

HATTERS IN A HOLD-UP!

By ERIC HARRIS

STUBBORN Chelsea left Kenilworth Road last night with some new friends after temporarily pegging Luton's promotion celebrations when they held the Town to a 2-2 draw.

A Hatters victory would have left them with a nine point lead at the top of the Second Division, but it never materialised against opposition who were rarely prepared to sit back and settle for a point.

Luton's biggest League attendance of the season, 16,185, were enthralled by a game which could finally have swung either way although Chelsea

were full value for their point.

It left the Town with a slight chance of winning promotion, depending on other results, at Rotherham on Saturday. But there were no complaints from manager David Pleat last night.

"We are not disappointed with a draw but I didn't think we deserved to lose," he said. "Chelsea didn't make it easy for us although some of our controlled football in the first half pleased me."

Chelsea boss John Neal,

meanwhile, was delighted with the performance of his team.

Influence

"My lads had the guts to match a team who are in the First Division," he said. "It was a match which will entice the supporters to come back for a second helping because they all went away feeling pleased with what they saw."

Although Ricky Hill returned from injury to add a steadying influence in midfield, the Town were

again without winger David Moss who failed a late fitness test on his achilles injury.

Raddy Antic retained his place as an emergency striker to support Brian Stein and Steve White — and the Yugoslav could have been responsible for securing a Luton victory.

He knocked in the first goal to cancel Chelsea's lead and went desperately close with another two efforts which both deserved goals.

Luton were restricted by Chelsea's 4-4-2 forma-

tion which left only Alan Mayes and Clive Walker up front. But the ability of Mike Fillery to contribute skilfully as an auxiliary forward often put the Town under fierce pressure.

Refreshing

They generally coped adequately although Jake Findlay got them off the hook after the visitors regained their lead for the second time with a fine save from Colin Pates.

Another Chelsea goal at that stage would probably

have been enough to sink Luton who often struggled once they reached the Chelsea 18 yard line.

But there was never any suggestion of panic as Chelsea showed a refreshing attitude to attack throughout. The visitors had nothing to lose apart from the points and the applause at the end was for both teams.

The Town made the first threat after only 50 seconds when young Steve Francis, whose handling during the 90 minutes was impeccable, pulled down Brian Stein's shot after he had been given space by Antic.

Then Lilly Fuccillo, who went through an unusual dodgy spell in the second half, forced the Chelsea keeper to make a repeat of the save.

After Mal Donaghy headed the Town's first corner into Francis's arms in the 17th minute, Chelsea had their first shot on target when Chris Hutchings's effort was well taken by Findlay.

Luton should have struck first when Antic sent a few flutters through Chelsea hearts. There were only 14 minutes left to half-time when he brushed aside two challenges before pushing a fierce shot narrowly wide.

Cross-shot

It was an excellent effort but Chelsea snatched the lead two minutes later after Donaghy was guilty of making a rare mistake.

Mayes was put clear on

the left without support but Donaghy, with the benefit of time on his side, was sold a quick dummy by the Chelsea striker Mayes then found Fillery whose cross-shot bounced out from the diving Findlay to Walker who headed easily home.

But, with only a minute left to the break, the Town got back into the game at a vital time when Antic swept Brian Horton's pass low past Francis for the equaliser.

Antic was the only front runner who seemed capable of winning the match for the Town and, in the 57th minute, he was desperately unlucky with a screaming shot which Francis turned around a post with a full length save.

Elegant

Three minutes later Chelsea regained their lead with the best goal of the match. It stemmed from an Ian Britton pass from midfield which found Fillery some 30 yards out.

There was no apparant danger as the elegant midfielder struck the ball towards Findlay. But it was an effort out of Antic's book and swerved past the bemused keeper who appeared to have his feet embedded in concrete as the ball sailed past him.

The setback was the signal for more fanatical support from the Luton fans who groaned when Francis tipped away Hill's header aimed at the top corner.

But the match was far from over and Donaghy joined the attack to nod in an excellent equaliser from Stein's corner in the 76th minute.

LUTON: Findlay, Stephens, Money, Horton, Goodyear, Donaghy, Hill, Stein, White, Fuccillo, Antic. Sub: Jennings.

CHELSEA: Francis, Locke, Hutchings, Nutton, Lee, Pates, Britton, Chivers, Walker, Mayers, Fillery. Sub: Wilkins.

REFEREE: A. Hamil (Birmingham). ATTENDANCE: 16,185. GOALS: Antic (44), Donaghy (46), Walker (33), Fillery (60).

BOOKING: Horton (foul on Pates).



ANTIC AGAIN! This time the Yugoslav cracks in a drive which went inches wide