

Rags-to-riches Luton provide the answer

We'd give the lot for our manager

LUTON goalkeeper Milija Aleksic has no doubt why his club are up there fighting for a place in the First Division, just 16 months after they were on the point of going out of business.

Aleksic said after Saturday's rout of Carlisle: 'It counts a lot if the boss is an optimist.'

'The players would break a leg for that fellow Harry Haslam.'

In the first half of last season, Luton owed £724,000. Dennis Mortimer, club chairman, said that if they didn't sell Peter Anderson to Antwerp they would go into liquidation.

Luton5 Carlisle0 : By BRIAN SCOVELL

They sold him for £80,000 and here they are all set to go back into the First Division.

The economies that followed the December 1975 crisis were so effective that now the debts are down to £250,000; still a hefty sum when the gate is only 11,735 as it was on Saturday.

Problems

The club have trimmed costs so much that their break-even gate is only 8,000. Haslam has only 14 first-team players. A couple of sneezes could wreck the whole operation.

With all the financial problems they encountered becoming a First Division club with a ground capacity of only 25,000, do they really want to go through all that again?

'You bet', Haslam said, 'if you're in the First you can't be relegated to the Third. That's the killer, the Third.'

Part of the trouble was that when Luton went up in 1973-74, the 26 players went on a First Division pay structure.

Twelve months later, back in the Second with halved gates, they were on the same money.

Luton showed against Car-

DIV TWO LEADERS

	P	W	D	L	Dif	Pts
Wolves	31	17	9	5	+33	43
Chelsea	32	16	11	5	+14	43
Luton	33	19	4	10	+23	42
Bolton	31	16	7	8	+16	39
Nottm For.	32	15	8	9	+25	38
Blackpool	33	12	13	8	+8	37
Notts Cnty	32	15	7	10	+5	37

lisle that they have players of First Division quality. The most impressive were midfielders Alan West, and Lil Fuccillo.

Paul Futch, on the verge of the England side, struck some Bobby Moore-like balls but missed vital tackles as well as a penalty. His twin striker Ron looked a much sharper player than when I saw him six months ago.

LUTON: Fuccillo (9 mins.), Ron Futch (39), Husband (61), West (74), Aston (89).

SPORTSMAIL ON THE BATTLE IN DIVISION TWO

WOLVES

ELEVEN MATCHES to go, five at home, 43 points, goal difference 33.

More style than rivals, patient build-ups, but need two more defenders. John Richards, as he showed on 'Match of the Day', is the best finisher in the division. Clear favourites.

CHELSEA

TEN MATCHES left, five at home, 43 points, goal difference 14.

Feared for their pace, aggression and spirit but criticised for using stereotyped methods. 'They knock in the same kind of ball all the time,' said Bristol Rovers goalkeeper Jim Eadie last week. Sound bet.

LUTON

NINE matches left, four at home, 42 points, goal difference 23.

Long ball exponents. A young side, well organised with quality players. With 23 points from the last 24 the form side, but on Saturday's evidence, not playing as fluently as they can.

BOLTON

ELEVEN matches to go, six at home, 39 points, goal difference 16.

Like Wolves, seek to retain possession. Form erratic but strong in defence and must have fair chance despite extraordinary lapse last week against Carlisle.

FOREST

TEN matches left, five at home, 38 points, goal difference 25.

Making comeback after the blow of losing to Southampton in the FA Cup. Brilliantly motivated but the high average age may count against them when the real pounding starts over Easter. Outsiders.