

Luton on course for club record

By Vince Wright

Luton Town..... 1
Sheffield Wednesday ... 0

The result was predictable, for if any team were going to flounder on Luton Town's artificial pitch it was Sheffield Wednesday. Wednesday's long ball game is unsuited to synthetic surfaces, which demand that passes are played directly to feet, and by the time they varied their approach it was too late. Luton were in no mood to surrender their slender advantage and were deserving winners.

Luton are well on course to achieve their highest ever League placing, their best being eighth in the first division in season 1957-58. They lie sixth and do not seem in the least

embarrassed at looking down on more illustrious clubs such as Arsenal, Tottenham Hotspur, Newcastle United and Manchester City. Nor should they, for they have many fine players and no obvious weaknesses.

Wednesday, in ninth position, have many fine players too, although that was not so obvious on Saturday. Sterland, who was switched to midfield in the absence of Blair, looked what he is — a defender being played out of position; Marwood was strangely ineffective and Thompson, once regarded by many as the answer to England's problems in attack, did not land a shot on target. Wednesday's defence was not blameless either as Hart and Shirtliff often resorted to unfair means when trying to stop Harford and Newell.

There was nothing they could

do to prevent Harford from scoring the winning goal after 16 minutes. A nicely flighted right wing corner by Preece cleared Wednesday's tall defenders and Luton's man of the moment hung in the air like a latter-day Tommy Lawton before heading powerfully past Hodge.

For a while Wednesday were rattled and Hart and Shirtliff were booked for crude fouls on Harford and Thomas respectively. Then the visitors composed themselves but came up against a brick wall in Foster and Donaghy, who must be second only to Lawrenson and Hansen as a defensive partnership in this country. With Thompson and Marwood kept at arm's length, the only threat to Luton came from the former Doncaster Rovers player, Snodin, who tested Sealey with a couple of raking drives.

A big plus for Luton is the form of Newell, their inexpensive signing from Wigan Athletic. If he continues to perform as he did against Wednesday then the injured Stein, Harford's regular partner up front, will not be missed. Luton's manager, David Pleat, takes the credit here for a shrewd signing. The purchase of Nicholas also comes into that category. Pleat has made him more confident and positive than he was at Highbury, where his career went backwards, and on Saturday he was a dominant figure in midfield.

LUTON TOWN: L Sealey; R Johnson, M Thomas, P Nicholas, S Foster, M Donaghy, R Hill, M Newell, M Harford, M North, D Preece.

85/86

SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY: M Hodge; M Sterland, C Morris, P Hart, P Shirtliff, M Smith, B Marwood, G Megson, G Thompson, G Shelton (sub: C Shutt), G Snodin. Referee: D Axcell (Southend).