

# REF RUMPUS AS HATTERS TAKE A FALL

Luton Town 1 Cardiff City 2

79/80

LUTON'S promotion challenge took another headlong dive at Kenilworth Road last night in a match full of controversy which left manager David Pleat shaking his head in disbelief at the performance of Chessington referee Michael Bidmead.

Leading scorer David Moss was carried off with an ankle injury in the 24th minute immediately after putting Luton ahead.

But after that it was a night of frustration, with the Town fans taking their feelings out on Cardiff by lobbing a beer can on to the pitch and then shattering a window in their dressing room.

Moss was taken to hospital where an X-ray revealed only extensive bruising, but he must be rated extremely doubtful for the visit to QPR a week today when the Town must take two points to maintain any slim hopes they have of playing in Division One next season.

Last night's defeat, only their second at home this season, now leaves the Town with the proverbial mountain to climb and Pleat pondering on his team's inability to take more than two points from their last five games.

That isn't promotion form in anyone's book and even Pleat and his players must be secretly harbouring thoughts that their chance has gone.

The Luton manager, however, managed to put on a brave face at the post-match Press conference when he said: "Promotion? I don't concede we are out of it."

## Eric Harris with Luton

LUTON: Findlay, Stephens, Donaghy, Saxby, Price, Hill, West, Stein, Hatton, Moss (White).

CARDIFF: Healey, Dwyer, Lewis, Campbell, Pontin, Thomas, Buchanan, Stevens, Moore, Ronson, Grapes. Sub: Micallef

REFEREE: M. Ridmead (Chessington). ATTENDANCE: 9,246. GOALS: Moss (24), Buchanan (44), Stevens (49). BOOKING: Saxby (foul on Stevens).

"I cannot complain at the character my players showed, although tonight was a disaster for us. Nothing went for us and, as far as I am concerned, Friday night soccer stinks."

And the manager could not conceal his disappointment at the referee's display. "I'm baffled," he said. "We had Mal Donaghy and David Moss hacked down and nothing was done about it. I'm a bit lost for words on that score."

Mr Bidmead gave the kind of display which emphasises the growing alarm in Football League circles over inconsistency. Fouls on Moss and Donaghy went unpunished before the referee booked Mike Saxby for a fairly innocuous offence against Gary Stevens.

And a bad tackle by Bob Hatton in the second half also went unpunished.

It all added up to frustration for the Town fans, and the



Agony for Moss as he is carried off after scoring Luton's goal

Cardiff players were shattered by glass when a brick was thrown against a dressing room window after the game.

Stevens said: "We were all sitting in the bath when we heard a tap on the window. Then, suddenly, the window shattered and we were all covered with broken glass."

All those unsavoury events overshadowed the Town's inability to take at least a point from a game which was reduced to a farce on a morass of a pitch.

During the afternoon Luton called in the referee to make an early inspection and the

match eventually went on despite Cardiff's reluctance to play.

Ball control was impossible on a saturated surface and when Luton lost Moss — their best weapon on the flanks — it was left to the full backs to use the few yards of firm ground.

Cardiff escaped a quick break in the first minute when Bob Hatton pushed over an accurate cross which Brian Stein chested down but then hit tamely at Ron Healey.

Moss tantalised the Welshmen with another centre which floated just behind. But the early minutes failed to

produce anything to trouble either keeper.

Stevens — always a source of inspiration to Cardiff and a worry for Luton — made the first significant strike when he forced Jake Findlay to make a low diving save.

Then Mike Saxby was forced to concede the game's first corner when he headed the ball behind before a typical piece of Moss's intricate footwork provided the first goal.

He took on John Lewis and Rod Thomas on the left, and cut in cleverly before pushing the ball low past Healey into the bottom right hand corner of the net.

## Twisting

That should have provided the Town with the vital early boost they needed but Moss aggravated his ankle injury in the process of scoring and was carried off to play no further part in the match.

Steve White, who reverted to substitute following his elevation to the senior side at Preston the previous week, came on and immediately headed wide from Stephens's cross before another twisting header from the former Bristol Rovers youngster almost surprised Healey.

Stephens was the victim of a piece of flint on the pitch and retired to the dressing room to have a badly cut hand treated. Cardiff equalised while the Town were down to ten men.

There was only a minute left to half time when the visitors won a free kick just outside the 18-yard box — and Luton fell for the oldest set-piece move in the book.

Lewis and Pontin stepped over the ball and left Buchanan to beat the defensive wall and Findlay, who groped desperately in his attempt to prevent the ball entering the net.

Stephens was still in the dressing room at the start of the second half when Stevens missed the best chance of the game by chipping his shot wide with only Findlay to beat.

And the Town were still down to ten men when Stevens made amends four minutes after the resumption.

Buchanan's cross fell at Stevens's feet and he accepted an easy chance by knocking the ball past Findlay.