

Mad hatful for Luton

Luton Town..... 4 Newcastle United..... 0

by Brian Glanville

WHOEVER would have thought it? Luton, without their tall, bruising, highly effective centre-forward, Harford, suffering from a virus infection, scored four goals against Newcastle, and looked better, quicker, crisper and more incisive than one has seen at any other time this season.

When, into the bargain, you recall that Luton were also without Hill, their most creative midfield player, and their new Scottish forward, Weir, you will appreciate still better the measure of their success.

By a tremendous irony, this was the day on which Mirandinha, Newcastle's much-publicised and previously very effective centre-forward, returned after absence. In their previous two matches, away to Wimbledon and at home to Arsenal, Newcastle had played most of the football, made plenty of chances, but had failed to put them away.

With Goddard and Darren Jackson up front, closely supported by that talented young maverick, the 20-year-old Gascoigne, they had looked sharp and inventive.

As it was yesterday, Mirandinha was never more than a small, forlorn and marginal figure, bouncing off the great rock of Foster. When, late in the second half, Goddard, who largely had a dreadful game, headed him through in an excellent position, he was far too slow to do anything about it.

So the game belonged to Luton's three exuberant attackers, the brothers Stein, and that fast, elegant, underrated player, the Nigerian, Nwajiobi. Without the magnetic presence of Harford, Luton were obliged to do something more than boot high balls into the middle, in the hope that Harford would either reach them with his head, or that the defence, terrified by the sight and threat of him, would make a decisive error.

With Wilson giving brisk, intelligent support from midfield, the three strikers produced an early goal, went into a period of hibernation, then emerged from it in the second half to make Newcastle's defence look sadly inept.

Newcastle never began to come to terms with the plastic pitch, though Gascoigne, alternating the skilful with the unsuccessful, occasionally showing his skill and promise, did keep going bravely until the end.

With just three minutes gone, Wilson, with the outside of his right foot, beautifully volleyed a pass to the admirable Allinson, then on the right. Allinson walked round his man and Mark Stein, pouncing on a weak header out of defence, banged the ball past Kelly.

An error by Roeder, strangely shaky in the first half, resulted in shots by Nwajiobi and Brian Stein being blocked. But Newcastle's goal did not fall again until the 62nd minute.

With delightful finesse, Nwajiobi, out on the left, found Allinson. Over the ball came, Kelly was slow off his line, and Mark Stein cleverly beat him to it.

Fifteen minutes from time, Allinson's in-swinging corner from the right was allowed to reach Mark Stein. He drove it into the goalmouth, and an exuberant Nwajiobi did the rest.

Brian Stein, nimble and busy throughout, wasn't going to be upstaged by his younger brother indefinitely. But he owed his goal, two minutes from the end, to Mark, exploiting Allinson's backheel to cross from the left. Brian's header made it four.

Weather: cold and clear. Pitch: plastic.
Goals: M Stein (3min) 1-0; M Stein (62min) 2-0; Nwajiobi (75min) 3-0; B Stein (88min) 4-0.

Luton Town (4-3-3): Sealey; Breacker, Foster, Donaghy, Grimes; McDonough, Wilson, Allinson; B Stein, M Stein, Nwajiobi.

Newcastle United (4-4-2): Kelly; Anderson, P Jackson, Roeder, Tinnion (sub: O'Neill, 68min); Wharton, McDonald, Gascoigne, D Jackson; Mirandinha, Goddard.

Referee: M L James (Horsham).