

Luton's own goal joy

'It's better this time'

MANAGER David Pleat was delighted with Saturday's victory — more than with the famous win at White Hart Lane a fortnight earlier.

"At Tottenham two or three players were not at their best. Today the performance of the team as a whole was better," he said.

He thought Luton were well worth the victory. "We settled very quickly and were very composed. We were in command.

Equaliser

"I was disappointed with their equaliser because I thought we were in charge of the game.

"But maybe it was the rocket up the backside we needed, because we came again to win the match."

Watford's Graham Taylor admitted Luton's football was "more pleasing to the eye" but thought his side deserved an equaliser.

He blamed "rather naive defending" for the eventual outcome.

Watford 1 Luton 2

A late own goal gave Luton a victory in yesterday's derby clash at Vicarage Road.

Full-back Mitchell Thomas put the Hatters ahead after 28 minutes only for Brian Talbot to level the scores with eight minutes remaining.

But in the 87th minute, Watford centre-back Steve Terry sliced a cross by Stein into his own net to give Luton the points.

David Pleat stuck by the team beaten 1-0 at home by Coventry last week, with Ray Daniel taking the substitute's shirt.

Watford also persisted with the side which lost on their last outing, a 2-1 defeat at West Ham, which meant no recall for dropped stars Luther Blissett, Colin West and Nigel Callaghan.

Luton made the early running on a muddy, slippery surface and Watford keeper

Report by Graham Punter

Coton had to be on his toes to grab a fierce low cross from Stein. Then a shot by Nwajiobi was charged away by a retreating defence.

Watford threatened when Barnes won an aerial duel and set up a chance for an overhead kick by Allen. But Sealey was in the right place.

The opening exchanges were cautious under the watchful eye of England manager Bobby Robson and the Sports Minister Dick Tracey.

The travelling contingent of fans were brought to their feet by a flying header by Stein which whistled just wide after Thomas and Preece had combined well to set up the chance.

It was Stein again who threatened Coton's goal when he raced on to a headed pass by Harford. But he was eventually crowded out.

Malcolm Allen missed a golden chance for Watford when Sterling's high cross



Mitchell Thomas

eluded the Luton defence. Allen, seeing the ball late, failed to make contact.

Luton had enjoyed a lion's share of the early play and were rewarded after 28 minutes. Preece played a superb ball through the Watford defence and although Stein's shot was blocked by Coton, full back Thomas followed up to score his first goal for the Hatters.

But it was Watford who ended the first half in menacing mood and Sealey put his courage to the test with a brave save at the feet of Allen. Moments later he did well to grasp a snap shot by Sterling.

Watford started the second-half determined to pull back the deficit and Luton keeper Sealey saw plenty of action. He was injured hurling himself at the feet of Sterling but recovered to pull off a good save from a crisp shot by Allen.

Luton eased the pressure with fast breaks from defence and on one such occasion Nwajiobi failed to connect properly when well placed to finish off a low cross by Preece.

Luton regained their touch with some good moves and one particular build up involving Hill, Nwajiobi and Harford, nearly ended with a goal. But Stein's final shot was well held by Coton.

As the game reached its final stages play became scrappy as the home crowd grew increasingly frustrated. Substitute Smillie joined the fray at the expense of Porter in a final fling to try and pull Watford back into the game.

Watford: Coton, Bardsley, Rostron, Talbot, Terry, Sinnott, Sterling, Allen, Barnes, Jackett, Porter. Sub: Smillie.

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

Terry woe

WATFORD manager Graham Taylor revealed last night that his England Under-21 international Nigel Callaghan—dropped for the last two games—had handed in a written transfer request. An obviously angry Taylor told us: "As far as I'm concerned he can go. He's on his way. I've been expectin ghis and now I'm glad its happened. If he wants to go, my reaction is 'Fine.'

"I must have players around me who have the will and the desire to play and do their best for Watford Football Club all the time."

Of this local derby, which for the most part was scrappy and disappointing, Graham said: "I thought we had made a draw out of a defeat but some naive defending let us down.

"I felt after our equaliser, and having battled the way we

Watford 1 Luton 2: by ALAN HOBY

did, we handed the game to Luton."

He can say that again, for it was an almost unbelievable error by Watford defender Steve Terry which gave a grateful Luton these three precious points.

With the well-behaved 16,107 crowd watching in stunned amazement, Terry stretched to a Brian Stein cross only to see the ball ricochet off him into his own net.

This appalling stroke of luck for poor Terry three minutes from the end settled a game which I thought Luton, with their neater, short-passing approach work, just about deserved to win.

So did their manager, David Pleat, who said: "I'm happier at our performance today than when we won at Tottenham a fortnight ago. The whole team was sound all round, but two or three were a bit short at Tottenham."

Watched by England manager Bobby Robson as well as Sports Minister Dick Tracey, Luton always looked the more likely

to score in that scratchy opening period.

Young Mitchell Thomas emphasised a fine all-round display by scoring from a bizarre angle—although, admittedly, helped by a deflection off Gary Porter.

David Preece had begun the move with a crafty through ball which Stein chased. Watford keeper Tony Coton blocked the ball with his legs, but to no avail.

It took battling Watford until the 82nd minute before they deservedly equalised. From Smillie's long cross the alert Sterling knocked the ball back into the middle.

Barnes miskicked and it was left to Watford skipper Brian Talbot to level the scores with a neat shot. And that was that. Really a game to forget.

WATFORD: Coton, Bardsley, Rostron, Talbot, Terry, Sinnott, Sterling, Allen, Barnes, Jackett, Porter. Sub: Smillie.

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