

COMEBACK CAP'N ANDY SHATTERS THE HATTERS

98/99



By **CHRIS SWIFT**
at The Memorial Stadium

SKIPPER Andy Tillson made a Rovers return to remember as Ian Holloway's men picked up their first three points at home since October 20th at the Memorial Stadium today.

Tillson, making his first appearance since September, guided home the only goal of the game with a 26th minute header from the player-manager's free-kick.

It was just the boost Rovers needed to pick themselves up after last weekend's FA Cup exit at Barnsley, and the home side deserved a win in a game of few clear chances.

Rovers boss Ian Holloway made four changes to the side that had started in the FA Cup defeat at Barnsley last weekend.

David Pritchard, Steve Foster and Mike Trought were all left out of the squad as Robbie Pethick made his debut at right back, Andy Thomson returned after being cup-tied, and club skipper Andy Tillson made a come back after a long spell on the sidelines through injury.

Stephane Leoni had a place on the bench as Josh Low — subject of a possible move to Portsmouth — began in the left flank.

It was Low who almost helped give Rovers the perfect start in the second minute when he swung over a dangerous corner which just evaded Tillson beyond the far post.

Luton's first real attack in the seventh minute saw Irish marksman Stuart Douglas try to latch onto a long ball forward. Though it bounced awkwardly for Thomson, the central defender recovered well to shepherd the striker away from the ball as Tillson cleared up.

Two minutes later at the other end, Holloway found Rob Trees with a chip, and the Mancunian's left-foot cross was only an inch too high for the on-rushing Jamie Cureton.

New boy Pethick was soon involved with a good pass to Jason Roberts inside the box, but the striker just broke too early as he went for a return pass from Cureton.

Luton threatened again in the 15th minute when Graham Alexander's diagonal ball into the Rovers box was laid off for Michael McIndoe, whose shot was charged down for a corner.

Holloway almost lost the ball in midfield, but made amends when he sent Roberts sprinting free down the left. The marksman reached the bye-line and cut the ball back towards the near post, where Andre Scarlett was back to scramble the ball away.

Both sides were putting passes astray as the game went through a scruffy period with 20 minutes gone, with a fresh wind not helping either side's control.

Luton won a corner when Thomson blocked Scarlett's near-post shot, and Lee Jones was out well to safely gather Ray McKinnon's corner.

As Roberts chased Jones' clearance, he was pulled back by Alexander. Holloway floated the free-kick deep into the six-yard box, where **TILLSON** out-jumped his marker to guide a header past the sprawling Kelvin Davis and inside the far-post.

It was the perfect way for the captain to mark his comeback after the tendonitis problem that had kept him out since September.

There was almost a second for Rovers on the half-hour mark as Sean Dyche almost made a mess of a header from Jones' huge clearance. It fell for Roberts, whose fierce shot on the turn was only just kept out of the net by Davis.

Dyche, on loan from rivals Bristol City, was getting the traditional hostile welcome from Rovers fans.

Luton's back line looked susceptible to the pace of Rovers' front two and survived a few close offside calls, not least when Roberts tried to sprint onto an angled through ball from Pethick with 34 minutes gone.

Jones was finding real distance with some wind-assisted clearances, and Davis had to be out smartly to kick the ball away from Cureton before the two Rovers strikers linked up with some neat inter-play only for Roberts to be crowded out.

Only a last-gasp tackle from Alan White on the edge of his won box denied Roberts as the Rovers marksman threatened to burst through in the 40th minute. Rovers were having the best of it now, and an offside flag halted Luton in their tracks as they tried to relieve the pressure.

A mistake by McKinnon allowed Holloway to find Cureton down the left. The ball broke for Low, whose cross into the box was dealt with by the Hatters' back line.



No way through: This time Rovers striker Jason Roberts is crowded out by the Luton defence

TEAM CHECK

BRISTOL ROVERS

Lee Jones	1
Robbie Pethick	2
Trevor Challis	3
Rob Trees	4
Andy Thomson	5
Andy Tillson (cap)	6
Jamie Shore	7
Josh Low	8
Ian Holloway	9
Jamie Cureton	10
Jason Roberts	11
Stephane Leoni	12
Gary Penrice	13
David Lee	14

LUTON TOWN

Kelvin Davis
Graham Alexander
Alan White
Michael McIndoe
Sean Dych
Marvin Johnson (cap)
Andre Scarlett
Paul McLaren
Stuart Douglas
Gary Doherty
Ray McKinnon
Stuart Fraser
L'Andry Zahana Cain
Tresor Kandol

Referee: George Cain (Seaforth, Mersyside)
Weather: Sunny & cool

HALF-TIME: BRISTOL ROVERS 1 LUTON TOWN 0

Rovers carved out the first opening of the second half in the 48th minute when Cureton burst on to a long clearance on the edge of the Luton box, jinxed his way inside the area, but saw Marvin Johnson's outstretched leg divert the ball to safety.

Next the little marksman tried to take advantage of Tillson's delivery deep into the Hatters' box, but couldn't get control and Johnson was again able to complete a clearance.

Luton hadn't created a real chance in the first half, but had an opportunity in the 53rd minute when Gary Doherty's angled run across the face of the Rovers box brought the shot which Jones did well to parry.

As Luton won another narrow offside decision, Roberts reacted angrily, claiming he'd been caught by Alan White's elbow after the whistle had gone, and the niggles between the two continued off the ball.

Pethick was having a strong game on his debut and put

in a great tackle to deny Doherty before putting in a good ball forward towards Cureton.

After Trevor Challis had been caught by a late challenge from Scarlett, Low raced to the bye-line, but Trees could only head his deep cross into the arms of the keeper. Scarlett was then booked for his lunging tackle, which had left the Rovers left-back needing treatment.

Rovers nearly extended their lead on the hour when Roberts used his strength to get the better of Dyche and touch the ball through to Cureton, whose shot was palmed away at full stretch by the diving Davis.

Rovers had a spell of pressure from the resulting corner, and won another straight afterwards.

Luton's defence all converged on the same ball as Holloway floated a free-kick into the box, and Thomson's header from the resulting corner was deflected into the arms of the waiting Davis.

Play went from end to end as Challis led a charge down the left for Rovers, but his cross was over-hit and Luton broke through Douglas.

Though he got past Tillson, the Luton marksman saw Jones block his shot comfortably.

Rovers launched another spell of pressure as they won a couple of free-kicks around the Luton box and the visitors made their first change of the game in the 74th minute when L'Andry Zahana Oni came on for Scarlett.

Luton made another change in the 77th minute when Tresor Kandol replaced McIndoe.

Rovers had a narrow escape in the 78th minute when their defence opened up as Douglas burst towards the box, eventually firing just wide of Jones' left-hand post.

Rovers made their first change with around 10 minutes left as Gary Penrice came on to replace Low, and Cureton almost added to the slender lead.

His right-foot shot was deflected a foot wide of the post, but Rovers had a late flurry of pressure before a corner from Trees was safely grasped by Davis.

Luton were throwing men forward in a desperate hunt for an equaliser, but Roberts was offside at the other end.

Jones was twice up well to catch as Luton tried the aerial route to goal, and Oni put another shot wide from 18-yards as he just evaded the outstretched leg of Pethick.

There was a nervous moment when Luton threw men forward at a throw-in until McKinnon fired over the top as the game moved into stoppage time.

A great challenge from Penrice sent Trees cutting in from the right, but Davis was down to make a one-handed save as Roberts waited for the pass.

ATTENDANCE: 6,361