

ONE OVER THE EIGHT

LUTON were smacked back into the battlefield of mediocrity last night. They gave a legless performance and tottered to the end of a smooth winning run in the League, which had looked to be pushing them back to Division One.

If they slip back any further they will find themselves out of the running altogether. Their opponents last night look certs for promotion.

Although Luton are no push-overs, nowt, as they say in Lancashire, is likely to stop the Trotters.

I can only think, after seeing this display, that the form Luton have produced in recent weeks has been something of the sheep in wolf's clothing.

You can't show buoyant form like Luton have in eight successive League victories and sink this deep in the dip.

In the second half, they prevented further embarrassment, but that is hardly a compliment.

It all began with a giveaway goal by Paul Futcher in the fourth minute. He tried to find goalkeeper Barber with a back-pass — and missed. Garry Jones scored from Neil Whatmore's pass in spite of a brave plunge by Luton keeper Keith Barber.

With the anticipation of promotion in their nostrils, what an excitement there seems to be in playing for Bolton these days.

Luton lacked the ambitious conviction of the home side

Bolton 3 Luton 0

and their aimless clearances gave them nothing to string together in attack.

The midfield was the biggest problem. King and Chambers didn't seem to be able to win the ball, while West went charging about in a frenzied rush to calm things down, often leaving his post to do so.

For all the space they were given, Bolton might have been playing on the nearby Belmont fell.

Every kick, every pass went wrong. As the goals rattled in, Luton even seemed to get every bad bounce of the ball.

In the 23rd minute Byrom scored after Chambers had lost the ball and Paul Futcher had made a last-ditch tackle on

Sad Town totter to end of winning run

By ROGER DUCKWORTH

Reid. There might have been a whistle for a foul, but there wasn't, and the Bolton man took advantage of Luton's hesitancy.

Then big Sam Allardyce dived through the Luton defence to head in a cross from former England man Peter Thompson, and it was all over — as far as Luton were concerned.

Luton's lack of tackling power in midfield and their unbalanced attack left them struggling against a side destined for another spell in top company.

Fray

If this is what a Cup defeat can do for you, then it's better not to bother. The decline of Luton in a couple of weeks has been unbelievable.

Despite a double measure of effort, Ron Futcher was no

match for the big Bolton middle pair of Paul Jones and Allardyce. And Jimmy Ryan, playing as a right-winger, was not accustomed to the fray following his recent time on the substitute's bench.

John Aston had no change out of Ritson, and wasn't helped by the local boos, a legacy of his days with Manchester United, whom everyone seems to hate at Burnden Park.

Bolton couldn't better their intentions in the second half when Luton tried a bit harder.

Ron Futcher hit the post and in the last minute Chambers missed a goal that I reckon would have been tucked away on any local rec!

But there was no way Bolton were going to lose. They even seemed to ease off and sit on

their obviously imminent success.

John Ryan failed to nail the still-thrilling Thompson, but Buckley came through with some credit at left-back.

Paul Futcher did some great stuff in the second half and Faulkner tried to salvage something from the ashes but it was too late.

Luton now have to come back to earth against Brian Clough's Nottingham Forest on Saturday. They are going to have to buck their ideas up.

MATCH DETAILS

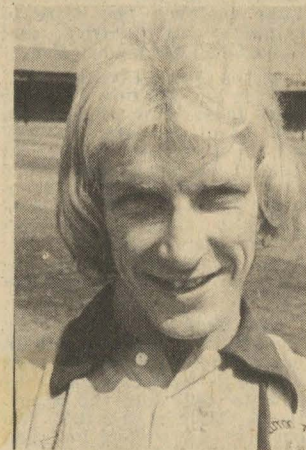
BOLTON: Siddall; Ritson, Dunne, Greaves, Paul Jones, Allardyce, Byrom, Whatmore, Garry Jones, Reid, Thompson. Sub: Nicholson (for Byrom 62 minutes).

LUTON: Barber; John Ryan, Buckley, Chambers, Faulkner, Paul Futcher, Jim Ryan, King, Ron Futcher, West, Aston. Sub: Paul Price.

REFEREE: Mr Jack Taylor (Wolverhampton).

GOALS: Garry Jones (4 mins), Byrom (23 mins), Allardyce (36 mins).

ATT: 21,358.



PAUL FUTCHER



STEVE BUCKLEY