

Harford the hero misses Robson vote

QPR 1 Luton 1

By JOE LOVEJOY

THE MAN they call 'The bludgeon' finally battered down Rangers' defences yesterday — but Bobby Robson wasn't there to see it.

The England manager had been expected at Loftus Road to assess the international potential of Luton target man Mick Harford.

But Robson missed the sort of headed contribution that has made Harford such a force in the First Division this season and earned him the nickname bestowed by Arsenal manager Don Howe last week.

Harford was denied his 18th goal of the season by Mike Newell's intervention, which helped the ball over the line. But the credit clearly belonged to the big man.

Jim Smith asked about Robson's absence, said: 'I don't know why he didn't come, but he wasn't a bad judge, was he?'

Smith's team had to endure chants of 'rubbish' from their own fans as they were restricted to just two noteworthy strikes at goal. From one, John Byrne gave them an ill-deserved lead.

Robson may have decided that the ping-pong football on Rangers' artificial pitch is irrelevant to his World Cup possibilities and I'm inclined to agree.

Luton, of course, should not be at a significant disadvantage on the Rangers carpet.

But the blame for yesterday's disappointing specta-

cle belonged with the players rather than the plastic.

After the early promise offered by Steve Wicks' athletic goal-line clearance of Harford's well-executed shot, it was downhill all the way.

Rangers, with nothing to offer apart from defensive organisation and Wayne Fereday's pace on the left, seemed as surprised as anyone when they took the lead after 36 minutes with their first attack.

Byrne swivelled expertly before shooting home off Les Sealey's right-hand post after Wicks had knocked down a Warren Neill free kick.

Luton scored the equaliser they deserved after 63 minutes. It was a product of Harford's intelligence and aerial power.

First he eluded his marker, and then his expert header directed the ball across Paul Barron, towards the far corner, where Newell applied the finishing nudge.

Luton manager David Pleat's most interesting comments were on the vexed subject of artificial pitches.

He revealed that several First Division clubs have visited Kenilworth Road for advice on joining the plastic revolution.

OXFORD fielded their full first team in a reserve match at Luton yesterday, in case their Milk Cup semi-final first leg at Aston Villa goes ahead on Tuesday. Jeremy Charles and John Aldridge scored in a 2-1 win.