

Bruised Thorpe gains revenge

96/97



● Marshall starts his goal scoring run



● Tony Thorpe is felled in the Rovers box

Luton Town 2 Bristol Rovers 1
BATTERED and bruised
Tony Thorpe bounced
back from receiving a set
of studs in the face to
slot home an injury time
spot kick winner.

The Hatters' striker – who needed stitches to a head wound after the match – volunteered to take the crucial kick just two minutes after being floored by Rovers' goalkeeper Andy Collett.

Referee Graham Pooley ruled the cynical assault just inside the box to be fair much to the wrath of the Kenilworth Road faithful.

But two minutes into injury time the villain of the piece turned into Hatters' saviour by awarding a penalty for hand ball.

Rovers protested vigorously but to no avail and Thorpe coolly dispatched the kick by sending the goalkeeper the wrong way.

But battling Rovers played Luton off the park for all but the last five minutes – and after snatching a late equaliser looked the more likely side to steal all the points.

When Pirates' substitute Jason Harrison pounced on Mitchell Thomas' error with ten minutes left

Report by PETE KENYON

it was the least the visitors deserved.

But Luton dug deep and finished with a flourish, culminating in the penalty, after Marcus Browning was adjudged to have handled Ceri Hughes' long throw under pressure from Kim Grant.

Rovers' Manager Ian Holloway hotly disputed the award after the match – claiming his man had only handled as a result of a shove in the back.

Earlier Dwight Marshall – starting his first game since breaking a leg last season – made it a dream comeback by netting on the half hour.

Thorpe sliced Rovers' defence open with a long ball and Marshall raced through to chip the ball over the advancing Collett, whose touch was not enough to stop the ball bobbling over the line.

But after that it was all Rovers – who had fired warning signals as to what was to come as early as the first minute when Jamie Cureton blasted over the bar with only Feuer to beat.

Feuer had to be alert to stop Harrison getting on the end of a woefully short Mitchell Thomas

backpass just before the break, and eight minutes after the restart Feuer again had to race out of his box to deny the same player.

On 61 minutes Peter Beadle got a lucky break after Davis' attempted clearance cannoned into his chest and took him clear.

But instead of trying to round the hulking figure of Feuer he chickened out and shot from long range.

Fifteen minutes from time a rare Luton forward foray ended with Marshall smashing a close range shot against the outside of a post. It was the little Jamaican's last piece of action as he was replaced by Ghanaian substitute Kim Grant.

Rovers finally got what they deserved on 80 minutes. Despite having four or five chances to clear their lines from a Bristol corner, Hatters conceded another corner which Thomas failed to clear and succeeded only in teeing up Harrison for a point blank poke into the net.

After the match Luton Manager Lennie Lawrence admitted Luton had been outplayed but paid tribute to the fighting spirit shown by his players immediately after conceding the equaliser.

"We showed spirit to come back in the last ten minutes. They played very well and set their stall to have a

real go at us.

"In the second half Bristol nearly overran us but we managed to hold out. It was all hands to the pump but we weathered the storm and I thought we were going to hold on to the lead.

"After they scored we dug deep and surged back and should have had a penalty before we did when Thorpe was flattened by their goalkeeper.

"Something happened there that's for sure, but the referee was clueless because he was 30 yards behind the play.

"Thorpe needed stitches in the dressing room afterwards and has a badly bruised eye but showed great courage to take the penalty we did get later on.

"We did not deserve any more than a draw."

He then paid tribute to Dwight Marshall, who he revealed he had been very dubious about starting.

"He is a yard short on pace but I was well pleased with his general play."

Luton: Feuer, James, Thomas, McLaren, Davis, Johnson, Hughes, Alexander, Showler (replaced by Guentchev 82mins), Thorpe, Marshall (replaced by Grant 75 mins). Sub not used: Skelton. Attendance: 5315.