

OH WHAT A WASTE...

73/74

LUTON must be the most infuriating promotion prospects of all time. There they were last night, a goal up and the bright lights of the big time glittering temptingly across the Thames — and wham. In the blink of an eye they were one down and struggling without avail to salvage even one point.

Their dash to Division One may have continued in all its glory had an effort by Barry Butlin not been discounted after 62 minutes. And afterwards Luton's unlucky centre-forward fumed: "It was a good goal. It should have been allowed. There was nobody offside when I headed in Andy's cross.

"The linesman gave Aston offside but he was just following through. He was not offside when I put it in."

And manager Harry Haslam agreed: "It looked all right from where I was sitting," he said. "Fulham didn't protest, you can always tell by that."

But it was not to be and Luton were sent home by their former manager with a frustrating message ringing in their ears. "Tough luck, Harry," Alec Stock told the Luton boss. "It should have been a draw."

That didn't help Luton's mood at all. A draw it might have been but now the Town have to go some to retain their second place in the promotion gallop.

While it was an entertaining affair with a lot of skill, it gave one the impression that it was being played on a pin-table.

Cradled

It was electronic soccer played in fits and starts. There were the impatient waits while the ball looped from the flipper and then frantic action as it scuttled between the springs and rubbers of the players' legs.

The speed of the game made it difficult to control but the

ball usually found its way to where it was intended in the long run. It was almost a relief when it went out of play and it could be started all over again.

The fixture was the game in hand Luton had cradled for so long as they challenged the leaders. They have now played 31 matches, the same as Middlesbrough above them and Orient below them. But they are still a point clear of the Londoners.

Luton's biggest problem was again at the apex of the attack where battling Barry Butlin was not given enough support. At times he looked to be challenging the whole defence alone. I thought he gave an admirable performance.

Jimmy Husband, who is still

spluttering towards his best form, scored his first goal for the Town to give them a 58th-minute lead. After the fourth corner by Aston in quick succession had been half cleared, Husband headed high into the goalmouth.

Certain goal

Fulham goalkeeper Mellor and three defenders missed the ball as it looped into the top of the goal.

But Luton had not stopped patting themselves on the back before Fulham were level. Goalkeeper Horn, who had previously saved a certain goal from Busby with a brave dive, chose to fist out a cross from the right instead of catching the ball.

It went straight to Lloyd on the edge of the penalty box and he cracked it through Luton's defence with accuracy and arrogance.

Courageous

Three minutes later came Butlin's disappointment during a spell of real Luton pressure. But Fulham fought their way back and with amazing judgment Horn allowed a Barrett shot to hit a post.

Minutes later Lloyd collected the winner when he mis-hit a cross from Barrett past Horn after laxity by Faulkner. And that was that. Once again Luton had shown their fangs without releasing the venom.

Apart from his error in the air, Horn made some timely and courageous saves and Bobby Thomson is obviously playing with a return to the First Division as his main object.

Busby, I felt, was too quick for Faulkner who chased him with dedication but not always with success. Luckily Garner was alert and did a good job sweeping up in the back yard.

The first quarter of the match went to Fulham, the second quarter to Luton but the Town could do with another lion in the forward line to aid Butlin.

Conviction

Anderson had too much to do in midfield where Jimmy Ryan had a splendid match. Unfortunately Alan West and John Aston seem to have lost some of the excellent understanding they had earlier in the season and the result is a lack of balance when Luton are moving forward.

Aston does not seem to be going round the outside of his man with the same conviction as he used to have though, to

be fair, he was always given two men to beat.

Butlin was given little scope in the air although he took his "goal" beautifully. He found the tall John Lacy difficult to beat.

Mullery and Anderson fought a spirited battle in midfield, where another ex-Luton man, Alan Slough, played with his customary vigour.

But the man that caught my eye in the Fulham side was 21-year-old Barry Friend, making his home debut. A nipper from the Conway-Barrett mould, he looks a tremendous find by Mr Stock.

Last word from Harry Haslam: "I thought we were unlucky and I am very disappointed. But we must not be depressed. We must forget this one and take Saturday's match at Hull as it comes."

Points down the drain at Fulham

DIVISION II — Top three—Eleven matches left to play

	Home				Goals		Away				Goals		
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pts	
Middlesbrough	31	12	3	1	25	7	7	7	1	21	15	48	
LUTON	31	9	5	1	29	6	6	4	6	15	20	39	
Orient	31	8	4	3	22	11	5	8	3	24	20	38	

By ROGER DUCKWORTH
Fulham 2 Luton Town 1

MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Horn; John Ryan, Thomson; Anderson, Faulkner, Garner; Jim Ryan, Husband, Butlin, West, Aston.

Sub: Price.
FULHAM: Mellor; Fraser, Strong; Mullery, Lacy, Dunne; Friend, Slough, Busby, Lloyd,

Barrett. Sub: Moreline.

Referee: Mr Tommy Dawes (Suffolk).

Attendance: 10,071.

Goals: Husband (Luton, 58 mins); Lloyd (Fulham, 59 and 82 mins).