

Pioneer style

85/86

Luton's new look brings the best out of Arsenal

Luton.....2 Arsenal.....2: By JEFF POWELL

THE high-class entertainment provided by Luton and Arsenal last night suggests that the second generation of synthetic pitches can transform the future of English football.

Luton's £250,000 installation is such a dramatic advance on QPR's pioneering of the Omniturf that it demands to be used by players rich in skill, sharp of mind and fleet of foot. What a pity that no more than 10,012 fans witnessed the exhilarating response of Luton and Arsenal.

The gaps in the stands and terracing were as visible as the sand embedded in the plastic surface but there was nothing empty or artificial about a match as good as any in the First Division so far this season.

Appropriately for a company which manufactures tennis courts, En-tout-cas have produced a surface with a firm foothold, a normal bounce and offering reward for accuracy and imagination.

The surest, swiftest way to expel the memory of this summer's tragedies and restore the public's faith would be to serve up a succession of games like this.

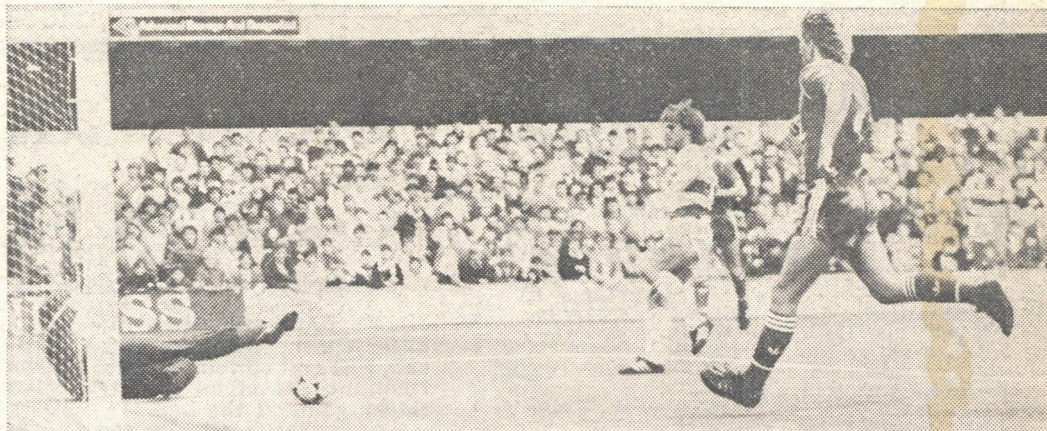
Masterpieces

The first and last goals were minor masterpieces. Luton went ahead in only the second minute, Mick Harford heading on Andrew Dibble's long clearance for David Preece to cross low and Nigerian Emeka Nwajiobi to steer past John Lukic.

With 20 minutes remaining, Tony Woodcock sped onto a perfect return pass from Charlie Nicholas to plunder Arsenal's second equaliser.

In between Arsenal recovered from the loss not only of the early goal but also centre half David O'Leary to a recurrence of the facial injury suffered against Manchester United on Saturday.

England centre forward Paul Mariner was called from the



GARY BANNISTER scores the first QPR goal in their 2-1 win over Nottingham Forest. Report: Page 31.
Picture: MALCOLM CLARK

substitute's bench as early as the tenth minute to perform his now familiar role as an emergency defender.

In the immediate confusion, Emeka Nwajiobi and Brian Stein should have increased Luton's lead. But Arsenal regrouped and both Stewart Robson, who struck the angle of post and crossbar, and Woodcock, who stumbled over a Nicholas header, should have equalised before half-time.

When the levelling goal came in the 53rd minute, it was by

courtesy of Luton. Ian Allinson's low cross was turned back by Graham Rix and Mal Donaghy diverted the ball into his own net under pressure from Woodcock.

Luton's Tim Breacker and Harford and Arsenal's Viv Anderson and Mariner were booked before the home team regained, then lost, the lead in the space of two minutes.

Ricky Hill's 68th-minute pass enabled Stein to squeeze his shot beneath Lukic, with Arse-

nal asking questions of their goalkeeper.

Recrimination turned to celebration immediately as Woodcock and Nicholas combined in their classic strike.

With the exception of O'Leary, who needs an X-ray today on his damaged jaw, everyone left Kenilworth Road smiling. O'Leary was injured in an aerial clash with Harford and manager Don Howe said: 'Elbowing is becoming far too common.'