

FIGHTING FANS LET DOWN A FIGHTING TEAM

A HUGE Torquay policeman condemned Luton fans as "The worst I have seen" after Saturday's match at the seaside. "Tell them to keep away next time," he said. "We don't want them down here. One Torquay supporter had his head cut open by a bottle chucked by a Luton fan, and a crowd of them were singing 'We're for ever throwing bottles'."

The law added: "We tossed about 10 of them out of the ground." There was trouble reported on the train going down to the coast on Saturday morning, when a group of hoodlums spoiled the reputation of the rest of the football loving fans by breaking a window, spraying paint and hurling beer cans out of the train windows.

Which is, all a great pity, for Saturday was the day the Luton team won back its pride.

There were seven changes, including that of sub, from the side that lost at Barrow. And the re-organised Hatters went all out to prove to themselves, and to everyone else, that they are still real live promotion candidates.

In fact, they were only four minutes from bringing back both points after fortunes had swung to and fro in a thrilling second half.

Playing with two wingers, there was a refreshing attacking flavour about Luton's play, and they might have had three goals in the barren first half, had Macdonald, Slough and French taken a little more care.

Firmer hold

As it was most of the action, and all the memories, come from the second half which saw Torquay take the lead just as the Town were beginning to use the wind to their advantage.

After more than holding their own before the break, Luton came out determined to take both points. Gradually they took a firmer hold on things, and looked good for something. But then the Town defence panicked in a Torquay raid, Sandy Davie failed to gather at Cave's feet, and from the corner, which John Moore did well to concede, Kitchener headed on to Mitchinson, who headed past the Luton goalkeeper.

Nine minutes later Mike Harrison made his mark on the match with a beautiful goal, kicked crisply from well outside the box, following a pass by Alan Slough. Later a Torquay official said he could

TORQUAY 2 LUTON TOWN 2 By ROGER DUCKWORTH

not remember a goal as good as Plainmoor.

It was just reward for Harrison, who had a splendid first half, and who still managed to catch the eye in the second. This was when Graham French came more into his own, though he had been a willing chaser from the start.

After their recent bad results, Luton's relief was obvious. And a minute later, when Macdonald shot ahead from a goalmouth mix-up, the whole side leapt about in glee.

That was in the 72nd minute, and the way Luton were playing it looked as if they would have little trouble in holding on. But four minutes from the end Torquay equalised with a rather lucky goal. Eric Welsh lobbed the ball forward and it was deflected off the top of Rudge's balding head past Davie.

Torquay manager Allan Brown was about right when he told me: "It was a fair result."

Mixed

Now what? Town manager Alec Stock said it was too early to say whether or not he would keep the same side for the visit of Brighton, who stepped over Luton in the table on Saturday. Asked about retaining two wingers, the Luton manager said: "It looks like it, doesn't it?"

In the Luton goal Sandy Davie had a fair game, although he dropped a couple of difficult low shots. Fred

Jardine, who came back for the first time since being helped off at Brighton last October, did enough to suggest that he could still retain a regular place once he brushes some of the rust off.

I thought Chris Nicholl and Alan Slough had mixed games, at times looking superb, and then spoiling it with the suggestion of a slip-up. I made John Moore, who came back in the shake-up, the pick of the defence. His covering and tackling were first class.

John Ryan had another good match.

Mike Keen, who would not have played had Jack Bannister passed a fitness test, looked better in the tackle, and at times was really positive — if sometimes he failed with his passing.

Up front Macdonald and Tees never stopped trying, though Tees found ex-West Ham defender Kitchener a tough nut.

Viv Busby, the 20-year-old who was taken as sub, enjoyed the experience, but in the circumstances I think it was as well he was not needed. In situations like this you need a known quantity in reserve is anyone is injured.

Fighting spirit

Most pleasing thing of all is that nobody can accuse Luton of not going all out to win on Saturday. And even after going a goal down, they darned nearly pulled it off. That fighting spirit has returned to the side. I hope it hangs about a bit — for Luton are two points behind Reading, with two games in hand, and one point behind Orient and Brighton. We should see some fun and games next week.

For Torquay, former Luton wing-half George Potter went on as sub in the second half, but was not allowed to add much to his side's effort.

MATCH DETAILS

TORQUAY: Donnelly; Joy, Benson; Dunne (Potter), Young, Kitchener; Welsh (E), Cave, Rudge, Mitchinson, Welsh (A).

LUTON: Jardine; Ryan, Slough, Nicholl, Moore; French, Macdonald, Tees, Keen, Harrison. Sub: Busby.

Referee: Mr R. Paine (Hounslow).

Attendance: 6,819.



Mike Harrison, re-instated on Luton's wing on Saturday, in a tussle for the ball with a Torquay defender

