

Luton find a new hero

75/76

WIDE-EYED and breathless, Ricky Hill left the Kenilworth Road pitch yesterday after the most exciting 22 minutes of his 16-year life. He had been sent on as Luton's substitute. He left as their hero.

For in his first taste of League football Ricky won the game for Luton. It was 1-1 and as boring as hell when he went on in the 68th minute. It was 3-1 when he went off. He had made Luton's second goal and scored an incredible third himself.

Then he was first out of the bath, dressed and away. Said John Ryan, Luton's longest-serving player: "He was off like a shot. Still sweating he was. I don't think he knows what's hit him."

Hill, who has come from Cricklewood via Luton's youth scheme, was the best thing that could have happened to yesterday's match. It badly needed a talking point.

With 65 minutes gone, centre-half John Faulkner, just back from a month off with an ankle injury, twisted his knee. When it became obvious he wasn't going to make it back, young Ricky took of his tracksuit and the crowd, sensing they were about to witness something new, experienced a buzz of excitement.

Giant

It took Hill a few minutes to get used to the pace of the game, and then he went looking for the ball. With four minutes left he split the defence with a through ball for Brian Chambers to chase, which brought Luton's second goal.

Chambers did magnificently to score. First of all he knocked the ball high over the outrushing giant of a Bristol goalkeeper, Jim Eadie, and then, timing his jump to perfection, he beat the massive Taylor in the air to direct his header at an empty goal.

They were still talking about that one when Hill produced what I am sure will be only the first of many League goals. He took a pass out on the right, and from outside the penalty box he beat the unfortunate Eadie with a terrific low shot that never rose more than a few inches.

The lad was too bewildered even to show emotion. He just turned and walked back towards the middle — sort of as if that's what he was there to do. Then he was mobbed by his mates.

So the match ended on a

MATCH DETAILS

Luton Town: Barber, Price, Buckley, Chambers, Faulkner (Hill 68 mins), Paul Futcher, Husband, Fuccillo, Ron Futcher, West, John Ryan.

Bristol Rovers: Eadie, Williams, Parsons, Day, Taylor, Pulis, Britten, Smith (Stephens 65 mins), Staniforth, Fearnley, Evans.

Referee: Mr D. Turner (Cannock).

Attendance: 7,646.

Goals: Britten (Bristol, 42 mins).

Price (Luton, 58 mins).

Chambers (Luton 84 mins).

Hill (Luton, 87 mins).

By ROGER DUCKWORTH
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high note. It was more than it deserved. The first half was terrible. With the wind tossing the ball about like a numbered disc in a bingo-caller's dome, both sides found it hard to settle.

In the 20th minute Jimmy Husband, always an enthusiastic player, perpetrated one of his best misses of the season from right in front of goal, and then Ron Futcher shot over from just as close after Husband had had a shot saved.

In the meantime Bristol had gone ahead through a soft header from the unmarked Martyn Britten, who got his head to a long throw.

Forty years ago to the day

Joe Payne scored his famous ten goals for Luton... against Bristol Rovers. It soon became clear that nobody was going to try to equal his record yesterday.

Meagre

With John Aston going down with flu, Luton had to start with John Ryan in attack. It didn't really work, and he played the second half at left-back with Steve Buckley, who was Luton's best player, looking impressive on the left-wing.

In the 58th minute Paul Price, who played at right-back, equalised with a header, and I think a disappointed and meagre crowd would have settled for a draw. They were becoming restive, and there wasn't even anything worth reading in the programme.

Then Hill entered the arena, and it was a different matter. Twice Husband failed to finish off good build-ups, and Ron Futcher made another miss after chasing through.

Lilly Fuccillo had another good match in midfield, and Chambers played some impressive stuff. Again Luton fell down in front of goal. But with one match left and hopes of promotion gone, there's plenty of time to put that right.

In the end the day belonged to Ricky Hill.