

UNLUCKY—BUT WHAT NEXT?

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LUTON TOWN 1 SUNDERLAND 2

NOW WHAT? On Saturday Luton stumbled to their first home defeat since the heart of last season after a disappointing, ragged second-half performance against a cracking Sunderland side. But so far manager Alec Stock is not talking about changes.

This was the culmination of a four-match season in which defeat has been looming inevitably. If I were in charge I would certainly be tossing the possibility of a couple of changes about in the dressing room.

Luton were lacking in midfield, at full-back, and, on occasions, in goal.

On Saturday Luton go to Hell. They were top last week but crashed at Cardiff at the weekend. So Luton have two possibilities — either upset a settled side in an effort to shake it into shape, or leave it as it is in the hope that it can now pull itself together and revert to the paths of victory that were expected as a matter of course a month ago.

Excuses

There were faint rumblings from the players afterwards that they were unlucky; that Sunderland were in it for only brief spells; that they didn't get the rub of the green. These are purely excuses.

The fact is that Luton did not play very well. They were unfortunate to go in a goal down after going close at least

half-a-dozen times, but good sides can ride these upsets.

Luton's misfortune began early when a Givens effort from the byline was cleared from inside the goal, but the referee took the work of his linesman that it was out of play before being crossed.

Macdonald had one cleared off the line, and later nearly broke the crossbar from 10 yards after Givens had neatly headed on a Court corner.

Givens had a down-header clawed away by Montgomery, who is the best goalkeeper I have seen this season, and Hoy had one shot kicked away and saw another scrape the angle of the post.

Then, with the biggest home league crowd of the season roaring them forward, Luton conceded a soft goal.

A weak clearance was headed out to Park who scuffed a low centre into the danger area, and Joe Baker, who was not being tightly marked for some reason or other, almost mis-kicked it low and slowly past Read, who

By ROGER DUCKWORTH

looked at one stage as if he would stop it.

You could have heard the corner flags flutter. Luton trooped in with heads hanging, and after a brief spell of aggression in the second half, they went to pieces. Sunderland took over and delighted with some fast, positive and well-balanced football.

Court was pulled off by Mr Stock, and didn't look too pleased about it. It could have been John Ryan or Hoy who was sacrificed for the introduction of Viv Busby — a strong-running forward.

Afterwards the Luton manager said: "It is one of those silly decisions you have to make. Someone had to come off to make room for another forward. After all, football is a 12-man game these days."

It worked. Luton began to push forward again, and after Montgomery had made a fantastic flying save to a superbly hit and placed free kick from Keen, Luton began to chug again.



Malcolm Macdonald mirrors the delight of scoring that equaliser against Sunderland on Saturday. He is shown thanking Jimmy Ryan for the pass. Joining in the congratulations are Mike Keen (left) and Alan Stough (right)