

Forest's flyers grounded at Luton

86/87

Luton 4 Nott'm. Forest 2: By TREVOR HAYLETT

THE procession of ashen-faced players heading for a hurried exit on the Nottingham Forest team coach should have stayed a little longer to hear their praises sung. Brian Clough had clearly been sharpening his tongue in the dressing-room after this fourth successive away defeat, although true to form, he was not about to share his thoughts until he was back in Nottingham.

So, it was Luton, almost embarrassed to find themselves elevated to fourth place and in the thick of championship circulation, who were left to commend their opponents' part in a riveting afternoon's entertainment.

'Forest are the hardest side we have met this season', chorused skipper Steve Foster and manager John Moore, while Foster went on to add: 'They kept coming forward and stretched us at the back.'

Back home Clough said: 'I must admit I had mixed feelings about us staying in the top three. Obviously I want us to be as high in the table as possible but we are still on bonuses for being in the top three and the way we are performing at the moment we just don't deserve them'.

Brave

After their four-goal defeat of Liverpool here three weeks ago and now this swift execution of the team which has spent most of its time on top of the League, Luton can no longer be considered among the First Division make-weights.

The alertness of the brothers Stein helped give them a three-goal advantage in the first 16 minutes.

But it was Foster whom Luton had to thank for maintaining their comfortable lead as Forest twice pulled back the arrears with some of the best football of the game. He stood firm as Franz Carr slung in a series of second-half crosses, and afterwards proved equally adept at fielding questions about his side's ability to sustain a championship challenge.

Can Luton win the League this season?

'I would say No rather than Yes,' answered Foster. 'We have still to meet the top sides away from home, we haven't yet hit a bad patch, and the squad is not strong enough. One more injury, and we could be in trouble.'

LUTON M. Stein (1, 6), Foster (16), B. Stein (68). FOREST—Bowyer (25), Birtles (80).