

By **ROGER DUCKWORTH**

LUTON TOWN made a tentative start to their Easter parade of promotion matches against Rotherham yesterday. They won, kept in the race, and promised better things to come. Only trouble was that everyone else involved in the issue, who played, also won.

With a high wind, dazzling sun, a hard pitch and a light ball, things were not easy. But Luton were in command of the situation and another couple of goals would not have flattered them.

Especially in the second half, Luton gave the fans confidence, with some swashbuckling attacking football which untidy Rotherham were lucky to keep at bay.

Two things came out of the match — as well as the points. Graham French had to leave the field in the second half with a recurrence of his thigh injury, and is likely to be missing for the rest of the Easter programme.

And then there's the form of youngsters Alan Starling and Viv Busby, both making their Football League debuts. They made an encouraging start to obviously promising careers, and both won the support of the crowd, who backed them from the start, for enthusiastic performances.

Thrills

Starling, who had one bad moment in the first half when Rotherham equalised, thrilled the holiday crowd with some impeccable handling. He showed that he has the makings, though it must be said that he was well shielded by a resolute defence.

What he did, he did well. So did Busby, a 20-year-old, who shows some really mature touches. He is keen to get into the thick of things, brave in the box, and has an eye for an opportunity. He nearly snatched a goal in the second half that would have made his day.

It was nice to see the Luton crowd so wholeheartedly intent on giving the two debutants all the encouragement they could.

Keith Allen, who I thought had a splendid game, and Malcolm Macdonald led the attack with gusto and understanding. It was good to see Luton playing with four forwards. Busby mucked in well and French gave fair service before he had to leave the proceedings.

Allen got his second goal in successive matches when he powerfully headed home an

MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Starling; Ryan, Bannister; Slough, Branston, Moore; Busby, Allen, Macdonald, Keen, French (Harrison).

ROTHERHAM: Tunks; Houghton, Leigh; Hague, Watson, Swift; Warnock (Fantham), Lill, Phillips, Bentley, Mullen.

Goals: Allen (Luton, 9), Swift (Rotherham, 14), Slough (Luton, 32).

Referee: Mr R. Darlington (Bristol).

Attendance: 14,315.

ultra-accurate free kick from Jack Bannister in the ninth minute, awarded for a foul on Moore by Lill.

Five minutes later the crowd was stunned into silence when the Luton defence let a Bentley free kick through to Starling. He could not get hold of it properly, and Swift nipped in to flick it over the unlucky goalkeeper's head into the net.

The Luton defence was in good form, with veteran Terry Branston leaping around like a spring lamb, and John Moore working overtime to clear everything that came near him.

Ryan and Bannister were coolly confident at the back to give the Town defence a resolute appearance.

In midfield Alan Slough shone in patches, but did not impress as much as his skipper Mike Keen, who caught the eye with his non-stop work and soccer intelligence.

Roar

There is still a faction at Kenilworth Road after his scalp, and I had to laugh when a group sitting near me roared in anger and beat their fists against the front of the stand when Keen failed to catch a fast through ball that not even an Olympic sprinter could have caught. Still, they pay their money. . . .

Branston's enthusiasm showed all over the pitch, and

in the first half he started several grand moves involving Macdonald, Allen and Slough. On one occasion he was lucky to escape when the referee caught him kicking young centre forward Phillips.

In the 32nd minute Slough rammed home what proved to be Luton's winner, after a Busby-Allen move in the box. Again the goal followed a Bannister cross in a move started by French.

Adjust

It was strange that all the goals should come in the first half — which was not nearly so entertaining as the goalless second.

With so much at stake, and with a few knocks in the camp, manager Alec Stock was not picking the team until just before the kick-off for today's match against Reading.

When Mike Harrison went on for French eight minutes from the end, it was too late for Luton to adjust. But it was not really necessary. Luton were all over Rotherham by this time anyway.

On Starling's performance, coach Jimmy Andrews said: "He did a good job. It's pure hard work that got Alan into the team. He's been trying and trying — even coming back in the afternoons for special training. He's deserved it."

★★Sporting footnote — Sandy Davie, Luton's deposed goalkeeper, said before the match yesterday: "Alan's worked for his place, and there's certainly no hard feelings. I have been playing badly. I have wished him all the best of luck, and told him not to worry."