

HARFORD GIVES LUTON LATE SURVIVAL TONIC

By MICHAEL CALVIN

Luton Town ... 2 Manchester United ... 1

MICK HARFORD, emerging as the key figure in Luton's resistance to relegation, emphasised the inevitability of Everton's accession to the title of League champions with a match-winning performance at Kenilworth Road yesterday.

Manchester United, currently leading the academic pursuit of Howard Kendall's team, were ready to allow Luton only the satisfaction of a moral victory when Harford scored the last-minute goal which lifted his side three places up in the First Division.

His eighth goal in six matches leaves Everton only three wins away from being proclaimed as champions and prompted Ron Atkinson, the United manager, to observe with undiluted sarcasm: "Everton must have a chance now."

Frustration at the manner of United's televised defeat may have been understandable, but Mr Atkinson struggled to offer a convincing case against the theory that Luton deserved an important victory.

United suffered from the emotional intensity of their FA Cup duel with Liverpool and effectively lost the game in midfield, where Nicholas overshadowed Robson and the scurrying Strachan was badly missed.

Acrobatic save

That they survived 69 minutes before conceding a goal was a tribute to Bailey, the goalkeeper who has found that even England recognition is not enough to answer his critics.

The ovation for one acrobatic save from Preece's drive had hardly died down when his remarkable reflexes enabled him to beat away Stein's close-range drive.

But, crucially, he conceded a

penalty by bringing down Stein after Foster's powerful header had created unforgivable defensive confusion.

Harford, recovered from an ankle injury sustained in the FA Cup semi-final against Everton, allowed Bailey to get a hand to his spot kick before turning away with a mixture of delight and relief.

Luton had endured few alarms but, within three minutes, United drew level as a result of White side's fiercely competitive streak.

Kept their nerve

The Northern Ireland international, whose aggression was predictably punished with a late booking, made a forceful run into a scramble at the near post which climaxed with him hooking the ball into the roof of the net.

That offered Manchester brief illusory hope that Luton's developing team would betray its relative inexperience by allowing the game to slip away.

Instead, the strugglers kept their nerve and, when Foster's 89th minute free kick thudded against the cross bar, Harford ignored the lunging bodies to apply the finishing touch.

"You won't see a better centre forward than Harford all season," said David Pleat, Luton's manager, with understandable satisfaction. "He is not just a big man—he has a fine touch as well. Things are beginning to take shape."

Luton Town. — Sealey; Breacker, Thomas, Nicholas, Foster, Donaghy, Hill, Stein, Harford, Nwajiolobi, Preece.
Manchester United. — Bailey; Giddman, Albiston, Whiteside, McGrath, Hogg, Robson, Muhren, Hughes, Stapleton, Olsen.



Hughes, the Manchester United striker, tries an acrobatic overhead kick, though closely guarded by Breacker, the Luton defender.