

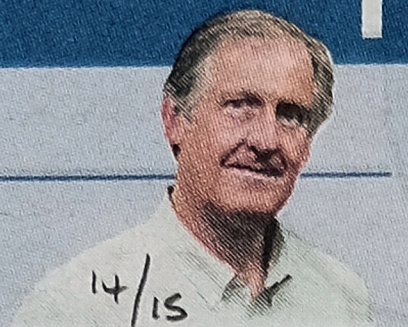
STRUGGLES CONTINUE

Rovers survival battle will go to wire after latest defeat to Luton

TRANMERE 0
LUTON 1

By **NICK HILTON**

at Prenton Park
nick.hilton@liverpool.com
@LivEchoSport



TRANMERE'S Football League survival fight looks like going down to the wire.

On an afternoon when most of their relegation-threatened rivals were beaten, Rovers contrived to lose a game they had dominated for most of the 90 minutes.

Luton Town, coming off a run of seven consecutive defeats, secured the points with a goal on 81 minutes by Cameron McGeehan.

The Hatters spent most of the contest looking like a team who simply wanted to avoid another defeat at all costs and were clearly delighted with the bonus of a victory. They caught Tranmere on a counter-attack that resulted in a penalty for goalkeeper Peter Brezovan's trip on Mark Cullen.

Although Brezovan made a fine save from Cullen's spot-kick, McGeehan reacted quicker than the Tranmere defenders to pounce on the loose ball and poke it home.

Rovers, though rarely fluent going forward, nevertheless created enough chances to have won the game.

They were thwarted by a couple of high class saves from Elliott Justham, some bad luck and a little lack of composure, perhaps understandably, in playing the right ball into the box as the minutes ticked away.

A crowd who had been supportive through most of the afternoon became a little agitated towards the end. They went home with the consolation of knowing that little ground was lost as every team in the bottom four lost.

But now Rovers have just five games remaining. It may be a blessing that three of them are away from home. Tranmere don't look like a side who relish playing at Prenton Park, having taken one point from the last five games.

Tranmere had a clear-cut chance to take the lead in the fourth minute.

The impressive Steve Jennings, winning an interception on the halfway line, played a well weighted pass that sent Jennison Myrie Williams running clear through the inside right channel.

The winger ran into the box but in



■ Max Power lies prone on the pitch before he had to leave injured; and his replacement Marc Laird rues a missed chance (inset above)

IAN COOPER

attempting to tap a shot wide of Justham, he knocked the ball against the goalkeeper's legs and the opportunity was lost.

At the other end Brezovan, retaining the gloves ahead of Owain Fon Williams, had to make his first save when pushing out a header on the run from Paul Benson over the bar on 16 minutes.

The Rovers goalkeeper was grateful to see an intended clearance from Max Power slice over the bar a minute later.

An early goal might have settled Tranmere. As it was, their football betrayed some anxiety. They struggled to build moves through a crowded midfield or put their attacking players on the ball in dangerous positions.

Myrie Williams found more encouragement than anyone down the right flank and had some tenacious tussles with full-back Scott Griffiths.

He found some space and time beyond the far post on 32 minutes to get underneath a well delivered across from Liam Ridehalgh but could not make a clean connection with his volley.

The second half was only a couple of minutes old when Tranmere lost Max Power. Feeling unwell, the midfielder was stretchered from the pitch and taken to hospital for a check-up. Power was replaced by Marc Laird.

Tranmere, looking to build some pressure on the visitors, won a free-kick

just outside the box when wide midfielder Rob Taylor was fouled on 57 minutes. The confident George Green took on the shot and curled the ball towards the right-hand corner of the net but goalkeeper Justham was able to make a comfortable save.

Manager Micky Adams opted to make a change after 61 minutes, introducing Iain Hume into an attacking role in place of Taylor. When Tranmere won another free-kick a few yards outside the box, Myrie-Williams took on the responsibility but his shot gave the goalkeeper no more trouble than Green's have done.

Hume was quickly involved, playing a pass back from inside a crowded box to Green, whose shot was deflected wide of the right-hand post.

As Tranmere built some momentum and pressure on the visitors' defence, the crowd responded with noisy support.

Adams made another change on 74 minutes, replacing Myrie-Williams with George Donnelly.

Tranmere were dealt a body blow on 81 minutes when a rare Luton attack produced a goal against the run of play.

Rovers were caught on the back foot by Cullen's run into the box from the left.

Goalkeeper Brezovan, seeing the danger, dashed from his line to intercept but caught Cullen fractionally late, giving a referee Dean Whitestone an easy

penalty decision.

Brezovan did well to push out Cullen's well struck kick but McGeehan was first to the loose ball to knock it into the net.

Laird must have thought he had equalised three minutes later when heading a flick-on from Kayode Odejayi towards the top corner, only to see Justham make a superb reflex save to touch the ball over.

Soon afterwards Hume directed a sharp header from Green's corner to the near post narrowly over the crossbar.

Tranmere piled players forward during seven minutes of injury time but they didn't have quite enough penetration to find a way through the Luton defence.

TRANMERE (4-4-1-1): Brezovan, Ihiekwe, Donacien, Dugdale, Ridehalgh, Myrie-Williams (Donnelly 74) Power (Laird 52), Taylor (Hume 61), Green, Odejayi Unused subs: Fon Williams, Holmes, Stockton, Molyneux.

LUTON TOWN (4-4-1-1): Justham, Harriman, McNulty, Wilkinson, Griffiths, McCullen, Doyle, Smith (Howells 90), Hall Lawless 72), McGeehan, Benson (Stockley 82). Unused subs: Lacy, Gutteridge, Robinson, King. Bookings: McNulty

REFEREE: Dean Whitestone.

ATT: 6035.

STAR MAN: Steve Jennings – calm and solid in midfield.

SKY BET LEAGUE 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Burton Albion	41	24	9	8	59	34	81
Shrewsbury	41	24	8	9	61	28	80
Wycombe	41	20	14	7	60	40	74
Bury	40	21	7	12	53	39	70
Southend	40	19	12	9	47	35	69
Stevenage	41	17	11	13	56	49	62
Newport County	41	17	11	13	47	46	62
Plymouth	41	17	10	14	47	31	61
Luton	41	17	10	14	49	42	61
Exeter	41	16	13	12	57	55	61
Northampton	41	17	6	18	60	53	57
Morecambe	41	14	12	15	44	46	54
AFC Wimbledon	41	14	12	15	52	56	54
Portsmouth	41	13	14	14	48	47	53
Dag & Red	41	15	7	19	50	54	52
Oxford Utd	41	12	14	15	43	48	50
Accrington Stanley	41	14	8	19	51	67	50
Cambridge Utd	41	12	11	18	53	55	47
York	41	9	18	14	42	46	45
Mansfield	41	12	9	20	33	53	45
Carlisle	41	12	6	23	49	69	42
Hartlepool	41	11	7	23	33	61	40
Tranmere	41	9	12	20	43	58	39
Cheltenham	41	8	13	20	35	60	37