

Storybook end to six-goal thriller

LUTON TOWN 3 CARLISLE 3

70/71

ONE OF the most exciting matches I have seen ended like a stirring tale from Boy's Own. Three goals down at home, with 17 minutes to go Luton left their fans breathless by grabbing a point, with schoolboy hero Malcolm Macdonald snapping up the equaliser a minute from the end.

By ROGER DUCKWORTH

It was magnificent stuff. Luton fully deserved their point, but it was the sheer enjoyment of the way they went about it that sent their followers home all a-tingle.

Carlisle made a huge contribution to the match by playing open, adventurous and confident football, that belied their away record and a reputation for caution rather than creation.

Thud and blunder

It was thud and blunder rather than blood and thunder, but in spite of Luton's frenzied efforts to score there was a veneer of class about the match — often provided by Carlisle.

It would have been the Cumbrians' first away win since Boxing Day. It was very nearly Luton's second home defeat on the trot.

But the Town showed the courage needed to get out of tight corners. After going two goals down in 17 minutes their first-half efforts to get back into the game were as exciting as their three-goal blitz in the last 17 minutes to draw level.

Macdonald and Givens showed skill and big-hearted endeavour in the mud and rain, and against an equally determined defence. They did everything but score as the crowd bayed for a goal.

Fervour

I can recall three occasions when both Luton strikers looked as if they couldn't miss. But the mud and outstretched legs, plus some brave goal-keeping from former Luton keeper Allan Ross, rebuffed their efforts until half-time.

And when Dennis Martin turned in a headed-on corner in the 55th minute Luton could have been excused a bit of depression. It almost came, but Keen whipped up the fervour before it set in, and Luton fought back like they have never fought back before.

Carlisle right-back Derek Hemstead rubbed in the Northerners' early superiority when he lobbed a soft goal past Tony Read from outside

the box in the 12th minute. Why wasn't he tackled?

Luton were visibly shaken. But five minutes later they were set back on their heels when Chris Balderstone thumped a free kick through a gap in the defensive wall obligingly opened by Roger Hoy who broke off.

Givens and Macdonald inspired Luton's fight-back. With Slough and John Ryan pushing forward along the flanks, and Court, Hoy and Keen probing desperately from midfield it looked as if Luton must score. As could be expected they became over-eager and passes began to go wrong.

But Hoy and Court are to be singled out for their aggression. Nicholl and Moore again stood out at the back, and the news is good about Moore's late injury. It's just bad bruising and he should be OK for next week.

Jimmy Ryan, who had been well attended by Joe Davis, lit the fusepaper under the fight-back when he rounded off a desperate goalmouth tangle in which the crossbar and the knees of a defender had foiled Macdonald and Givens. Nicholl was somewhere in there too. It was Ryan's first goal for Luton.

And less than two minutes later Alan Slough hit his fourth of the season while Carlisle were still blinking.

All of a sudden Luton looked in with a chance. But time was against them.

Then came the storybook finish. Hoy used his long throw to good advantage, and Busby, who went on for Moore had an effort blocked in the jungle of legs.

But for once the ball bounced right for Mac, and after blasting in the equaliser he charged off on a delighted semi-lap of honour. Lady-smith could not have been more relieved than all concerned at Luton. It was Macdonald's 17th goal of the season.

Funny how that figure keeps cropping up in this match. Perhaps it's Luton's lucky number. It was also their 17th league match of the season.

What a welcome back after

a long-illness it was for Town chairman Mr Tony Hunt. The tension must have been enough to give him a relapse.

For Carlisle Hatton was a willing leader and Owen gave him great support. In midfield Ternent and Barton gave impressive performances — as did Ross in goal.

Afterwards Carlisle manager Bob Stokoe would not comment on his promotion hopes. But he said: "Luton are a good side — but I can't help thinking we threw a point away. But I am also pleased we got a point."

MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Read; John Ryan, Slough; Hoy, Nicholl, Moore

(Busby, 80min); Jimmy Ryan, Court, Macdonald, Keen, Givens.

CARLISLE UNITED: Ross; Hempstead, Davis; Ternent,

Winstanley, Sutton; Martin; Barton, Hatton, Ower

Balderstone. Sub: Gorman.

REFEREE: Mr H. Williams (Sheffield).

ATTENDANCE: 14,837.

GOALS: Hemstead (Carlisle, 12), Balderstone (Carlisle, 15), Martin (Carlisle, 55), Jimmy Ryan (Luton, 73), Slough (Luton, 75), Macdonald (Luton, 89).