

Luton spot of mystery

Luton..... 1 Arsenal..... 1

87/88

Report by JEFF POWELL

NOT EVEN Luton manager Ray Harford could enlighten Arsenal about the mysterious penalty which deprived the North London giants of two championship points.

Arsenal's George Graham said: 'We don't know why the penalty was given and neither do the Luton players. Not one of them appealed.' Harford admitted: 'I didn't see anything. The referee said something about a push. Perhaps it was a gentle one!'

The incident occurred only three minutes after the 14th minute shot in-off-a-post with which Paul Davis collected his third goal this season from Arsenal's midfield.

Cautioned

Referee Ray Lewis was in a minority of one as he pointed to the penalty spot. So vehemently did Arsenal centre-half David O'Leary question whether the decision went against his aerial challenge on Mike Newell that he became the first player to be shown the yellow card.

Thereafter, Mr Lewis proceeded to demonstrate why he had chosen to live in the little town of Great Bookham. Arsenal's Steve Williams and Perry Groves and Luton's Mal Donaghy were cautioned for a variety of minor misdemeanours.

And the principal offender on the pitch, Luton player-coach Steve Foster, escaped all punishment despite his sly professional attempts to curb the speed with which Groves caused him so many problems.

Graham shrugged his shoulders and said: 'We're not allowed to criticise referees.' Harford added: 'It looked more of a penalty when Alan Smith seemed to handle in the second half and we thought there might have been offside against Arsenal's goal. But we weren't going to get two decisions like that.'

Arsenal were no more convinced about the condition of Luton's artificial pitch than they were by the penalty decision.

Shame

The surface does not look as close a facsimile of natural grass as it did when first laid and Graham said: 'It's getting faster. It's difficult to get round the back of defences because the ball flies off these plastic surfaces.'

'In the event a lot of teams stop trying to play football and that's a shame because they were supposed to help produce better skills.'

Arsenal, on the receiving end in the first half, were readjusted by Graham at half-time and the tighter performance might have given them victory.

Even so, John Lukic had to make a flying save from David Preece's header right on the final whistle.