

By ROGER DUCKWORTH

Middlesbrough 0 Luton Town 0

AN IMPORTANT, hard-won point at Middlesbrough yesterday shouldered Luton out of immediate relegation trouble and lifted them over today's opponents Sheffield Wednesday. For the Town it was a point of desperation.

While it was poor holiday entertainment, Luton are at a stage in their career where points means more than applause.

It was Luton's eighth goalless draw of the season. It was their 16th draw. But how welcome it was for starters for Easter.

The match was as dull as the smog from the local heavy industry swirling through the drizzle. But it had its bright spots.

Luton's best player was again goalkeeper Keith Barber who turned in another outstanding performance which undoubtedly saved the Town.

Barber's handling was first class in the first half as Middlesbrough took the attacking initiative, with McMordie, Laidlaw, Vincent and Hickton pushing forward and full-back Craggs operating as an extra winger.

Anderson was far and away Luton's best forward. He showed speed and aggression and his arms were up and down like a puppet's to show his disappointment each time Luton's ambitions fizzled out.

Busby and Halom ran hard in support but their openings were limited. Halom often fell back to help out in midfield and thus Luton's attack was down to two men, who had little chance against a defence with such good middle men as Maddren and Boam.

Slough had another fine match and commanded Luton's back line with authority, and John Ryan and

Shanks gave most capable performances.

Garner, playing only his third match for the Town, showed that his previous two excellent efforts were far from flashes in the pan. He stuck close to the dangerous Hickton and snuffed the fire of the big striker.

### Brilliant save

A half mistake late in the match by Garner almost let Hickton through, but the Luton centre-half recovered to show that it was not more than last-minute jitters as Luton hung on for a point.

It was in the second half

that Barber really came into his own. The dangerous McMordie put Vincent through and Barber hurled himself at his feet to gather.

He then made a brilliant flying save to a cleverly bounced header from the same player before pulling off the save of the day with a reflex dive to his left to divert a firece shot from McMordie from its path of destruction.

All this may make it sound exciting. But it wasn't. The crowd began to slow-handclap in the 64th minute.

In the 67th minute John Moore replaced Givens, who had worked hard in midfield.

Later coach Jimmy Andrews explained: "We sent him on to stop McMordie doing any further damage. He marked him well."

Court and Keen were busy in midfield but their attentions were too often focused on back-peddling to be able to think too much about constructive attack.

Even so, with six minutes left, Anderson, mud-stained, battle scarred from a clash with Boam, and with one sock flapping round his ankles, intercepted a bad pass from Jones and very nearly snatched a winner for Luton.

With Platt beaten his shot scraped the outside of a post. I

# DEMON DISPLAY BY BARBER

## MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Barber; John Ryan, Shanks; Keen, Garner, Slough; Halom, Court, Anderson, Busby, Givens (Moore, 67mins).

MIDDLESBROUGH: Platt; Craggs, Jones; Maddren, Boam, Spraggon; Stiles (Downing, 72mins), McMordie, Laidlaw, Hickton, Vincent.

REFEREE: Mr F. M. Nicholson (Manchester).

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wonder what Malcolm Macdonald, who drove down from Newcastle to see his old mates, thought about that one?

It was sad to see Nobby Stiles labouring under the strain of Second Division football. And even sadder to listen to a roar of approval when he was pulled off.



■ Keith Barber