

COURT MAKES STEADY START

By ROGER DUCKWORTH
GILLINGHAM 0 LUTON TOWN 1



JIMMY RYAN ... booked



JOHN MOORE ... solid

LUTON did just enough to win their way into the second round of the League Cup in a scrappy match at Gillingham last night. But even though the opposition was enthusiastic, there was an obvious division of difference between the two sides, and Luton produced far more method than they did at Bolton on Saturday.

They were helped in midfield by the inclusion of David Court, the expensive Gunner, who made his debut and showed promise of better things to come.

Afterwards Court, who caused a surprise by being left out of the side last Saturday, told me: "I felt that was a lot better. Competitive games are much better than friendlies. I felt OK — and there's more to come."

"I am always a slow starter, and you know, it's a bit of a wrench after 11 years with one club to fit straight in with the ways of another. Football is the biggest habit in the world."

Happy

And although he could obviously have hoped for more verve from his costly team, manager Alec Stock was happy with the result. "The important thing with cup games is to win them," he said.

"That was OK. There was a lot more shape about things tonight. We began to show a bit."

Even so, a lot of Luton's ambitions were broken down by a rugged, but fast-tackling, defence. Result was that Jimmy Ryan was reined in by David Peach for much of the time, and when he did break the bonds with a superb piece of footwork, his splendid low shot, which beat Simpson, hit the inside of a post and somehow cannoned out.

You can understand, if not condone, his frustration at being whistled up for doubtful handling offences twice in five minutes after this, and his feeling at being booked for kicking the ball away after the second offence.

Givens showed well early

MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Read; John Ryan, Slough; Hoy, Nicholl, Moore; Ryan, Court, Macdonald, Keen, Givens. Sub: Bannister.

GILLINGHAM: Simpson; Bailey, Peach; Yeo, Williams, Quirke; Woodley, Tydeman, Green, Ronaldson, Pound (Watson).

Referee: Mr H. B. Sinclair (Guildford).

Attendance: 7,238.

Goal: Macdonald (Luton) 32 minutes.

on, and has already struck up a rich understanding with Malcolm Macdonald.

It was this partnership that brought Mac's well-taken goal to break the deadlock in the 32nd minute. Givens pushed a good ball through and Mac hit it a fraction before goalkeeper Simpson reached the spot, and his shot, though deflected, went home.

Hoy and Court soon got to know each other in midfield and with the help of Keen, who was again Luton's outstanding player, there was a deal of solidarity about Luton's waistline.

Missed chance

On a par with Keen were centre-back men Chris Nicholl, making a long-awaited comeback, and John Moore, who saved Luton embarrassment on several occasions.

John Ryan swapped with Alan Slough and took his old position at right-back. This worked better than at Bolton, but both were extended on occasions by the speed of wingers Woodley and Pound, and later Watson, who replaced Pound in the second half.

The first 15 minutes were deadly dull, but the tedium

was broken when Tony Read, who otherwise had a magnificent night, mistimed a cross from Peach and Green missed a chance of making a name for himself by flicking the ball on to the top of the netting.

Court, Givens, Macdonald and Jimmy Ryan worked well together with Hoy and Keen in an effort to give the Luton attack some bounce, but it was hard to find.

It was about half an hour before Luton began to click, and after Macdonald's goal, Court went close with a powerful drive. But Gillingham were always game, and Pound let Luton off the hook by shooting over. Then Ryan had one turned over by Simpson as both sides began to find their feet.

And right on half-time Read saved Luton's bacon with a great save to a screaming shot from Woodley, which he somehow managed to turn over.

Went close

In the second half Keen hit the crossbar with a strong header, and Macdonald put the rebound into the side-netting. Read stepped in again to foil Green, and Hoy almost clinched it for Luton. Macdonald went close with two more efforts, but goals were hard to come by last night.

This was never a cup thriller, and at one stage the crowd gave the teams the slow-handclap. Even so Luton did enough to win. That's what they had to do.

Commented coach Jimmy Andrews: "That was an improvement. We should have clinched it though. We needed another goal to take the pressure off us. We were better tonight. We were tighter in defence."

And Basil Hayward, manager of Gillingham, said: "I know we lost, but we did a bit better. We were winning things tonight, but we needed a bit more fight for the ball."

All in all Luton can be satisfied. They won and they began to find a blend between their new players and their old. That's going to be the hardest thing to master in the opening stages of this campaign.