

HATTERS, past-masters at passionate performances in moments of crisis, were beaten at their own game at Highfield Road.

Coventry City were desperate for a win to keep their First Division survival hopes alive and found reserves of endeavour to overcome their obvious deficiencies and earn their three points.

Luton spent the first-half providing a lesson in superiority in every department. They were more sure at the back, more creative in midfield and had more punch in attack.

But soccer is a many faceted game and when the chips are down, hard running and a determination to succeed can sometimes count for more than ability.

So the second-half proved, with Luton under siege, and Hatters' only complaint can be that they failed to take advantage on the break of some fragile defensive cover as the home side stormed into attack.

Luton, as promised by manager David Pleat, did Coventry no favours, fielding what has become established as the first choice line-up.

COVENTRY 1 LUTON 0 By Graham Punter

Coventry ^{84/85} were missing former Luton favourite Kirk Stephens, side-lined with a knee injury that meant a cartilage operation the day after last Thursday's match.

Luton showed a keenness to get on with the job in the early stages, and there was no evidence of the patience that might have been expected, waiting for Coventry to commit themselves in a do-or-die effort in the later stages.

In the opening eight minutes Stein, Preece and Harford all went close and later in the first half Nwajiobi and Stein were unlucky while Ricky Hill, showing some wonderful control throughout the game, had an effort tipped over the bar.

Coventry were disappointed to see old boy Les Sealey thwart them with an instinctive save from a close range shot by Adams.

City gave notice of their second half transformation just a minute after the break when Foster and Sealey combined on the line to keep out a drive from Bennett.

With centre-back Brian

Kilcline joining the attack at every opportunity Coventry found themselves stretched at the back and Nwajiobi raced through only to fire wildly high and wide.

Little Terry Gibson had a diving header blocked, big Cyrille Regis missed his kick in front of goal and Kilcline had a header tipped over as the pressure built up. There were squeals for a penalty when the ball hit Tim Breacker's arm.

Coventry save the day seven minutes from time when Kilcline drove the ball low past Sealey through a pack of players.

No joy then for the considerable travelling contingent of Luton fans among the 14,833 crowd — except the knowledge that they contributed to the £2,543 raised on the night for the Bradford Disaster Fund.

COVENTRY: Orgrizovic, Butterworth, Kilcline, Peake, Pearce, Bennett, McGrath, Hibbitt, Adams, Regis, Gibson. Sub: Gynn.

LUTON: Sealey, Breacker, Foster, Donaghy, Thomas, Hill, Nicholas, Preece, Stein, Harford, Nwajiobi. Sub: Daniel.

● Coventry beat Everton 4-1 on Sunday to send Norwich down to Division 2.



● IN THE THICK OF IT . . . Steve Foster and Mick Harford climb above a Coventry defender.