

BATTLE OF TACTICS IS WON IN THE DUG-OUT

Substitutions turn tide against QPR

THE DELICATE arts of football management turned a bunch of losers into Saturday afternoon heroes at Loftus Road as the Town shook promotion rivals Queens Park Rangers by fighting back in the last 20 minutes to earn a point that should have been beyond them.

In a recovery act well worth its top billing on Match of the Day, the team picked itself up from a string of disappointments to bounce back and leave QPR boss Tommy Docherty admitting: 'Luton were easily the best team in the second half.'

'They deserved their point, and it would have served our lot right if they had got both. They murdered us in midfield after the interval.'

The Town's recovery started after Andy Pearson, 19, was sent on as substitute for his first taste of league football, replacing the hapless Steve White.

Town attacks were given width and balance, lacking for the previous 69 minutes.

The first half had been painful to watch as the Town's re-shuffled side struggled to find a rhythm. Mal Donaghy was switched into the centre of the defence, and blotted out 25-goal Clive Allen, the Second Division's leading scorer, and his supremacy was probably the most telling factor of the day.

Donaghy ensured that Mike Saxby's absence was not a disaster in itself. Mark Aizlewood slotted in at left back to good effect and Graham Jones went in at right back in place of Kirk Stephens for his first game in the Second Division for over a year.

The defence took a long time to settle, with Jones under heavy pressure and not always well supported as Rangers attacked his flank.

There was no cover in the middle at all when Paul Goddard grabbed the first goal after only two minutes, sweeping in a low cross after Steve Burke had left Jones stranded.

The second goal in the 31st minute, started with a Town attack. Bob Hatton lost control after receiving a throw-in from Ricky Hill, and Jones, pushing up in support of the attack, was by-passed as Rangers swept down their left wing. Burke's cross was flicked on by Allen and Goddard collected his second goal.

At half-time the biggest defeat of the season looked on the cards, but Rangers eased off and the Town took over in midfield. As Tony Currie faded Tony Grealish and Alan West opened up. Rangers back-pedalled, and Ricky Hill joined in more and more attacks.

So did Paul Price and Aizlewood, and the Town produced the day's best football. Price smashed a shot against the crossbar and Stein tricked Gillard and shot against a post, with Chris Woods fumbling the ball and lucky to escape.

Then came the vital management decisions. Tommy Docherty decided to take off his skipper, Glenn Roeder — 'He wasn't competing against West and Grealish.'

I thought it was an astonishing decision, because Currie hadn't been competing since the first 15 minutes.

**REPORT by BRIAN SWAIN
PICTURES: MARK RICHARDS**

In the Luton dug-out manager David Pleat decided to take off a defender and introduce Pearson to a four-man strike force. Assistant Ken Gutteridge argued against that policy, and Mr Pleat was later man enough to admit that his number two was right.

White, the Town's most expensive reserve, came off to give Pearson the chance to show that he can one day replace David Moss, whose absence through injury was most marked in the first half.

Pearson did the simple things well, forcing the Rangers to spread their defence across the width of the pitch for the first time.

With their midfield second best, they came under increasing pressure.

The equaliser came from a sweet passing move, with West weighting a forward pass perfectly for Hatton. He took the ball round the outside of Bob Hazell and crossed accurately for Stein to head a picture goal, his seventh of the season.

