

ENGLAND manager Bobby Robson came to watch Brian Stein and Paul Elliott but went away with Vince Hilaire's name in his notebook.

The winger may have taken the first jinking steps towards resurrecting his international prospects after an enterprising display.

Hilaire, an England youth and under 21 international and once tipped to become England's first senior black player, showed skill, pace, vision and a willingness to work as Robson watched from the stands.

It was not perfection, certainly, and he missed a late chance to equalise. But his ability was an outstanding memory from a largely forgettable match.

David Pleat opted to use just two recognised midfield players, with four front men, although Stein had a slightly deeper role than the other three.

The result was that Hatters ended up trying to match Wednesday's fast and furious style, with long balls knocked to Steve Elliott, and came off second best.

The match may best be regarded as good practice for next Saturday's derby with Watford, who share Wednesday's passion for using goalkeepers as schemers and greyhounds for strikers.

LUTON 1 SHEFF WED 2 By GRAHAM PUNTER

But perhaps David Pleat will spend a thoughtful week before deciding his tactics for the big game.

There was no disputing Luton's 100% commitment and undying passion, but they cried out for the calm foot of experience and on Saturday's showing Colin Todd cannot appear soon enough in a Luton shirt.

Passion

Paul Elliott was a surprise inclusion after the concussion he sustained five days earlier and he was not at his most efficient — unfortunate in view of Robson's presence and his recent outstanding games.

Ashley Grimes was suffering from sciatica which meant Wayne Turner, after a succession of excellent performances in the centre of midfield, had to be restored to his old left-back position.

Although Luton came within one goal of a point, and their late onslaught nearly brought them that goal, they could equally well have been buried by half-time.

And it was Luton lad Imre Varadi who did his home town side a favour by allowing them to stay in the game. He missed two chances within a minute, first lofting the

ball over the bar and then being foiled by Dibble's bravery.

Hilaire impressed as early as the second minute when his driven volley was pushed over the bar by Hodge.

In the build-up Wednesday's Gary Oliver, making his Division 1 debut, received an elbow in the face and was stretchered off with a broken nose and concussion.

Hilaire constantly had Wednesday defenders struggling for speed and although he found his way round the defence his crosses were not given the treatment they deserved.

On occasions Luton remembered the game they play best, footballing their way through the midfield, and Steve Elliott was unlucky with a low shot that curled wide of the far post after slick approach work by Bunn and a defence-splitting pass from Hill.

Problems

Luton lost their way after 34 minutes when Chapman scored as the ball pinged off a post before going in.

The speed of Varadi and Marwood was posing Luton's defence all kinds of problems as they popped up in various positions and

Varadi was unlucky when he got goalside of Paul Elliott but fired wide.

Wednesday were fortunate with their second goal but it killed off Luton. Donaghy attempted to clear the ball, it struck Paul Elliott and fell invitingly for Lyons to score after 52 minutes.

Five minutes later Luton were unlucky when once again an all-too-rare move through midfield ended with Hill setting Stein up for a blistering drive that Hodge did well to save.

With 61 minutes gone Pleat took Moss off and creative midfielder Parker came on to try to inject more ideas into the attack. Almost immediately he produced a diagonal pass of marvellous accuracy that split Wednesday's defence, only for Hilaire to be caught a fraction offside.

Bunn stormed through from midfield to crack a superb goal after 78 minutes and that was the signal for a frenzied onslaught but the equaliser proved elusive.

LUTON: Dibble, Thomas, Elliott (P), Donaghy, Turner, Hill, Bunn, Hilaire, Stein, Elliott (S), Moss. Sub: Parker.

SHEFF WED: Hodge, Sterland, Smith, Lyons, Oliver, Blair, Ryan, Shelton, Marwood, Varadi, Chapman. Sub: Worthington.