

Francis puts clock back with second hat-trick

By KEIR RADNEDGE

Luton 1, Birmingham 3

It was a case of congratulations all round at Kenilworth Road on Saturday — with the greatest weight, of course, being invested in Trevor Francis for his first hat-trick in more than three years.

Francis took his total for the season to nine with two carbon copy goals in the first five minutes, and another 23 minutes from time.

But more than the goals, his class stood out in everything he did and it was most appropriate that afterwards, when asked to name the players he admired — for their skill on the field — he picked out Stan Bowles and Rodney Marsh.

First to congratulate Francis at the final whistle, however, was not one of his colleagues but Luton skipper Bobby Thomson, the former Wolves and Blues international who was at full back for Birmingham on the day late in 1970 when Francis made his first League appearance at the age of 16 — as a substitute.

Thomson, who had desperately wanted to do well against his old club, had suffered the indignity of being partly to blame for the first two goals.

After three minutes, Joe Gallagher took a free kick on the right just inside his own half. The ball swung away to the left, Kenny Burns headed it across the box, Thomson and his co-defenders hesitated, and Francis was in for the kill on the far post.

Action replay

Two minutes later, this crassly inept Luton defence allowed Blues to repeat the ploy: from Gallagher's free kick, to Burns's header, to Francis's shot. With action replays like that, who needs television?

Jeff Astle, the former West Bromwich Albion centre-forward, was among the spectators and was one of the first to add his congratulations when Francis emerged to run the gauntlet of the Press.

Astle must have felt that, with centre halves like Steve Litt around, there is still a place for him in the First Division. Litt looked barely ready for the Football Combination, let alone the Football League.

Francis's only other hat-trick was contained in the four he scored against Bolton back in his debut season—one of the performances which gave rise to the "Superboy" tag.

He has made great progress in between then and now. Yes, he was playing better now because he was more consistent. No, he didn't think about an England chance. Yes, he was learning to pace a game better. No, no-one was in fear of another relegation-frought finale.

Francis's own pint of cheer was merely milk, which might have been a sobering thought to many Blues' fans later, raising their glasses to the best goal of the match

— Francis's third goal. Now first woman director in 1968 company, and became its rith the Royal Shakespeare tared a long association Dame Peggy Ashcroft has community. e from the surrounding ur audience will therefore ally a sizeable proportion of