

BRISTOL ROVERS 3 LUTON TOWN 3

Nationwide Division Two

ROVERS SLIP UP IN SIX-GOAL THRILLER

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ROVERS wasted the chance to claim their first home league win of the season when they failed to capitalise on a two-goal lead against Luton.

Steve Foster had nodded the home side in front with his second goal of the season on 14 minutes, and Nathan Ellington extended the margin before Tresor Kandol pulled a goal back for the visitors on the stroke of half-time.

Though Ellington restored the two-goal cushion with his second goal of the game just after the hour mark, Kandol scored again after 72 minutes and Liam George levelled the scores with six minutes remaining.

It was a disappointing outcome for the Gas, even though they stretched their unbeaten start of the season to 12 matches.

Rovers made one change from the side that had started the mid-week win over Everton, Mark Walters making his first start of the season at left back as Marcus Andreasson came out of the squad.

That meant Che Wilson starting in central defence, and there was also a place on the bench for Moussa Dagnogo, the 28-year-old French striker just signed on a three-month contract.

Nick Culkin made a confident start in the Rovers goal when he advanced to catch a cross from Peter Thomson.

At the other end Vitalijs Astafjevs was soon breaking towards the by-line, pulling the ball back across goal, only for Matthew Taylor to head clear.

Astafjevs had soon found his touch and was beginning to spray some useful passes around as he tried to get Rovers moving forward.

He found the advancing Lewis Hogg just outside the Luton box after 10 minutes, but the youngster's downward header towards Nathan Ellington was mopped up by the Hatters' defence.

Walters, who had been in such impressive form after coming off the bench against Everton, won Rovers their first corner after 13 minutes when he skipped past Stuart Fraser.

It came to nothing, but Rovers soon won possession back as they set up the move which saw them take the lead.

Scott Jones launched a superb cross-field ball towards Marcus Bignot, and the right-wing back sent over a measured cross which saw **FOSTER** rising above the Hatters' defence to nod home from inside the six-yard box.

It was a great start for Rovers, and Bignot soon had two more chances to put them further ahead.

He fired the first over the bar from the edge of the box. Then, when Walters again skipped down the left and saw his cross take a looping deflection, it fell once more to the former Crewe man, who again could only send a finish over the top.

Rovers almost carved out an opening with 23 minutes gone when a throw-in from the right was helped on towards Hogg, but the youngster's shot was charged down for another corner.

What a goal!

Vitalijs Astafjevs congratulates Steve Foster, who scored first for Rovers



By **CHRIS SWIFT**

at The Memorial Stadium



Luton staged their first real threat after 24 minutes when the ball broke to Liam George just outside the box.

His shot saw Culklin dive to his right to make a block, which earned the Hatters their first corner of the afternoon.

The visitors retained possession from Rovers' clearance and George sent over a teasing cross from the right, which Tresor Kandol rose to meet, sending a header narrowly over the top from 12 yards.

Luton were presented with an unexpected chance to level after 28 minutes when the ball was threaded through to Thomson, who had slipped the offside trap but could only fire wide of Culklin's left-hand post from the edge of the box.

Rovers increased their lead after 31 minutes when Walters picked the ball up 10 yards inside the Luton half, got passed Fraser and crossed for **ELLINGTON** to head home his fifth goal of the season.

Luton tried to summon up an immediate response and were only inches away from pulling a goal back when George found Kandol with a side foot cross, which the tall striker headed against the top of the Rovers bar after 34 minutes.

When Adam Locke slipped the ball inside Wilson towards the advancing George, it took an excellent saving tackle from Bignot to halt the charge from the Hatters midfield.

Another incisive ball from Astafjevs sent Walters galloping away down the left again. But Julian Watts just managed to nod the ball clear before it could reach a Rovers player.

Fraser had to stoop low to head away a dangerous cross from Ellington after Astafjevs again showed good vision to

find the striker advancing down the right.

