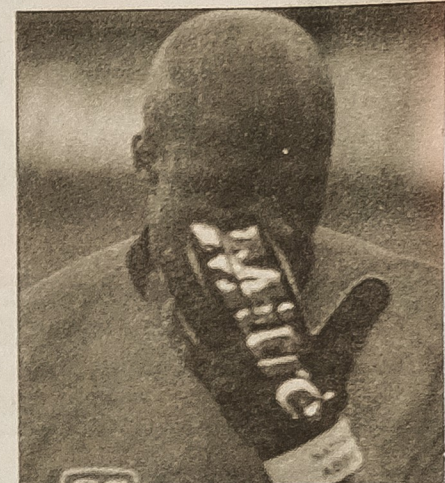


■ It's there: Phil Gray celebrates after scoring for the Hatters in the first half against Bristol Rovers



Abbey habit sinks promotion hopes



■ Tanny Abbey

ANY remaining Hatters' play-off hopes died along with Tanny Abbey's credibility in this drubbing.

Luton's number one was booed by his own fans after gifting the visitors two goals with two horrendous blunders.

It was always going to be difficult for Luton boss Lennie Lawrence's men coming up against the team with the meanest defence in division two.

But it all started well for Hatters, who looked the brighter side early on.

Liam George had a tame effort cleared off the line after just six minutes and seven minutes later the Hatters were in front.

Stuart Douglas – a constant threat to the Rovers' defence in the first half – broke down the right flank.

He beat Steve Foster for pace and crossed for Phil Gray, who had the easy task of side-footing home from three yards out.

But just a minute later, Rovers bombarded the Luton goal with three consecutive corners.

The game turned on a Douglas effort which clipped the post and Abbey's first mistake of the

Luton Town 1 Bristol Rovers 4
Report by **MARTIN BUHAGIAR**
Pictures by **ANDY HANDLEY**
and **MATT SIMMONDS**

afternoon. A long ball from Doherty in the 25th minute found the Luton striker, who again outpaced Foster.

His cross shot shaved the post and was cleared by Andy Tilson.

His long ball fell to the feet of Abbey, who controlled the ball but then sliced it under no pressure.

Robbie Pethick found Jason Roberts, who raced onto the ball and had the easy task of placing past the under-fire keeper.

Abbey's next touch was met with a chorus of boos and jeers from the Hatters' faithful.

Ten minutes later Douglas was given a chance to spare his keeper's blushes when a Taylor cross found him unmarked in the Rovers' box.

But he hit his shot straight at Rovers' keeper Lee Jones.

Within three minutes, the visitors were in front.

A long ball forward from Pethick was initially caught by Abbey but for some reason he



■ Adam Locke tussles for the ball

dropped the ball at the feet of ex-Norwich City striker Jamie Cureton.

He controlled the ball and chipped it into the top left-hand corner.

The second half was dominated by the visitors but there was nothing Abbey could do about Rovers' third goal.

Cureton cut inside Taylor, beat Johnson and fired the ball into the top corner with the outside of his boot.

That was Cureton's 19th goal of the season and his fourth against Hatters.

Luton came back into the game after that.

And Doherty nearly scored when he rose above the Rovers' defence to head a Spring corner towards goal.

But Jones was on hand to pull off a save once again.

In injury time Roberts got his second goal when he latched onto Cureton's pass and half-volleyed past Abbey.

Rovers now sit in joint first place with Preston following their draw with Bury.

After the game Lawrence dropped his biggest hint yet that Abbey may be on his way out.

He said: "It was plain to see from that game that the 11 players on the pitch can't go forward.

"I'll have to look at the situation. This was the blackest day of the season so far.

"What happened in the penalty area cannot be allowed to happen and that cost us the game.

"At half time we told Abbey to pull himself together because mistakes like that cost people games."

Luton: Abbey, Boyce, Watts, Doherty, Johnson, George, (Fotiadis, 70), Locke, Spring, (White, 64), Gray, Douglas, Taylor. Subs not used: McGowan, Fraser, Tate.

Attendance: 6,520.

Man of the match: Douglas.