

A FIGHT TO THE END AS LUTON GO OUT

76/77
(sic)

TWO goals in three minutes just before half-time stifled Luton Town's League Cup challenge at Sunderland last night. But what a magnificent fight they put up against last season's Second Division Champions.

Indeed, a crowd of 22,390 repeatedly applauded Luton's stirring efforts to retrieve the situation in the second half, and all Sunderland got was the slow hand-clap and foot-stamping.

Sunderland kept trying to build up from the back — an exercise which more often than not meant making progress backwards — whereas Luton's go-ahead style, played with great speed and fluency, was more palatable.

So was their fierce shooting which, given average good fortune,

would surely have forced Sunderland to a replay.

The unfortunate men were Jimmy Husband, Lilly Fuccillo and diminutive Dixie Deans, who all deserved to score in the second half when Luton were fighting to wipe out a 3-1 deficit.

Gratefully

But time ran out, and Sunderland could reflect gratefully on Billy Hughes's one-man act of destruction which won them the tie in the opening half.

It all happened in the 38th and 41st minutes when Ray Train knocked the ball in at the second attempt from the left, and Hughes beat Keith Barber with a close-range shot.

Barber half-stopped the

Sunderland 3 Luton Town 1

ball but it trickled over the line and referee Pat Partidge awarded the goal.

Three minutes later, Barber came out to parry a Hughes shot and, when the ball ran loose, Hughes got the break and squared it to Bryan Robson who had only to blast it into a gaping net.

Before these two killer goals Luton had stormed back to equalise after Hughes had shot Sunderland ahead with an incredible shot from the sharpest of angles on the left.

That opening goal came after 23 minutes but, two minutes later, Husband equalised from close in after good work by Paul Price and Ricky Hill.

Before that, the 17-year-

old Hill had shown his skill on the turn which created an opening for Husband, whose shot from 25 yards grazed the crossbar.

At that stage Luton were completely composed and were knocking the ball about well and with accuracy.

Husband, acting as a double spearhead with Deans then made an opening for Fuccillo who hit the hardest shot of the night but it, too, was a whisker too high.

But the expression of real football flair and inherent instinct for hitting the target even when shooting blind was provided by Deans in the 18th minute.

Confronted by Jeff Clarke

on the edge of the box and, with his view of the goal obstructed, the little Scot still managed to curl in an incredibly accurate shot from 20 yards, and Jimmy Montgomery had to dive full length to save at the foot of a post.

Then, after Sunderland had surged to their 3-1 lead, Husband ran half the length of the field and sent another screamer inches over the bar.

Luton came out for the second period full of purpose again. They had nothing to gain by trying to be tight at the back and, if a Husband volley had not been turned over the bar by Montgomery after 48 minutes, Sunderland would have faced an anxious battle to keep their two-goal lead.

John Faulkner was solid at the back and Paul

Fletcher was grafting hard, while up front there was a directness and fluency from Husband, Deans and John Aston which the home side could not match.

The crowd were sickened by Sunderland's attempts to keep possession and build laboriously from the back and more often than not the ball ended up with Montgomery.

Inevitably, and with Faulkner fighting under the handicap of an injury for most of the second period, Luton's fierce counter attacks gradually died and, with six minutes left, Faulkner limped off and was replaced by Jim Ryan.

But Luton looked a very good side on the night and, on this form, should be in the promotion shake-up.