

Angry Pleat warns: Play better or else

FULHAM 1, LUTON TOWN 0

Report by ERIC HARRIS

DAVID Pleat issued a stiff ultimatum to some of his players after last night's miserable 1-0 defeat at Fulham.

The Luton manager stormed out of the dressing room after the match and said angrily: "We didn't compete. If one or two players don't pull their fingers out, there is only one way they can go.

"I was very disappointed with the result and the way the team played — and I am being very kind by putting it so mildly."

Pleat's mood was easy to understand. Luton gave their worst display of the season against a Fulham side who were nothing more than average but who were made to look better by the Town's lethargic approach to the game.

"Our attitude was all wrong," Pleat said. And his earlier comments can only be interpreted as a threat to transfer list any players who do not contribute 100 per cent effort.

Any confidence gained from the 3-1 victory over Cardiff last week soon disappeared.

Luton had only two worthwhile attacks throughout the game and, although Fulham were mediocre, the London team should really have won by four goals.

■ Luton's John Faulkner and Paul Fletcher challenge



Seven games under Pleat have yielded only three Second Division points and Luton have also been knocked out of the FA Cup.

Those statistics mean that the Hatters must be eternally grateful for the points they collected earlier in the season which still leaves them in a respectable Second Division position.

Motivate

There was precious little to motivate the Luton fans who made the trip to Craven Cottage. All the attacking ideas were supplied by Fulham against a Town defence which looked ragged throughout.

Only bad finishing and some lucky deflections allowed Luton to be let off the hook so lightly.

Fulham showed their ability to create chances as early as the second minute when young Tony Mahoney's full-blooded shot was blocked by a Luton defender.

But Town hit back immediately and could have scored when Graham Jones' shot was blocked and, from the rebound, his second effort was well saved by keeper Gerry Peyton.

But that was an isolated incident and Mahoney continued to torment Luton's defence.

He could easily have scored a hat-trick and one effort — eventually blocked by full-back David Carr — deserved a goal, instead of a corner.

Deserved

Most of Fulham attacks were created by Brian Greenaway who had something of a field day against Carr. His strong runs down the right were a continuous threat to Luton and, supported by Ray Evans' overlaps, the Town rarely had any answer to their tantalising provocation.

When Fulham took the lead in the 14th minute, it was nothing more than they deserved. Significantly, it was made by Greenaway, who

again found room on the right to float over a perfect centre.

It was met by the tenacious Mahoney, who rose above Luton's flat-footed defence to head a fine goal past Milija Aleksic.

But, a minute earlier, the Town could have broken the deadlock when Alan West's shot was deflected for a corner by Peyton, only for the referee to strangely award a free-kick.

A goal down at half-time, Luton did little in the second-half to suggest they could claw their way back into the game. It was only a terrible mis-kick in front of goal by Mahoney, who received John Mitchell's cross, which prevented the Town from falling further behind.

Pleat sent on substitute Ricky Hill for the unimpressive Brian Stein after 64 minutes. For a brief spell, it looked as though Hill could possibly inject some much-needed fire into Luton's bellies, but it was a forlorn hope.

Luton's only chance in the second-half came when Phil Boersma supplied Lilly Fucillo with a fine pass, but his shot brought an equally fine save from Peyton. As far as the Town were concerned, that was it.

There is some fine individual talent in the team and no reason why they should not have a successful run-in to the end of the season.



■ David Pleat walks sadly off the pitch after last night's defeat

MATCH DETAILS

FULHAM: Peyton; Evans Strong, Mahoney, Lacy, Money, Greenaway, Gale, Mitchell, Evanson, Margerrison. Sub: Gray.

LUTON: Aleksic; Price, Carr, Jones, Faulkner, Fletcher (P), Stein (Hill), West, Fletcher (R), Fucillo, Boersma.

Referee: Mr A. Grey (Yarmouth)

Attendance: 7,996.

Goal: Mahoney (14 minutes)

Booking: Price (foul on Strong).