

Still room for improvement

By ROGER DUCKWORTH

Rotherham Utd 1
Luton Town 1

LUTON'S fans sing a little ditty that goes something like this: "Watford, Watford going down; Making room for Luton Town." While Watford don't look like setting the Second Division alight, Luton will have to do a lot better than this if they are to maintain their grip on the Third Division lead.

This was a grim affair that raised few cheers. Luton were out of touch and made Rotherham, surely no more than a moderate side, look much better than they were.

The trouble stemmed from midfield. This was where Luton lost out. And the result was that, instead of flowing forward, the Town had to rely on long punts down the middle.

Try as they might, Tees and Macdonald had little chance of winning much in the air against a tall and uncompromising defence. And if one of the Luton strikers got his head to the ball first, there was nobody following up to take over.

Add to this the fact that there was little from either Luton wing — one of which didn't exist — and you have little semblance of an attack from the Town.

How I look forward to next Saturday when Mr Stock has promised to play a system involving two wingers at home against Barnsley!

On the other hand Luton won another away point and really you can't moan about that. Perhaps it's that we are coming to expect too much from them. Fourteen away points from a possible 18 can't be bad.

Outstanding

The winger who wasn't was Collins, he played a midfield role — without a great deal of success — and Alan Slough did not look at his sharpest. This put a lot of weight on the shoulders of Nicholl, who did quite well.

It's easier to list those who played well. They were full-backs John Ryan and Jack

Bannister, goalkeeper Sandy Davie, and Keith Allen, who was the outstanding player on the field.

Mike Keen did quite well with his passing and use of the long ball, but he did not tighten his defence enough.

But, at this stage of the season, I think Luton need encouragement rather than criticism. So let's look forward to a good display against Barnsley, who are second in the table and who always give value for money.

If he fancied a reshuffle, Mr Stock could always switch French back to the right flank and give Mike Harrison a chance on the left. Apparently on Saturday Harrison played a blinder for the reserves and scored a couple of times against Southampton Reserves.

Surely the only point of playing well in the reserves is to win a place in the first team. That's what it's all about.

Peter Phillips travelled as reserve, and can consider himself unlucky not to have been given a run in the second half. Macdonald had two shots cleared off the line, but apart from that, and Allen's splendid goal, Luton rarely impressed as an attacking force.

They are not going to get many goals by pumping long, high balls up the middle, and then being outnumbered when they drop into their opponents' half. Mr Stock's dictum has always been: "Do the simple thing." That surely

means running into space and giving off quick, short passes. It would be nice to see.

Penalty

Three minutes before half-time Allen went up with Watson for a high ball, which he handled. The referee awarded a penalty — and I think he was a bit harsh. Allen was pushed in the back as he went up and although the ball hit his fist he gained neither control nor possession from the incident.

Full-back Dennis Leigh scored from the spot, though Davie chose the right way to go, and only just missed it.

In the 54th minute Allen got his own back. French floated

across a fine centre from a short corner on the right and Allen headed it past the static Furnell.

And so Luton won another point to stay clear at the top. But both Barnsley and Rochdale are breathing hotly down their necks. They play them both — at home — in the next fortnight, and the result of these matches should set the pattern at the top for the halfway stage of the season at Christmas.

For Rotherham, right-back Mealand and centre-half Watson played well in defence, while Warnock, Downes and Fantham showed spirit in attack. Hague was their best player, in an Allen-typerole. But their hard-working all-rounder blotted his copybook in the second half when he was booked for a foul on French.

Throughout there was a deal of niggling, with both sides putting in sly elbows, shirt-tugging and ankle tapping.

On the whole it was not good entertainment.

MATCH DETAILS

ROTHERHAM: Furnell; Mealand, Leigh; Hague, Watson, Hudson; Lill, Fantham, Downes, Bentley, Warnock. Sub: Womble (for Mealand, 53).

LUTON TOWN: Davie; Ryan, Bannister; Keen, Nicholl, Slough; Collins, Macdonald, Tees, Allen, French. Sub: Phillips.

GOALS: Leigh (Rotherham, penalty, 42 minutes); Allen (Luton, 54 minutes).

ATTENDANCE: 8,727.

REFEREE: Mr A. Bone (Sunderland).

Harrison and Lewis shine

Luton Reserves 5
Southampton Reserves 3

MAINLY due to the fine form shown by Brian Lewis and Mike Harrison, Luton completely outplayed Southampton in their Combination game at Kenilworth Road on Saturday.

Southampton had little answer to the thrust and speed of Harrison, while Paton was at sixes and sevens against Lewis. It was Lewis who combined with Harrison to lay on the first goal for Fossey with Lewis grabbing the second after Southampton's Stokes equalised from a penalty.

Lewis scored his second and Luton's third after 60 minutes with Harrison completing the scoring with two goals.

Stokes completed his hat-trick with Southampton's second and third goals.

LUTON RESERVES: Read; Dougan (Hooper), Jardine; Guild, Branston, Moore; Fossey, Hipwell, Lewis, Wainwright, Harrison.



DISBELIEF shows on Keith Allen's face as referee Alan Bone points to the penalty spot after Keith had handled the ball. Rotherham's Leigh scored from the spot