

AFTER THE LORD MAYOR'S SHOW...

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LUTON TOWN lost this match, and possibly their chances of promotion, because they failed to heed the warning "Be prepared." The Boy Scouts motto was bugled loudly last week, and even manager Harry Haslam said: "These sides always play better than you think they will."

They did, and Luton were not up to raising their game to combat a last-trench stand by doomed Brighton. Luton were poor. It was hard to believe that they had whacked Newcastle in the Cup the previous week. As one colleague commented: "After the Lord Mayor's show..."

Town hardly raised a worthwhile attack, and in the second half goalkeeper Keith Barber stood between Brighton and a good hiding for Luton.

Town must now whip up some enthusiasm for the visit of Cardiff on Saturday. The Welsh side play their second FA Cup replay against Bolton at West Brom tonight, and Luton could be meeting them again — at Ninian — a week later.

Then they go to Blackpool before meeting Bari, Italian Second Division leaders, in the Anglo-Italian tournament.

Confident

So they have a lot on. They must forget Saturday. Pretend it didn't happen. It was no real surprise anyway.

Not one Luton fan I spoke to on the train to the seaside felt really confident about Luton beating the bottom club. "Always hard ones to win, these," they muttered into their beer.

Luton were beaten by the enthusiasm of two teenagers. Pat Hilton, 17, signalled his intention of launching a

bright career in the first minute when he hit the first of a volley of shots over the Luton crossbar.

He played a blinder. So did Tony Towner, 18, who was also making his debut.

Signings

Said Brighton manager Pat Seward in the Press room afterwards: "Football is a daft game. I can't understand how you can have a couple of kids, playing for a few bob a week, look so much better than the £45,000 stars.

"You get a couple of kids like that and they'll run all day for you. That's more than some of the big-money signings will do.

"This pair won their way into the side on merit, and they were great."

A listless first half turned a sunny afternoon into rain, and when the ball began shooting about on the wet surface, Luton were all at sea.

Town skipper Bobby Thomson made his worst mistake of a distinguished season when he let young Towner take the

ball off him and centre. There was Ken Beamish to sweep the ball into the net.

It was a goal similar to Luton's second at Newcastle when Slough did the donkey work for Aston.

But Luton, like Newcastle, couldn't do anything about it. They tried a bit of a revival, but their finishing power was never up to the approach work.

Luton sent on reserve centre-forward Derek Hales when Brighton scored their first. Don Shanks, who had been injured previously, limped off and Hales joined Butlin in the attack with John Ryan reverting to right-back and Jimmy Ryan going into the middle.

Creditable

It didn't work. Hales played with enthusiasm and showed considerable strength and skill. But I don't think Luton would have scored if they'd stayed the weekend.

The creditable thing about the switch is that manager Harry Haslam is prepared to throw on another attacker away from home.

Luton's centre-backs Garner and Moore did well for most of the afternoon, but towards the end they were both skinned a couple of times by the fast through ball and the nippy forwards that chased them.

Luton's link between midfield and attack seemed broken, and up front Butlin was given a hard time by Piper.

Barber was Luton's best player, and was it not for his agility and good handling of the wet ball, Luton could have been humiliated.

As it was it was bad enough. Beamish scored the second in the last knockings when he belted through a hesitant defence, went wide on the right, and beat Barber, who was trying to narrow the angle, with a hard, low shot.



■ Brighton's Goodwin and Jimmy Ryan fight it out



■ Alan Garner gets up to a high ball with Piper

