

Luton luck is misery for Neill



87/88



Luton's Danny Wilson battles with Mark Falco

LUTON remain on course for Wembley in three cup competitions but if they get there it is to be hoped they perform better than this.

A fifth round FA Cup replay that had little incident and little or no creativity was, almost inevitably, decided by a mistake by a defender.

Warren Neill, the Rangers' right-back, was the offender and even the Luton fans must have felt some sympathy for him.

Sixty minutes had gone with everyone contemplating extra time when Mark Stein headed towards Mick Harford and Neill, aiming to turn the ball behind for a corner, volleyed it past goalkeeper Dave Seaman.

Neill, who had put through his own goal on the plastic pitch to give Luton a 1-0 victory in the League last season, was mortified.

But manager Jim Smith said: 'You couldn't blame him, it was bad luck. I thought he could have let it roll but it his his left shin and flew into the top corner.

'They got the break and we didn't. We felt we had done enough but we weren't decisive enough.'

Neill blamed the pitch. 'It doesn't skid like it does on our pitch and I thought it was coming to my right foot and had to change my mind,' he said. 'It was a real sickener, the worst moment of my career.'

Except for catching a volley from Mark Stein in the 25th minute, Seaman, back for the first time in three months after breaking a thumb, had nothing else to do. Rangers had far more

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By BRIAN SCOVELL	

possession without being able to do much with it.

Luton manager Ray Harford admitted: 'We didn't play well. We looked very tense and we are carrying our luck at the moment. I hope we haven't used it all up. It could be a case of too many cup ties.'

The trouble with plastic pitches is that when two highly committed sides set out to stop each other playing, the spectators might just as well go home. On a cold night like last night, some of them must have been tempted.

Quite simply, football the English way, with its emphasis on aggression and pushing up to the halfway line, isn't meant to be played on these surfaces. It requires a Continental passing game.

All-ticket

Brian Stein might have added a second goal in the 79th minute when he wrong-footed Seaman and rolled Danny Wilson's right wing cross against a post.

Wilson has a groin injury and may miss Sunday's televised second leg of a Littlewood's Cup semi-final against Oxford. Luton hold a 1-0 advantage from the first leg.

Skipper Steve Foster has a head gash but Harford expects him to be fit.

Luton now face Portsmouth in an all-ticket sixth round tie in the FA Cup and they meet Stoke next week in the quarter-finals of the Simod Cup. They are also one of the First Division qualifiers for the Festival of Football at Wembley in mid-April.