

Pretty to watch but no end product from Blackwell's men

Pirates plunder an unlikely victory

LUTON TOWN FC

LEAGUE ONE

LUTON

1

Spring (pen) 19

BRISTOL ROVERS

2

Lambert 2, 83

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SHOT-SHY Hatters surrendered their 100 per cent home record to a resilient Bristol Rovers side.

Despite having all the play and all the possession, Luton got none of the points as Rovers' smash and grab raids proved more lethal than the home team's pretty football.

The Pirates, now unbeaten in 15 league games stretching back to March last season, took an early lead through Rickie Lambert's sensational strike, but Matt Spring levelled things up with a penalty at the third attempt after the referee ordered two re-takes.

The final product let down Luton time and time again and Lambert left the Hatters with egg on their face, heading in the shock winner seven minutes from time.

"They tried to kill the game after their early goal and that's how it worked," said a despondent Kevin Blackwell.

"They've got six or seven six footers and we knew they'd only be able to score from a set piece. But we should have won it well before then.

"I don't think Rovers saw the ball in the first half we were that dominant. If they'd have played the same way second half we'd have won.

"But going in at half time, I bet they couldn't believe they were level at 1-1 and it gave a hard working side confidence.

"It's a long season. In the short term I think we're playing some of the football that Luton Town is renowned for but I want to turn this approach play into goals."

Yesterday's game at Kenilworth Road had a lunchtime kick-off due to international fixtures and began with a goal that would have graced Wembley Stadium.

Two minutes in the ball fell out of the sky and from a full 40 yards Rovers' forward Lambert had no hesitation, smashing a volley past an amazed David Forde in the Luton goal.

The jaw-dropping strike had everyone stunned, not just Forde, and gave the visitors a dream start.

There were six changes to the team that triumphed over Northampton in the Johnstone's Paint Trophy as more established first-teamers came back into the fold.

One of those was Paul Furlong who was rewarded for some battling displays up front for his new club with the Powerade League One player of the month this week.



THREE'S A CROWD: Paul Furlong is the meat in a Rovers sandwich yesterday

The veteran has put in the kind of performances that are helping Luton fans forget that he played for bitter rivals Watford and QPR.

The in-form Furlong nearly got the equaliser moments after Lambert's wonder goal with his own long-range effort but chipped wide from outside the box.

Sixteen minutes in and Furlong wasn't to be denied, as from David Bell's pass, Rovers' Bryon Anthony clattered into the Luton hitman giving away a penalty.

Spring stepped up to take the spot kick and coolly dispatched it past Steve Phillips but the referee ordered a re-take for encroachment into the area. Once is forgivable, when Spring was ordered to take it for a third time after he'd sent the City 'keeper the wrong way with penalty number two, it seemed laughable.

But midfielder Spring kept his nerve and scored to put Luton back on level terms with his third goal of the season.

For the remained of the half Hatters had all the possession leaving The Pirates chasing shadows. The 'keep ball' was pleasant on the eye in Bell and Darren Currie Luton have the best wingers in the division – but Bristol were defending in numbers and difficult to break down.

Only a Spring daisy-cutter on 38 minutes warmed Phillips' gloves which was a poor return on the amount of play Blackwell's men had.

A resurgent Rovers came out for the second half and from the off looked the more likely to score.

On the hour mark defender Steve Elliott's header from a corner was hacked off the line by both Currie and Richard Jackson.

From a similar position to his earlier chance Elliott this time headed wide, Lambert flashed a shot wide and as the game wore on, Rovers were creating what few chances there were.

Only a weak shot from Bell gave Bristol any concern as Luton looked

all out of ideas.

At the other end Forde saved well with his feet from an Elliott volley and palmed the ball around the post when another corner was swung into the area.

But the on-loan 'keeper's good work was undone on 83 minutes when Rovers stole the win through Lambert.

Skipper Stuart Campbell's corner was aimed at Elliott, who beat Forde to the ball leaving the Cardiff shot-stopper punching thin air. Lambert was at back post to nod into an open goal.

For all their early possession Luton left it to the last seconds to finally force Phillips into some work.

Bell's deep cross was launched into the box and the Rovers' goalkeeper came for it but fumbled under pressure from substitute Paul Peschisolido.

The Canadian swivelled quickly to volley goalward but Anthony was in the right place at the right time to block on the line.

stats corner

MAN OF THE MATCH



Matthew Spring

Three good penalties – even if only one counted

THE SQUAD

Forde; Jackson, Perry, Coyne, Goodall (Hutchison 89); Currie (Morgan 77), Robinson, Spring, Bell; Furlong, Talbot (Peschisolido 67). Subs: Fojut, Andrew

MATCH FACTS

CORNERS

LUTON 6 BRISTOL ROVERS 7

OFFSIDE

LUTON 3 BRISTOL ROVERS 4

SHOTS ON TARGET

LUTON 4 BRISTOL ROVERS 4

SHOTS OFF TARGET

LUTON 3 BRISTOL ROVERS 8

BOOKINGS

LUTON 2

Robinson 66, Perry 80

BRISTOL ROVERS 1

Carruthers 25

REFEREE

F GRAHAM (ESSEX)

ATTENDANCE

6,131

FOOTBALL LEAGUE ONE

Carlisle	0	Tranmere	1
Crewe	2	Huddersfield	0
Leeds	2	Hartlepool	0
Leyton Orient	1	Bournemouth	0
Luton	1	Bristol Rovers	2
Southend	3	Gillingham	0
Walsall	0	Port Vale	0

FOOTBALL LEAGUE ONE

P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts	
Leyton O	5	4	1	0	8	3	13
Tranmere	5	3	1	1	7	3	10
Carlisle	5	3	1	1	5	2	10
Hartlepool	5	3	0	2	9	6	9
Brighton	5	3	0	2	9	7	9
Bristol Rvrs	5	2	3	0	7	5	9
Huddersf'd	5	3	0	2	4	5	9
Crewe	5	2	2	1	6	5	8
Yeovil	4	2	1	1	4	3	7
Swindon	4	1	3	0	5	4	6
Luton	5	2	0	3	7	7	6
Southend	5	2	0	3	8	9	6
Northampton	5	1	2	2	7	7	5
Port Vale	5	1	2	2	2	4	5
Swansea	4	1	1	2	5	5	4
Cheltenham	4	1	1	2	2	3	4
B'mouth	5	1	1	3	2	4	4
Doncaster	5	1	1	3	4	7	4
Millwall	5	1	1	3	2	6	4
Notts Forest	4	0	3	1	3	4	3
Oldham	4	1	0	3	3	7	3
Gillingham	5	1	0	4	3	10	3
Walsall	5	0	2	3	3	7	2
Leeds	5	5	0	0	11	3	0