

STOCK: 'We came out with credit'

MERCER: 'I was scared to death'

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By ROGER DUCKWORTH
JOE MERCER, Manchester City's manager, stood in the Maine Road Boardroom at 5pm on Saturday, and said: "I'm damned glad we don't have to come and replay at Luton. I wouldn't be at all happy about that. Luton put up a great show and scared me to death towards the end when they put in that fighting finish."

And Luton manager Alec Stock said of his Third Division team: "They did us great credit. City have a few big guns and a lot came out of the game to our credit. I shall certainly take the same 12 players to Shrewsbury on Wednesday."

"But we were given one lesson at Manchester — that accuracy pays. As we attacked we kept giving them the ball. But we were playing against a class side...."

Mr Stock's confidence in his side is justified. This week the Town could bag four points and be right back there among the

Division III leaders. They are now five points behind table-toppers Watford, but have games in hand on all the teams above them except Swindon.

Wednesday night's rivals, Shrewsbury, are next to the bottom with only struggling Oldham below them. And on Saturday the Town entertain Crewe, who are in the lower half of the table.

Apart from a few minor bruises, Luton players picked up no injuries in Manchester. In their current mood they should do well against both their next Third Division rivals.

Fighting spirit

What a good show Luton put up at Manchester. Playing against the League champions on their own 'midden' is never easy, even for the best. But it is a mighty task for a Third Division team.

Luton's fighting spirit was so high that it took a penalty goal to beat them. And they all but equalised three times in a storming finish that had 37,120 City fans screaming for the final whistle.

In spite of all this, and the plaudits of Press and public, it must be said that Luton were outplayed for most of the time. As they were driven back by City's scintillating attack it was only an outstretched boot or a

brave body that kept out the barrage of shots from the champions.

And Luton always knew they had Sandy Davie behind them. The goalkeeper had a wonderful afternoon and the Lancashire crowd was full of admiration for the series of acrobatic but sure saves he made.

Davie had to face the full force of shooting stars Lee, Coleman and Bell. He revelled in his task. Afterwards he said: "Lee? Sure he can shoot a bit, but I'd love to play in that division. Don't they play fast?"

City's lone goal came in the 26th minute when English international Lee blasted home a penalty. Even then Davie chose the right way to dive, but he would have had to be a superman to get to the fierce shot in time.

Brilliant Slough

It followed a foul by John Moore on Lee on the by-line. It was a harsh decision as Moore took the ball before Lee was tripped, but once the referee had decided it was a foul, he really had no option but to point to the spot.

As City became more desperate to score again, the Luton defence was stretched to its limit, but Max Dougan and Jack Bannister, both of whom

showed cool heads under pressure, were outstanding in both work-rate and skill.

But for me, Luton's man of the match was Alan Slough. Taking a leaf from skipper Terry Branston's book, he fought fiercely, tackled bravely, ran his heart out and covered every inch of the field.

But every defender can take credit for a fine performance. Terry Branston was as solid as Manchester Town Hall, and gave lessons by example. And John Moore more than made up for the unfortunate penalty incident.

Like Slough, Keith Allen covered miles of Manchester as he played his heart out. He was a bit over-eager at times, and angered the crowd and Colin Bell alike with some tough tackling. It certainly seemed to be the only way to stop the speedy England international.

With Branston holding centre-forward Bobby Owen, City's sparkle was mainly four-fold. Danger men were Lee, Coleman and Bell. Neil Young had an off day with his shooting, although his approach work was as elegant as ever.

Apart from the last quarter of an hour, Luton's raids were mainly breakaways. Brian Lewis, who was pulled off in the 63rd minute, took part in most of the better-looking ones, but at times his passing was bad.

Closely watched

Explained Mr Stock afterwards: "I felt we still had something to offer up front, and decided we might do better if Keith Allen added his height to the attack. This is why I sent McDerment on to plug the gap in the middle."

McDerment soon entered into the spirit of things, and fought as hard as anyone.

Rioch's class showed through often, but he was closely watched by Mike Doyle who is fighting to keep his place in the City team. Twice in the closing minutes goalkeeper Harry Dowd made thrilling flying saves to great efforts from Rioch. One was a shot and the other a header which appeared to be speeding over the line when Dowd flung himself across the goal to tip it round.

Wingers Mike Harrison and Graham French had splendid games. Both showed speed and courage and, most important, the ability to shoot hard and accurately after cutting inside.

This was a fine all-round show by Luton who fought tigerishly — and very nearly caused the biggest surprise of the day. I know that after going out so bravely they have no regrets. They can now get on with winning promotion which, after all, is what they are playing for this season.

Manchester City: Dowd; Pardoe, Mann; Doyle, Booth, Oakes; Lee, Bell, Owen, Young, Coleman. Sub Bowles.

Luton Town: Davie; Dougan, Bannister; Slough, Branston, Moore; French, Lewis (McDerment), Allen, Rioch, Harrison.

Referee: Mr K. H. Burns (Wordsley).

Attendance 37,120.