

LUTON'S BITTER CHAMPAGNE

72/73

LUTON TOWN made a mockery of the division of difference between soccer's top flight and its second string at Northampton last night when they ran Birmingham ragged for a good hour of this League Cup second round, second replay.

As in the two previous encounters, in each of which Birmingham pulled back a goal to equalise, Luton were the better side.

The speed and purpose with which they played left City reeling until half an hour from the end of this five-hour marathon.

Afterwards Town manager Harry Haslam said: "It's bloody sickening to be standing here talking about them playing Coventry in the next round.

"It should be us. We did enough to win each match against them, but we could just not score the goals that mattered. The lads are livid. Sheffield Wednesday had better watch out on Saturday."

Criminal

The Luton players, in fact, were so bitter about the whole business that they opened and drunk the champagne director Eric Morecambe had taken along in the event of a victory celebration. "I don't blame them," said the television star. "They deserve it."

A colleague from Birmingham said: "It's criminal that Luton should lose. They have been so much better than Birmingham in each match. In fact Luton are a better side than Derby where Brum played last week."

In the first half the Town pinned back Birmingham's ears with a display of controlled aggression. It was often a physical match, but Luton looked faster and fitter.

Anderson and Halom had tremendous matches, and controlled the midfield in the first half by sheer running and guts. Fern added the finesse that tipped the balance firmly in Luton's favour.

By **ROGER DUCKWORTH**
Luton Town 0, Birmingham City 1
(At Northampton)

A good share of the 11,000 crowd was behind Luton and they drowned the Birmingham support as Luton breezed about in search of a goal. Aston, Busby and John Ryan all went close early on as Birmingham were left gasping at the speed of Luton's attacking.

Best

Busby had his best match of the season, but the luck would not run for him. He plugged away all night at the City attack, and it must be remembered that he was against one of the fastest, toughest centre-halves in the country in Hynd.

In the opening seconds of the second half Busby had Luton's best chance of scoring. He was put through a tongue-tied defence by Halom, but shot against goalkeeper Latchford who charged out at him.

Shackled

Halom was never out of the match, and he and Anderson would have been the heroes had Luton won.

Every member of the team gets full marks for effort. Jimmy Ryan and Aston played some superior football from the wings in spite of some scything tackling from a panicking defence. Both went close several times.

Anderson also received some tough treatment, and both Burns and Hynd were booked for fouls on the Luton man. Anderson must

have impressed Spurs' manager Billy Nicholson, who was talent spotting. But so must the rest of the Luton side.

Goalkeeper Barber was sure of himself though he never had as much to do as his opposite number.

Luton's back-line of defence was outstanding. The tackling and speed of recovery of backs Thomson and Johy Ryan was a treat to watch, while the middle-men shackled City danger men Trevor Francis and Bob Latchford.

It is therefore tinged with irony that these two should play a part in putting Luton out of the Cup.

There were 13 minutes to go to another session of extra time when Birmingham's best player, Page, took over in midfield, made ground and whacked a long pass out to Hatton on the left.

He crossed it and Latchford nudged the ball on to Francis who shot low through the forest of legs for the winner.

Limping

In the first half Garner played so well that Francis was unnoticed. But Garner then had some bad luck. In the 38th minute he hurled a huge throw-in into the Birmingham box.

Halom headed back from the near-post and Latchford made a lucky grab to stop Fern's down-header.

YOUR MATCH FACTS

LUTON TOWN: Barber, John Ryan, Thomson, Anderson, Faulkner, Garner, Jimmy Ryan, Fern, Busby, Halom, Aston. Sub: Slough for Garner (39 mins).

BIRMINGHAM: D. Latchford, Carroll, Pendrey, Campbell, Hynd, Page, Burns, Francis, Latchford, Hope, Hatton. Sub: Whitehead.

Referee: Mr E. Jolly (Manchester).

Attendance: 11,451.

Goal: Francis (Birmingham, 77 mins).

THANK YOU, FANS

TOWN secretary Bob Readhead today praised the supporters who made the trip to Northampton.

"We at the club would like to thank every Luton fan for the way they supported us last night," he said. "It was very encouraging and we are sorry we couldn't repay them with a winning result. But we want them to know how much we appreciated their vocal support."

And Garner was left limping on the line. His big effort had pulled a groin muscle, and he is not likely to play at Sheffield on Saturday.

Slough went on and continued the tight job on Francis. Afterwards Birmingham manager Freddie Goodwin said: "Trevor needed that goal. He's not been having the best of times."

Faulkner did a splendid job on Latchford, who was also "missing" for most of the time.

Luton lost, but they came out with their heads held high. They deserve every credit for their display last night, as they do for their previous two meetings with the First Division side this season.

They must now continue in this vein for their assault on the Second Division.