

TOWN BOOSTED BY MAC'S MAGIC

By ERIC HARRIS

ROGER DUCKWORTH, who is ill, was unable to report last night's match

LUTON TOWN last night silenced the critics who had written them off as promotion candidates with a superb victory. Reading's formidable unbeaten run of 15 matches was ended just 30 seconds from time by a brilliant goal from leading scorer Malcolm Macdonald.

Shrugging off their tag of also rans, Luton gave a display which was reminiscent of their pre-Christmas championship form. It was a pity it couldn't have been reserved for the Kenilworth Road "knockers".

Despite heavy rain and almost impossible conditions, Luton gave their best. No quarter was asked — and none was given. The rain started when the team stopped at Slough for tea and it accompanied them to Reading and throughout the match.

It was feared for a time that the match would not be completed. Before the start the centre circle was engulfed by a sea of mud and water.

The match took another farcical turn when Reading kicked off with only ten men. Goalkeeper Steve Death had been delayed in a traffic jam and arrived too late for the kick-off.

Full-back Butler donned the green jersey for a couple of minutes until Death raced from the dressing room.

Confidence

The manner in which Luton achieved their victory matters more than the slender score-line. It was the night they regained their lost confidence. Had fortune gone their way they could have held a three-goal lead at half-time.

TOP FIVE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brighton	37	19	9	9	47	30	47
Orient	33	17	11	5	48	25	45
Bristol R	36	16	13	7	67	45	45
Luton	34	17	10	7	58	34	44
Reading	35	17	9	9	61	53	43

Instead, they had to settle for a goal less first half — but only just. Macdonald headed against a post and brought a brilliant save from Death, and Allen, who came on for French after 38 minutes, should have scored when he was left with only the goalkeeper to beat.

Luton hit Reading from the kick-off. The will to win and sheer grit and guts showed on

everyone's face. This was Town at their best and had they played in this manner during the past few weeks, they would have been where they were before Christmas — at the top of the Third Division.

They were always looking for the ball, and, on a surface where mistakes were inevitable, they got it. When they lost possession, there was always someone ready to go in and get it back.

Fire

Showing as much fire as their unfamiliar red shirts suggested, Town had Reading reeling from constant pressure during the first 45 minutes. Their motto seemed to be "get the ball at all costs" — and that was where they had Reading licked.

Long through balls down the middle often split the Reading defence but it was not until the last minute that they paid dividends with Mac's golden goal.

Even so, Reading had their moments and Luton their escapes. Jardine headed a shot from Habbins off the line and Davie was forced to make two

brilliant saves from Butler and Tony Wagstaff.

But without a doubt, the evening belonged to Luton. Reading were at sixes and sevens against Town's relentless running and determination. They were forced into mistakes by Luton's speed.

Control

Reading seemed content to settle for a point at the start of the second half until Luton suddenly lost their rhythm. Then it was Reading's turn to buzz. There was a nasty moment for Town when Branston tried to pass back to Davie and Habbins took the ball off his toe. But he delayed his shot and lost the opportunity.

Their superiority didn't last long. Luton came back and regained control.

Keen got through a tremendous amount of work and had one of his best games for a long time. So did John Ryan who was always willing to support the forwards with intelligent overlaps.

After a shaky start, Slough gathered confidence and Collins was effective against his old club. John Moore never stopped running and Terry Branston used his weight to its full advantage.

Danger

Macdonald was a constant source of danger and Tees did his bit by setting up Luton's goal. When he came on Keith Allen did enough to warrant his nomination as substitute.

At the back, Sandy Davie was in fine fettle although his handling at the start was a bit suspect.

Luton's goal? It was a gem. Matt Tees won possession inside his own half, and sent the ball through to Macdonald. His sheer speed took him past Sharpe as he embarked on a 30 yard run. Sharpe was left standing as Death advanced, but Mac calmly swerved round him and slotted the ball into the empty net.

Reading's largest crowd of the season were stunned into silence while Luton's fans, who had made the journey by special train, went wild.

It was a splendid match under difficult conditions and one which deserved better status than the Third Division.

Town now face two home games, beginning on Saturday with a visit from Mansfield. On Tuesday Bury visit Kenilworth Road. Town are presented with a wonderful chance to climb above the fourth position they took from Reading last night.



GRAHAM FRENCH, who went off in the 38th minute of Luton's match against Reading last night with a hamstring injury