

Reading boss set to throw in towel

MOSS AND STEIN KEEP HATTERS ON SAFE COURSE

LUTON, with the exception of a seemingly impossible Reading fightback, can look forward to a place in the third round of the Football League Cup.

Goals from David Moss — after only 59 seconds — and Brian Stein gave the Town a 2-0 victory over the Third Division side whose manager Maurice Evans has almost conceded defeat in the two-legged second round tie.

But Cup football is full of intrigue and, on the evidence of last night's performance,

Reading 0 Luton 2 By ERIC HARRIS

Luton would be well advised to treat next Tuesday's second leg at Kenilworth Road with caution.

The Town finally won easily and well. But there were times in the first half when they lived dangerously.

Luton boss David Pleat, conscious of the Town's poor record over the last two seasons against inferior opposition, later revealed he would have willingly settled for a draw.

Thanks to Moss and Stein, it wasn't necessary, but the Luton boss is still faced with at least two problems before he tackles the domestic League game at Newcastle on Saturday.

Emphasised

After making a bad mistake which led to Derby County's winning goal at Kenilworth Road on Saturday, central defender Mike Saxby went through another unhappy spell last night.

And, although rookie striker Frank Bunn was a foil for Stein, the Town still appear to have a deficiency up front.

Bunn tired in the second half and was eventually replaced by Steve White, dropped against Derby, after 73 minutes. But the substitution merely emphasised that Pleat still has a headache in that department.

Bunn showed that he has an appetite for aggression but, when it comes to knocking the ball into the net, Luton are still forced to rely on Moss and Stein.

"I watched Cambridge beat Wolves on Tuesday and now I've heard Bradford City have beaten Liverpool," said Pleat. "Although we won by two clear goals, it would be foolish to ignore those other clubs and wonder if they would fit in with our pattern. I want to produce something from within our own ranks and I feel that we are on the right track.

"I would have settled for a draw tonight, but a victory was a bonus. A goal within the first minute is always a tremendous boost and we should be able to put on a show for our fans next Tuesday.

"But after saying that, I am conscious of our game against Gillingham last season when we went out in the first round against Fourth Division opposition."

Pleat is as puzzled as the Town fans with Saxby's lean spell. Outstanding last season after a record £200,000 transfer from Mansfield, Saxby has hit a barren spell at a bad time and showed little sign of pulling out of it last night.

"Saxby isn't playing as well as he can," added Pleat. "I don't know the reason but every player goes through a bad spell sometime."

Despite not functioning to their maximum capacity, Luton were still an overall class above Reading, and manager Evans seemed to throw in the towel for their chances in the second leg by saying: "We will go all out and attack but it looks very hard for us. I rate Luton highly and they didn't disappoint me for most of tonight's game."

Reading hardly knew what had hit them as Luton took the lead with their first attack. Stein, a superb player in a one-against-one situation, did extremely well to avoid a lunging tackle from a Reading defender.

Composure

He flicked the ball on to Bunn who found Moss on the left. He looked up briefly and ran on before smashing a fine shot past Death who could only help it into the net.

But any thoughts the Town had of a runaway victory were quickly dispelled as Reading regained their composure with Roger Joslyn testing Jake Findlay with a shot which was too close for comfort.

That came after Bunn, on the run, shot narrowly over from Moss's pass and before the clumsy Dave Shipperley — Luton should really have gone to town on his ineffectiveness at the back — was booked for a nasty foul on the young striker.

At the start of the second period, Saxby deflected Dixon's effort away for a corner before Findlay jumped on the rebound after Pat Earles hit the post following a devastating build-up involving Heale and Dixon.

Then, for the first lengthy period in the game, Luton finally took a firm grip and Stein shot narrowly wide after Raddy Antic turned

Reading's defence inside out with a gem of a pass.

After 65 minutes it was all over for Reading when an absolutely superb pass from Moss found Stein. He mesmerised Shipperley with the speed of his quick turn to knock a crisp shot low into the bottom of the net.

MATCH DETAILS

READING: Death, Joslyn, White, M (Webb), Bowman, Shipperley, Moreline, Earles, Heale, Dixon, Sanchez, Beavon.

LUTON TOWN: Findlay, Stephens, Donaghy, Grealish, Saxby, Price, Hill, Stein, Bunn (White, S), Antic, Moss.

REFEREE: D. Lloyd (Worcester).

ATTENDANCE: 5,778.

GOAL: Moss (1), Stein (65).

BOOKINGS: Shipperley (foul on Bunn)



■ Luton keeper Jake Findlay gathers safely watched by Kirk Stephens and Paul Price



■ Luton defender Mike Saxby challenges Reading striker Kerry Dixon, a close season signing from Dunstable