But Simon Bryant's forward pass was over-hit as he attempted to find Clinton Ellis moving into space.

Paul McLaren had got in a crucial tackle to divert the ball away from Walters as the winger again went on a charge down the left.

The resulting corner eventually reached Foster towards the corner of the box, but the central defender stroked his shot across goal and wide of the far post.

Luton did pull a goal back deep into first half stoppage time when Taylor's corner wasn't held by Culklin, who was under pressure from Watts, and the ball ran loose for **KANDOL** to prod home from close range.

HALF-TIME: BRISTOL ROVERS 2 LUTON TOWN 1

LUTON made a change for the start of the second half, with veteran Mark Stein replacing Thomson.

The former Chelsea striker almost got on the score sheet within seconds of the restart, when he pounced on a loose ball inside the Rovers box, only for Culklin to palm the effort away.

It was a sign that the Hatters, who had squandered two or three good opportunities in the first half, were still a danger as they looked to build on their fight back.

Rovers made their first switch after 49 minutes, when Trevor Challis replaced Clinton Ellis.

The former QPR defender dropped into the left back berth, with Walters moving up front to partner Ellington.

Challis was soon in action when he charged down a shot from Locke, and the crowd were beginning to get restless as Rovers struggled to regain the rhythm they had shown before the break.

Rovers were being forced onto the back foot as the Hatters continued their bid to take the game to the home side, as Luton sensed a way back into a game that had looked to be drifting away from them.

It took another good header from Challis to get in a vital clearance when George crossed dangerously from the left as the Hatters continued to have the upper hand.

A huge clap of thunder marked the start of a downpour with an hour gone—although the sun was still shining brightly. There was another ray of sunshine for Rovers seconds later when Bignot provided a ball across the box, which led to **ELLINGTON** firing home his second goal of the game on the turn after 61 minutes.

More good work by Astafjevs set up Challis with a chance to cross, but Walters was just unable to control the ball inside the box. The former Swindon man left the field to applause moments later as Dagnogo made his first senior appearance from the bench.

In the 67th minute Challis was penalised for a challenge on substitute Gavin McGowan, who had replaced Fraser early in the second half. McGowan became Luton's first caution for a tackle that left Ellington needing treatment.

In the 72nd minute **KANDOL** capitalised on a loose ball to prod home Luton's second goal.

Rovers made their final switch with Dwayne Plummer replacing Ellington.

The game still looked in the balance. Luton came forward with George teeing up Kandol for another strike at goal, but this time Culklin went to his left to divert the ball around a post.

Then the Hatters made their final switch with Peter Holmes replacing Matthew Spring. Luton's efforts finally brought reward six minutes from time when **GEORGE** drilled a shot inside Culklin's right-hand post, the ball flying into the net off the woodwork.

Team Check

ROVERS

- 1 Nick Culklin
- 20 Marcus Bignot (c)
- 30 Scott Jones
- 9 Mark Walters
- 4 Steve Foster
- 29 Che Wilson
- 31 Simon Bryant
- 21 Lewis Hogg
- 15 Vitalijs Astafjevs
- 23 Clinton Ellis
- 18 Nathan Ellington
- SUBSTITUTES
- 6 Mark Foran
- 3 Trevor Challis
- 25 Dwayne Plummer
- 32 Matt Glennon
- 10 Moussa Dagnogo

LUTON TOWN

- 1 Mark Ovendale
- 17 Emmerson Boyce
- 5 Julian Watts
- 11 Liam George
- 13 Stuart Fraser
- 15 Matthew Taylor
- 4 Matthew Spring
- 7 Peter Thomson
- 18 Tresor Kandol
- 8 Paul McLaren (c)
- 12 Adam Locke
- SUBSTITUTES
- 20 Peter Holmes
- 10 Mark Stein
- 2 Gavin McGowan
- 22 Dean Brennan
- 16 Nathan Abbey

Attendance:

7,901

Referee:

George Cain

Saturday Live