



Harford . . . goal

Luton's plastic title pretenders



GOUGH HAS AN OFF DAY . . .

★ GRIM-FACED Tottenham defender Richard Gough is left standing as Luton's Mal Donaghy launches into some aerial acrobatics

It's only a surface threat

LUTON have set themselves up as League championship pretenders.

Their 3-1 victory over Tottenham puts them in third place with eight matches to play—four of them at home.

So it would be wrong to suggest they have no chance of the title.

But I say that they stand out like punks at a police ball.

Because their exalted League position has as much to do with plastic as pedigree.

Examine their record. They have lost only one of 17 games at their Kenilworth Road fortress, which is exclusive to their own fans and has the added advantage of an artificial surface.

Yet of the top 12 teams in the First Division only one—Coventry, in 10th place—has collected fewer away points.

Sadly, Luton's manager John Moore, a withdrawn, suspicious and uncommunicative Scot, declines to elaborate on these tell-tale statistics.

Obvious

With his usual predictability and statement of the obvious, he says: "It's not me. It's down to the players."

Pardon me, Mr Moore, but I would suggest it is down to the pitch.

I watched Luton in the mud at Southampton last week. They were well beaten and looked very ordinary—a long way from likely title contenders.

They have adapted a style of



By STEVE CURRY

play that suits their tailored pitch. In Saturday's match programme, even their coach Ray Harford was suggesting that one of the reasons the big clubs have foundered at Luton is because they have no vocal support from their travelling fans.

So it was all the more poignant and ironical for David Pleat, who helped lay the foundations of the Luton revolution, that his new club's title aspirations should falter there.

Situation

I suppose this result is good for most things. It is certainly good for Luton and perhaps for the championship situation, especially with Liverpool losing.

But it was not good for Glenn Hoddle, who now sadly misses Wednesday's England international in Belfast with a groin injury and whose restricted participation affected Saturday's result in Luton's favour.

Luton, it is true, should be given credit for playing some impressive football and scoring two excellent goals through Mick Harford and Mike Newell.

And there was confirmation too that Ricky Hill is still a midfield player of stature . . . inventive, innovative and the game's outstanding participant.

Spurs now must concentrate on their FA Cup semi-final against Watford in two weeks.

To that end, Steve Hodge was withdrawn in the second half to avoid any skirmish that might have brought him a booking and put him out of contention.

Tottenham can now forget any hopes of winning the First Division title.

Luton, meanwhile, will continue to enjoy the distinct advantage they get when playing at home.

But I am not sure that in the spirit of sport they should be allowed to.