

LUTON ARE KINGS AT THE PALACE



■ Above: Don Shanks wins another tackle. Below: John Aston challenges Palace keeper Hammond.



THERE WAS a touch of the First Division about Luton on Saturday. And today they are crouching behind the promotion positions with two matches in hand on all the clubs around them.

Luton were cool, brave, rugged, fast and tenacious. All in one. They were a better side than the Palace who have just been kicked out of the top bracket and look set for another drop.

This was Luton's best performance of the season. Better, even, than their win at Sunderland. For Palace are a side full of class players. And we all know they have to win sometime.

Luton made sure it was not at their expense. They played like a side possessed. It is little wonder that manager Harry Haslam and coach Roy McCrohan went on the pitch at the end to congratulate every one of their players.

Luton are now looking for some decent support for Wednesday night when they entertain Grimsby in the second round of the League Cup. I doubt they'll get the sort of following they deserve.

On Saturday Luton had to change the side for the first time since the first day of the season when Jimmy Ryan, who has taken a few thumpings in recent weeks, finally succumbed with a ricked back that had been troubling him for a few days.

Geordie Hindson was shoved in at the last minute, and he played a blinder, taking part in both goals showing speed, control and

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the accuracy of an educated left foot.

Now Ryan is going to have to win back his place. "He knows that," said Mr Haslam afterwards. "They all know that if they are out they have to fight their way back in."

So it looks as if Hindson will face Grimsby on Wednesday. But Bobby Thomson, who had an outstanding match at left-back, is doubtful. He hurt an ankle in the first half, and played on courageously to turn in his most cultured performance of the season. His temperament and ability to play it cool in a tight corner were an example to his colleagues which they were glad to emulate.

John Faulkner continued to look the best centre-half in the Second Division, playing far more forward than the traditional role, and often joining in the midfield goings-on.

Dangerous

This gave Alan Garner a more difficult job to do when Palace made a quick break, but he had a smashing match, tackling quickly and using his speed to sweep the back line.

Tackling was the high spot of Don Shanks's game, and he soon had the dangerous Don Rogers looking elsewhere for his fun.

In the first half Palace looked a bit too scared to shoot. After they had weathered Luton's initial 20-minute flurry, they got on top, but were off target on most occasions, or too slow in shooting, and were robbed by Faulkner or Garner.

But it was a different story in the second half. And it was here that goalkeeper Graham Horn earned his man-of-the-match badge.

The defence soaked up much of the sting, but Horn made some incredible saves to Rogers (twice), Tambling (twice) and Whittle. He even had the Palace fans applauding him. And that's no easy

MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Horn; Shanks; Thomson; Anderson; Faulkner; Garner; Hindson; John Ryan; Butlin; Finney; Aston. Sub: Holmes.

PALACE: Hammond; Mulligan; Taylor; Cannon; Barry; Jeffries; Possee; Cooke (Swindlehurst, 65 minutes); Whittle; Tambling; Rogers.

REFEREE: Mr K. Styles, Barnsley.

ATTENDANCE: 19,790.

GOALS: Anderson (Luton, 50 mins); Rogers (Palace, 58 mins); Butlin (Luton, 61 mins).

task these days. Again Peter Anderson was the heart of the Luton victory. He is having a terrific season, and on Saturday he fought for everything, used the ball with intelligence and took a superb goal to put Luton ahead. It came from a John Aston free kick out on the right. Hindson made a dummy run to the right to take the Palace eyes off the ball which Aston swung over unerringly, and Anderson plunged in front of a transfixed defence to head in by the near post.

A few minutes later Rogers smashed in a spectacular goal from near the penalty spot.

But it lasted only three minutes. Hindson chased an Anderson pass to the right corner flag, managed to beat Taylor with a fast swivel, cut back and banged over a magnificent left-footed cross for Butlin to climb high to head home.

Aston had a fine match, always willing to run at a snapping defence, and there was a great deal of willingness from John Ryan and Finney.

Finney has lost some of his earlier fire, but he still looks on the verge of something good.