

FREE KICK TRICKERY WINS AGAIN

A WINNING goal from a carefully-practised free kick routine gave the Town justice at Eastville after a game in which they had shown us flashes of perfection.

They looked world-beaters for the first half, then struggled for a spell, then came back to deserve their first away points of the season.

Bristol manager Don Megson admitted that the better team had won, but was able to point out that his side would have taken one point at least if they had put their chances away.

Against that, the Town also had failed to pick up the goals their brilliant approach-work deserved in a scintillating opening spell.

The midfield and attack warmed up quickly, and the Rovers were in danger of collapsing as the Town's quick passing cut through a slack defence.

Ricky Hill, Alan West and Lil Fuccillo got a grip on the midfield, and Ron Futcher produced some imaginative running off the ball.

By **BRIAN SWAIN**

Jim Husband kept popping up in places where no defenders expected him, and Steve Buckley worked like a Trojan to add to the Town's numerical strength in attack.

Hill, Buckley and Ron Futcher combined to lay on a half-chance for Husband which was blocked by a defender, but the pressure brought the goal it well deserved in the 21st minute.

Buckley hammered a long diagonal cross from left to right, and Ron Futcher turned well and crossed accurately. Bristol's defence was split, and Phil Boersma calmly found space on the edge of the six-yard box to head the cross accurately and powerfully past the goalkeeper's right shoulder.

Bristol were kept fully stretched, but were allowed back into the game through a soft equaliser four minutes later.

John Faulkner, not as commanding as he usually is, chased back with Buckley beside him as a hopeful lob went down the middle.



● **BRISTOL ROVERS UNDER SIEGE:** Jim Husband gets airborne for a header at goal, with Ron Futcher on the right ready for any half-chance. Phil Boersma had crossed the ball from the right wing, and the Town's ability to switch their front three around left Rovers baffled for long periods.

The two defenders got in each other's way so badly that Buckley, who might have cleared, was frightened to do so for fear of delivering his kick at Faulkner as well as the ball.

Paul Randall capitalised on the confusion and helped himself to an easy goal.

Gradually, the Town's high standard began to slip, and while Husband was out of luck with a flashing drive at one end Evans and Randall put headers wide of the target at the other.

In the second half Bristol started to pick themselves up. They tightened their

marking and as Hill faded in midfield things began to look mediocre.

There were some chaotic moments in the Town's penalty area, with shots being charged down and Bristol appealing vainly for a penalty when Evans went headlong as Aleksic dived at his feet.

The Town defence went through a rocky period, with even Paul Futcher being pulled out of position, and Staniforth wasted a good chance by blasting wide from 12 yards.

But the Town survived, and came back to score a clever winner to demon-

strate the value of hard work in training.

They had a free kick about five yards outside the penalty area. Bristol built a solid wall, which stood firm as West dummied to shoot from the free kick. He slipped the ball to his left, and this time Fuccillo feigned to shoot.

The wall was beginning to break forward, and the second dummy saw Fuccillo move the ball still further to the left.

This time Buckley was on his way for the shot, and the only dummies to be seen were puzzled defenders as Buckley's 25-yard drive screamed low into the far corner of the net.

It knocked the stuffing out of Rovers, and the result could have been more emphatic because Hill got through for a header but put it straight to the keeper, and Paul Futcher went on a fast run forward and sent a 30-yard bender onto the crossbar with the goalkeeper beaten.

Match Details

BRISTOL ROVERS 1, LUTON TOWN 2
Half-time: 1-1

TOWN: Aleksic; Price, Buckley, Faulkner, Paul Futcher; Fuccillo, Hill, West; Husband, Boersma (Carr, 88 minutes) Ron Futcher.

BRISTOL ROVERS: Thomas; Bater, T. Taylor, Day, S. Taylor; Prince, Barry (Hendrie 70 minutes), Evans; Williams, Randall, Staniforth.

THE GOALS: Phil Boersma, his first in the league for the Town, close range header, 21 minutes, after Buckley and Ron Futcher carved up Bristol's defence; Paul Randall for Bristol, 25 minutes, after Buckley and Faulkner got mixed up; Steve Buckley, 63 minutes, as Bristol were baffled by a free-kick trick worked by Alan West and Lil Fuccillo.

REFEREE: Derek Nippard, Christchurch: firm and efficient throughout, and completely justified in his use of the book.

BOOKING: Ron Futcher for following-through and kicking the goalkeeper who had already got down and caught the ball.

ATTENDANCE: 5,940 — the lowest of the day in the Second Division, and barely half who go to Eastville for speedway racing.

ENTERTAINMENT: Very bright in the first half, but faded when Rovers introduced tighter marking and harder defence after the break.

**'First half
an hour
was
perfection'**

TWO points stood out in manager Harry Haslam's thoughts about his side's performance at Eastville: the quality of the soccer produced in the first half-hour, and the quality of the two Town goals.

"We clicked early and I thought we were near to perfection for half-an-hour," he said. "After that we lived dangerously at times but on balance we deserved to win."

"In training you work hard to set a pattern, and to get players to perform up to the limit of their abilities. In the last three games that work has brought the results."

"Both goals were beauties, and it's particularly good to see the set pieces work out so well. We work for hours on them, and you can sometimes go a whole season where things don't go right on the day."

"Now they're coming off. Jim Husband's goal against Charlton was the result of one idea we had worked on and Steve Buckley's against Bristol was another."

"After Bristol had equalised they began to look like an away team. I think they decided they would do well to take a point from the game, and my impression was that they decided at half-time to close the game down and hold on to one point."

"We were always prepared to go looking for more goals, and that's why we sometimes let them come back at us. But the second goal released us from the pressure and I am in no doubt that the result was right."