

Stein show lifts the gloom

85/86

LUTON 1 IPSWICH 0 **By GREG FOUNTAIN**

THE Manchester United spies who watched Luton's inept first-half fumbblings against Ipswich on Tuesday must have gone home feeling that little now stands between their club and 11 consecutive wins.

But it is fair to assume that when United come to Kenilworth Road on Saturday they will face more of the kind of creative spirit that flickered occasionally in Tuesday's second-half.

For an hour Luton were dogged by frustration and disappointment, partly due to their own lack of ideas and partly to Ipswich's willingness to battle.

But a bundled 65th-minute goal by Meka Nwajiobi released them from their shackles and prompted some flowing football.

Brian Stein at last enjoyed a night of domination on the plastic surface he is meant to be thriving on, and his excellent control was instrumental in everything Luton achieved.

Nwajiobi, too, looked quick and positive, and with Preece running the midfield the Hatters earned their success.

All the danger stemmed down the wings, with Mitchell Thomas and Tim Breacker willing to push forward, and it was from a

delightful Thomas through ball that the goal came.

He released Stein on the left, and his low cross evaded keeper Paul Cooper for Nwajiobi to bundle the ball home under pressure from Kevin Steggles.

A minute later Luton won a corner, and from Preece's kick Harford unleashed a vicious volley which Cooper did brilliantly to turn over the bar.

Referee Malcolm Cotton then astonished everybody, including Cooper and the linesman, by giving a goal-kick.

It was not the first time Mr Cotton had made himself unpopular with both sides. Earlier he booked Mark Brennan and Alan Sunderland along with Luton's Harford, all for innocuous incidents.

Luton boss David Pleat said of Mr Cotton: "Nobody was violent or over the top tonight and I cannot understand why referees are so willing to book players.

"The reason so many players get sent off is that they are booked too easily in the first place."

And Ipswich boss Bobby Ferguson added: "The booking of Mark Brennan was absolutely disgraceful. It wasn't even a foul, let alone a booking offence."

LUTON: Sealey, Breacker, Thomas, Nicholas, Foster, Donaghy, Hill, Stein, Harford, Mwajiobi, Preece. Sub: Parker. IPSWICH: Cooper, Yallop, Gernon, Zondervan, Steggles, Cranson, Atkins, Putney, Brennan, Wilson, Sunderland. Sub: Dozzell.