

LUTON TOWN 0 BRISTOL ROVERS 0

00/01

Nationwide League Division Two



Ace chase: Anisah Owusu closes in on former City defender Julian Watts. Right, Marcus Bignott manages to get his cross in despite the attentions of Keith Rowland

REVIVED ROVERS PULL POINT OUT OF HATTERS

Team Check

LUTON TOWN

- 16 Nathan Abbey
- 17 Emmerson Boyce
- 5 Julian Watts
- 33 Richard Dryden
- 30 Petri Helin
- 15 Matthew Taylor
- 8 Paul McLaren (c)
- 39 Keith Rowland
- 12 Adam Locke
- 11 Liam George
- 10 Mark Stein
- SUBSTITUTES:
- 14 Andrew Fotiadis
- 9 Stuart Douglas
- 7 Peter Thomson
- 23 Jude Stirling
- 24 Scott Ward

BRISTOL ROVERS

- 1 Nick Culkin
- 29 Che Wilson
- 4 Steve Foster (c)
- 30 Scott Jones
- 3 Trevor Challis
- 20 Marcus Bignott
- 25 Dwayne Plummer
- 19 Simon Bryant
- 33 Mark McKeever
- 18 Nathan Ellington
- 11 Anisah Owusu
- SUBSTITUTES:
- 10 Justin Richards
- 21 Lewis Hogg
- 15 Vitalijs Astafjevs
- 23 Clinton Ellis
- 39 Ryan Clarke

Attendance:
7,405

Referee:
Paul Danson

ROVERS extended their unbeaten run to five matches as they secured another valuable point at relegation rivals Luton in a close game.

There had been few clear chances for either side before the break as defences dominated.

But the game opened up in the second half with opportunities at both end. Rovers thought they had grabbed a second half winner when Scott Jones nodded home a Marcus Bignott corner - only to see the effort ruled out because of an infringement inside the box.

Steve Foster was also foiled at close range and Nathan Ellington nodded against the bar just before the interval. But Paul McLaren had also rattled Rovers' woodwork in the opening minute and Liam George wasted a good opportunity to nod home the Hatters' winner after the break.

Rovers made one change to the side that won 2-1 at Bournemouth in midweek, Dwayne Plummer returning after a three match suspension in place of Lewis Hogg, who started on the bench.

A light fall of snow had been cleared from the pitch in the morning, leaving the surface perfectly playable for a match which saw two former Rovers bosses - Bobby Gould and Gerry Francis - watching from the stands.

Luton were the first on the attack and won a corner which was cleared by Trevor Challis. Then Matthew Taylor set up a chance for Mark Stein, only for the striker to scuff his shot.

The Hatters had another opening seconds later when Liam George burst through down Rovers' left, but he could only pull his shot across the face of goal.

The visitors were being put under the cosh in the opening minutes and they scrambled the ball away for another corner. As the ball eventually broke to Paul McLaren just outside the box, Luton skipper hit a speculative left-foot half-volley which bounced off the angle of Nick Culkin's post and bar.

Challis became the first booking of the game in the eighth minute for dissent after he was penalised for a foul on Petri Helin.

Rovers won their first corner after 11 minutes. Marcus Bignott's delivery was aimed towards Mark McKeever but was deflected high in the air, allowing keeper Nathan Abbey to collect.

Moments later, Rovers carved out their first chance, but Anisah Owusu fired his shot from the edge of the box straight at Abbey, who was able to make the save.

Plummer had made an impressive start on his return to the side, and was winning some useful balls in midfield in a bid to get the visitors moving forward.

There was a lengthy delay while Challis received treatment for a head injury, and the Pirates almost

By **CHRIS SWIFT**
at Kenilworth Road



created an opening when Simon Bryant fired the ball forward from midfield, only to evade both the onrushing Ellington and the goal.

