



All-out action on the QPR artificial pitch: Harford, of Luton, rises high above McDonald but not high enough to beat goalkeeper Barron.

Great debate on beating freeze

By ROGER MALONE

PLASTIC pitches or undersoil heating for traditional grass? Or, a three month mid-winter break for next season such as West Germany has decided on this weekend? A great debate is brewing up on how to combat the big freeze.

Queens Park Rangers, followed this season by Luton, vehemently preach the commercial virtues of their artificial pitches—but, proved unable on Saturday, when playing each other, to demonstrate that the quality of play does not suffer.

Everton, champions and again leading the First Division, do not like synthetic surfaces, preferring undersoil heating, and maintaining it should be compulsory in the First Division. They are joined by seven other clubs already with undersoil systems.

Certainly a televised view of Everton's visit to Liverpool's heated grass suggested a more manageable bounce of the ball than we saw at the disappointing Queens Park Rangers-Luton match.

Hazard to players

On the other hand, in the precious few matches on grass which were staged in England and Scotland, there were several instances of unpredictable bounces, and of players being hurt by falling on frozen turf.

Luton's David Pleat, respected for his astute management, reveals that besides a handful of clubs in the lower divisions who are applying for permission to lay artificial pitches, several First Division chairmen and managers have recently visited Kenilworth Road to investigate plastic virtues.

But Mr Pleat's answer to my question of whether he believes additional First Division clubs will have artificial pitches for next season was perhaps significant—"I could not say that. They would have to be brave to do so."

Leicester, for one, are campaigning against the spread of synthetic pitches. West Ham are believed to be worried about how different artificial pitches would produce differing playing conditions.

However, as Mr Pleat and Rangers' manager, Jim Smith, stressed on Saturday, at least plastic guarantees play, when so many other clubs are frozen into inactivity, with cash flow problems and frustrated supporters.

LUTON FAIL TO CASH IN

QPR 1, Luton 1

THOUGH proving better equipped, collectively, than disappointing Queens Park Rangers at the techniques demanded by artificial pitches, Luton missed the opportunity to improve their position in the leading group in the table.

Without Stein's class alongside the trustful Harford, moves built on Foster's control of defence, and the progressive ideas of Hill and Thomas, too frequently broke down.

In Wicks, Rangers had the individual making the two most telling contributions. He headed off his own line to deny Harford an early score and then set up the home side's 35th-minute goal, bravely putting his head down among the flying boots to steer Neill's free kick into inviting space where Byrne finished perfectly.

Wicks often kept an effective rein on Harford, but the would-be England striker, unlucky not to be making his international debut in Israel this week, proved that outstanding players are never totally subdued.

Harford's exciting demonstration of how to beat his markers in the air and then direct a long-range header with precision enabled Newell to glance home the 63rd-minute equaliser.

Overall, however, instead of a convincing argument in favour of synthetic pitches from the two sides who use them, the entertainment faded.

QPR.—Barron; McDonald, Dawes, Neill, Wicks, Penwick, Fillery, Allen, Bannister, Byrne, Fereday.

Luton.—Sealy; Johnson, Thomas, Nicholas, Foster, Donaghy, Hill, Newell, Harford, M. North, Preece.