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OFF-SIDE!

Chelsea 1 Luton 0
By JOE LOVEJOY

But Chelsea stay in hunt

BOBBY ROBSON wasn't sharing John Hollins's broad smile after Chelsea had maintained London's championship challenge with their eighth win in 10 League games.

The other two matches were drawn, and with his team hot on the heels of the First Division leaders, Hollins is able to dismiss a disappointing performance as a rare aberration.

England manager Robson, however, must have wondered whether his journey to Stamford Bridge was really necessary.

It can hardly have helped his World Cup plans, since virtually all the international aspirants on view failed to impress.

Mitchell Thomas caught

the eye with some adventurous sorties down the left touchline and the Luton youngster could well be Kenny Sansom's understudy in Mexico.

But Kerry Dixon had one of his off-days, the likes of Steve Foster, Ricky Hill and Brian Stein will remain yesterday's men unless they can do better than this under Robson's scrutiny.

It was announced during the interval that Cathy Pates, wife of Chelsea captain Colin had presented him with a baby girl. Colin missed the match to attend

the birth and in his absence his team struggled to find their rhythm.

Luton would have had an unshakeable grip on the points by half time had they accepted a reasonable proportion of their chances.

Hill was the chief culprit, spurning three clear-cut opportunities.

Luton's extravagance in front of goal meant no damage had been done by the time Hollins delivered a much-needed halftime pep talk.

He revealed: 'I told my players: "Surely we can do better than that."'

'We were all over the place. We were watching Luton play rather than doing something to stop them.

Debut

'In the second half we didn't allow them so much space, and we went on to win it with a very good goal.'

The crucial strike came after 55 minutes, when a colossal clearance from goalkeeper Eddie Niedzwiecki was helped on by Dixon to David Speedie, who drove in his 15th goal of the season from six yards.

Once ahead, Chelsea asserted themselves, and were never seriously threatened.

Luton's £80,000 recruit from Wigan, Mike Newell, had an anonymous debut, and manager David Pleat must be relieved that Mick Harford will be back to spearhead his attack sooner than expected after his knee operation.

GOING UP! Joe McLaughlin clears from Luton's Steve Foster
Picture: KEITH DOBNEY