Ellington did well to hold off three Luton defenders down the right flank after 20 minutes and won the visitors a free-kick. McKeever swung it into the box but Abbey was eventually able to collect after a scramble in the goalmouth.

Luton threatened again when Helin crossed from the right and Culkin was only able to punch partially clear. But George sent a header looping high over the bar.

As Luton broke forward again just after the half-hour, Stein and George threatened to combine until a late offside flag halted the Hatters in their tracks.

The home side were again caught trying to steal a few yards as Keith Rowland burst forward attempting to latch on to a defence-splitting pass from Adam Locke.

McLaren was lucky not to be cautioned for a challenge which left Simon Bryant writhing on the floor. The England Under 18 international midfielder was stretched off with his right leg in a protective brace, and the injury did not look to be good news for Rovers. Vitalijs Astafjevs came on to replace him.

Rovers surged forward with Ellington evading a lunging tackle by Richard Dryden and crossing, with the Hatters grateful to hack the ball away for a corner. The ball eventually broke to Astafjevs, who brought a save from Abbey with an angled shot.

Rovers almost stole the lead seconds before the interval when Bignott sent Wilson bursting down the right. Ellington rose to meet the full-back's cross and his header looped over Abbey but bounced back off the crossbar.

HALF-TIME:
BRISTOL ROVERS 0
LUTON TOWN 0

ROVERS had began the second half attacking the Oak Road End housing the travelling fans, but it was Luton who won the first corner after the interval.

Steve Foster headed it clear, and as the visitors broke at the other end, Ellington was cautioned for upending Taylor near the corner flag.

Former Bristol City defender Julian Watts was left holding his head in despair when he nodded over from 14 yards after being presented with a free header from another corner.

Rovers almost carved out a 53rd minute opening when a fine ball from Wilson looked destined to find Owusu inside the box, but Emmerson Boyce stuck out a leg to hook the ball away.

The visitors were having a promising spell as Luton repeatedly gave the ball away and a fierce drive from Astafjevs on the edge of the box left Watts doubled up on the floor.

The home fans were getting on their teams' backs as Rovers kept them penned inside their own half.

Foster was next in the book for a challenge from behind on George just after the hour mark.

Rovers survived a scare when George threatened to turn inside the box, but Scott Jones stuck out a leg to foil the Hatters marksman.

Rovers almost forced a breakthrough in the 67th minute following a corner. It led to Bignott supplying a dangerous cross towards the far post, which just evaded Ellington and Owusu as they looked to force the ball home.

The Hatters then made their first change with Stuart Douglas replacing Stein.

Rovers were making more impact in the second half and thought they had taken the lead in the 69th minute when Jones nodded home a Bignott corner, but a linesman had his flag raised after spotting an infringement to cut short the visitors' celebrations.

Luton won a free-kick 20 yards out shortly afterwards, but Taylor fired his shot straight into the Rovers wall.

But as the Hatters continued to press Rowland sent over a dangerous cross which George rose to meet beyond the far post. However, the striker could only divert his header across the face of goal.

McKeever was only inches wide with a looping left-foot volley from 22 yards which dipped just the wrong side of Abbey's left-hand post.

Once more, Rovers looked poised to make the breakthrough in the 74th minute when Abbey failed to collect a free-kick. It fell for Foster in front of goal, but his effort was blocked by the grounded Watts.

The game was becoming an end-to-end affair as both teams looked for the crucial first goal, and Luton made another change with Jude Stirling replacing McLaren with ten minutes remaining.

The substitute had a chance to set up his strikers from the edge of the box, but the home fans again howled their disapproval as an ill-judged pass rolled straight to Culkin.

Rovers made their first switch with six minute left as Clinton Ellis replaced Owusu. Foster needed attention after taking a bang in the face while attempting to nod the ball away from Douglas.

Plummer, who had had an impressive game, tried his luck from 22 yards after being teed up by Astafjevs. But the midfielder could only scuff a shot which bobbled straight to Abbey.