

RUSHED OFF THEIR FEET

ONE of the many surprises of an amazing day at Anfield was the fact that shattered Luton Town still won praise and admiration after their worst defeat in nearly 20 years.

Liverpool had shown all the skill and talent that has made them Britain's top team in recent years. They deserved all six of their goals—and had another disallowed for offside—and were ruthless in a demonstration of the class gap between the best in the First Division and the rest.

For Luton fans it was torture to see their team as bit-part actors on a stage where Liverpool strutted with elegant excellence. Yet even I found a perverse pleasure at watching the best team performance I am ever likely to witness.

It was one of those days when everything Liverpool tried came off. "We'd have taken care of most teams on that form," said manager Joe Fagan.

"The big difference today was that we played well and got the goals. Other days they haven't been going in like that."

And he added a tribute to the Town: "A lot of teams come here and try to close

Ruthless champions are real smashers

**Report by Brian Swain
Pictures: Mark Richards**

the game down. They pack tight in defence and deny you space.

"But Luton tried to play the game as it should be played . . . and we profited from that."

The Town were on the ropes within five minutes of kick-off, when a reshuffled side found itself two down and chasing shadows as Liverpool played with simple but precise skill.

PURRED

Anfield purred at the smoothness and expertise of every man in a red shirt. They were so much on top that you wondered if they hadn't put an extra man or two on the field.

Goalkeeper Bruce Grobbelaar had such an easy afternoon that he had picked up his bag of bits and pieces five minutes or more before the whistle blew for half-time and at 90 minutes.

He was persuaded to

throw it back into the net when the Town had a late defiant flurry, with Paul Walsh shooting against the bar in the last minute.

Before then the Liverpool goalkeeper had been a spectator. He made just three saves, all simple, in the whole game, one from Brian Stein and two from free kicks by Raddy Antic. His only other work was to deal with a couple of crosses.

Ian Rush will be remembered as the goal king, completing a hat-trick by the 36th minute and adding two more in the second half.

Kenny Dalglish, the most glittering of the Liverpool stars, was gitted the fourth eight minutes before the interval with a long-range shot which went through and under Les Sealey.

The best goal of the match was Rush's fourth, nine minutes into the second half. It was typical of the day: Alan Kennedy raced up the left

wing, crossed high and hard to the far post, and Rush was perfectly placed.

He tried a volley which might have gone anywhere, but hit the top of the net because this was an afternoon when Liverpool could do no wrong.

MISSED

The Town were not as bad as the record books will suggest. They missed the injured David Moss, and with Trevor Aylott also ruled out by injury they kicked off with a 4-4-2 formation.

It never had a chance to settle down because Rush scored his first in just 75 seconds after Paul Elliott had blocked shots by Sammy Lee and Phil Neal. The rebound from the second block, true to the day's pattern, fell towards a red shirt and not a white one, and Rush did the rest with just a hint of offside in the air as he scored.

Mitchell Thomas had been brought in at left-back with Wayne Turner pushed into the problem midfield position.

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The prime requirement in that department was for solid tackling. Brian Horton did everything he could, but Turner, Ricky Hill and Antic all found it too much.

It was almost impossible to tackle Liverpool because they rarely bothered to take men on in midfield, simply passed the ball around with controlled freedom, knowing that a man would be making himself available.

Attacks were mounted down both flanks, with the full width of the pitch used and with defenders getting forward at will.

The Town's cause was hopeless at half-time when they were four down, yet they restored some pride in the second half with another reshuffled formation.

Antic was pulled back into a sweeping role, with Kirk Stephens and Thomas being asked to break forward more often.

