

LUTON BOW OUT TO BERTSCHIN

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By BILL MEREDITH

Birmingham ... 1

Luton ... 0

LUTON finally conceded their promotion chance after 40 games which have seen them in the top three almost all season.

They went down fighting to the finish at St. Andrews, where Birmingham nervously edged home in a thrilling, fascinating encounter which had every ingredient of football entertainment.

The swirling, capricious wind made high-class soccer almost impossible, yet these two ambitious sides put together moves that were quite breathtaking at times.

Birmingham started and finished badly, but in-between they just about earned the points, secured for them by the bravest of headers from Bertschin following Dillon's cross in the 25th minute.

Luton had their chances, five or six of them, but their strikers were badly off target. Moss, Stein and Hatton all looked gift chances in the mouth; and Donaghy smacked his header against a post.

Sharper finishing

Birmingham, despite their rather meagre goals tally of 53 against Luton's 62, looked sharper in the art of finishing.

Ainscow and Gallagher both netted, only to have their efforts disallowed, but Gemmill rather disgraced himself by missing his first penalty this season.

After Saxby had pulled down Dillon in the area, Gemmill hit his shot too close to Findlay, who dived to his left to make a fine save.

That was in the 71st minute and, 10 minutes earlier, Findlay had been booked for charging out and pulling down Bertschin when the Birmingham striker had been put clear by a superb Curbishley pass.

Massed defence

The last 10 minutes belonged to Luton as clusters of orange-shirted players threw themselves against the massed blue defenders of Birmingham. How the ball stayed out of the net was a mystery.

Jim Smith, the Birmingham manager, admitted: "We were frightened to death. They gave us a real going over."

But somehow Birmingham survived, and now they must steel themselves for tomorrow's visit to West Ham, the Cup finalists who still have one eye on promotion themselves.

Birmingham. — Wealand; Broadhurst, Dennis, Curbishley, Gallagher, Todd, Ainscow, Worthington (Lynex 80), Bertschin, Gemmill, Dillon.
Luton. — Findlay; Stephens, Donaghy, Grealish, Saxby, Price, Hill, West (White 5), Stein, Hatton, Moss.