

Pearson pops in a header

78/79

NIGEL WALKER passed a fitness test on an ankle injury but was relegated to substitute for Newcastle United against Luton Town at St. James's Park this afternoon.

United had Peter Withe making his debut after his big-money move from League champions Nottingham Forest, and he had Jim Pearson and John Connolly as his front-running partners.

David Pleat, the Luton manager, dropped full-back Steve Sherlock and brought in Mark Aizlewood.

Fuccillo failed a fitness test but Luton had several new faces on view, including defender Chris Turner and experienced striker Bob Hatton.

An early free-kick to Luton, taken by Turner, posed few problems for United. He floated the ball to the far side of the goal but Kelly quickly won possession to slide it safely back to Mahoney.

When United broke away down the right, Suggett was obstructed and from the free-kick Aizlewood headed behind.

And Aleksic had to dive at Pearson's feet when the ball came over from the corner.

There was a big cheer for Withe when he got up well to head the ball across the face of the penalty area from a Barker free-kick. It fell to Pearson but he volleyed it high over.

Good work by Barker stopped Stein when he tried to make progress down the right wing and the next time Luton moved forward Blackley was in quickly to tidy up with a back pass to Mahoney.

United were under pressure when Moss found space out on the left and crossed dangerously into

TODAY'S TEAMS

NEWCASTLE UNITED

- 1 Mahoney
- 2 Kelly
- 3 Barker
- 4 Cassidy
- 5 Bird
- 6 Blackley
- 7 Suggett
- 8 Pearson
- 9 Withe
- 10 Hibbitt
- 11 Connolly

Sub.: Walker

Ref.: Mr. M. Lowe

LUTON TOWN

- 1 Aleksic
- 2 Stephens
- 3 Aizlewood
- 4 Donaghy
- 5 Turner
- 6 Price
- 7 Hill
- 8 West
- 9 Stein
- 10 Hatton
- 11 Moss

Sub.: McNichol.

(Sheffield).

the goalmouth only for Mahoney to come out well and collect the ball off Hatton's head.

Combined

Again Moss got clear on the left to force United back, but when he crossed, this time aiming for West, it was Mahoney who got to the ball first to hold it cleanly.

Withe and Suggett combined to win the ball a dozen yards inside the Luton half, but Suggett's pass, aimed for Pearson, was cut out by Stephens.

Then Aleksic dived bravely at Withe's feet as the big No. 9 chased after a loose back pass.

A foul by Blackley gave Luton a free-kick just outside the penalty area, but the ball was quickly cleared with Connolly breaking into the Luton half before trying to find Suggett who had gone storming through the middle.

But Aleksic was alert to the danger and saved well. With 13 minutes gone

referee Lowe came to the touchline to change the ball.

When Connolly tried to go down the left he was blocked.

But he did find space in the next minute and from his centre Suggett headed wide.

Mahoney had to race out side the penalty area to kick clear as Luton pushed forward and he was in action again almost immediately, moving out to gather the ball from a centre by Stephens.

United strung together a promising move after 18 minutes. It was started by Withe and carried on by Suggett, whose final pass found Connolly. He shot low across goal and Aizlewood did well to turn the ball behind for a corner which was cleared.

Caught

Luton were caught out in the next minute with Withe starting the build-up from the right and Pearson carrying it on with a first-time pass towards Suggett. But Aleksic moved quickly to save.

At the other end, Donaghy was allowed space to run across the penalty area and fire in a low left-foot drive which Mahoney saved at full stretch.

Finally United got the break through they had been seeking with a brave goal from Pearson after 21 minutes — his first goal for the club.

As the United pressure mounted, Cassidy had a shot blocked, Suggett moved on to the rebound to head it forward and PEARSON thrust himself forward to head in past Aleksic's despairing dive.

Now United were beginning to put their game together and a nice touch by Connolly after 26 minutes pushed Luton back.

He chipped the ball forward to Hibbitt and the United skipper took the ball round Aleksic as the goalkeeper raced off his line.

But Aleksic recovered enough, although he had to concede a free-kick to stop Hibbitt.

Then a cheeky backheel by Hibbitt found Suggett and from his centre Connolly won possession only for Aleksic to save cleanly from his low drive.

Another fine move almost brought United a second goal after 32 minutes.

When Connolly hit the ball low into the penalty area Pearson allowed it to run through his legs for Suggett to touch back into

the path of Hibbitt, whose first-time left-foot effort was not far off target.

There was a let-off for United in the next minute when Mahoney failed to get the ball and Hatton headed forward.

But with Mahoney out of position, Moss could only steer the ball wide of the post with a header.

Young Kelly was having a fine game in defence against the dangerous Moss. First he stopped him with a solid tackle and a couple of minutes later was in quickly to make an excellent interception.

Five minutes before half-time United were almost caught when Hatton went through the middle and found Stein outside him. But from a good position the Luton man shot well wide.

A good crossfield pass by Hill started another Luton attack and this time it ended with West trying a shot from the edge of the penalty area, which forced Mahoney to go full length to save at his left-hand post.

United were still leading 1-0 at half-time.

Halted

Hibbitt did well to get the ball away from Hill, but when Suggett tried to carry on the move he was quickly stopped by the Luton defence.

Then Withe came edging to try to lose Turner, but he too, was halted.

