

Rory, Rory hallelujah!

97/98

Luton 3 Carlisle 2
BY PETE KENYON

HATTERS' saviour Rory Allen signed off a spectacular loan spell with a match-winning injury-time volley.

Luton boss Lennie Lawrence is now pinning next season's promotion hopes on his eight-match wonder-boy.

Allen, still only 20, netted six times during his short loan spell at Kenilworth Road – and Lawrence is now praying that Tottenham will let him go.

"I would dearly love to get him back here next season but whether that happens is something else," said Lawrence.

"I am hoping that Tottenham will sign another big-name frontman which would leave Rory out in the cold. It does us no harm that Tottenham won 6-2 today," said Lawrence.

But in truth, Allen had a quiet afternoon and was virtually invisible for most of the match.

Yet with the sides tied at two-all, Allen picked his moment to blast a spectacular volley into the Carlisle net deep into injury time to give the fans the goal they had all come to see.

The statistics show that without Allen's goals Luton would be eight points worse off – enough to place them a point below Brentford, who were relegated yesterday.

After dominating most of the early exchanges, Luton went in front on 25 minutes, through Sean Evers.

The youngster finished off a lovely move around the edge of the Carlisle box by curling an exquisite left-foot shot past Tony Caig from 15 yards.

A minute later, David Oldfield should have made it two, but Caig pulled off a brilliant diving stop to tip his header over the bar.

Kelvin Davis did his best to gift Carlisle an equaliser but was lucky that Ian Stevens had left his goalscoring boots in Cumbria.

But if the first half was mostly Luton's, Carlisle came out for the second playing for their pride despite the fact that they were relegated regardless of the outcome of yesterday's match.

And seven minutes after the break, Carlisle's pressure brought its reward when Graham Anthony curled a beautiful free-kick over the Hatters wall and in off a post from nearly 30 yards.

Allen might have restored Luton's lead a couple of minutes later, but his angled drive flew a couple of yards wide.

And at the other end only good goalkeeping from Davis prevented Stevens from putting the visitors in front after he had sprung the offside trap.

But with just eight minutes to go, Carlisle's

loyal band of 150 supporters had something to celebrate after Nick Wright headed home Richard Liburd's cross at the far post with Davis exposed.

Hatters' response was immediate and almost from the restart Graham Alexander floated a deep cross towards Carlisle's goal.

David Oldfield brought the ball down, skipped inside a challenge, and fired off a right-foot drive which might have gone in, but in any case was helped on its way by a useful touch from backtracking centre-back Will Varty.

Darren Patterson missed a great chance a couple of minutes later – his free header from Oldfield's cross flashing wide when he should have hit the target with ease.

But a minute into injury time Allen won the points for Luton – ramming home Steve Davis' header back across goal into the roof of the net off the underside of the crossbar.

After the match, Lennie Lawrence said: "How we conjured a win out of that performance is staggering. I have had a few critical words in the dressing room but I don't want to go over the top because the overall effort over the last three months has been good.

"It was a terrific winning goal from Rory and Sean's goal was equally good.

"I can't remember the last game we had where there was no pressure on the players to get a result and we had difficulty getting to grips with this match as a result.

"This season overall has been traumatic, disappointing, and the hardest I have ever experienced. But in the last three months we did well.

"To lose nine games at home is disappointing, but I have won automatic promotion with away form worse than ours was this season.

"Too many senior players have not made a good enough contribution, mainly because of injury, but not always."

Looking forward to next season, he said: "The key for us is having a proper number of senior players fit for long enough. We have got a good number of younger players who have all come on during this season, but they can't be expected to do it by themselves.

"If the young ones continue to develop we have got a chance next year, though whether we have got enough depth yet for first or second place I doubt."

With the close season now upon us, Lawrence must now feel that securing the services of a striker is of paramount importance to a side which, in the main, has looked reasonably solid in defence and midfield over the latter part of the season.

Luton: K Davis, Patterson, Fraser, Evers, S Davis, White (Doherty 69), Fotiadis (Douglas 60), McLaren (Spring 60), Oldfield, Allen, Alexander.

Attendance: 6,729. Man of the match: Alexander.



● Rory Allen, centre, in the thick of the action against Carlisle



● Sean Evers celebrates his goal for Hatters