That was in the 73rd minute, and eight minutes

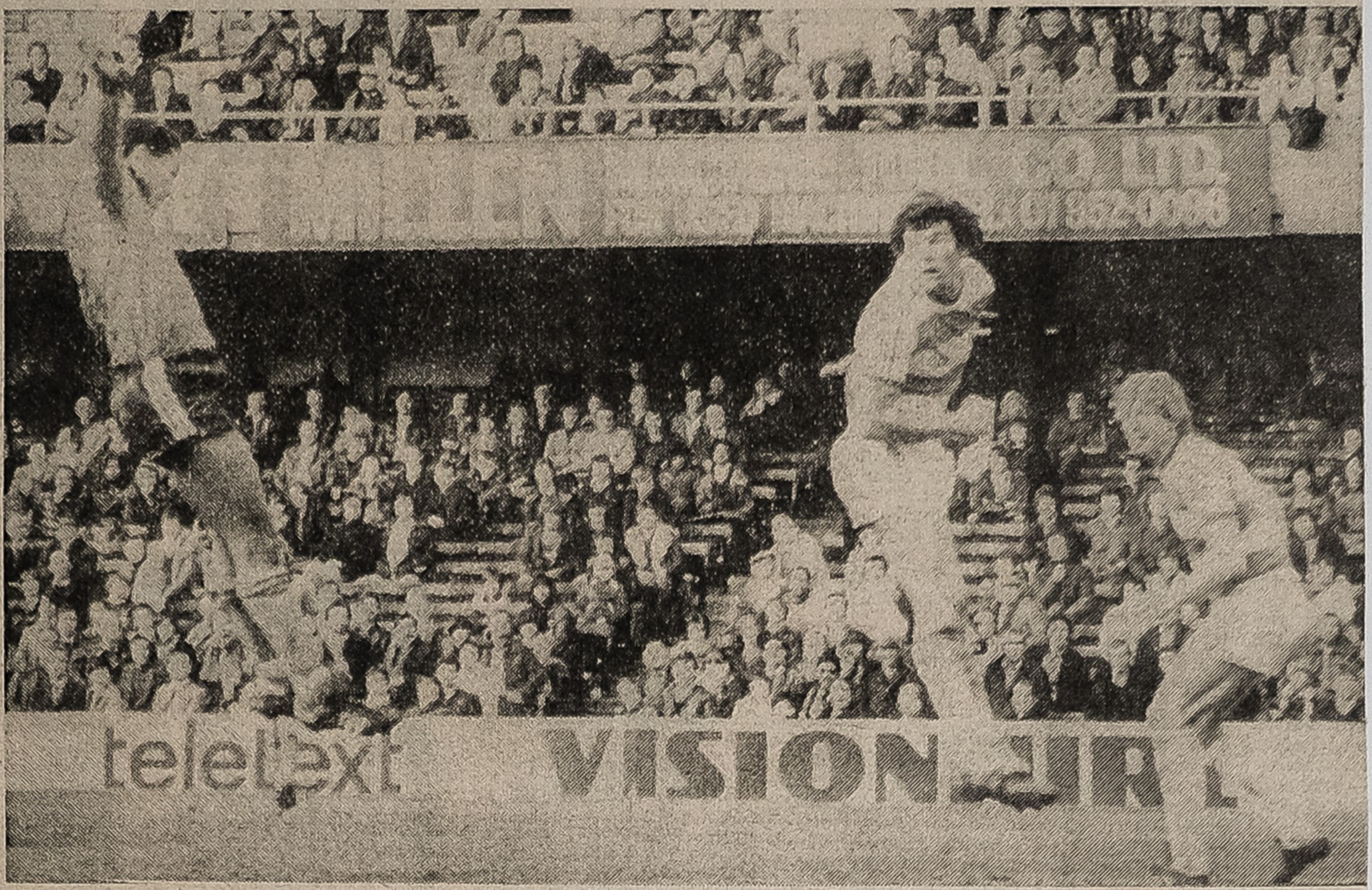
later came the deserved equaliser. Aizlewood attacked down the left, and his long cross left the goalkeeper panic-stricken as Hatton tried to win the ball.

Woods managed to punch the ball out, but only weakly, and Hill's muscles bulged to ensure the header was directed accurately into the top of the net, too high for Hazell to clear off the line.

With three regulars out of the side, the result may well turn out to be the Town's best of the season, and Docherty had no complaints.

'You're always disappointed to lose a two-goal lead,' he said. 'But even when we were winning 2-0 Luton were playing so well. They put more passes together than we did.'

'I've told some of my players that they're just not good enough, and Luton proved it. I said earlier in the season that they're one of the best footballing sides in the Second Division, and I still think that.'



