Luton 1
Queens Park Rangers 1

By ROGER DUCKWORTH

LUTON's biggest crowd of the season applauded John Moore as he left the field on Saturday for the dour manner in which he had marked the mastery of Rodney Marsh.

But they all went home unaware that the Luton centre-back had needed all his courage to keep going after an early injury.

Nearly everyone else would have come off with an injury like that," said coach Jimmy Andrews afterwards.

"His ankle is black and blue, swollen like a balloon and is scarred by four great stud marks. Had he taken his boot off at half time he would never have got it back on."

Moore received his injury just after Francis had put Rangers ahead with a splendid fifth-minute goal. So for eighty-odd minutes he had the job of marking the best player in the Second Division with a gammy ankle, a pronounced limp and a deal of pain.

What a good job he made of it. Moore stuck to his task grimly, and kept his head as Marsh tried every trick in the book including persistent leaning-on and phoney trips.

Luton will have won many friends with this showing. After looking second best early on they fought back, and could just as easily have won as shared the spoils.

It was a match full of feeling and associations. Mr Andrews and Luton manager Alec Stock used to be in charge at Rangers. Luton skipper Mike Keen led them to Wembley to win the League Cup.

MATCH DETAILS

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

QPR: Parkes; Clement, Hazell; Venables, Hunt, Mancini; Saul, Francis, Leach, Marsh, Ferguson. Sub: Busby.

GOALS: Francis (QPR, 5 min); John Ryan (Luton, 21 min).

REFEREE: Mr Kenneth Wynn (Wolverhampton).

ATTENDANCE: 17,280.

Brilliant

Afterwards the Town skipper said: "I don't think Rangers are any better than when I was there. But there's only one word for Rodney — Brilliant."

Six of Saturday's Rangers team were there under Mr Stock — Clement, Hazell, Hunt, Francis, Leach and Marsh. They were all out to show their old boss how good they were.

These undertones brought a lot of fight into the game. And it benefited as spectator value because of it. The anxiety of the players to do well almost overspilled into trouble.

Court kicked Marsh from behind an aeon after the Rangers man had passed the ball on, and was justly booked. He could well have been sent off.

And Marsh himself was booked during the interval after speaking to the referee. Marsh said afterwards that he had said to the referee: "Can I ask you something, ref?"

The referee is alleged to have said: "Yes, you can give me your name."

That was Marsh's verdict of what happened. That's what he told manager Gordon Jago.

No comment

But his boss was not being drawn into saying anything. "I would prefer to make no comment on that until I have seen a copy of the referee's report," he told me. But Mr Jago had plenty to say about Court's foul.

"It was cold, calculating and deliberate," he said. "I thought he was lucky not to have been sent off."

Back to the game. John Ryan, who had a hard-working afternoon, equalised for Luton with a superb goal in the 21st minute — his first of the season. And from then on the fur began to fly.

Both sides had spells on top, and both had chances. Marsh and Mancini went close for Rangers, Nicholl and Hindson, twice, for Luton.

Hindson, who looked good throughout, turned on a fine second half display, and at one stage looked like beating the Londoners on his own. Both he and Givens displayed ball skills that matched those of the mythical Marsh.

In midfield Keen and Court both had terrific matches, while Slough and Nicholl were capable at the back.

The goal-scoring department of Anderson and Halom produced a disappointing show, but both slogged away where it hurts.

Anderson kept running into a brickwall defence while Halom, who showed good control, never had a shot. He must whip up his greed for goals if Luton are to progress.

In Luton's goal Read gave a display of quiet efficiency, but he was fouled far too often as he went for high balls, and was usually allowed the peace and quiet of a free-kick by which to clear.

Luton must now concentrate on getting Moore fit for the Oxford match next week. Physio Reg Game will have his hands full with this one. As Mr Andrews said: "John will probably have to keep his ankle up for two to three days, and he'll need treatment every day this week.

"But if it's at all possible he'll make it. John Moore is a professional's professional."