

Luton go to town with a confident smile

By Clive White 84/85

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It made a change to hear the ever-enthusiastic David Pleat, manager of Luton, enthusing about his team at Kenilworth Road on Saturday. Luton's run in the FA Cup semi-final stage has given them more resilience, as has the purchase of hardened professionals like Harford, Foster and Nicholas. Since they settled into the side, Luton have gone 10 home games without defeat, and have suffered only one loss in their last nine games. They are confronting the danger of relegation with a confident smile.

It must be some time since one said of Luton that they could have won 9-1. Yet in the first 20 minutes of this strange game, one could have been forgiven for forecasting something more like 1-9. Ipswich swarmed all over Luton in that period, but were rewarded with only one goal. It should have been enough to encourage them further, but such is the fragile state of their confidence that when one went in at the opposite end they fell apart like cardboard characters.

Brennan and Gates had been given the freehold of midfield, but now Stein dropped deep to occupy Brennan, and Nicholas could give



Pleat: ever enthusiastic

Gates more attention. Like others before them, Ipswich found it a problem containing Stein on his runs from deep positions. But Luton, unlike Ipswich, also have one or two kings, if not exactly aces, up their sleeve.

Harford is more than just a tall head, he is deceptively adroit on the ground, too, as he showed when scoring the third, and when putting Donaghy clean through for what should have been goal No 8 or something. Pleat said: "I paid decent money for him, and would have paid more and more again if necessary. We haven't had a forward here in years who makes

the most of his physique." But it is Harford's head which hurts the opposition most, as he showed when nodding in the equalizer and earlier, when he headed against the bar.

The move of the match, though, had already been struck up by Ipswich when, following a corner, Putney and Zondervan, with first-time passes set up Gates for a first-time volley. But Gates is not usually the most accurate finisher.

Ipswich's attack was constantly being undermined by their defence, who, through their experience and quality, have held the side together this season. Three minutes before half-time, and after Hill had curled a crafty little shot against an Ipswich post, Osman failed to clear properly and a Stein back-heeled a pass which Nwajiobi just touched home under Cooper's body.

Ipswich were crumbling fast when England's centre-half, Butcher, let a softly stabbed pass by Nwajiobo slip by him to Harford, who finished impressively.

LUTON TOWN: L Sealey; T Breacker, M Thomas, P Nicholas, S Foster, M Donaghy, R Hill, B Stein, M Harford, E Nwajiobi (Sub: R Daniel), D Preece.

IPSWICH TOWN: P Cooper; G Burley, Gernon, R Zondervan, R Osman, T Butcher, Putney (Sub: J Dozzell), M Brennan, D'Avray, K Wilson, E Gates.

Referee: D Letts (Basingstoke).