

WELL DONE,

But Luton aim to join Boro in Division One

73/74

LUTON TOWN fans, almost outnumbered and definitely outshouted on their own patch, had the frustrating experience of watching their team's victors doing a triumphant lap of honour round the Kenilworth Road pitch after clinching the Second Division title on Saturday.

And however grudging their applause, they must have known in their heart of hearts that Big Jack Charlton's lads from Teesside thoroughly deserved their title.

It seemed that half the populace of Middlesbrough had made the pilgrimage from the North to salute their team's success. They turned the Luton ground into a noisy, swaying, red-and-white atmospheric bowl.

David Mills, who modestly admitted that he mis-hit his shot that scored the winner, said afterwards: "You can't lose with fans like that. They are great, especially away from home."

By ROGER DUCKWORTH

Luton Town 0 Middlesbrough 1

And the goal? "The ball wouldn't seem to drop for me. I had to hit it up here," he said, holding a hand about a yard off the floor. "There was no power in it and bounced in off a post."

Vastly

Mills deserved his goal, which came in the 76th minute. I thought he had outstanding match, especially in the first half.

Middlesbrough looked a vastly improved side to the one that Luton met at Ayresome Park in November. Big Jack has added a touch of Leeds United to what was previously no more than an honest-to-goodness side.

Now they are hard and uncompromising. They have that all-important mixture of skill and determination. When you are away from home and you need to win to take the title, you don't fanny about. You do just what Middlesbrough did on Saturday — get stuck in.

Mr Charlton looked a proud man as he waited for his players to complete their circuit. He shook hands with every one of them as they left the field. Not even the most bigoted Luton supporter would deny him their congratulations — to which I add my own.

But please do not get the impression that Boro had it all their own way. Luton fought like blazes in the second half and when West, Anderson and Jim Ryan got on top in midfield, Luton really began to buzz.

Miserable

Aston found a way round the chunky legs of Craggs, and Butlin and Husband fought bravely to reach his crosses in a frantic goalmouth.

The jumping of Butlin was brilliant and he gave big centre-half Boam a miserable time when Luton were attacking via the wings.

Husband ran his heart out and was never afraid to dive in among the threshing legs when he saw the possibility of a goal.

But it was not to be. Butlin headed wide after a great early move by West and that was to be Luton's pattern for the afternoon. In the 14th minute John Ryan hooked a Mills header off the line and Boro muscled their way to superiority.

Murdoch and Cochrane were booked for fouls on Husband and Aston, and Hickton missed a sitter with the Luton defence on the wrongfoot.

Garner and Faulkner slugged it out to the last ditch against the big Hickton and Foggon, and both spent Saturday night in the X-ray department at the Luton and Dunstable Hospital for their trouble. Garner had a suspected broken nose and Faulkner a broken finger.

Credit

John Ryan kept Armstrong quiet and Bobby Thomson had an outstanding match at left-back, showing speed, control and a wonderful reading of the game.

Asked afterwards if he thought Boro had been professional toughnuts, he said: "No. I don't think they were as physical as many of the sides we have played this season. I wouldn't take anything at all away from Jack. He's done a wonderful job and deserves every credit."

Horn did well in the Luton goal, especially under pressure when he used his size with obvious delight against a shoulder-battering from Hickton and Mills. I don't blame him for the goal, Foggon escaped on the right, centred and Mills miscued his shot from behind the Luton centre-backs.

Anderson was booked for trying to attract the referee's attention to the fact that two of his colleagues were hurt. There were differences of opinion over Mr Spencer's handling of the game but I thought he kept a firm grip on a potentially explosive match.

Job

There were no hard feelings afterwards from Luton manager Harry Haslam. Drinking his inevitable cup of tea, he told me: "No sour grapes, Jack's done a great job and I've told him so."

"I thought we might have seen more flowing attacking football from Middlesbrough today but they came to do a job. I don't blame them."

"I still say we are going up with them."

After all the bally-hoo I was surprised that the gate was less than 20,000. A full house had been forecast and the day was perfect for it.

The bright sun and the blue sky beamed on the colourful fans and we had the stirring sight of the London Irish Girl Pipers, provided by match sponsors Budget TV Rentals.

It was a First Division occasion in Second Division wrapping. Let's hope we have the real thing next season.



■ Luton's Barry Butlin ends in the net — but the ball stays outside. Pictures by KEITH DOBNEY

MATCH DETAILS

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

MIDDLESBOROUGH: Platt; Craggs, Cochrane; Souness,

Boam, Maddren; Murdoch, Mills, Hickton, Foggon, Armstrong. Sub: Smith.

REF: Mr J. Spencer (Wootton Bassett).

GATE: 19,812

GOAL: Mills (M'boro) 76min.