDONALD, who promptly smacked it into the net.

End for the Rovers

That was the beginning of the end for the Rovers who were scarcely in it after the interval, when the Town, though playing well generally, certainly did not secure the goals that should have come their way.

French is probably still wondering how he failed to make certain of scoring after a flash of controlled brilliance took him through the defence, but he mishit his shot so that Moorcroft was able to hook the ball off the line.

Then, in the 59th minute RYAN, that much improved full-back, did what he has threatened in some recent matches by opening his scoring account for the club. He did so with a shot that might have been deflected, and finally went in off the far post.

Driving power

Recalled to the team because it was thought he would be better suited to the hard going than Nicholl, Branston, I feel, brought some of the driving power and inspiration that has been missing, and he came through most creditably.

So did Moore, who was probably the outstanding member of the team, Jardine and Ryan, and, while argument still goes on about which position Slough would be more gainfully deployed, the fact is that he brings needed driving power to the midfield, where Collins on this occasion was more impressive than the somewhat labouring Keen.

LUTON TOWN: Davie; Ryan, Jardine; Slough, Branston, Moore; MacDonald, Collins, Tees, Keen, French. Substitute: Allen.

TRANMERE ROVERS: Lane; Griffiths, Gill; Moorcroft, Knapp, King; Kennedy, Mathias, Beamish, Pritchard, Crossley. Substitute: Pointon.

Referee: D. W. Smith, Stonehouse, Glos.

Attendance: 11,368.