

Comedy of errors serious for Oxford

87/88

By Christopher Davies

Luton Town 7 Oxford United 4

OXFORD'S relegation worries deepened before an estimated live television audience of 200 million throughout Europe who witnessed a comedy of errors as a warm-up to Wednesday's Littlewoods Cup semi-final tie at the Manor Ground.

United's hopes of staying up must be slim with the worst defensive record in the First Division.

In September Luton won 5-2 at Oxford and on Saturday almost every attack ended with a goal. The woodwork was hit three times.

The match was like a testimonial at times, with half-hearted challenges and defenders seemingly allowing opponents to score.

When the obvious jokes had ended it was left to Mick Harford, the Luton striker, to take an objective look at a match that was difficult to take seriously.

"We may have made it more difficult for ourselves in the Littlewoods Cup because people will now assume that Luton are on their way to Wembley," he said.

Maurice Evans, the Oxford manager, hopes to strengthen his back four on Wednesday with the return of Slatter and Dreyer, while former Luton goalkeeper Judge will replace the shell-shocked and Cup-tied Hardwick.

Ray Harford, the Luton manager, believed Oxford's ambitious style contributed to the scoreline. It was the first time United have conceded seven goals in the League.

Oxford's idea was to play five

Bottom seven

Division One

	HOME						AWAY						
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pts	
Portsmouth	27	4	7	4	18	19	2	4	6	8	24	29	
Norwich	26	4	3	6	17	18	3	2	8	6	15	26	
Coventry	24	2	4	4	10	17	4	3	7	14	22	25	
Derby	24	3	3	5	10	10	3	3	7	11	20	24	
Watford	26	3	3	6	8	13	2	5	7	9	19	23	
Oxford	25	5	1	6	19	24	1	4	8	13	29	23	
Charlton	26	3	4	6	12	18	1	4	8	11	22	20	

at the back, but with attacking full-backs in Bardsley and Rhoades-Brown, who is usually a winger, the visitors were invariably left with only three defenders.

Mark Stein, whose small frame belies his strength on the ball, scored his first League hat-trick inside 11 minutes, but apart from Harford's blistering shot from the edge of the penalty area in the seventh minute, a goal worthy of any occasion, the other 10 goals were the result of blatant defensive errors.

For the record the goalscorers were, for Luton: Mark Stein (3), Harford (2), Brian Stein and McDonough; and for Oxford: Saunders with a penalty, Foyle, Hill and Phillips.

Luton: Sealey; Breacker, Johnson (Grimes 45), McDonough, Foster, Donaghy, D Wilson, B Stein, Harford, M Stein, Allinson.

Oxford: Hardwick; Bardsley, Hill, Shelton (Mustoe 83), Briggs, Caton (Whitehurst 72), Hebberd, Foyle, Saunders, Phillips, Rhoades-Brown.