

JUST THE TICKET!

IF EVER soccer needed an advertisement as it drags itself out of the gutter then this was it.

Luton and Arsenal served up every facet of football that makes the game great, at Kenilworth Road on Tuesday.

There was skill by the bucketful, commitment, endeavour, pace and thrills.

Both sides contributed to the entertainment and the result reflected the joint effort.

The only pity was that the all-ticket arrangement meant just 10,012 people were able to witness the event.

Luton opened with a blistering spell that would have graced any stage, outclassing Arsenal and scoring the crucial goal.

But the Gunners, looking such a different outfit to the whimpering weak-kneed side that limped to a 3-1 defeat last season, found reserves of courage, weathered the storm

LUTON2
ARSENAL....2
By Graham Punter

and made a real game of it.

David Pleat had a selection problem before the kick-off and didn't settle on his line-up until 6pm.

Paul Elliott had not recovered from the ankle injury sustained at West Ham and with Foster and Stacey North still sidelined he had no partner for Donaghy.

Nicholas slotted in at centre-back and Ricky Hill, rushed back after the knee injury that denied him two games,

Pleat: It's the best so far ^{85/86}

MANAGER David Pleat saluted the efforts of his makeshift line-up and rated Arsenal the best side Hatters have played this season.

"I was worried all day because I had a real team selection problem," he said. "We were not as strong in the air at the back and that worried me. But they coped very well.

"I am not worried about results any more. I know we'll be all right. That was the best game we have been involved in so far."

Arsenal boss Don Howe said: "It was a cracking game, terrific. Never in a million years is English football dull."

played in the centre of midfield.

But it worked and thankfully Luton were not unduly tested in the air.

It may have been a different story had Arsenal not lost David O'Leary with a cheek injury.

That forced the Gunners to use sub Paul Mariner as an

emergency centre-half and ensured he was not in a position to trouble Hatters' patchwork defence.

The slick first-time football produced by Luton for openers further reinforced the suitability of the synthetic pitch and had Arsenal on the ropes.

With two minutes gone Preece knocked in a low hard cross and Nwajiobi steered it past Lukic.

As Arsenal gradually fought their way back with sheer graft Robson twanged the crossbar and then Dibble produced heroics to grab the ball on the line from a Nicholas header with Woodcock waiting to pounce.



● Mitchell Thomas puts the pressure on Arsenal.

In between Harford forced Lukic into a brilliant tip-over save.

Arsenal levelled in the most peculiar of circumstances, with Mal Donaghy, under pressure from Woodcock, slicing into his own net.

The creativity and vision of Hill produced a telling ball that enabled Stein to drive under Lukic's body to put Luton ahead again after 69 minutes.

Hatters looked home and dry but Woodcock was allowed to make too much progress too quickly and produced a blistering drive to make it 2-2 after 71 minutes.

Arsenal, to their credit, went looking for the winner and Dibble had to react quickly to

keep out a Robson header late in the game.

There was much more to this game, too. Both sides had near misses and Luton netted twice, only for the efforts to be disallowed for offside.

And in a competitive match, four players were booked, Breacker and Harford for

Luton, Anderson and Mariner for Arsenal.

LUTON: Dibble, Breacker, Nicholas, Donaghy, Thomas, Parker, Hill, Preece, Stein, Harford, Nwajiobi. Sub: Grimes.

ARSENAL: Lukic, Anderson, O'Leary, Caton, Sansom, Stewart, Davis, Rix, Allinson, Woodcock, Nicholas. Sub: Mariner.