

PITCH FEVER

KEEP your noses out of our business. That was the joint message last night from Rangers and Luton to anybody who wants to give synthetic pitches the big boot.

To Rangers and Luton plastic is perfect. And while the majority of the country's soccer stars spent another Saturday afternoon kicking their heels because of the freezing conditions, the Shepherds Bush show went on as usual.

Luton manager David Pleat also hit back at criticism from clubs like Leicester, West Ham and Coventry saying: "I don't think anyone should tell us what we should be doing.

"Leicester are panicking because so many other clubs are showing an interest in following the example set by Rangers and ourselves. You'd be shocked if you knew how many clubs, including some in

QPR 1 Luton 1; by PAUL PARISH

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the First Division, have been making inquiries.

"We've had two matches on our pitch at Luton today, there's another one on Sunday and another on Monday," added Pleat.

But if Rangers and Luton wanted to back up their arguments with a synthetic spectacular something went wrong along the way. The First Division's two plastic pioneers were not, to put it mildly, at their best.

Missing

Even England manager Bobby Robson didn't turn up as expected and Rangers boss Jim Smith quipped: "He's not a bad judge is he?"

Both managers agree that a draw was a fair result.

Luton, missing the subtlety of injured striker Brian Stein, had to rely heavily on Mick Harford.

He almost gave Luton an early lead with the games' only real touch of class but Steve

Wicks cleared off the goal-line.

It was all Luton until Rangers popped in a 36th minute goal totally against the run of play.

Wicks was a key figure again, delicately guiding a Warren Neill free-kick into the path of John Byrne who smacked home his 10th goal of the season.

Luton's equaliser never seemed in doubt and Harford played a vital role, rising at the far post to head on a David Preece free-kick in the 63rd minute and allow Mike Newell to apply the simplest of finishing touches.

A skirmish in the seat behind the goal and a banana thrown on to the pitch just behind Luton's stylish black defender Mitchell Thomas were reminders that plastic pitches can't solve all soccer's problems.

● Luton midfielder Ricky Hill was last night called up for the England squad to replace Everton's Peter Reid in Israel on Wednesday.