

TOWN STAY IN HONOURS HUNT

FULHAM 0 LUTON TOWN 1

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69/70

THE FRANTIC pace and ceaseless chase of this match left not only the players breathless at the end of last night's match at Craven Cottage. But in spite of all the high-speed action, the highlight of the evening was the only goal — scored by Luton's Macdonald, Division Three's leading goal-grabber — against his old club.

It could be the goal that sees Luton back into Division Two. The cool-headed way in which Mac scored it has certainly kept Luton in the honours hunt today.

The Thames-bankers became outsiders once the solid Town defence repelled their attempted fight-back, and Luton now have two valuable home fixtures in which to rub in their aspirations to Division Two.

Every man-jack of the Luton side deserves his bonus for sheer devotion to duty — for it was a dressing room battle of wits as much as anything that won this match.

It was a tactical victory and Luton played it perfectly. Promotion again looks a possibility. Of their remaining five matches this at Fulham was reckoned to be the hardest.

Professional

Luton now wait until Saturday night to coin the profits of last night's win. Unless they wallop Walsall well and truly, the flattening of Fulham will have been to no avail.

After keeping Fulham's fight-back at arm's length, Luton played a truly professional game in the second half when the Londoners never once looked like breaking down the Hatters' resistance. The difference between this show and that painful 0-0 draw at Halifax on Saturday doesn't make sense.

Afterwards one of the club's most senior players told me: "It's barmy after playing like this tonight. We should have hit Halifax for six."

Fulham's run of 15 matches

without defeat was shattered in the 10th minute when Mac showed the sort of alertness that has made him the most feared marksman in the present company. It underlined his speed, control and level-headedness.

Full-back David Moreline exposed his inexperience by hitting a weak back pass to goalkeeper Webster. It never arrived. Macdonald swept into the picture, collected the ball, ran it round the goalkeeper

and calmly banged it in the net.

Magnificent

That was it as far as goals were concerned, but there were plenty of thrillsto come. Four minutes later Fulham should have been on terms, but to young Starling's everlasting credit he made a startling save. Pentecost banged over a long free kick and there was some indecision in the Luton defence. Fred Callaghan, five yards out, found the ball bouncing at his feet and drove it hard at goal.

Starling dived left and somehow managed to catch the fierce shot. It was a magnificent save.

A few minutes before the start Town manager Alec Stock announced the changes that I believe won this match for Luton. Alan Slough, he said, would play sweeper, in spite of his number seven, and Keith Allen came in as a midfield man in place of John Collins, who was sub.

For my money Slough was man of the match. He gave his best performance of the season and looked a natural at the job. His speed made it look easy but he picked everything up at the back and bound the Town defence together.

After taking the lead Luton consolidated their position by some calm, long-ball play. They let Fulham work the fury out of their systems.

In the 37th minute Luton almost went further ahead — in similar fashion. Matthewson pushed a potty pass back to Webster, and this time Busby nipped in and shot. But the Fulham goalkeeper made a good block save.

In the second half the pace refused to slacken and the Town defence cushioned everything that came at them. Branston and Moore were ruthless in their tackling and clearing, and Bannister gave the nippy Conway little rope. Also playing against his old club, John Ryan dealt well with Les Barrett.

With such solidarity behind them, Keen and Allen worked incessantly in midfield. Up front Busby showed a deal of skill and had a good understanding with Macdonald, who was the outstanding forward.

Hard time

French returned on the left and gave the Fulham defence a hard time. Luton pressed right to the last and were good value for their win. French had hard luck on a couple of occasions, one from a chipped free kick, but Macdonald's goal was enough to snuff out any promotion hopes Fulham might have had.

For the Londoners Callaghan and Lloyd impressed but there were shaky tendencies in their defence.

With Luton in this mood, Walsall can watch out on Cup Final night.

It was the first time that Luton have won at Craven Cottage. It was the 28th meeting between the two clubs.

Fulham will have reason to regret selling Macdonald to Luton, for it was he who scored the only goal of the match when the two teams met at Luton in November. Quite a double for club and player alike!