

DERBYSHIRE SPARKLES IN ROVERS ROMP

Luton0
Blackburn4

By ANDY SIMS

MATT Derbyshire's rise to prominence continued as Blackburn ruthlessly swept aside Luton.

The 20-year-old scored either side of the break to take his tally to five goals in his last six appearances, while Benni McCarthy and Morten Gamst Pedersen also found the net.

Derbyshire, a lifelong Blackburn fan who initially worked as a coach in the club's community office before signing as a player in a £20,000 move from Great Harwood, had earlier in the week agreed a new contract that will keep him at Ewood Park until 2010.

And he celebrated his new deal in style as Rovers recorded a crushing victory which did not flatter them.

Luton boss Mike Newell, who helped Blackburn win the Premiership title under Kenny Dalglish in 1995, has now only a grim relegation battle to look forward to.

But for Rovers counterpart Mark Hughes, there are increasingly heady days and this latest success took him one step towards a return to Wembley.

The former Wales striker lifted the FA Cup as a Manchester United player in 1985, 1990 and 1994, before claiming his fourth winners' medal with Chelsea in 1997.

With new signing Stephen Warnock enjoying a hugely impressive debut at left back and Ryan Nelsen also making his first appearance since last April, Blackburn disposed of Luton with ease.

Newell handed new signing Drew Talbot his debut up front following his arrival from Sheffield Wednesday.

However, Croatian midfielder Ahmet Brkovic missed out after injuring his ankle following a horrific tackle from QPR midfielder Stefan Bailey during the Hatters' midweek third round replay victory.

Rovers debutant Warnock, who lined up at left back, caught the eye in the fifth minute when he showed impressive pace and skill to carry the ball forward and send Brett Emerton racing clear.

The Australia international forced a corner which was delivered by Pedersen to the far post.

No Rovers players was on hand to profit but Hughes' men were rewarded for their early dominance when Derbyshire produced a fine goal to open the scoring in the 10th minute.

When McCarthy slipped a hopeful

Blackburn's MATT DERBYSHIRE scores



looking pass into his path, there appeared to be little danger when Derbyshire collected possession on the right hand side of Luton's 18-yard box.

However, he calmly took a touch before rifling a rising shot which flew past Marlon Beresford and into the top corner.

Yet Luton's response was impressive and they quickly sought to force their way back into the game.

When Sol Davis launched a long punt deep into Rovers territory in the 18th minute, Blackburn goalkeeper Brad Friedel punched weakly and the ball fell to David Bell 30-yards from goal.

Friedel was some way off his line but Bell could not control his attempted lob and the ball sailed harmlessly over the crossbar.

Luton's best chance of the half came in the 34th minute when Lewis Emanuel swung in a dangerous corner from the right and Talbot rose unmarked to send the ball goalwards.

He failed to make solid contact but his flick still found its way to Richard Langleigh, who failed to divert the ball past Friedel from just two-yards.

Three minutes later, Blackburn all but secured their passage into the fifth round when a delightful move sent them 2-0 ahead.

Warnock was again heavily involved, embarking on a strong run down the

left flank before slipping a neat pass on to Pedersen.

The Norwegian sent over a dangerous cross which Derbyshire bravely headed across the face of goal to give McCarthy an easy tap-in from inside the six-yard box.

McCarthy wheeled away in celebration of his 15th goal of an increasingly productive season, while Derbyshire received treatment after taking a boot in the face as reward for his bravery.

Blackburn extended their advantage 11 minutes after the restart when Emerton swung in a teasing cross which Derbyshire rose to dispatch with a firm header past Beresford to put the tie beyond doubt.

Luton attempted to hit back but Rovers' experienced central defensive duo, Stephane Henchoz and Nelsen, refused to budge.

Hughes then replaced McCarthy with former Everton and Arsenal striker Francis Jeffers in the 67th minute, and then withdrew Nelsen and brought on Christopher Samba.

Blackburn refused to ease up and Pedersen claimed his seventh goal of the season in the 74th minute to put the seal on an emphatic victory.

A deep cross from the right flank found Pedersen unmarked at the far post, and he smashed a half-volley past Beresford and into the corner to seal a solid win.

Hughes tips big things for young gun

MARK Hughes predicted a big future for Matt Derbyshire after the young striker's dazzling performance in Blackburn's win at Luton.

Hughes said: "In fairness

to Luton, the worst result for them was us losing to Watford in midweek.

"We weren't prepared to play like that again and we put in a thoroughly professional performance.

"Derbyshire has come in and had an impact whenever he's played, be it from the bench or starting. He's a great talent.

"I've got a few options up front but when a young player

makes an impact by scoring goals then you have to play him."

The result came as no surprise to Luton boss Mike Newell.

"Their extra quality showed through but I half-expected it with the way they've been playing and the disruption we've had," he said.

"It's not only about losing Vine and Edwards. If you look

at our injury list, we're missing half a team."

Newell was left to rue Derbyshire's display all the more having attempted to get the forward on loan at the start of the season.

"He's one that will get better," added Newell.

"He's got pace and he scores goals.

"What more could you ask from a striker?"