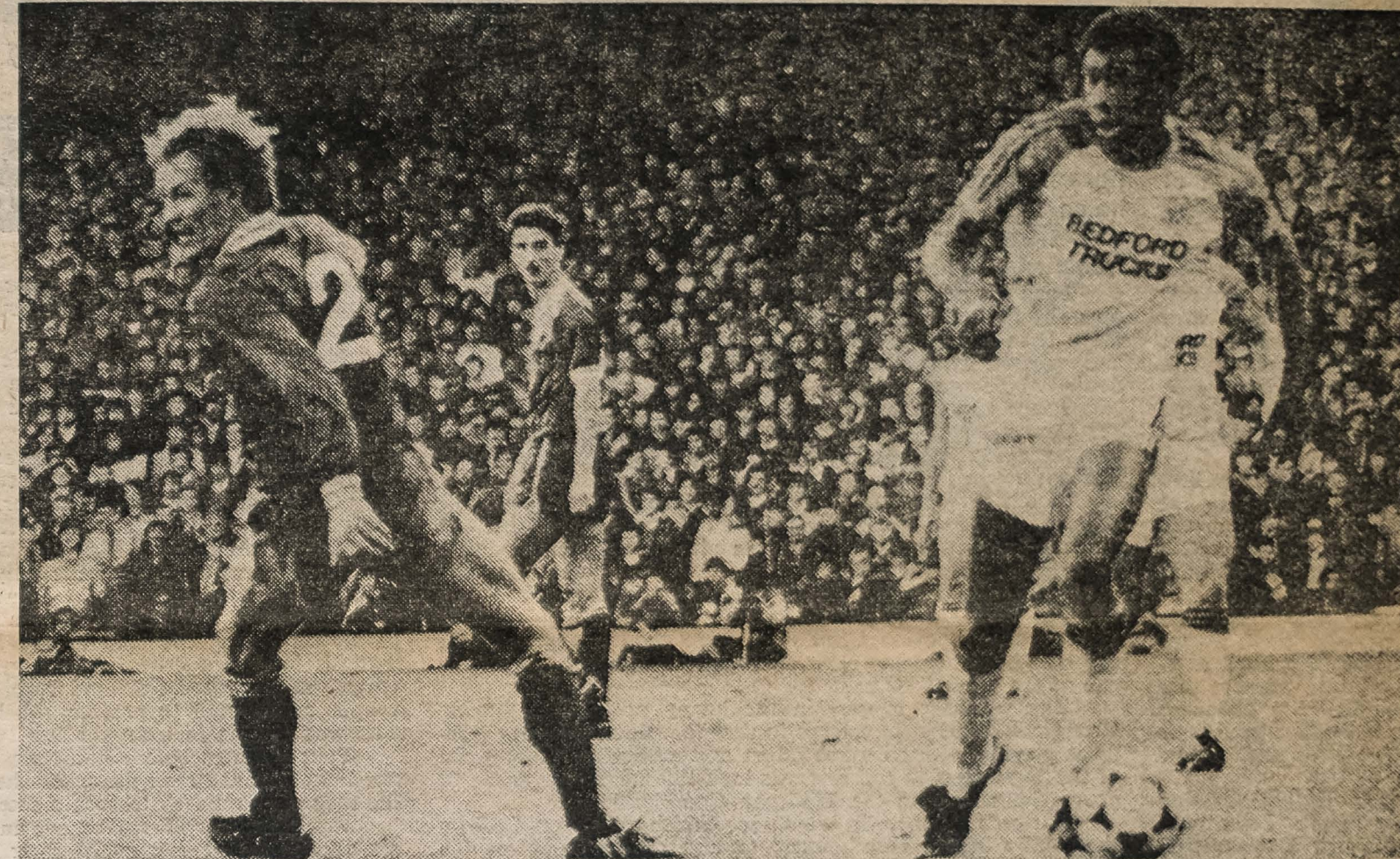
EFFECTIVE

That pattern looked a lot more effective, and at least gave the Town the look of a team that had a right to be in the same division as the champions.

Walsh shone, so far as anyone did, with his willingness to have a go, and threatened so much that at least one Liverpool pressman was wishing he and Michael Robinson would switch clubs.

The problem for the Town, as Rush said as he left the ground, was that goal-scoring is easy when you have ten men like Rush's colleagues in the team with the marksman.

The Town may not have done themselves justice, but it was a case of Liverpool being nothing less than brilliant. You can't play good soccer if the other side never lets you have the ball.



● LOST: Just for once Phil Neal is baffled. Mitchell Thomas is the man responsible.



● BLOCKED: Bruce Grobbelaar makes one of his three saves with Brian Stein the optimistic attacker.

Fans earn cheers as well

EVEN the Town's fans earned applause at Liverpool. Hundreds who made the journey were still singing "We'll support you ever more" as the sixth goal went past Les Sealey.

The Kop applauded, and sang back "We're so glad that you could come."

The Luton contingent included supporters fighting the Milton Keynes transfer. They posted their banners and at least one telephoned Liverpool FC on Monday to pass on a message to the Liverpool chairman, Mr John Smith.

Unless Luton directors explained it to

him, he must have been puzzled to hear a group of visiting supporters apparently calling for his resignation.

One group of Luton fans spent a remarkably happy hour in a Liverpool city centre pub on Saturday night explaining to seouse soccer-lovers what the row in Luton was all about.