

LUTON SHINE WEARS OFF AS THOMAS HITS GOAL FORM

Newcastle 3 Luton 1: by DAVID HAIGH

LUTON'S midfield play was far better than down-table teams usually produce and their cultured football, especially in the first half, should have produced more than their solitary goal.

But although left winger Walden made a couple of glorious run that had the Newcastle defence clearing desperately, the rest of the Luton attack held the ball too long and seldom got in a good shot.

The man who finally ended Luton's hopes was Newcastle centre-forward Barrie Thomas who scored twice in four minutes.

In ten previous matches Thomas had scored only five goals, which is a good deal less than value for money with a £45,000 price ticket tied to your name.

For most of the first half Thomas did nothing right. His inside partners Hilley and the gangly Suddick swarmed over Luton's wing half Groves and Morton, but Thomas just kept on missing the chances they made until in the 44th minute came his final moment of shame.

Luton goalkeeper Baynham dropped a Keith free kick and there was Thomas, the ball at his feet and the goalmouth gaping, five yards away. Centre-half Pacey watched incredulously as Thomas's stubbed shot rolled gently forward and booted it off the line with violent relief.

But Hilley, whose first half was a lesson in accuracy and enterprise,

made a superb dash through the middle and from his pass Fell hit Newcastle into the lead with a fine left-foot shot after 33 minutes.

It was not much reward for increasing United control . . . but if Luton had written off Thomas as lost, he had other ideas.

Seven minutes of the second half ticked by and there he was climbing above Pacey to head the ball solidly past Baynham from left back Clish's centre.

At 56 minutes right half Neale exchanged four decisive passes with his centre forward, and Thomas lashed the ball home with his right foot.

Luton never gave up swinging the ball about and scored through inside left McGuffie with a terrific shot from 30 yards.

But with a defence that played it slow and square, I feel the Thomas of old would have rubbed in this defeat much deeper.