METCALFE IS BOOKED AS BLACKBURN ROAR IN

STUART METCALFE
— booked after 19 minutes

JOHN BUTCHER
— confident in Rovers gol

By PETER WHITE

THERE WERE three bookings and several near misses in an incident-packed first half at Ewood Park this afternoon, but neither Blackburn Rovers nor Luton Town was able to break a goals deadlock.

Blackburn, who showed much more determination than in recent weeks, had slightly the better of things in a hard bruising encounter and could claim to be unlucky when they had what seemed a clear cut penalty refused.

Blackburn Rovers: Butcher, Hird, Bailey, Metcalfe, Keeley, Fazackerley, Brotherston, Craig, Radford, Foller, Birchenall. Sub: Waddington.

Luton Town: Aleksic, Price, Aizlewood, Hill, Turner, Donaghy, West, Fuccillo, Stein, Hatton, Moss. Sub: Jones.

Ref: R. Bridges (Deesside).

John Radford and Kevin Hird were back after injury for Rovers.

John Waddington was demoted to substitute and close - season sighning John Aston was left out against one of his former clubs.

There were some fierce tackles in the opening minutes with both sides going in hard and a liberal helping of rree kicks did not help the flow of the game.

Apart from long range efforts from Stuart Metcalfe and Radford for Rovers and shot by Ricky Hill and Bob Hatton at the other end neither goal was threatened in the first 15 minutes.

As Rovers began to gain in confidence, however, they had a very strong appeal for a penalty turned down when Paul Price appeared to commit a blatent foul on striker Joe Craig, pushing him in the back. But the referee waved play on.

Although the attendance was very poor the fans gave Rovers some enthusiastic backing in their bid to pull out of the second division's trouble one.

BOOKED

Referee Bridges was earning few friends in the crowd with some strange decisions and there were more jeers after 19 minutes when he booked Rovers' midfield man Mescalfe for a foul on Price. Worse things seemed to have gone unpunished.

Four minutes later, Rovers almost snatched the lead. John Bailey moved out of defence to make a run down the middge and unleashed a fierce drive from 25 yards. Luton keeper Milija Aleksic flung himself to his left and managed to palm the ball round his left hand post.

Metcalfe was taking a lot of stick from Luton, and, after 22 inuaes Mark Aizlewood went into the book for a bad foul on the midfield man.

There was a scare for Rovers after 34 minutes when Stein outpaced the defence but goalkeeper John Butcher came quickly and confidently off his line to clear the danger.

A minute later Hatton escaped the attention of Rovers' defence turned past Derek Fazackerley and hit a powerful shot just over.

Hill became the second Luton player to be booked — for a foul on Glen Keeley. The Rovers' defender had to have a lengthy spell of treatment but was able to continue.

Two minutes before half-time, Noel Brotherston, who was looking much livelier, had a shot well saved.

Half-time: Blackburn 0, Luton 0.

Rovers brought on Waddington for Keeley at the start of the second half and the action was soon coming thick and fast.

After 53 minutes, Rovers again had claims for a penalty turned down when Bailey was upended by Stein.

Martin Fowler was having a very good game in midfield and he combined with Radford to set up a chance for Craig. The Scot, however, rushing in at top speed, bungled the ball wide of the post.

Luton were looking increasingly dangerous and only two fine saves by Butcher prevented them taking the lead. First he flung himself to his right to fingertip round a fierce drive from Hatton. Then, at point blank range, he pushed a shot from Moss over the top.

Official attendance: 7,450.

Result: Blackburn 0, Luton