

Sad town must pay the penalty

78/79

ERIC HARRIS at Wrexham

LUTON's penalty for failing to win at Wrexham yesterday is almost certainly a place in the first round of next season's Football League Cup.

The Town lost 2-0 in a typical end-of-season game, and had Mark Aizlewood sent off when he protested about referee Colin Seel's decision not to award a penalty in the second half.

The last eight teams in the Second Division table are automatically included in the first round draw for the League Cup, and Luton manager David Pleat desperately wanted two points at the Racecourse ground to eliminate the Town until the second round.

There were pre-match hopes that Luton, who ensured their Second Division safety by beating Fulham 2-0 on Saturday, would benefit from having the tension removed from their shoulders.

It never happened. Luton looked lethargic and the legacy of a nail-biting finale to

their season was painfully obvious with several players failing to find anything like their normal form.

Luton didn't deserve to leave Wales with anything. Without the injured David Moss and Alan Birchenall, Pleat gave a first team debut to young midfield player Wayne Turner and retained Paul Price to play alongside the back four.

The responsibility of scoring goals rested with Bob Hatton and Steve Taylor.

Punch

In the second half, with Luton trailing 1-0, Pleat pulled off Turner — who enjoyed a good debut — and sent on Brian Stein to add punch to the attack.

But it's points that win matches and Luton had only two decent chances throughout the game — and squandered both.

Almost on half time, Ricky

Hill intercepted a bad back pass and pushed the ball through quickly for Hatton. He took far too long to take his chance — one which he would normally gobble up — and allowed Cegielski to take the ball off him all too easily.

Hill created the second chance in the second half when he fed Stein with a precision pass. Stein ran on and was faced by Welsh international keeper Dai Davies who had moved off his line to narrow the angle.

Stein could have done better by attempting to round Davies, but hesitated and the keeper maintained his run to make a vital save by blocking the ball with his feet.

Splendid

Wrexham had taken the lead with a fine goal after 30 minutes. Buxton, wide on the right, collected a cross field pass and made a couple of strides before thumping the

ball over Jake Findlay's head from a narrow angle. It was a splendid goal and Luton paid the penalty for failing to cut out the danger from the flanks.

A minute later, Wrexham might have scored a second when Findlay anticipated McNeil's run to move off his line to narrow the angle. It was enough to put the Wrexham striker off his stride and his final shot was deflected for a corner.

Luton may have had a first half penalty when Frank Jones climbed Hatton's back. Mr Seel looked totally disinterested in Luton's claims.

The controversial no-penalty incident came after 73 minutes when Joey Jones appeared to palm Stein's cross away after Hill had headed the

ball on.

Three minutes later, Wrexham took advantage of Luton's ten men when Rowlands headed Buxton's cross past Findlay.

MATCH DETAILS

WREXHAM: Davies; Cegielski, Dwyer, Jones (J), Jones (F), Giles, Williams, Sutton (Roberts), McNeil, Buxton, Fox.

LUTON: Findlay; Stephens, Aizlewood, Donaghy, Phillipson, Masters, Price, Hill, West, Taylor, Hatton, Turner (Stein).

Referee: C. Seel (Carlisle).

Attendance: 7,842.

Goals: Buxton (30, Rowlands (76)).

Booking: Price (foul on Fox).

Sending-off: Aizlewood (dis-sent).