

Luton's happy families

Luton 1 Manchester City ... 0

By JIM HOOLEY

LUTON'S bold experiment in combating the hooligan menace received another vote of confidence—this time from the happy families who enjoyed an afternoon at Kenilworth Road in complete security.

The gate of 9,371 was only 500 down on the corresponding fixture last season. When the absent City fans are taken into account that represents another significant increase in home supporters, many of them women and young children.

For someone who has been a regular visitor to Luton for more than 15 years, I can vouch for the dramatic and welcome change of atmosphere, free of the fear, tension and ritual obscene chanting which used to pollute the afternoon.

Not only that, the Luton fans now feel able to be generous to the opposition. It was a frustrating game for them as a combination of poor finishing and dogged defending denied them victory until Brian Stein's 86th minute breakthrough, but they were still able to give an ovation to their chief tormentor, City's England Under-21 goalkeeper Perry Suckling.

Hypocrisy

City players themselves punctured the hypocrisy of football's case against Luton, which culminated in their exclusion from the Littlewoods Cup for refusing to allow away fans at Kenilworth Road.

Republic of Ireland defender Mick McCarthy summed up the City players' reaction: 'The atmosphere here was marvellous and that has to be good for the players, home or away.'

Luton, with eight days to persuade their fellow League clubs to re-instate them in the Littlewoods Cup, will make sure they know how the management committee did the dirty on them.

'Most clubs believe we simply flouted the rules,' said Luton chairman David Evans. 'But I'm equally convinced they do not know the full facts.'

Power

Luton first approached the League about their members-only scheme last December and over a period of five months were given every indication it would be backed in both League games and the Littlewoods Cup.

This was confirmed by the then management committee in May, but within 48 hours they were out of office in a shift of power to the big clubs and the decision to allow Luton to compete in the cup was overturned.

□ MICK HARFORD, who has not played in the First Division this season after three knee operations in a year, could be back for Luton at Tottenham next Saturday. He came through a reserve game on Saturday and with Brian Stein starting a two-match suspension, Harford will almost certainly be risked if he negotiates another reserve game tomorrow.