

FRENCH SAYS IT WITHOUT WORDS ...

■ All the dd power is in Graham French's shot as he outstrips the Millwall defence and hits home Luton's second goal.
Picture: PETER HOARE



What the others said

REGGIE BURR (Luton director): "What did I say? At one time I was the only person who believed that Graham could still do it. He was brilliant. We have proved that we were right in having him back at Luton."

HARRY HASLAM (Luton manager): "He was great. He has so much skill it's not true, and however long you are off you don't lose that. He still has some way to go building his stamina, but I was delighted with his display. And scoring that goal will have done him no end of good."

ALAN SLOUGH: "I thought Graham did very well. I was very pleased when he scored our second goal."

LES RICHARDSON (manager of the Hatters Club): "It was the first time I had seen Graham play. But when I was manager of the Black Bull in Luton people used to come in and say what a great player he was. He is great. I saw today that everything everyone had said was right."

72/73 GRAHAM FRENCH, his face flushed with a mixture of elation and fatigue made a quick exit from Kenilworth Road on Saturday night, following his fairy tale comeback to soccer.

Wearing a natty white jacket Graham walked quickly to the car park minutes after the end of the match, brushing off reporters' questions with a brusque "Nothing to say."

What about the goal? "No comment." What about the reception from the fans? No answer.

Graham stopped just once in his flight to anonymity to oblige a pleading boy with an autograph. Then he vanished into the December murk to be alone with his thoughts.

Luton's comeback hero did not need to talk. He had answered all the questions on the field with his ball artistry, inherent skill, compass-plotted passing and, most of all, with a magnificent goal.

Slimmer

It was a goal that everyone had wanted to see. It came six minutes into the second half when French, looking slimmer than on his last appearance for the Town three years ago, hurtled after a pass channelled into the nucleus of the Millwall defence by Butlin.

French took the ball in his stride, slipped it past King, and ran to the Oak Road crowd to take his bow.

The attendance might not have been as high as it could have been, but that goal brought the biggest roar for

years at Kenilworth Road. It was an emotional moment.

After the match Luton director Reggie Burr beamed: "Thank God I was right. At one time I was the only person who believed Graham could still do it."

"Today he completely justified my faith in him. He was brilliant. Superb. Fantastic."

He was. It was if French, who is 26, had never been away. All the skill was there. All the petulance. All the thinking.

Best player

He led his team onto the field. And led them all afternoon. He was the best player on the field.

But let us not get carried away. Let us not forget that Luton again slipped up at home. I point out for the umpteenth time that the Town have not won at home since September 16. When you notice they are still in sixth

position, it takes some figuring.

After only four minutes on Saturday Barry Butlin, nicknamed Bullet by manager Harry Haslam, scored his second goal in two matches. A determined bit of football by Anderson produced a shot which was only half stopped, and Butlin pounced to thump it into the net.

For the rest of the first half Luton hardly let Millwall have a kick. But they couldn't score again.

Their frustration, however, was relieved when French scored his goal. But the cheers were still swirling among the rafters when Possee, who is on the transfer list, headed a cheeky goal from an even cheekier free kick by Irishman Dunphy.

And then it started. The match, which had always been of a high quality, rose another notch in timbre as Millwall began to get some of their own back.

Wrong end

Suddenly it was Luton who were on the wrong end of things. And in the 73rd minute goalkeeper Barber was forced to bring Alder down in the penalty area to stop him cashing in on a mistake by Garner.

Bolland, who had been moved to full-back from inside-forward, diverted his penalty hard and wide past Barber.

Luton, who had earlier looked so confident, went shaky. And if the match had gone any further I think the Londoners would have won.

But the interesting thing about it all is that Mr Haslam's bold changes paid off — in confidence for the future if not in points.

Don Shanks also made his comeback at right-back, and had an outstanding match. He has lost nothing through his absence.

And John Ryan had his best match of the season after moving to the centre of the defence. He proved to everyone that he can do the job Garner has been doing for most of the season.

Garner replaced Faulkner at centre-half, and also had an outstanding match — apart from his one, vital, mistake.

Fumbled

He fumbled with Alder racing in, and tried to recover and put the ball back to Barber.

The elegant Bobby Thomson put in another terrific performance at left-back, while Anderson and Halom grafted through the hard work of the midfield positions with enthusiasm and perception.

There were good contributions from orthodox wingers Aston and Jimmy Ryan, and in goal Barber's handling was generally good and his kicking had a more positive look about it.

Unfortunately, the Luton manager will be forced to make changes next week because John Ryan faces a two match suspension. I imagine Alan Slough will be brought back to a defensive position.

MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Barber, Shanks, Thomson, Anderson, Garner, Ryan (John), Ryan (Jimmy), French, Butlin, Halom, Aston. Sub: Fern.

MILLWALL: King, Bolland, Cripps, Dorney, Kitchener, Burnett, Brown (Steve), Possee, Wood, Dunphy, Alder. Sub: Smethurst.

Referee: Mr Roger Kirkpatrick (Leicester).

Attendance: 11,550.

Goals: Butlin (Luton, 4min).

French (Luton, 51min).

Possee (Millwall, 52min).

Bolland (pen, Millwall, 73min).