● UP, UP and away: Brian Stein, on the left, pulls clear of his marker to get in a perfect header and reduce the deficit to just one goal midway through the second half.

Match Details

QPR 2, LUTON TOWN 2
Half-time: 2-0

TOWN: Findlay; Jones, Aizlewood, Donaghy, Price; Grealish, Hill, West; Stein, Hatton. White (Pearson, 69 mins).

RANGERS: Woods; Shanks, Gillard, Hazell, Wickes; McCreery, Roeder (Harkouk, 56 mins), Currie; Goddard, Allen, Burke.

THE GOALS: Paul Goddard twice for Rangers, 2nd and 31st minutes; Brian Stein 73 mins, header from Bob Hatton's cross; Ricky Hill, 81 mins, header from Mark Aizlewood's cross after Hatton pressurised Woods.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Rangers five saved and five off target; Town three saved, six off target and two hit the woodwork.

ATTENDANCE: 15,054, with the loyal Town followers heard at their very best, even when their team was two down.

ENTERTAINMENT: Provided by Rangers in the first half, with the Town's second-half fightback the day's real pleasure.

REFEREE: Alex Hamil, Wolverhampton—played like both teams, very good at times and not so bright at others.

BOOKINGS: Mal Donaghy for a foul on Tony Currie, who had got away with something similar on Tony Grealish a few minutes earlier; Rachid Harkouk for a foul on Grealish.

Eight games to make up leeway

WITH PROMOTION contenders apparently trying to show that not one is a class above the rest, the Town's draw at Loftus Road left them in fifth place in the Second Division, two points below the top three, with eight matches to go to the end of the season.

Leaders Chelsea, 1-0 home winners over Orient, and Leicester City, who beat Burnley 2-1 at Turf Moor, were the only teams in the top eight to win.

Leicester moved up into second place because Birmingham lost at Cambridge, Tom Finney scoring one in the 2-1 home victory and thus doing a favour for his former clubs Luton and Sunderland.

The Second Division's only unbeaten home record was maintained at Roker Park, where Sunderland drew 1-1 with Swansea, while Newcastle also drew 1-1, at Cardiff.

The day's big shock was at Upton Park, as West Ham show every sign of proving David Pleat's prediction right — they have caught the League jitters after winning through to the FA Cup semi-finals.

Their second successive home flop defied explanation, because it was against relegation-bound Fulham, who hadn't won for three months. The Hammers scored first, and were later 2-1 ahead, but still managed to lose 2-3.

The win at Upton Park lifted Fulham off the bottom of the table for the

THE TOP TEAMS						
	P	W	D	L	F	A
Chelsea	34	20	4	10	57	45
Leicester	34	15	21	7	48	33
Birm'ham	33	17	7	9	46	31
QPR	34	15	9	10	42	42
Luton	34	13	13	8	55	39
Sun'land	33	15	9	9	53	37
Newcastle	34	14	11	9	43	36
West Ham	31	16	5	10	42	31

first time in 13 weeks, with Charlton taking their place. The only side in the division without an away win, Charlton managed to score three goals at Oldham, but conceded four.

Charlton have 20 points, Fulham 21 and Burnley, Saturday's visitors to Kenilworth Road, have 22, and those three teams need a miraculous combination of results to escape the drop — the next club up is Watford, six points clear of the bottom three despite losing 0-1 at home to Shrewsbury.

PLAYERS STRIKE A BLOW FOR FANS

WHY ARE so many uniformed commissioners at football grounds miserable old bods? I have found it to be the case at most clubs I visit, and it is a pleasure to report that one was well deflated at Loftus Road.

Supporters from Luton had gathered to welcome the Town's arrival. They crowded round for autographs as the players stepped off the coach.

The doorman, all uniform and petty officiousness, tried to clear them away, and told the players to get through the door to the dressing rooms quickly.

To their credit, they ignored him. The fans, most of them youngsters, got the autographs they wanted. I don't think the QPR custodian appreciated having his orders ignored, but I did.



● POINT-SAVER: Ricky Hill's equaliser on its way over the QPR defence towards the net.