

Luton whirlwind

86/87
By COLIN MALAM
Luton 4, Nottm Forest 2

REVENGE was indeed sweet for Luton yesterday as they subjected Nottingham Forest to the same sort of humiliation on Kenilworth Road's plastic pitch as Liverpool had suffered three weeks previously.

The Luton fans have never really forgiven Forest for beating their team in the 1959 FA Cup Final. So Luton's first home victory over the old enemy for 13 years was doubly significant.

Treble so, really, considering that this emphatic win in a thoroughly entertaining match takes Luton level on points with Forest and establishes them firmly among the leading contenders for the First Division title.

As when Liverpool lost here 4-1, the synthetic surface had a definite bearing on the result. Like the League champions, Forest found it extremely difficult to adjust to the extra pace of the ball, especially in defence.

The brothers Stein claimed three of Luton's four goals between them. It was thoroughly fitting, too, that the other should have been scored by Steve Foster, the rumbustious centre-back with the distinctive head band.

At a time when England are scratching around for reliable central defenders, Foster reminded us with a commanding performance that he, a former international, is probably as good as anybody else about.

Foster certainly looked the better international bet than young Walker, restored to the Forest defence after injury. Only 35 seconds had elapsed when the England under-21 international was trying desperately, and failing, to stop Mark Stein opening the scoring.

It was a goal that typified Luton's early directness. A long

clearance by Sealey was headed on by Newell, getting up above Metgod in a way Mick Harford could not have bettered, and Mark Stein did the rest with a diving header.

The youngster's alertness and speed of reaction were also evident when he put Luton 2-0 ahead after only eight minutes. Newell's header from Wilson's free-kick hit the underside of the bar and bounced out, but Stein's head was following up to make sure.

Luton's third goal arrived as early as the 16th minute from another set piece. Nicholas flighted a left-wing corner to Foster some 10 yards out at the near post, and the mighty head-band sent the ball glancing into the far corner with surprising delicacy and deadly accuracy.

It needed the expertise of young Nigel Clough to get Forest into the game after 24 minutes. His intelligence provided Carr with the opportunity for a centre that, half-cleared, was driven precisely into the bottom corner by Bowyer's trusty left foot.

Forest threatened to take over in the second-half, Bowyer thumping another left-foot shot against the bar from 20 yards. Brian Stein, however, edged Luton further ahead with a lovely curling shot after 68 minutes.

Even then, Forest's resistance was not broken. Led spiritedly by Clough, they kept plugging away dangerously enough for Birtles to score 10 minutes from the end, caused palpitations among the Luton faithful, and softened slightly the blow of their fourth away League defeat on the trot.

Luton: Sealey, Breacker, Johnson, Nicholas, Foster, Donaghy, Wilson, Stein B., Newell, Stein M., Grimes (McDonough 66.)

Nottingham Forest: Segers, Butterworth, Pearce, Walker, Metgod, Bowyer, Carr, Webb, Clough, Birtles, Mills.

Referee: A. N. Buksh.