

NOW LUTON CAN WIN BACK FANS

71/72

LUTON TOWN 2
MILLWALL 1

By ROGER DUCKWORTH

THE New Year came in with a great big smile for Luton Town as their biggest crowd of the season saw them beat the promotion challengers from London in the best match of the season at Kenilworth Road.

As they collected their 11th point out of the last 14, Luton did their image no end of good. Gates had slumped before Christmas, but once people realise that Luton can still play like this, the turnstiles will be spinning lucratively again.

Even Millwall manager Benny Fenton, not best known for his praise of his victors, said: "Luton deserved their win. They looked a good side."

The Town outdid Millwall at their own game. They progressed with slick, close-passing ground football, and used the wings to finish the job off.

Tough

It is now eight matches since Luton lost — at Watford on November 13 — and that lean spell of October and early November seems like another world.

With a tough programme ahead, there can be no relaxing, but Luton must be praised for pulling themselves out of the mire which at one stage looked like sucking them under.

Those who returned to Kenilworth Road on Saturday must still be glowing from Luton's first half performance. The Town made Millwall, who are really quite a good side, look a very ordinary one.

Once Keen and Court, who were both superb, mastered the middle of the field, Luton launched a series of thrilling attacks which could have brought them more reward than the two goals by which they led at half time.

Spectacular

For the first, Hindson curled over an inswinging corner and Nicholl, who had previously gone close from a similar situation, slipped Bolland to head a good goal.



Peter Anderson left, scores Luton's second goal

The second was a more spectacular affair. It is a goal I will remember for a long time. Don Givens made it, controlling a high ball on his instep near the left-hand corner flag, somehow turning into space and banging over a crisp centre which was met by the head of Anderson who flashed the ball into the net.

He said afterwards: "It was one of the best goals I have scored. But what a lovely ball I received from Don. It all seemed to happen so quickly. I

just didn't have time to think about it."

It was Anderson's ninth goal of the season. It could not have come at a better time for him. He got one last week at Sheffield after being dropped in favour of Jimmy Ryan, and then playing when Ryan went down with flu.

Now Ryan won't find it so easy to get back. Anderson gave a fine account of himself with a blend of skill, ambition and courage.

"I'm glad it went in," he told me. "I know I have been having a bad time recently, but I felt better today. I enjoyed it."

In fact the whole attack played well, with Hindson looking a classy player with his running and crossing of the ball, and Halom chasing everything and taking all the bangs for his colleagues.

At the end, his legs were black and blue from his close association with Kitchener

who was booked following a clash in the second half with the Luton centre-forward.

Honours

Givens was everywhere, but played a lot of the match as a dual centre-forward with Halom, with Anderson dropping back in the later stages.

In defence John Ryan takes the honours with Nicholl. He had his best match of the season and looked to have

shaken off a recent attack of the jitters.

Moore and Slough also did well, with Slough coming to Luton's rescue twice in the dying minutes as Millwall fought to equalise.

They pulled a goal back in the second half when the tiny Possee collected a good pass from the right and shot low and hard through a hesitant defence to give Read no chance.

Mood

The Luton goalkeeper had another fine game, and though he did not have to slave over-hard, his positional sense and catching were a treat to watch.

Millwall pulled off Dunphy just after half-time and sent on Alder. He did well, but with Luton in this mood there was not too much he could do about it.

King played well in goal for Millwall and was hurt just before half-time making a brave save at Halom's feet. He played on with a huge lump on his knee.

Luton's performance can give them confidence for the tough weeks ahead. Next Saturday they go to Preston and, the following week, to West Ham for the third round of the FA Cup.

Then there's QPR at home. They are going well, and with Saturday's sparkling show in mind, I think Luton will get an even bigger gate than they did on Saturday.

MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Read; John Ryan, Slough; Keen, Nicholl, Moore; Anderson, Court, Halom, Gevens, Hindson. Sub: Walnwright.

MILLWALL: King; Brown, Cripps; Dorney, Kitchener, Burnett; Bridges, Bolland, Possee, Smethurst, Dunphy (Alder, 49 mins).

REFEREE — Mr Frank Bassett (Swindon).

ATTENDANCE — 15,113.

GOALS: Nicholl (Luton, 20 minutes), Anderson (Luton, 34 minutes), Possee (Millwall, 52 minutes).