

PIRATES' PRESSURE DELIVERS POINTS

01/02

Rovers took over at the top of the Third Division after an impressive performance in a five-goal thriller against Luton.

Nathan Ellington put the Gas ahead before Matthew Taylor levelled for the Hatters late in the first half.

David Hillier got his second goal in two games to restore the home side's advantage and Kevin Gall made it 3-1 with his first goal of the season 15 minutes from time. Though Lee Mansell pulled another goal back for the Hatters late in the game, the Pirates held firm to extend their 100 per cent record and make it four wins out of four.

In fact, the margin could have been much greater for Rovers as they taken a number of other good chances. But Martin Cameron and Ellington both saw a number of good opportunities go to waste.

Rovers made one change from the side that started the midweek Worthington Cup win at Wycombe, with Cameron in for his first start of the season. The Scottish marksman replaced Ross Weare, who had failed a fitness on a calf problem.

Luton were the first on the attack as Ronnie Mauge conceded a corner in the opening minute. Ian Hillier supplied a dangerous cross from the right, but former Bristol City player Adam Locke put a header well wide. In Rovers' first foray forward, Che Wilson attempted to send Ellington clear, but an offside flag went up as the youngster fired the ball into the net.

Carl Griffiths tried his luck with a snap left-foot volley from the edge of the box, but Scott Howie was well positioned to save his angled attempt.

Rovers were just a fraction away from taking the lead in the 11th minute when Luton defender Emmerson Boyce almost fatally delayed a clearance. Cameron reacted quickly to close him down and blocked the attempt, but the ball ricocheted agonisingly a foot wide of keeper Carl Emberson's left-hand post.

David Hillier, who had notched his first Gas goal in midweek, almost set up Ellington for the opener after 13 minutes with a good through ball, but Emberson plunged to his left to grasp the striker's shot.

Rovers threatened another set piece goal when Andy Thomson rose to meet David Hillier's 18th minute corner, but the central defender put his header just a foot too high.

Rovers should have taken the lead in the 27th minute when Scott Jones fed Ellington inside the box and the youngster set up Cameron with a measured pass.

But the Scot pulled his shot wide of Emberson's right-hand post from eight yards out when he should at least have hit the target.

High jump: Rovers' Che Wilson fails to make it to the ball in the home clash against Luton



By **CHRIS SWIFT**
at the Memorial Stadium



However the Gas did break the deadlock two minutes later after a flowing move which took them out of defence with Thomson feeding Gall up the right.

He did well to advance and tuck the ball inside for **ELLINGTON**, who steered a neat finish past Emberson at the near post for his second goal of the season.

Rovers almost increased their lead shortly afterwards when Emberson could only parry a looping shot from Gall, but it was scrambled away for a corner as Ellington closed in on the rebound.

Rovers kept the pressure on though, as they put together some of their best football so far.

Ellington had another glorious chance 10 minutes from the break when the flag stayed down when he moved on to another pass forward from Thomson, but Emberson was able to make a smothering stop and the Luton defenders finally scrambled the ball away.

Ellington was in eye-catching form and almost sent David Hillier through, but Boyce had blocked off his break from midfield. Emberson had to go full length to his right to keep out a well-struck 28 yard free-kick from Jones as the interval neared.

Luton equalised out of the blue in the 42nd minute after a slip at the back was punished ruthlessly. Kevin Nicholls pumped a free-kick towards the Rovers box and Wilson's slip allowed **TAYLOR** a sight of goal. The left wing-back rifled a low shot across Howie and inside the far post.

It was a blow for Rovers, who wasted a great chance to restore their lead a minute later when Cameron badly miscued a volley from eight yards with the net gaping. The home side must have gone off at the interval wondering if some of their first-half misses were going to cost them dear.

HALF-TIME
BRISTOL ROVERS 1
LUTON 1

Luton made a couple of changes for the second-half, Adrian Forbes replacing Griffiths up front, and Lee Mansell taking the place of Paul Hughes.

There was a fright for Rovers soon after the restart when Foster left a back pass to Howie slightly short and the keeper's clearance cannoned off Steve Howard across the face of goal. Howie did well to catch a dangerous cross-shot from Ian Hillier on his own line.

Luton survived another goal line scramble after 55 minutes when Ellington rose to nod goalwards. Cameron was again unable to provide a finish and the Hatters eventually cleared their line.

Howie had to be alert when Boyce hoofed a huge bouncing clearance towards the Rovers goal from deep in his own half. The keeper was well positioned as the ball bounced on top the bar and behind for a goal kick.

The game was still very much in the balance as it moved into the final half hour. But it swung Rovers way again in the 64th minute with a bizarre goal – although the home fans weren't complaining.

Mauge fed the ball into the box towards David **HILLIER**, whose attempt on goal took a deflection on its way into the net. Although it appeared to have touched Cameron, it was the former Arsenal man who was being congratulated by his teammates – and he looked delighted to claim his second goal in five days.

Rovers increased their lead in the 75th minute – thanks to sheer perseverance.

Thomson, who had enjoyed another impressive performance, fed Cameron down the right and although the strike battled his way to the bye-line, his cross looked to be heading straight to Emberson.

But the alert Ellington nipped in front of the keeper to steal possession and steer the ball back to **GALL**, who side-footed home a measured finish from 16 yards.

Gall led another Rovers break up the right, but after forcing his way into the box he could only stab his attempt over the top while under pressure.

It was no less than the Pirates deserved for their best performance so far this campaign – and another big crowd were in jubilant mood.

Luton made their final change two minutes later when Stuart Douglas replaced Ian Hillier.

Luton pulled another goal back in the 81st minute after Douglas forced his way between two defenders to scramble in a shot which rebounded into the path of the on-rushing **MANSELL**, who forced it high into the net. It set up a nervous last few minutes for Gasheads, doubtless remembering that their team had thrown away a two-goal lead in the corresponding fixture last season. Rovers almost restored their two goal cushion moments later though, Ellington sending in an angled header from Gall's cross which Emberson clawed out from just inside his right-hand post.

And there was another let-off for the Hatters moments later when Thomson skimmed a post from a 25-yard free-kick. Another fine pass from Hillier picked out Gall cutting in from the right, but the youngster shot over the top after bursting into the box.

Saturday Live

Team Check

ROVERS

1	Scott Howie
12	Che Wilson
5	Andy Thomson (capt)
4	Steve Foster
24	Mike Trought
30	Scott Jones
10	Kevin Gall
9	Ronnie Mauge
8	David Hillier
14	Martin Cameron
18	Nathan Ellington
SUBSTITUTES	
20	Ryan Clarke
23	Alvin Bubb
6	Mark Foran
2	David Pritchard
32	David Gilroy

LUTON TOWN

16	Carl Emberson
33	Ian Hillier
15	Matthew Taylor
6	Marvin Johnson
22	Jude Stirling
18	Adam Locke
8	Kevin Nicholls (capt)
27	Paul Hughes
17	Emmerson Boyce
10	Carl Griffiths
19	Steve Howard
SUBSTITUTES	
1	Mark Ovendale
7	Adrian Forbes
9	Stuart Douglas
32	Lee Mansell
21	Richard Dryden

Attendance:

9,057

Referee:

Clive Penton
(Sussex)