

LUTON KEEP IN TUNE WITH THE LEADERS

Courageous Husband is man-of-the-match

By ROGER DUCKWORTH
Luton Town 2, Sunderland 0

ONE of these days somebody is going to hang the bloke who sits just along from me from the Bobbers Club flagpole. He was at it again on Saturday.

While the team was trying its heart out and pulling off a great win to keep in the promotion race, all he could manage was: "What a load of rubbish". And he wasn't talking about Sunderland.

Two of the Luton players, who had great matches, were described as "bloody fairies" and "old women", by our friend.

Why he pays all that money for a season ticket I don't know. He must be a masochist. He'd be better off giving his money to charity and going to play on the motorway on a Saturday afternoon.

Just in case anyone who sat near him was influenced by his diatribe, let me now give you the truth. Luton fought like blazes for a splendid win against one of the best sides in the Second Division.

With a team mainly made up of youngsters they shrugged aside the rugged tackling and negative play of Sunderland and persevered with great character to keep in tune with the other promotion hopefuls.

Plugged away

Ron Futcher, according to manager Harry Haslam, was "as sick as hell" at half time for missing three chances. But remember the lad was playing his first match for a fortnight, and going out there against Sunderland isn't like kicking a plastic ball about on the rec.

Give Ronnie his due, he plugged away with such dogged ambition that Sunderland's big, tough defence eventually gave way to him.

After Jimmy Husband had squeezed an own goal out of Bobby Moncur, who had kicked him up in the air in the first half, Ron set up the second goal.

He found Husband with a fine pass. Husband controlled the ball with his chest, raced forward, beat a flailing

Pictures by
KEITH DOBNEY

Right, Sunderland keeper Jim Montgomery watches helplessly as Moncur's deflection flashes into the net to give Luton the lead, and below, Ronnie Futcher races in to add the finishing touch to Jimmy Husband's shot for Luton's second.



approach by goalkeeper Jim Montgomery, and knocked the ball towards the goal.

We all thought it was over the line, but Futcher followed up to help it into the net. I see from yesterday's papers that Ronnie was claiming the goal.

Who scored it doesn't really matter. What is important is the manner in which Luton kept chipping away at the rock-hard Sunderland defence

like patient stonemasons.

Ron's brother Paul was so outstanding in defence that goalkeeper Keith Barber had hardly anything to do. He made one save from Towers in the first half and one to Tom Finney in the second.

Apart from that he was sheltered from the storm of Sunderland's forwards by the most promising young defender in the Second Division.

To give our friend in the stand a little bit of credence, it must be pointed out that there were some deficiencies in Luton's make-up.

Apart from his errors in front of goal, Ron Futcher was caught offside far too often. And there was a bit too much back-passing to the keeper when a ball out to the flank would have done just as well.

John Ryan made short work of Finney, marking him closely, whacking him into touch when necessary, and generally making it a miserable afternoon for the former Luton man.

He must have been glad to be substituted by Greenwood in the 72nd minute.

Steve Buckley had another good match at left back, using his speed and that incisive left foot well.

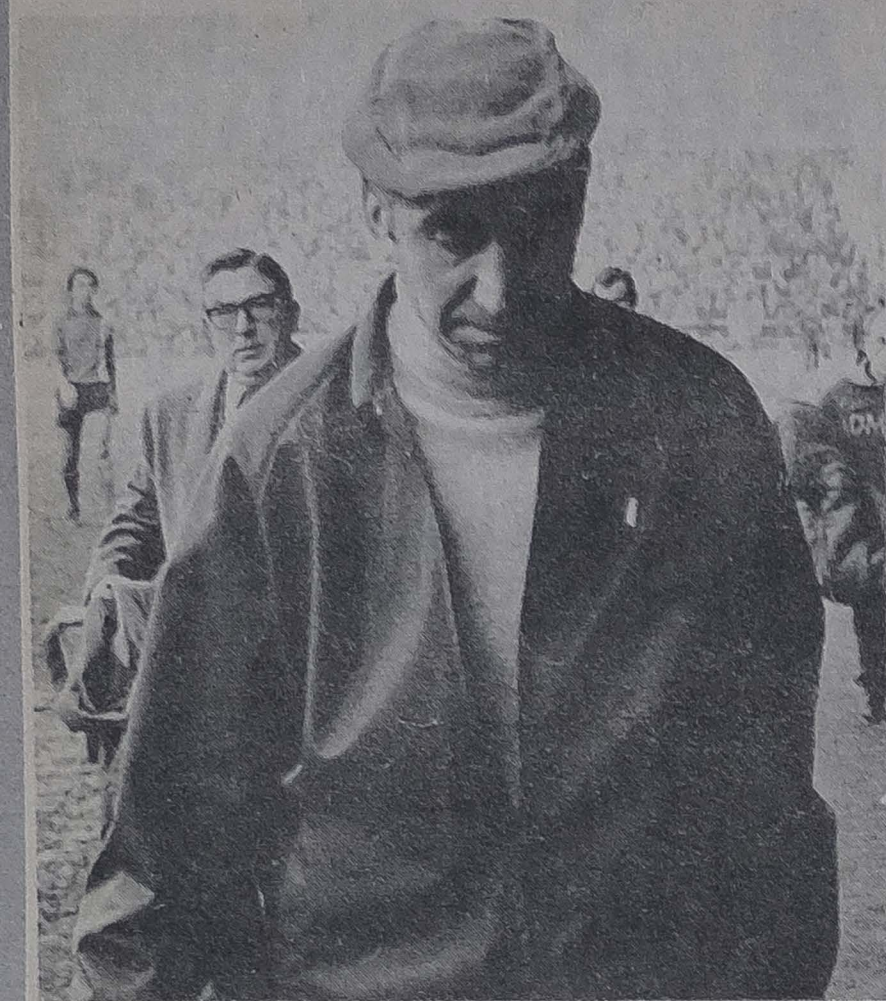
And Andy King produced the goods in midfield, often going past his man at full stretch when he looked to have lost possession.

Lilly Fuccillo played on the left in place of the injured John Aston, and made a great contribution to the match.

I will be surprised if Mr Haslam makes any changes for tomorrow's home game against Southampton.

But in the end I stick to my Saturday verdict and make Jimmy Husband my man of the match. His running, control and courage in the ruck were outstanding. And whoever they go down to, he was responsible for both Luton's goals.

A look at the table will have shown you that Luton's promotion aspirations are still very much alive. If they beat Southampton tomorrow they will go to Bristol City on Saturday with everything to fight for.



A dispirited Bob Stokoe walks back to the dressing room after seeing his side lose another away match.



The one that didn't count. Jimmy Husband raises his arm to celebrate Ronnie Futcher's goal. But it was ruled out for offside.