

An Emperor in a Teashop

From Clement Freud

Luton T. 0 Manchester U. . . 0

"It is a mark of insincerity of purpose to seek an emperor in a low-down teashop," wrote Confucius. But surely in a game involving this year's and last year's Cup finalists, one doesn't expect the fouls and exhibition of vicious tempers to which we were treated at Kenilworth Road.

The local teddy-boys had nothing on these two sides—though to be fair I didn't myself see a flick-knife.

With a remarkable lack of sense of occasion, Luton rested their pivot, skipper and coach Syd Owen. They served up the sort of football we have come to expect from them: tough, hard, close-marking—a difficult side to beat.

For 20 minutes Manchester United played beautifully, and but for Baynham in goal and a sensational miss by Pearson they might have had the game won within its first quarter.

Instead the next 25 minutes were bedlam. After a fierce tackle Goodwin thumped Bingham, then Pearson and Cummins were forcibly separated, and minutes later there was a ring of players holding back the belligerent Groves.

Hand on Shoulder

So it went on until in an electric spell there was Bingham being held by Carolan, freeing himself and retaliating with two great kicks at the Manchester back.

The referee, who was undoubtedly much to blame for this, came running up and with one hand on Bingham's shoulder pointed majestically to the dressing-rooms.

The boos were silenced. Bingham off? Suspension? Will he miss Wembley?

In this moment of chaos the offender himself was racing round the field, shaking hands here, apologising there, while his team mates pleaded with the referee. Somehow, the game continued with 22 men.

The second half, played at a low emotional level, gave us some run-of-the-mill football. Luton's small ground didn't suit the Manchester forward line, and Bradley and Scanlan on the wings had insufficient room for the move that has been responsible for so much of United's successful attack.

In the closing minutes the home side staged a dangerous assault on their visitors' goal. Brown, who had missed many chances, hit the bar and Pacey scored a goal that was narrowly ruled offside. But as a game it was poor stuff; only the two goalkeepers, and perhaps the linesmen, emerged from it with any sort of glory.