

# A CHAMPAGNE NIGHT

By ROGER DUCKWORTH

MANSFIELD 0, LUTON TOWN 0

THAT VOLUBLE TRIO Tony Hunt, Alec Stock and Eric Morecambe led Luton Town's triumphant footballers in song and champagne last night after the Hatters had secured their return to Division Two. The chairman, the manager and the new director set the corks popping seconds after the final whistle at Mansfield, and continued the celebrations as the team's coach sped home down the Motorway.

It was a memorable night for the players, the officials and the hundreds of Luton fans who travelled to the Midlands to cheer Luton to promotion.

The only thing worth forgetting of the whole night was the football. It was abominable. Horrible.

But not a football follower in the country this morning will blame Luton for their tactics. They made no pretence of anything but clinging on to the point they started with — the point they needed for promotion.

Luton forgot all about attack — or ignored it purposely. They packed their defence unashamedly, oblivious to the chants of "shame" and "shocking" from the Mansfield fans.

### Unsavoury

For once I defend these tactics. There would have been no future at all in waking up this morning and saying: "Well, we played some nice football — what a pity we lost." This was an unsavoury job that had to be done as professionally as possible. It was.

There were some brief thrills set up by Luton early on while the light lasted. But Luton's scoring ambitions faded with the twilight.

The highlight of their attack was a magnificent shot by French. It came after 17 minutes when the Luton winger squeezed between two defenders, pulled another out of position, and belted a beautiful drive against the far post.

Earlier still, Macdonald had used his speed to chase a long goalkick from Read that hung awkwardly in the wind. He pulled the ball on to his thumping boot, the left, but goalkeeper Brown made a good diving catch.

That was about the extent of Luton's scoring aspirations.

### Fast and flighty

They fell back and relied on the big boot. At times the Luton defence looked as jittery as the occasion, and Mansfield piled forward in an effort to beat the system. But it held out.

The match was fast and flighty, but Luton's forwards were forced further and further back. Luton began with kick and rush — and ended with kick and hope.

Luton cannot be blamed. They were playing to orders, but the hearts of those with Luton sympathies must have been fluttering on more than one occasion.

The back wall of Ryan, Slough, Branston, Moore and Bannister held out magnificently, and never has a football been kicked so far, so high and so often. There was little class for visiting managers, who included Arthur Rowley, Brian Clough and Matt Gillies, to mull over on the way home.

### Love and hate

But what the heck. Luton have won promotion — even if it meant finding touch like seasoned rugger players.

The Luton fans loved it. The Mansfield fans hated it — and toilet rolls blew across the pitch like the debris of a ticker-tape reception.

On the field there was a certain nervy dissension among the Town players. It was tense.

Goalkeeper Tony Read fumbled a couple of times, and Keen and Allen spent most of the night with their backs to the wall. Up front Busby and Macdonald ran willingly when the opportunity arose, and French found the going hard again an angry Mansfield defence.

What a relief when referee A. P. Oliver blew the final blast. Luton fans joyfully invaded the pitch, chanting: "Ee ah addio, we're going up."

What football there was came from Mansfield, but they found Luton's tactics impossible to fathom. Roberts went close with a first half flick from a corner, but for most of the time Luton kept them at bay. The ball spent most of the night above stand level. And you can't play football when it's up there.

It's only a pity that with no home matches remaining, Luton will not be able to do a lap of honour for their fans. But I would not be surprised to see one at Rochdale on Saturday, when the Town expect to have a 1,500 following.

## MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Read; Ryan, Bannister; Keen, Branston, Moore; Slough, Busby, Macdonald, Allen, French. Sub: Collins.

MANSFIELD: Brown; Pate, Walker; Quigley, Boam, Waller; McKenzie, Stenson, Jones, Roberts, Goodfellow. Sub: Sharkey.

Attendance 10,301.

Referee Mr A. P. Oliver (Leigh-on-Sea).

|           | P  | W  | D  | L  | F  | A  | Pts |
|-----------|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|
| Orient    | 44 | 24 | 12 | 8  | 65 | 34 | 60  |
| LUTON     | 45 | 22 | 14 | 9  | 75 | 42 | 58  |
| Bristol R | 46 | 20 | 16 | 10 | 80 | 59 | 56  |
| Fulham    | 45 | 20 | 15 | 10 | 81 | 54 | 55  |
| Brighton  | 46 | 23 | 9  | 14 | 57 | 43 | 55  |
| Barnsley  | 46 | 19 | 15 | 12 | 68 | 59 | 53  |

