

Companions of the road

81/82

By JOHN MOYNIHAN
Watford 1, Luton 1

ONCE AN adventurous, splendidly exciting first-half between the Second Division pacemakers at Vicarage Road had been followed by one of familiar, fairly tedious attrition, a point apiece seemed inevitable.

Nobody on either side seemed particularly displeased about the outcome judging from all the handshakes and bows to rival supporters afterwards.

Luton, with their impressive record, came back adroitly once they had got over initial stage fright which allowed Rostron a seventh minute goal with a flukey effort.

Stein's equaliser after 34 minutes could have been added to by Luton in the second-half when White, twice, and Moss had shots saved by the impressive Sherwood, but in fairness, three points for either side would have been over generous.

Watford, who lost 4-1 in the previous encounter last September, made an exciting start, rattling Luton with industry and flair. But an injury to Blissett before half-time, which led to his retirement after 48 minutes to be replaced by Armstrong, produced a negative rather than positive reaction.

Watford could look back with satisfaction to the opening period. A left-foot shot by Taylor might have deceived Findlay had it been less obvious and direct. No matter, they took the lead a minute later after combination between Blissett and Rostron on the left.

The chunky left back aimed a speculative cross to the far post which to everyone's amazement, settled snugly in the top corner of Findlay's net.

Rostron's darting retreat to the halfway line with arms raised was as ecstatic in style as Chris Duffy's winning sprint after scoring for Charlton against Burnley in the 1947 FA Cup final.

In this case the game was not on its last legs, and Watford found much hard work ahead. A wiggling volley by Lohman, which gave Findlay a nightmare or two before settling uncomfortably in his tummy, would have been a treasure had it gone in.

As it was, the resilient Horton rallied his troops in Luton's midfield and the visitors began to move forward with power and persuasion.

As Watford relaxed Hill found openings in a squarish defence. Once, Stein crept in to deliver a masterly inswinging 25-yarder on the turn which Sherwood swept away with a long, extended fork of an arm.

Luton refused to be brow-beaten, and earned a justifiable equaliser. Taylor had just worried Findlay again at the other end, and from the break Luton won a free kick. Horton sent Stevens away and his pass found Stein scurrying in from the right to shoot a right-footer into the near corner.

Luton might have gone ahead in the 37th minute when Hill headed Moss's astute cross against the bar, and after Blissett's retirement, Watford looked progressively uneasy against attacks down the middle.

Terry's booking for a nasty tackle on Stein was evidence of their nervous mood and Luton could have settled it had White, twice, and Moss taken advantage of open runs down the middle. But then Lohman might well have scored for Watford after Jenkins headed down Barnes' cross.

Watford: Sherwood; Rice, Rostron, Taylor, Terry, Bolton, Callaghan, Blissett (Armstrong, 48), Jenkins, Lohman, Barnes.

Luton: Findlay; Stevens, Alzlewood, Horton, Goodyear, Donaghy, Hill, Stein, White, Fucillo, Moss.

Referee: K Hackett (Sheffield).