

Super Blues in storming win

by RAY MATTS

Luton 1, Blues 3

BLUES launched themselves into a match-winning orbit with two goals in the first five minutes against Luton at Kenilworth Road this afternoon.

Both were scored by Trevor Francis, who went on to collect a brilliant hat-trick with a third goal in the 70th minute as Luton threatened to hald themselves back into the game.

They had scored in the 10th minute but it would have been an injustice had they been able to square the game because they were outplayed by some superior soccer from Blues.

LUTON: Barber; Shanks, Thomson, Chambers, Litt, Ryan (John), Hudson, Ryan (Jim), Husband, West, Alston. Sub.: Fuccillo.
BIRMINGHAM CITY: Latchford; Martin, Bryant, Kendall, Gallagher, Pendrey, Campbell, Francis, Burns, Hatton, Calderwood. Sub.: Hynd.
Referee: W. Gow (Swansea).

Blues had the inspiration of a second-minute goal by FRANCIS to boost their confidence in their vital bottom-of-the-table struggle.

The goal came following a free-kick by Joe Gallagher who floated the ball into the left side of the penalty area.

Repeat

There, Burns rose high above the defence to lay on a magnificent header towards the far post for Francis to sweep in and volley home from an unmarked position.

A perfect start for Blues looked even more magnificent when, in the fifth minute, they made it 2-0 with a carbon-copy second goal.

Once more the ball was pumped forward from midfield to Burns who soared high on the edge of the

penalty area to wrong-foot the Luton defence.

FRANCIS again stole into a wonderful scoring position and made no mistake with his right-foot shot into the top corner of the net.

It was a vintage opening by City who were fully exploiting the weakness of Luton in the middle of their back four where they had inexperienced Chambers and Litt forming their rearguard partnership.

Luton tried to raise themselves after the double shock and forced a right-wing corner but Latchford, confident with the two-goal advantage, came off his line to perform a perfect interception and set up yet another Blues attack.

In the 10th minute Blues' lead was reduced when Gordon HINDSON scored a magnificent goal from a free-kick move. Alan Campbell protested when he was judged to have brought down a Luton raider just outside the penalty area on the right.

No chance

West slipped a short free kick square to Hindson who unleashed a tremendous shot which flew into the top far corner of the net, giving Latchford absolutely no chance of making a save.

The game was proving a first-class advertisement for English soccer. The willingness of both sides to attack and entertain was a credit to clubs concerned over their lowly League position.

Once again Burns and Francis combined to set up a fine sweeping move for Blues. Burns crossed from the right, Francis brought the ball under control on the opposite wing inside the penalty area, and slammed a cross-shot over the bar.

Blues had what seemed to be a perfectly good third "goal" cancelled out for off-side. Latchford thumped a long clearance downfield for Burns and Hatton to chase.

Burns got there first and as the goalkeeper came off his line headed over Barber's outstretched arms and into the net.

It was a simple move which was disallowed for off-side against Hatton who did not seem to be in such a situation when he began his run following Latchford's long kick.

Deflected

Kenny Burns showed his complete aerial dominance against the Luton defence when he rose high to nod down a Gallagher free-kick once more into the patch of in-rushing Hatton and Francis.

Francis shot for goal but the ball struck Hatton and was deflected away to safety.

mouth scramble at the Blues when half-a-dozen or more players from either side congregated as Luton tried to fly-kick the ball into the Blues goal and City men stuck out legs to prevent them doing so.

It was like a Rugby scramble which ended when Latchford picked up the ball out of the ruck.

Blues once again tried to penetrate the none-too-sure Luton defence, switching the ball from left to right for Calderwood to try a long-range shot but his effort sailed over the bar.

Latchford, who was having a quiet enough afternoon with the exception of a couple of harmless looking crosses, had to earn his keep when Chambers tried a long-range effort.

The goalkeeper dived low to his left to pull off a save.

Half-time: Luton 1
Blues 2

Almost immediately after the restart Martin had to produce an acrobatic header to clear the ball from under his own bar following a cross by overlapping right-back Shanks.

Luton, outplayed by City in the first period, had no doubt received a half-time pep talk by manager Harry Haslam, the subject of which is almost certain to have included the amount of freedom given to Burns in the first 45 minutes.

Blues had yet another goal disallowed for off-side and it was hard luck on Burns who had beaten Luton centre-half Litt yet again to set up the change which Hatton tucked away — only to be judged fractionally off-side.

Burns had to receive treatment after being brought down by Litt in the centre circle. The referee warned the Luton centre-half about the use of his elbow.

The plucky Scot resumed and from the free-kick awarded in his favour he produced a glancing header having taken up his familiar spot in the penalty area.

SO CLOSE

Then it was the turn of Hatton to demonstrate Blues' superiority in the air when he came charging in a right-wing cross to beat a defender and steer his header just wide of the post.

Full-back Martin tried to get in on the attacking action when he won the ball in midfield and proceeded to motor down the right flank, outpacing Thomson into the penalty area.

It took a brave dive by goalkeeper Barber to end the Blues players' exciting foray.

After the thrills of the first-half the game started to fall flat as Blues concentrated on a containing performance to protect their advantage and lost some of their effectiveness up front.

Luton were unable to carve any clear-cut openings in the Blues defence where Gallagher was dominant in the air and together with Martin policed danger man Alston into virtual inactivity.

Blues were beginning to make it difficult for themselves by allowing an ordinary Luton side to take some midfield superiority.

After Campbell had fouled Chambers, the ball bobbed dangerously around Blues' penalty area and they were fortunate to escape a penalty when Bryant brought the ball forward and it bounced up and appeared to hit his hand.

The referee, who had a clear sight of the incident, obviously considered it was accidental.

HAT TRICK

Blues responded to the threat with their third goal and FRANCIS'S hat-trick in the 60th minute.

They broke smartly and the ball found its way to Francis, operating on the left.

He moved forward, beat a defender and shot low under the body of diving goalkeeper Barber.

GOALS AND THEIR SCORERS

2m. Luton 0, B'ham 1. Francis
5m. Luton 0, B'ham 2. Francis
10m. Luton 1, B'ham 2. Hindson
10m. Luton 1, B'ham 3. Francis