

WE SHOULD HAVE WON!

DESPITE the result, it was Manchester City boss Malcolm Allison who looked the more downcast when he and Luton manager David Pleat faced the Press at the after-match inquest, on Tuesday night.

Puffing on a huge cigar and sipping white wine, he dismissed reports that his future at Maine Road was in jeopardy or that he was under any pressure.

But his expression was not that of a man with no worries.

And, in a moment of frankness, he admitted he was "not overpleased or excited" with his team's performance, in this League Cup crunch clash.

Nor should he be.

Although they showed themselves capable of skill

and intelligence, there was still too much desperation in the way they booted so often into touch, and employed blatant time-wasting tactics.

Skill

And the fact remains that here was a match Luton could — and should — have won.

As a philosophical Pleat summed up: "We contributed to both their goals, but ours was a pure piece of skill."

The Town's first major blunder came after only 12 minutes, when Paul Price's casual attitude near his own goal area allowed a loose ball to slip to a grateful Dave Bennett.

The wily forward side-stepped a stranded Jake Findlay and slotted the ball home without difficulty.

Those who expected a goal landslide to follow were disappointed as Luton fought to keep their heads up.

Raddi Antic, adapting well to his more flexible role up front, came close to levelling accounts with a searing header from a David Moss corner.

Cruel

And when Luton's equaliser did come after 26 minutes, it was the bustling Yugoslav who got his name on the scoresheet.

His free kick some 30 yards from goal cleared the wall of City players blocking his view, and dipped cruelly just under the crossbar to give goalkeeper Joe Corrigan no chance.

Sensing their chance, Luton began to take a tighter grip on the game and all the major action was concentrated in the City half, with Moss, Stein and Antic all searching for an opening.

Then with half-time approaching, City mounted their only serious attack for some time — and scored from it.

Daley's cross from the

Luton 1, Man City 2

By STEVE STONE

80/81
(FLC)

right found the Hatters' defence cruelly exposed, and Tony Henry had the easy job of popping up to head past Findlay.

After the break, Luton continued clamouring for an equaliser, and looked on course for it when Brian Stein was up-ended inside the City penalty area.

The referee, who displayed some alarming inconsistencies in his decisions, would have none of it, though.

Balance

And despite the appearance of striker Herbie Smith ten minutes from time, to replace the injured Tony Grealish, Luton failed to tip the balance in their favour.

Despite the efforts of Ricky Hill, who supplied the last-minute goal in Luton's 2-1 victory over Orient in the League on Saturday, the Hatters could not control the midfield.

They showed plenty of guts and fire in winning the ball — only to give it away again with inaccurate or unsophisticated passing.

And without a Bob Hatton in the side to feed off, David Moss seems to have lost some of the vitality which put him amongst the League's leading goal-scorers last season.

Nevertheless, Luton were not humbled in any way by their First Division opponents and the 10,030 crowd showed their appreciation.

Pleat admitted he was 'disappointed' after the match, but added: "I thought we looked their equal, and certainly did enough for a replay."

The goals they conceded he put down to "lapses in concentration".

And he added: "In a roundabout sort of way this has been a confidence booster for us because we have proved that we have nothing to fear from First Division teams ..."