

Hatters hit by a hoodoo

THE FA CUP is beginning to be something of a tax for Luton Town. Their home defeat at the hands of Manchester United this week means that they haven't been beyond the fourth round since 1974.

They have been knocked out at the fourth round stage for the last three years. Their best cup performance since they lost in the 1959 final was to reach the fifth round ten years ago, when they lost to eventual winners Sunderland at Roker Park.

Since David Pleat became manager, they have lost the fourth round at Millwall, in the third round at York and at home to Swindon, and in the fourth round Newcastle, at home to Ipswich and now at home to Manchester United.

United were the form horses for the cup-tie: they have been beaten only once in their last 15 league and cup games and their Kenilworth Road performance ought them their fifth consecutive victory.



● FOILED: Grounded Arthur Albiston gets in a tackle to prevent Brian Stein scoring from Brian Horton's flicked free kick.

BIG SPENDERS EARN A CUP RUN

ENGLAND winger Steve Coppel is one of the many who believe that his Manchester United team can now go all the way to Wembley after passing a difficult test against Luton Town at Kenilworth Road.

Manager Ron Atkinson has spent millions to try to build a team to compete with Liverpool, and they produced a highly professional demolition job to end the Town's FA Cup interests for another year.

And while the Town never looked like winning once United had taken the lead early in the second half, Coppel was full of admiration for the way they tried to outsmart his team.

"You always worry a little when you're drawn away in the cup," he said. "We knew Luton would give us a good test, but the way we're playing we aren't frightened of anybody."

"We came to Luton quietly confident, but they made us struggle a bit in the first half. They might have scored first and that would have made it very difficult for us."

FIRST VISIT

It was Coppel's first visit to Kenilworth Road, and like the rest of his team he enjoyed the day a lot more than the Town and their supporters.

And a memory of his early career set me thinking about what might have been if Coppel had come to Luton eight years ago. He recalled that he was playing for Tranmere Rovers when scouts from Luton and Manchester United were watching the Fourth Division club.

Each club thought the other was after their man, so United jumped in quickly to snatch young

Report by Brian Swain Pictures: Mark Richards

Coppel, while the Town signed John Seaman.

The key to United's win was in the quality of the whole team. Bryan Robson was superb at both ends of the field, but even if his £1.5 million transfer class shone, the Town were never ashamed.

United boss Atkinson picked out Remi Moses as the man who tipped the balance against the Town. He is keeping former England skipper Ray Wilkins out of the side.

"If anyone deserved to break the deadlock it was him," said Atkinson.

TOP FORM

I felt the Town's problems stemmed from the fact that they met a United team in which every man was playing at somewhere near top form. Sadly, several Luton players were below par.

Brian Stein, back after a seven-week lay-off, could not make a happy return without at least one reserve game behind him, and Paul Walsh was not as sharp as he can be. The attack rarely looked like unsettling one of the best defences in the First Division.

Richard Money's return, with experience preferred to the enthusiasm of 18-year-old Mitchell Thomas, left the Town still looking good at the back for the first half, but United's attacking work in the second carried just a little too much power.

Before the interval the visitors were very much a mean machine. Their 4-4-2 system was geared to playing it very tight at the back and stifling the midfield. The Town's normal pattern could not work the ball through for lack of space.

Manager David Pleat's forecast that the first goal

would be the important one proved to be exactly right, although Stein might well have got the vital opener.

LAST CHANCE

In the tenth minute he pounced on a poor back pass by Kevin Moran but slid the shot wide as Gary Bailey rushed out, and that chance turned out to be the last clear opening conceded by United.

They took the lead 63 seconds into the second half with Moses crashing in a shot that rose over Jake Findlay's arms into the net from 20 yards, after slick inter-passing play involving Robson, Coppel, Moses himself, and Whiteside.

HIT POST

Luck saved Bailey when Ricky Hill powered in a header from Brian Horton's free kick, but the ball hit the post, and soon after that the Town escaped when Whiteside hit the bar from a cross by Coppel.

The only other time United's goal was in danger was from a clever free kick by Horton. He flicked the ball over the wall and Stein was almost in for a close-range shot, but was denied by a superb tackle by Albiston.

PRESSURE

Forced to abandon caution to search for an equaliser, the Town were under more pressure than United. Findlay's fumble allowed a shot from Whiteside into the net in the 73rd minute, only for Stapleton to be given offside.

That was a bit of a let-off, but United scored again in the final minute. Findlay did well to tip over a drive from Stapleton, but from the corner he only half-saved Stapleton's header and Moran charged in to snap up the rebound, with Horton the only Town player covering on the goal-line.



● NEARLY: Ricky Hill beats Robson and Coppel to power in a header as the Town search for an equaliser.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 0 MANCHESTER UTD 2

Half-time: 0-0

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Goodyear, Donaghy, Money; Hill, Horton, Turner (Kellock, 75 mins); Walsh, Stein, Moss.

UNITED: Bailey; Duxbury, Moran, McQueen, Albiston; Moses, Coppel, Robson, Muhren; Stapleton, Whiteside. Sub: Macari, not needed.

THE GOALS: Remi Moses, 46 mins, drive over Jake Findlay from 20 yards; Kevin Moran, 89 mins, pouncing after Findlay blocked a header from Frank Stapleton.

OTHER STRIKES: Town one saved, eight wide, one hit a post; United four saved, ten off target, one hit the bar, one disallowed for offside. Corners: 7-6 to United. ATTENDANCE: 20,516, third highest at Kenilworth Road this season, producing record receipts of £55,906. REFEREE: Ray Lewis, Great Bookham—allowed the game to flow and had no problems as both teams got on with it.

ENTERTAINMENT: Not quite as sparkling as Luton fans had hoped for — United were too good at closing it down when danger threatened. They looked potential cup-winners when they clicked into a higher gear for the second half.



● Gary Bailey is still diving and hopelessly beaten, as the ball rebounds past him off the post. Referee Ray Lewis seems to share the general surprise.