

# New boy turns into an instant fans' favourite

SEVENTEEN-YEAR-OLD Ricky Hill, barely out of his school boots, galvanised Kenilworth Road on Monday by marking his first appearance in the Football League with a classy cameo of a performance, crowned with a beautifully-hit goal to make the score-line fit the run of play. The crowd rose to him with a standing ovation which was also a sigh of relief as the Town ended their most successful Easter for years.

Rovers deserved to be beaten—but until Hill's dramatic appearance and explosive effect on the attack, the game was in danger of vanishing as a spectacle.

The crowd had been getting restive as a string of chances were made, then missed, and the Town's play began to look decidedly disjointed.

It was a rare mixture of a game, starting with the team announcement: John Aston was out of action with flu, but John Faulkner was fit to play again.

Harry Haslam moved Paul Price into the right-back position, and switched John Ryan to the front, where he showed that as a striker he is a very good full-back indeed.

By the time that excitement was scrapped, at half-time, the Town were a goal down and had thrown away chances like bad Easter eggs.

Jim Husband scooped the ball over the bar from eight yards, and Ryan hit a man half-way up the terraces with another shot. Ron Fletcher also managed to shoot over the bar from six yards, and the only pleasing aspect of the first half was that Price looks a far better player as a full-back than he did as a central defender.

He was cool and assertive, Faulkner looked slightly rusty at times after his lay-off, but Paul Fletcher, the model of consistency, covered everything.

The Rovers threatened only twice in the whole of the first half. Evans netted after using his hand to control the ball, and had the "goal" disallowed, but three minutes before time the Town were caught out by a throw-in from their right flank. Parsons reached the edge of the six-yard area with his throw, Staniforth back-headed it into the goal-mouth and Britten nipped in to score from close range.

Alan West had a patchy game, with flashes of brilliance too often outshone by some mediocre passing. Brian Chambers and Lil Fucillo kept trying hard, and for a spell after the interval the sparks began to fly when Steve Buckley

## BRISTOL ROVERS MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN 3, BRISTOL ROVERS 1

Half-time: 0-1

BRIAN SWAIN'S VERDICT: ★★

TOWN: Barber; Price, Buckley, Faulkner (Hill, 68 minutes), Paul Fletcher; Fucillo, Chambers, West; Husband, Ron Fletcher, Ryan. Formation drastically reshuffled second half.

BRISTOL ROVERS: Eadie; Parsons, Dav, Taylor, Pulis; Williams, Britten, Smith (Stephens, 65 minutes), Evans; Staniforth, Fearnley.

THE GOALS: Britten for Rovers, 42 minutes, from Staniforth's back-header into goalmouth; Paul Price for the Town, 58 minutes, header from corner by Alan West; Brian Chambers for the Town, 86 minutes, made by an inch-perfect through-pass by Ricky Hill; Hill for the Town, 87 minutes, first-time cracker from the edge of the box after knock-back by Jim Husband.

REFEREE: Denis Turner, Cannock; sharper than a lot of the Town's shooting.

ATTENDANCE: 7,646—the lowest of the season.

ENTERTAINMENT: Spoiled by the Town's failure to collect the goals they made and missed, but then rescued by Ricky Hill's dramatic intervention and debut goal.

swapped places with John Ryan.

His hard running and direct shooting injected some much-needed fire into the front line, but it was defender Paul Price who eventually put the Town level, with his first-ever League goal, in the 58th minute, rising high ten yards from goal to head a corner into the top of the net.

The Town were in command from then on, but Husband shot wide under pressure from a through-pass by Ron Fletcher, and then the two of them baulked each other from the first chance made by Hill.

The lanky coloured lad, only just turned 17, went into the midfield when Faulkner limped off with a pulled knee ligament 22 minutes from time, with Fucillo dropping back into defence and doing a sound job there.

The occasion was ready-made for something out of Roy of the Rovers, and Hill provided the finishing touch.

His appearance lifted the crowd, and they in turn sparked more life into the Town players. After some early nervousness, Hill began to show the classy touches that have marked him out as a remarkable prospect.

The Rovers hung on doggedly, and they came within four minutes of saving a point, with Eadie making a desperate and courageous save at Ron Fletcher's feet.

But the goalkeeper was left hopelessly exposed when Hill sliced a deadly accurate through pass into the path of Chambers. As Eadie rushed out, Chambers flicked the ball over him, darted past him, and headed the ball into the empty net.

That set the crowd alight, and Hill was cheered every time he was brought into the play. They went wild when within a minute of making the goal for Chambers, Hill scored: Husband knocked back a short pass to him, and Hill hit the ball first-time from the edge of the box.



● THE NEW HERO: Ricky Hill, who galvanised the Town into match-winning action on Monday.

It brushed the turf all the way as it streaked into the corner of the net, Hill turned nonchalantly to walk back to the centre as the stadium erupted into a crescendo of noise and elation, and even Keith Barber ran the length of the field to congratulate the scorer of such a virtuoso goal.

It transformed a mundane match into something to remember. Harry Haslam has said often enough that he has to find young talent to build the new Luton Town. If he finds many more like Hill he'll be putting Don Revie out of a job.



● TAKE THAT: Hill cracks in the low shot which gave him a goal to remember on his league debut.