

Hatters are not out of trouble yet

97/98

**Bristol Rovers 2
Luton Town 1**

By BILL COLE

JULIAN James broke two bones in his right leg as Luton crashed to an undeserved defeat yesterday.

THE point that the Hatters deserved just eluded them, despite the Town dominating the last 20 minutes of a game they lost by conceding two preventable early goals.

The late fightback yielded David Oldfield's 10th goal of the season, but try as they might, the equaliser just would not arrive.

For the second away game running, the fans of a play-off contender were

extremely relieved to hear the final whistle.

Next week's fixture at Brentford now takes on added significance, but any result Luton get at Griffin Park will have to be achieved without Julian James.

He broke his right leg in an off-the-ball challenge with former Stevenage Borough striker Barry Hayles.

James spent last night in Southmead Hospital in Bristol.

Paul McLaren was missing his second consecutive match with injury, Sean Evers being preferred as his replacement to fellow teenager Matthew Spring, who dropped to the bench.

The Town started the game well on top without creating a clear-cut chance but for the umpteenth time this season they went behind to a soft goal from their opponents' first attack.

Dwight Marshall made a

hash of a fifth-minute clearance but ex-Watford striker Peter Beadle still had the whole Luton back four in front of him when he swung a hopeful boot at the ball from 30 yards out.

It caught Kelvin Davies on his heels, he was simply too late to the ball and it squeezed in at the near post.

With average luck the Hatters would have been level four minutes later.

Rory Allen and Graham Alexander played a fine one-two to put the latter clean through on goal at an angle.

His shot across Lee Jones beat the keeper but hit the far post and went behind for a goal kick.

Rovers top scorer Hayles managed to wriggle free in the visitors' box but his shot was easily saved by Davis.

But on 14 minutes Hayles and Julian James clashed after James had cleared his lines and James came off by

far the worst of the two.

While Hayles was able to continue after attention to his knee, James had to leave the action for the second Saturday running.

This week it was straight down the tunnel to hospital on a stretcher after extensive treatment on the field from a concerned physio Clive Goodyear.

Alan White came on in his place and Darren Patterson moved to the right of the back four.

After Jamie Cureton for Rovers and Rory Allen for Luton should have made more of an opening apiece, Cureton shooting wide - Allen's effort from 10 yards being partially blocked by Steve Foster - Rovers scored again.

Thomas was having a real problem with the pace and on 31 minutes blatantly hauled him back on the edge of the penalty area.

For the second Saturday running, the lack of a regular right back cost Luton dear.

The free kick was floated beyond the far post for the unmarked Foster to head powerfully back and Andy Tillson to head home from close range.

Both Patterson and Davis volleyed high from Alexander corners and Oldfield shot wide before the Town trooped off at the half, not really outplayed but with a lot to do for a point.

Beadle almost repeated his first-half trick five minutes after the interval but Davis just managed to save this time.

The game then went to sleep for long periods, but Stewart Douglas, on as a substitute for the ineffective Dwight Marshall woke the Town up with 20 minutes to go.

He put the ball in the net from Sean Evers' intelligent through ball only to be denied by a very marginal offside decision.

Luton began to take over as Rovers disintegrated and domination was turned into a goal with a quarter of an hour to go. Allen set off on a crossfield run with the ball, he found Douglas unmarked in the inside left channel and the resulting short pass gave Oldfield the chance to fire low across Jones into the far corner of the net.

A minute later Douglas could have levelled matters.

Another sublime through ball from Evers put the striker clean through, but his first touch was too clumsy and Jones was able to spread



● **David Oldfield: Scored his tenth goal of the season**

himself, stopping Douglas' progress with his feet.

Steve Davis was pushed up front in a desperate effort to salvage a point and he won several headers in the Rovers' box.

But the ball wouldn't fall to a Town shirt until the game entered injury time. Douglas, fed by Davis, struck an excellent low shot on target, but Jones made a great save at full stretch to keep all three points at home.

After the game, Lennie Lawrence said: "I have no complaints about the challenge on James, although to be fair I need to look at the video. The

players were upset.

"The opening goal was a body blow and Julian being stretchered off was another body blow but we didn't start playing until we were two down but still could have had a point. But Brentford and Plymouth losing were better for us than getting a point here."

LUTON: Davis K, James (White 14), Thomas, Waddock (Spring 70), Davis S, Patterson, Marshall (Douglas 55), Evers, Oldfield, Allen, Alexander.

MOM Sean Evers. Attendance: 8,038.



● **Julian James: Broke his leg in two places and will miss the rest of the season**