A quickly-taken free-kick by Hibbitt brought danger for Luton with Withe getting up, only for Turner to clear.

Then Cassidy had a shot deflected behind after Pearson had set up the chance.

Bird moved up but his shot from Pearson's pass was blocked and then Aleksic did well to dive at Withe's feet when the new man tried to take the ball round him.

United won another corner after 53 minutes when Aleksic failed to hold the ball under Suggett's challenge but was finally able to turn it behind.

From the corner Hibbitt flashed the ball dangerously low and it moved right across the face of the goal without any player managing to get the final touch.

Withe was in the thick of the action and he found Connolly with a good pass out on the left. The winger cut inside to feed Cassidy and his right-foot effort was not far off target.

There was a lengthy hold-up when Stephens was hurt in a goalmouth scramble and he needed treatment for a leg injury before he was able to return to action.

On the hour only a reflex save from Aleksic stopped United going further ahead.

Pearson showed fine close control in a packed penalty area before finding time and space to crash in a left-foot shot from 10 yards only for Aleksic to block it and Price to complete the clearance.

A good link-up between Cassidy and Connolly ended with Connolly driving the ball over from the edge of the penalty area. Then Luton made their substitution after 63 minutes with McNichol coming on in place of Stephens.

In the next minute there were great appeals for a

McGhee shines for Reserves

MARK MCGHEE, Newcastle United's £150,000 striker, made his comeback after injury away to Bolton Reserves this afternoon.

BOLTON RESERVES: Poole, Graham, Heaney, Wilson, Wardle, Taylor, Novacki, Thompson, Langley, Hogan, Moores. Sub.: Keighley.

NEWCASTLE RESERVES: Hardwick, Mulgrove, Burn, Ferguson, Barton, Smith, Mitchell, Scott, McGee, Parkinson, Robinson. Sub.: Guy.

Bolton had the better of the opening exchanges with Heaney and Moores linking up well down the left.

Then the home defence was stretched when McGhee slipped his marker and created an opening for Scott but the Newcastle striker lost his footing at the vital moment.

McGhee again found room on the right and only Taylor's fine tackle kept him out. Two corners in quick succession were adequately dealt with by the solid Bolton defence.

The first real shot of the match came from Newcastle. Parkinson found himself some room in mid-field but his long-range

effort was easily stopped by Poole.

Novacki brought the Burnden Park crowd to its feet with a fine diving header which Hardwick, the Newcastle keeper, did well to punt round a post.

MCGHEE, Newcastle's danger man, put his side in front after 33 minutes. He picked the ball up just inside the Bolton half but defenders allowed him to run and he punished them by shooting calmly past Poole.

Bolton thought they had equalised two minutes later. Wilson's powerful drive beat Hardwick, struck the crossbar and seemed to cross the line but referee Jones refused to allow the effort.

Newcastle's full-back Mulgrove was booked when he brought down winger Moores and keeper Hardwick gave away a penalty four minutes before the break by pulling down Hogan, but he redeemed himself when he dived full length to push away Graham's spot kick.

At half-time Newcastle led 1-0.

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Withe shines in new look United

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United penalty when Connolly's pass into the penalty area was headed on by Pearson and struck a Luton defender.

The linesman immediately raised his flag, but play was waved on by referee Lowe.

Let-off

United had a let-off after 66 minutes when Blackley failed to get much power behind a defensive header. The ball fell to Hill and his low right-foot shot flashed just wide of the post as Mahoney scrambled across his goal.

Withe was seeing plenty of the ball and he moved smoothly down the right to take a pass from Suggett. When he centred Pearson was up to direct it back to Bird only for the

centre-half's return to be cut off.

A mix-up between Cassidy and Hibbitt let in Hill but his shot from the edge of the penalty area lacked power, although Mahoney had to come out quickly to gather the ball as Stein raced in with a challenge.

Moss who had little luck against Kelly, switched over to the right to try to find a way through, but was pulled up for a foul on Barker when he tried to make progress.

Cassidy was in quickly to rob West and then Blackley cleared from the edge of the penalty area as Luton, with Hatton always dangerous, chased the equaliser.

A good first-time pass from Hibbitt was well

controlled by Suggett, who immediately returned the compliment as Hibbitt moved down the left.

But when he centred no one was in position to take advantage.

A superb header by Kelly put Withe in the clear and he moved aggressively down the right before trying to find Pearson.

Turner was in quickly to clear and then in the next minute — the 77th — Connolly found space on the left and from his centre the ball bounced off the crossbar before dropping behind.

Debut boy Withe got a tremendous reception from the crowd when he took the ball on his chest, controlled it quickly, and then went

THE GOALS

PEARSON, Ncle. 21 min.

on to fire a fierce left-foot shot just wide of a post.

But in the next minute Withe was pulled up for a foul on McNichol.

With five minutes left there was a reminder for United that the game was far from over.

Hatton won possession inside the penalty area and turned quickly. But fortunately for United he shot over the bar.

A neat backheel by Withe tricked Luton and Blackley moved on to the ball with Withe outside him, but the return effort was off target.

Two minutes from time Withe raced on to a fine through ball from Hibbitt, only to shoot wide from an excellent position.

Final:

NEWCASTLE ...One goal

LUTON TOWNNil

Official attendance: 21,300.