

OH LUTON - WHAT A WAY TO START



Where's the ball? Peter Anderson (left) and Barry Butlin challenge goalkeeper Barron

By ROGER DUCKWORTH

LIKE A couple of battle-scarred generals playing war games, Luton manager Harry Haslam and his aide-de-camp, coach Roy McCrohan, played soccer-chess with salt-cellars and half a dozen tonic water bottles in the restaurant car of the unhappy Hatters' Special on Saturday night.

And by the time the train rumbled into Luton station they reckoned they had sorted out the reason for the 4-0 thrashing with which Luton started the season at Nottingham on Saturday.

The forwards, it appears, were not doing what they had been told to do. They were bunching too much in the middle and allowing the Forest defenders to make touchline sorties into Luton's territory.

The Town will be drilled incessantly this week and you can be sure it will not happen again next Saturday.

Nottingham weren't anything to write home about but they made Luton look like raw recruits.

Town got the worst possible start to the season when, in the 12th minute, referee Ray Raby awarded Forest a free kick on the six-yard line because he reckoned goalkeeper Keith Barber had taken too many steps trying to get round a challenging forward.

McKenzie pushed the ball to Jackson who could not miss. The entire Luton team was huddled on the goal-line and Barber had no chance in the over-crowded goal.

Over-kind

Twenty-five minutes later Mr Raby did Luton another bad turn, giving Forest a penalty when Thomson tripped McKenzie, who didn't even fall down. It was the sort of penalty the home team will often get, the away team rarely. Jackson scored from the spot.

Asked afterwards if he thought he had been over-kind to the home side, Mr Raby said: "At half-time I spoke to one of my linesmen and said: 'This isn't a dirty game. But every decision I give seems to be against Luton'."

Said Roy McCrohan: "We were terrible — but the ref was diabolical. If that's the average standard, then God help English football."

"Two very harsh decisions went against us for the goals. But I am not quibbling. We were well beaten."

Luton also felt that Jimmy

Ryan, normally one of the mildest-tempered men, was wrongly booked. He threw the ball in anger after a bad tackle. It almost hit the referee.

The free kick and the penalty beat Luton. Trailing by two goals at half-time, they never looked likely to pull themselves back into the game.

But, to give them credit, they tried. Jimmy Ryan fought like blazes to get the attack going, and Peter Anderson and John Ryan gave him a lot of backing.

The side looked different when Tom Finney went on in the 59th minute. He immediately solved the problem of big defender Winfield overlapping, by keeping him busy. He was flattened a couple of times for his trouble but Luton got back into the game.

It was Finney's English League debut and once his fitness is lifted from the Irish standard to that of our own demands he will be a regular in the side.

He replaced the team's other debutant, Peter Cruse, who found it hard going. He and Butlin could not re-establish the understanding

they seemed to have in the friendly at Gillingham and the sharp end of the Luton attack had a sadly rounded look about it.

Cruse almost scored in the first half when a long throw from Garner caught Forest napping but his powerful, close-range shot hit a defender on the line.

The crowd was still brushing off the crumbs from half-time buns when Forest went three up. Aston allowed full-back O'Kane to take the ball off him and centre. Martin dived through the Town defence to head a fine goal.

Barron was forced to save at the feet of Aston but Forest didn't look particularly worried by Luton's occasional gestures of retribution.

John Ryan and Shanks both had shots saved and Anderson hit one over the top. But with a minute left McKenzie showed them how to do it by heading in a right-wing cross.

Barber didn't have a bad afternoon in the Luton goal, in spite of the score.

But this was a ragged performance by Luton. I am sure they would do better by keeping to the old idea of two wingers.

MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Barber; Shanks, Thomson; Anderson, Faulkner, Goodeve; Jimmy Ryan, John Ryan, Butlin, Cruse (Finney, 59 mins), Aston.

NOTTINGHAM FOREST: Barron; O'Kane, Winfield; Serella, Cottam, Jackson; McKenzie, O'Neill, Martin, Lyall, Dennehy. Sub: Galley.

REFEREE: Mr R. Raby (Leeds).

GOALS: Jackson (12 mins and penalty 37 mins), Martin (49 mins), McKenzie (89 mins).

ATTENDANCE: 10,793.