

SWANSEA EARN LUCKY BREAKS

THE PAPER-THIN line between success and failure cut off Luton Town's hopes of saving at least one point at Swansea. They left for the long trip home believing the ref had made a crucial mistake and robbed them.

"I feel desperately sorry for the players," said manager David Pleat. "They did well enough to get something out of that game."

I can share some of his feelings. An equaliser was in sight when a cynical foul stopped Brian Stein and Swansea's second goal was from a break when the Town were committed to a late attempt to throw everyone forward.

But on a cold wet day and greasy surface, neither team looked a good footballing outfit. Swansea were marginally the better of two poor sides.

DEPRESSING

In the depths of a depressing first half, with neither side putting together a single decent movement after the first five minutes, a Welsh voice in a bored Pressbox sounded a hurtful thought: "This game needs a touch of the Watfords'".

Swansea produced just that, with their longer optimistic passing giving them the edge.

They had been unlucky in the first half when Bob Latchford found the pace to surge past Kirk Stephens and hammer an angled shot on to the outside of the post.

It was the only real threat to either goalkeeper in a 45-minute fiasco of misplaced passing until the interval.

MARKING

At least the back four played well, but attacks had very little support and Paul Walsh and Stein found Swansea's tight marking and deep covering too much.

REPORT BY BRIAN SWAIN PICTURES: MARK RICHARDS

David Moss produced a couple of hopeful shots and Wayne Turner hit a firm drive from 20 yards almost straight at Dai Davies as Swansea's smallest league gate of the season was drifting away for half-time tea.

The second half had more enthusiasm about it, as though both managers had told their teams: "Come on, you can beat this lot."

The Town became a little more adventurous, and Mal Donaghy might have done better when he followed up in support of the attack but fired a shot wide.

Swansea set up their first win in five games with a 51st-minute goal which had the touch of the Watfords as our Welsh moaner had been asking for.

RETREAT

Ray Kennedy started it, running down the Town's right flank. Defenders retreated, and before getting level with the edge of the penalty area Kennedy sent a high square pass to the opposite flank. Right back Gary Stanley had made a solo run and as the defence started to turn one way he chipped the ball back into the goal area and Alan Curtis scored a simple headed goal, under very little pressure and with Jake Findlay stranded.

For a few minutes Swansea looked confident and

goal-hungry, but Curtis wasted a solo run through by shooting wide, and Findlay made two easy saves from drives by Latchford from around 20 yards.

The Town looked capable of getting back into it as they weathered the pressure and started at long last to put together a few passing movements.

DIFFICULT

Stephens pushed forward further, and one of his passes put Moss away down the right wing. He crossed to the far post and Stein beat everyone to the ball, but from a difficult angle headed into the side netting.

The turning point came in the 73rd minute, when another Stephens through-pass down the right sent Stein clear. Davies raced out of his penalty area, and with no cover in sight committed a blatant cynical foul, missing the ball and knocking Stein flat.

Referee Bert Newsome didn't even make it a booking. He was wrong. It should have been a sending-off, and even Welsh Pressmen thought Davies was lucky to stay on.

Raddy Antic, who had come on as sub for Wayne Turner, tried without success to bend the free kick into the net. The shot went wide, and so did



● FLASHPOINT: Heavy drizzle blurs the camera's view, but this picture shows Dai Davies tripping Brian Stein outside the penalty area to prevent a likely goal. It paid off for the Swansea goalkeeper — he conceded a free kick which brought the Town nothing, and he wasn't even booked, when he might have been sent off.

another cracker from Moss shortly after.

Nine minutes from time Swansea scored a second goal to wrap up the points when the Town were caught stretched by a counter-attack.

Robbie James broke down Swansea's right, looking as though he might have been offside when he received the ball just inside the Town's half. His low cross to the near post was met by Latchford, and the First Division's leading scorer stretched a leg ahead of Findlay to score his 15th goal of the season.

Latchford might also have been offside, but when you're down on your luck those decisions become additions to the catalogue of occasions when the knife-edge dividing line between success and failure cuts you up.

Equally true for the disappointed Town supporters who went to South Wales was that this was another day when the all-round team performance was not good enough to beat a side which will not be a major power in the First Division this season.

Ref sure that he got it right

REFEREE Bert Newsome won't be at all surprised if the Football League's assessor at The Vetch criticises him for not sending off Swansea goalkeeper Dai Davies for his foul on Brian Stein.

The Town players and manager had no doubt that Davies should have gone. Nor did I. Even Swansea manager John Toshack would not have been surprised.

The foul was a blatant trip to deny the Town striker a probable scoring opportunity. Football law says that has to be a sending-off, and even that may not be fair on the attacking side because by the time the free-kick is taken from outside the penalty area defenders have had time to get back, cover and mark, and put up a wall.

Lowest place of season so far

WITH only four points gathered from the 24 available in their last eight league games, Luton Town are out of the First Division's relegation places only because of goal difference.

They have dropped to their lowest position of the season, 19th, level on points with Norwich and Birmingham, who are in 20th and 21st places.

Sunderland are in danger of losing touch at the bottom, but are only one victory short of catching up Luton, Norwich and Birmingham. Ipswich won 3-2 at Roker Park, otherwise there could have been four teams joint bottom on 17 points.

Birmingham picked up a point at Everton with their fifth goalless draw of the season and Norwich produced the day's shock result, beating leaders Liverpool 1-0 at Carrow Road.

ABOVE

Southampton moved above the Town when Danny Wallace's goal gave them a home win over Stoke, a day before his goal against the Town at Kenilworth Road was voted goal of the month on BBC's Match of the Day.

Manchester United were the only one of the top four teams to win, beating Watford 1-0 at Vicarage Road to go second, three points behind Liverpool.

Watford dropped to fourth, overtaken by Aston Villa, who collected their fourth consecutive victory, 1-0 at home to West Ham.

Places at the lower end of the First Division:

	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
Everton	17	5	5	7	25	26	20
Southampton	17	5	4	8	18	31	19
Bristol	17	5	3	9	15	36	18
Luton	17	3	8	6	33	37	17
Norwich	17	4	5	8	20	29	17
Birmingham	17	3	8	6	11	25	17
Sunderland	17	3	5	9	21	34	14

Match Details

SWANSEA CITY 2 LUTON TOWN 0
Half-time: 0-0

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Goodyear, Donaghy, Money; Hill, Horton, Turner (Antic, 63 mins); Stein, Walsh, Moss.

SWANSEA: Davies; Stanley, Charles, Stevenson, Rajkovic, Hadziabdic; R. James, Kennedy, Mahoney; Curtis (L. James, 66 mins), Latchford.

THE GOALS: Alan Curtis, close-range header, 51 minutes; Bob Latchford, meeting near-post low cross, 81 minutes.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town three saved, five wide; Swansea four saved, five off target, one hit a post. Corners: 7-5 to Swansea.

REFEREE: Bert Newsome, Broseley, Shropshire. Marred a competent and even-going performance by failing to impose the sending-off rule against Dai Davies when the Town looked like getting an equaliser.

ATTENDANCE: 9,556, Swansea's lowest of the season, although the weather was atrocious. More than twice as many watched them the last time the teams met, as high-flyers in the Second Division.

ENTERTAINMENT: Precious little. Swansea were poor but the Town barely competed for long spells.



FOILED: Dai Davies intercepts the ball as Paul Walsh tries to meet a centre, with Brian Stein waiting for any slip by the goalkeeper.