

Luton leave it all to cool man Mac

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BIRMINGHAM'S REVIVAL was dramatically braked yesterday — just when it seemed that one moment of magic from Geoff Vowden was certain to give them another table-topping booster. For new manager Freddie Goodwin's men were moving towards victory on the strength of Vowden's great 24th-minute goal until Luton stepped in to spoil the celebrations.

It happened in the 83rd minute. Birmingham momentarily lost concentration, left themselves wide open, and Roger Hoy forced the ball home in a goal-mouth scramble.

But referee Ron Challis of Tonbridge ruled that Luton striker Malcolm MacDonald, whose rebound shot had been forced down by Hoy, had been fouled — and he awarded a penalty.

Frustrated Birmingham fans set up a deafening sound of jeers and whistles, but MacDonald was perfectly calm and hit the spot-kick low and hard beyond 'keeper Mike Kelly's reach to give Luton a point they had seemed incapable of winning.

"I'm still not clear why the referee ordered a penalty," said manager Goodwin. "But they had scored a perfectly legitimate goal anyway, so I'm not beefing about it."

"The fact is we lost our con-

Birmingham 1 Luton 1: by MARK WARDEN

centration from one throw-in and it cost us a goal."

It seemed a heavy penalty for Birmingham to pay. For once Vowden had put them ahead they looked absolute certainties to keep up the winning run that has really put the boom back into Birmingham.

MASTERPIECE

And what a masterpiece of timing it was by Vowden in more ways than one. Because Birmingham were by no means having their own way until he took an explosive hand in their affairs.

Indeed, Birmingham had twice had earlier escapes when first Matt Tees and then MacDonald missed close-in chances to give Luton a shock lead.

Then inside forward Johnny Vincent went veering across the pitch from the left wing. Even when he rolled his pass into the

path of the dashing Vowden there seemed little danger.

But Vowden, without a falter in his stride, cracked a right-foot drive from 25 yards which 'keeper Tony Read had not the remotest chance of saving.

That goal changed the whole pattern of the game. Suddenly and excitingly Birmingham started to attack with the pace and venom of a team who believed they were worthy of being front-runners in the promotion race.

Only the courage and danger of 'keeper Read prevented Birmingham from making it 3-0 by the interval.

Birmingham went off the boil a little in the second half. So much so that only a first-time drive from Paul Summerall, which was a mere foot wide, and a sharply angled shot from Bert Murray which shaved an upright, gave Read any undue cause of for alarm.

Luton, who substituted Jack Bannister for Tees 10 minutes from time, still didn't manage to look particularly dangerous until that fatal moment of indecision by Birmingham so close to the end.