

Sad Hatters fail to shine

98/99

LUTON'S depleted side put on a battling second half display that didn't quite have the spark to reverse an entirely preventable first half goal from Rovers.

After the overnight sensation of the David Kohler affair, Town would have been pleased to get on the pitch and play.

Mind you, a number of regulars could not do that because of the Town's increasing injury list. Harrison, Spring, Evers, Fotiadis, Gray, Thomas and Showler were all ruled out unfit, and McGowan was missing suspended.

There was an early resumption of hostilities between Sean Dyche, on loan from Bristol City, and Rovers' player manager Ian Holloway, after a controversial clash in the last Bristol derby game last year.

Their aerial coming together resulted in them both ending up on the seat of their pants, but with no harm done.

Unsurprisingly, the reshuffled Town side had difficulty getting their game together early on as the match was battled out in midfield.

Michael McIndoe, playing on the left, produced a good cross just a little too long for Doherty, and then a shot that looked like finding the target, but was deflected over.

But on 25 minutes it was Rovers who took the lead. Graham Alexander was annoyed to have a free-kick awarded against him, and presumably was even more upset seconds later when a goal resulted from it.

Holloway floated it in from 40 yards and Andy Tillson, totally unmarked in the six yard box,

**Bristol Rovers 1
Luton Town 0
By BILL COLE**

rose to head down past Kelvin Davis. The keeper seemed to have it covered as it bounced, but it beat his despairing dive to end up in the net.

The home side almost doubled their lead four minutes later when Dyche got a far from positive header to a long high ball, and Jason Roberts got in a close range shot. Luckily Davis got his body behind it to save because it evaded his grasp.

The Hatters gradually came together to match Rovers, but Roberts was proving a real handful for Marvin Johnson who was, nevertheless, giving another skipper's display at the heart of the defence.

When Roberts did evade Johnson and raced clear, Alan White stopped him with a magnificent tackle.

Town boss Lennie Lawrence must have issued instructions to his midfield to push up more often and Luton started the second half the better for it.

Former Norwich striker Jamie Cureton took advantage of the space and almost got clear but Dyche, constantly booed by the home fans for his City connections, scooted across to clear superbly.

Town were running the game now and soon both Doherty and Douglas had strong runs and power shots. Doherty's drive forced a fine save from Lee Jones, whereas Douglas' effort fizzed inches wide of the far post.

Doherty beat Jones to a high ball but the loose



■ *Stuart Douglas feels the pressure of a tackle from Andy Tilson and Trevor Challis*

ball would not fall to an orange shirt, and Douglas, after another run, showed too much of the ball to Jones, who dived splendidly at his feet to gather.

In between Davis had to be on his toes to pull off a fine diving save from Cureton's drive.

Lawrence brought on Landry Zahana-Oni for Scarlett and Tresor Kandor for his league debut, and they both laid on half chances for Douglas, who was narrowly wide of the target both times.

It was practically all one-way traffic. Zahana-Oni shot over when fed by a beautiful ball over the defence from White, and from one of a number of scrambles in the home area that produced some desperate defencing, McKinnon fired wild and high.

Despite all the Town pressure they did not get that bit of luck they needed to pierce Rovers'

defence, aided by some quality goalkeeping from Lee Jones, and the home side clung on to all three points.

After the match Lennie Lawrence said about the Kohler affair: "No matter who was involved, for it to end in that fashion was a disgrace. I have been through this before at Middlesbrough and Charlton where it was a signal for everybody, directors, fans, staff and players, to pull together."

"We need that on Tuesday which is a must win situation so we don't slide down the table any further."

Team: Davis, Alexander, White, McIndoe (Kandor, 77), Dyche, Johnson, Scarlett (Zahana-Oni, 73), McLaren, Douglas, Doherty, McKinnon. Sub not used: Fraser. Attendance: 6,361 (414 from Luton).



■ *Alan White gets in a midfield tackle against Ian Holloway*



■ *Andre Scarlett is out-jumped by Josh Low*