

ELECTRIC WALSH STRIKES

Luton revel in the mud

82/83



DAVID PLEAT

ENGLAND manager Bobby Robson left Upton Park last night applauding the exciting Paul Walsh hat-trick which lifted Luton out of the First Division's quagmire relegation area.

Luton's 3-2 unexpected but thoroughly deserved victory and Walsh's first goals since December 11, were even accepted by the most dedicated West Ham fans who twice saw their team take the lead.

Town manager David Pleat dropped former Liverpool defender Richard Money, on-loan striker David Geddis and midfielder player Lil Fuccillo.

Frank Bunn and Mitchell Thomas made their First Division debuts to replace Geddis and Money — and how they rose to the occasion in the Upton Park mud-bath.

They did everything asked of them in a totally

committed teamwork display which was cemented after only 18 seconds when Bunn's effort was hacked off the line — the first of four — after Walsh's cross thudded against the post.

Changes

Pleat threatened changes before the game and his tactical moves worked like a charm against West Ham's sophisticated approach work.

It provided superb entertainment for the fans in a pulsating game and gave Pleat his first night's decent sleep for many matches.

It may be unfair to single out Walsh's achievement. But the fact remains he ripped the Hammers defence apart with his lethal finishing and did his future England chances a power of good.

Robson left the ground bubbling over the three

Luton goals after saying: "It isn't fair to single out one player after a superb game which was a credit to both teams.

"But Walsh was very sharp on the turn and his finishing was of the highest quality.

Astonishing

"This was an astonishing effort on a sticky pitch from two teams playing their fourth match in ten days. What I saw tonight was magnificent for English football."

The pudding-like pitch appeared to be totally against decent football. But both teams overcame the conditions to give 21,000 supporters exceptional value for their money.

Walsh was given superb support by Bunn, who can

now look forward to an extended run in the first team, while Thomas, a student of the Youth Opportunities Scheme, also displayed his undoubted potential at the back.

Despite the fact West Ham twice took the lead, most of the attacking formulas were provided by Luton who lifted themselves well above their recent performances.

After that early scare to West Ham's defence, Ricky Hill threatened Phil Parkes' goal with a shot which the keeper managed to grab on the line before skipper Brian Horton — who got through a mountain of work — shot just wide.

But despite those early threats, the Hammers went in front after 19 minutes when Tony Cottee

stabbed in a close-range shot in West Ham's first serious attack.

The Town could have been level six minutes later when Wayne Turner, who replaced Fuccillo, should have done better with a clear vision of goal but wasted the opportunity by shooting wide.

Superb

David Moss, another vital cog in this superb display, also fired wide before Walsh equalised for the first time when he took advantage of a build-up involving Bunn and Hill.

But, with 65 minutes gone, Luton's luck appeared to run out when Geoff Pike struck the angle of the post and bar with a vicious shot. It bounced out to Sandy

Clark whose header beat Jake Findlay.

But the Town were far from buried and Walsh displayed his delicate ball control to smash a fine shot past Parkes in the 73rd minute to equalise again.

Eleven minutes later Moss made a terrible mistake when he allowed Parkes to grab the ball at his feet before Walsh struck in injury time taking advantage of Ray Stewart's mistake to draw the keeper before smacking in a deserved winning goal.

MATCH DETAILS

WEST HAM: Parkes, Stewart, Gallagher, Dickens, Martin, (Morgan), Devonshire, Van der Elst, Cottee, Clark, Allen, Pike.

LUTON TOWN: Findlay, Stephens, Thomas, Horton, Goodyear, Donaghy, Hill, Bunn (Kellock), Walsh, Turner, Moss.

REFEREE: T. Spencer (Salisbury).

ATTENDANCE: 21,435.

GOALS: Cottee (19), Clark (65), Walsh (33, 73, 90).