

LUTON'S AVENGERS settled another score and got 1988 off to a perfect start.

Days after reversing a 1-0 defeat by Charlton, Hatters turned around the 3-0 trouncing suffered at Stamford Bridge, to give Chelsea the New Year's Day blues.

Against visitors down on their luck — and looking it — Luton took full advantage.

They were gifted a goal's head start after 13 minutes and added a pair after half-time, while their opponents hardly ever posed a threat.

The home fans were celebrating a dream start when attacker Clive Wilson appeared in the centre-back position, to send a needless and woefully ill-judged back pass to keeper Roger Freestone. Mark Stein darted in, rounded Freestone and slotted into the empty net.

Like Charlton before them, the sluggish Pensioners were caught by a stream of offsidies. Otherwise only Mike Hazard's booking for dissent — he invited the red card too, by mocking the decision with sarcastic celebrations — and the same player's wasted free-kick on the edge of the Luton box, punctuated the first period.

An out-of-sorts Kerry Dixon sparked to life just after the interval, but he was too slow to capitalise on Kevin McAllister's pass and Tim Breacker intercepted.

And at the other end in the 51st minute, the ball came out to Breacker, whose header dropped into space for Brian Stein to coolly lob number two over Freestone, while his defenders stood and watched.

As the tempo warmed, Luton skipper Steve Foster's audacious punt from 10 yards inside the Chelsea half raised a cheer.

And Hazard should have left Luton keeper Les Sealey with no chance when he burst through, but his failed lob was pushed away for a corner.

Inside 65 minutes Hatters were three ahead. Breacker's stock-in-trade — the surging touchline run — ended with the full-back whipping in a cross which demanded to be finished by Harford. And the big striker was only too happy to oblige, planting a powerful header past a hesitant Freestone.

From there on Luton coasted, with the following day's game at Upton Park in mind. And Chelsea's only contributions were to get Gordon Durie booked for arguing and to force Sealey into a spectacular save, through Dixon seven minutes from time.

Hatters' boss Ray Harford reflected: "We didn't need to use our substitutes because the lads were

87/88

LUTON TOWN 3 CHELSEA 0

resting their legs as they went along."

He added: "Mark Stein played well and Mick Harford's touch was immaculate."

Blues manager John Hollins lamented: "It's always a very difficult game at Luton — but no excuses about the surface."

"The first goal was sloppy and it put Luton's tails up. We kept getting caught offside, but we started the second-half well — then conceded another simple goal."

● Attendance — 8,018.

LUTON: Sealey, Breacker, Johnson, McDonough, Foster, Donaghy, Wilson, B. Stein, Harford, M. Stein, Allinson. Subs: Black, Weir.

CHELSEA: Freestone, Wood, Dorigo, Clarke, McLaughlin, Bumstead, McAllister, Hazard, Dixon, Durie, Wilson. Subs: Wegerle, Hall.