

LUTON ARE BACK IN THE CHASE

75/76

By ROGER DUCKWORTH
Hull City 1, Luton Town 2

THEY'RE getting cocky again at Luton. The players know there's a crisis at the cash desk, and they are determined they will do their bit to put it right.

There's a sort of camaraderie in the dressing room. Skipper Alan West has whipped the players into a task force that cannot begin to think of going under.

On Friday night he promised Luton would win at Hull. "Easy", he said over a pre-Christmas Coke. "We'll murder 'em. Probably be two goals in it."

And Jimmy Husband, the club's leading scorer, promised another goal. "I fancy my chances," he said. "I like Hull, you know. Played my first Under-23 international there. Didn't score that night so I'll make up for it tomorrow."

Hull City or whoever can't beat

that sort of attitude. Hull were on a loser before they went out, for Luton carried that something extra onto the pitch.

Sparked

When there's a battle on you need fighting talk. Alan West led the troops with zest and courage, and deployed the right tactics to set up victory.

He started it off himself, slipping the ball inside to Buckley who passed to Husband and he promptly

fulfilled his previous night's promise with a firm and accurate left footer.

Under his direction he had the impudent skills of Andy King and the refined midfield mind of Brian Chambers.

As ever there was John Aston out on the left, waiting for the right pass to advance and scare the Hull defence. When Hull full-back de Vries went off wounded in the 16th minute, it looked as if it would be a massacre.

Paul Futchter had a long shot tipped over, and John Ryan just missed with a screaming effort. But Luton could not manage another goal before half-time.

Early in the second half Hull equalised through Alf Wood, who had been playing more in defence than attack after de Vries had been hurt. He ran up for a long free-kick from the right, beat Barber to the ball, and headed a good goal.

Thankfully, Luton regained their feet quickly. It was Captain West who again sparked the goal. He waited his moment to release a brilliantly weighted pass through to Aston near the by-line on the left. And Aston lobbed over a perfect centre for King to head Luton back into the lead.

It was such a well-executed goal that its three participants made it look easy. Again, the previous night's promises were coming true.

The ease with which Luton had taken their goals began to nettle Hull, and they staged a great fightback.

Flowing

Wood, Greenwood, Fletcher and substitute Gibson all stormed forward in an all-out attempt to equalise. For a spell, the Luton defence was at panic stations. John Faulkner and Paul Futchter were magnificent.

John Ryan and Buckley made significant clearances, and even the Luton attack had to help out.

But they survived, and in the last five minutes it was again Luton who were supplying the flowing attacks. Aston should have made sure of it with about five minutes left, and Buckley had bad luck when Wealands made a good save to his shot.

Just five or six weeks ago everyone was talking about escaping relegation. Everyone, that is, except manager Harry Haslam. He was insisting even then: "The fight's not over yet for promotion."

Nobody was taking much notice of him then. He was just being patriotic, we thought.

Yet here we are, going into Christmas with a great chance of rejoining the leading bunch by the New Year.

Every goal is going to be worth its weight in gold. That's why centre-forward Ron Futchter must polish his shooting boots. He displays effort, strength and skill, but needs to sharpen his finishing.

Then, with the enthusiasm of Husband and the unquestioned ability of Aston, this Luton forward line can really get cracking again.

Ronnie, and King, were booked, Futchter for arguing with the referee and King for a foul.

MATCH DETAILS

HULL CITY: - Wealands, Daniel, deVries, Hawley, Croft, Haigh, Grimes, Fletcher, Wood, Lyall, Greenwood. Sub: Gibson.

LUTON TOWN: Barber, John Ryan, Buckley, Chambers, Faulkner, Paul Futchter, Husband, King, Ron Futchter, West, Aston. Sub: Jim Ryan.

REFEREE: Mr T. Farley (County Durham)

ATTENDANCE: 5,449

GOALS: HUSBAND (LUTON) 24min, WOOD (HULL) 49min, KING (LUTON) 55min.

BOOKINGS: R. Futchter (dissent), King (foul on Greenwood)