

TOWN FIND ROVERS RARE BATTLERS

70/71

LUTON TOWN 2, BLACKBURN ROVERS 0

EVEN to the score-line, this match at Kenilworth Road on Tuesday was a replica of the one with Saturday's opponents, Bolton. Both proved to be more testing struggles than the lowly positions of these visitors from Lancashire would have seemed to indicate, writes **ERIC PUGH**.

In each case, the Town did rather less than justice to their own ability, despite the fact that they had two tremendous starts, and were able to dictate from positions of strength, though without really doing so against Blackburn.

In the midst of congratulations being showered on him for having taken the team to the top of the Second Division for the first time, even if only temporarily, manager Alec Stock weighed up the situation expertly.

"Things were not quite right somehow, but points are points, and that is what this game is all about.

"Blackburn are a better side than their position would indicate, and they have two or three players who can really go," he said.

According to Stock, his players were disappointed that they had to struggle so before their own supporters, but they seemed to be unanimous that Blackburn are the best team they have met so far.

'No difference'

That is probably some consolation for their team manager, Eddie Quigley, who commented afterwards: "This was a clash between a team at the top of the League and one at the bottom, and, for me, there was absolutely no difference.

"We did not have much luck because we created chances and then could not take them, whereas Luton did.

"Of course, I am biased, but I could not see anything wrong with our goal that was disallowed, because the ball seemed to go between two players."

This time, it was **GIVENS** who gave the Town their flying start, when only 50 seconds had ticked away. A cross by John Ryan rebounded off a defender, and there was Givens in the inside-right position to thud the ball like a bullet past the astonished Jones.

In an effort to stop their drift to the bottom, Blackburn had made several changes, mostly positional and the effect at times, with Mulvaney playing somewhat in the style of the Continental centre-half, in midfield, was that their tactics amounted almost to 4-2-4.

What sort of system they would have settled for finally, but for that shock start, we shall never know, but they had to come out in search of an equaliser and, again, the Town defence was something below its best, especially in the middle of the field.

Looked unlucky

For a time, Rovers looked distinctly unlucky to be in arrears, because their attack was nippy, but the final thrust was missing.

Read made one great save from Conlon, who then, three minutes after the interval, missed the chance of the match by shooting over after a back pass had left Moore in an impossible situation.

The "goal" to which Quigley referred came after 66 minutes, when Conlon seemed to have atoned by beating Read off the inside of the post.

Apparently the decision was, offside against Rogers, judging from where the free kick was taken. Certainly, it was a vitally important decision for the Town, who drew on their reserves as if they had taken full heed of the warning.

Then with 18 minutes left, **MacDONALD**, who again had the experience of being closely shadowed by two defenders—Hunter and Eccles in this case—broke loose to head a neat goal after Keen had chipped over a short corner from Jimmy Ryan.

Immediately the Town used their substitute, Busby, for Court, not because, perhaps, he had been the worst of a somewhat disappointing middle three, but because of his wearing up-and-down efforts designed to take some of the weight off the strikers.

The issue settled

Irretrievably, that second goal settled matters and but for the vigilance of the agile Jones, there could have been another goal, this time from Jimmy Ryan, who was always prominent and held the ball intelligently.

Givens, with four goals in the last three matches, is fulfilling all the high expectations of him, and the experience he has gained here has enabled him to come on a lot since the start of the season.

Inaccurate distribution, in which Keen was an offender, was one reason for the Town not gaining the midfield domination they have mostly enjoyed this season, while Hoy was less than consistent.

This tended to throw extra strain on the back four, who shouldered it willingly enough, with Nicholl and Moore combining well and both John Ryan and Slough solid.

At the same time, the defence is having a streak of good luck at the moment, otherwise Read, who made some brilliant saves, would not be able to point to a string of seven home League games without a goal against him.

LUTON TOWN: Read; Ryan (John), Slough; Hoy, Nicholl, Moore; Ryan (Jimmy), Court (Busby), MacDonald, Keen, Givens.

BLACKBURN ROVERS: Jones; Wilson, Wood; Hunter, Mulvaney, Eccles; Goodwin, Knighton, Conlon, Rogers, Kerr. Substitute: Russell.

Referee: W. S. Castle, Dudley.

Attendance: 16,372.