

LUTON SUFFER SHOOTING PAINS

LUTON TOWN threw this match away on Saturday. A catalogue of missed chances in the first half cost Luton a point — and could well have cost them promotion. Judging from the long faces afterwards many people have already sentenced the team to another season in the Third Division.

And you can't really blame them. The idea in football is to score goals. If you can't do that when you are completely on top, then you've had it.

This inability to kick the ball between the posts half neutralised the magnificent pair of points the team won at Reading during the week.

Red-faced

By half-time Luton could have had six, and should have had three goals to their credit. Instead they trooped in, red-faced, leading only by a goal thumped in by full-back John Ryan, who decided to show the forwards how to shoot.

And twice after the breather they let Mansfield equalise in the most friendly fashion. This is what frightens me. Friendly sides don't win things.

All this may sound a bit harsh, but it has to be said. We must also record that Luton played some lovely football and flowed so smoothly at times that the crowd rose to them.

All the forwards took part in some pretty, progressive

moves which swept Mansfield aside as if they had been lads from a local park. But Luton couldn't finish things off in the generally accepted manner. And if you can't do that everything else is wasted.

Brown in form

Mansfield goalkeeper Graham Brown must also take some credit. He produced some grand saves that must have disheartened Macdonald, Collins, Harrison, Tees, Keen and Slough, all of whom were foiled by the gritty Brown.

Tomorrow Luton can get back among the leaders. With Orient marching on in such determined way, Luton may have to be content with the runners-up place — if they win promotion. It is still within their grasp, but Luton now have some convincing to do, especially after Saturday.

Branston may well be fit to replace Nicholl tomorrow. He would add some granite to the defence, where it is needed. Nicholl did not really overcome his recent troubles on Saturday.

Slough impresses

Backs Ryan and Jardine both had splendid matches, as did John Moore in the middle of the back row. Slough impressed with some doughty running with the ball in attack, and Macdonald stole the show up front with a refreshingly sharp performance which should have brought him goals.

Tees battered away with courage at the tough Mansfield defence, without luck, and Harrison gave a workman-like performance on the left

wing. But most of his centres were long-range affairs and he did not get round the back of the defence often enough.

This is where the tantalising trickery of French was missed. But Harrison did his job well and after Mansfield's Roberts had equalised with a first-timer, he immediately restored Luton's lead with a coolly taken goal from Keen's pass.

Unfortunately Mansfield were given another equaliser. From a harmless-looking free kick Partridge shoved the ball past Davie. For some reason several members of the Town defence were standing around like Poor Cold Fred and nobody deemed it necessary to clear, so Partridge calmly earned his mates a bonus.

Goal disallowed

In midfield Keen and Collins both worked hard, but once again their errors rather than their attributes were picked upon by the frustrated crowd.

Davie had an adequate match in goal, and had not a great deal to do. And when Keith Allen substituted Tees ten minutes from the end, it was too late to make any difference.

Slough was unlucky to have a goal disallowed in the second half — presumably for offside — but it must have been a marginal decision.

Boam and Waller both worked well in the Mansfield defence, while Stenson impressed in attack. The Midlanders fought well in the second half, when they looked a different side from that which had been given a run around in the first.

LUTON TOWN 2

MANSFIELD 2

By ROGER DUCKWORTH

69/10



JOHN RYAN

... put Luton ahead

MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Davie; Ryan, Jardine; Slough, Nicholl, Moore; Macdonald, Collins, Tees (Allen), Keen, Harrison.

MANSFIELD: Brown; Pate (McKenzie), Walker; Quigley, Boam, Waller; Partridge, Stenson, Jones, Roberts, Goodfellow.

Referee: Mr J. P. Jones (Treharris).

Goals: Ryan 23 minutes; Roberts 51; Harrison 53; Partridge 58.

Attendance: 12,690.