

Howe's jabs shock Pleat

LUTON manager David Pleat insisted there was no needle between the two teams. Don Howe seemed not to agree, but then the Gunners' boss was probably in a minority of one in devaluing a pulsating Cup-tie by condemning Luton's tactics.

Howe said: 'They were trying to bludgeon us in and around our penalty area. I was surprised, because that's not Luton's style.'

Nonsense, Don. Luton, characteristically, played some excellent stuff with their England midfield man Ricky Hill easily the man of the match.

They did enough to establish a psychological advantage, and looked good enough to reach the last eight, even though a Highbury replay faces them.

Pleat, naturally, refuted Howe's criticisms. He said: 'So Don accused us of trying to bludgeon our way through, did he? And to think he is the England coach. We don't play that way — we're not equipped to do so.'

'All I saw was a good game of football, which we should probably have won. I am disappointed because we haven't gone through at the first attempt, but I don't see why we shouldn't get a good result at Highbury.'

Challenge

Whatever Pleat may say, gone are the days when his team could be battered into submission. Their skilled framework is now reinforced by a steel backbone, with formidable competitors like Steve Foster, Peter Nicholas and Mick Harford unlikely to be bullied by anyone.

Foster bowled over Tony Woodcock and Charlie Nicholas in the first five minutes with robust challenges which represented an emphatic statement of intent.

To cater for the more precise use of the ball demanded by Luton's artificial pitch, Arsenal recalled Woodcock up front to the exclusion of the less cultured Niall Quinn.

Also back after a two-month absence was the unsettled Steve Williams, entrusted with the onerous task of marking the dangerous Brian Stein.

With Stein held in check by his shadow, it was another superbly skilled midfield man who set the scene for the thrilling scrap to follow by firing Luton into a seventh minute lead.



85/86
Luton 2 Arsenal 2
By JOE LOVEJOY

Hill, recalled by England for the friendly in Egypt last month, strengthened his bid for a place on the plane to Mexico by holding off Martin Keown's clumsy challenge before scoring from 12 yards.

Arsenal, having spent the opening exchanges very much under the cosh, produced a surprise equaliser after a quarter of an hour.

Les Sealey's failure to hold a long range free kick from Graham Rix threw his defence into disarray. As they sought to regroup, Ian Allinson let fly from 25 yards with a left foot shot which bounced in via the keeper's right hand post.

Unlucky

Arsenal, their composure restored by the goal, sneaked into the lead in the 28th minute after Mal Donaghy was unlucky to be penalised for what looked like a perfectly legitimate tackle on the ineffective Nicholas.

The Gunners took full advantage of their good fortune by fashioning their second goal around the free-kick.

Deadball specialist Rix found Viv Anderson, whose knock down enabled the impressive Woodcock to screw the ball back for David Rocastle to head in at the far post.



CUP ANGER . . . Martin Keown argues the toss with Luton's Mick Harford

Picture: KEITH DOBNEY

Luton equalised in the 40th minute through the abrasive Mick Harford, who had just been booked for the second of two typically strong challenges on John Lukic.

The big target man won a cross from the left from Mitchell Thomas, and when the ball broke kindly for him he thumped it home left-footed from ten yards.

Luton had the better of what was a slightly disappointing second half but with Hill and Marc North both spurning opportunities to win it, they must try again in mid-week.

The date of the replay is in some doubt. For, apart from the frozen state of the Highbury pitch, Luton revealed that the demands of television may force a switch from Tuesday to Wednesday night.