

Simod Cup : Luton 1, Reading 4

IT'S DOWNRIGHT DISGRACEFUL!

WHAT A DISGRACE! That can be the only description of Hatters' appalling display in the Simod Cup Final at Wembley Stadium on Sunday.

They were outwitted, outpaced and outplayed by a Reading side who should have, on paper at least, have been well and truly crushed by Luton.

But little Reading, struggling to avoid the drop from Division Two to Three, played out of their skins.

Time and time again Luton were caught square at the back by a bubbling Reading strike force in which Michael Gilkes was brilliant.

He was backed up by almost as good displays by Michael Tait and Neil Smillie — a survivor, like Steve Foster, of the Brighton side which lost in the FA Cup Final re-play at Wembley in 1983.

Unfortunately Foster was below par — he spent two days in bed last week because he was ill.

Ironically Gilkes and Tait do not normally play up front. They were drafted into the attack as Steve Moran and Billy Whitehurst were cup-tied.

For the Reading fans — and for the neutral onlookers — Gilkes' showing was a delight to behold as he took full advantage of the space so generously donated to him by Luton. He often left the Hatters backline standing like statues as he jinked past.

Indeed it was such an incident which got Reading back on terms after 20 minutes when he and Smillie were left with acres of space.

THE CITIZEN AT WEMBLEY:

PICTURES:

DAVE POOLE

WORDS: PAUL BROOKMAN

Smillie pushed the ball forward to Gilkes who was given time to pick his spot in the top of the net over the head of Les Sealey who hardly came off his line.

Mick Harford had given Luton the lead a few minutes earlier with a well-taken diving header from a corner.

Six minutes after Gilkes' strike, Reading were in front.

Tim Breacker brought the 22-year-old down on the edge of the penalty area and Stuart Beavon planted the spot kick into the net.

Within a quarter of an hour of the start of the second half Luton's Simod Cup dream was all over.

Smillie beat a Luton man on the left wing, found himself with space and timed his cross perfectly for the unmarked Tait to drive home.

Twenty minutes into the second half Linden Jones was allowed far too much space and he did the work to create the chance

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● This old card sent to the Citizen by a reader sums up the situation perfectly.

which Smillie used to make it 4-1.

Even the substitution of brothers Mark and Brian Stein by Kingsley Black and Rob Johnson failed to make any impact for Luton.

LUTON: Sealey, Breacker, Grimes, McDonough, Foster, Donaghy, Wilson, B Stein, (Johnson, 80), Harford, M Stein (Black, 59), Allinson.

READING: Francis, Bailie, Richardson, Beavon, Hicks, Curle, (Williams, 79), Taylor, Tait (Peters, 83), Gilkes, Smillie.

Referee: John Martin (Alton, Hants).

Attendance: 61,740.

'Lowest moment of career'

IT was an embarrassed Ray Harford who emerged to face the media an hour after Luton's nightmare on the pitch had ended.

For the Hatters' boss though the nightmare continued as he admitted to reporters that a First Division side had been totally outclassed by a lowly Second Division one.

Of his team's display he said: "I was embarrassed really. It was as bad as we have played. If we play like that against Arsenal (in the Littlewoods Cup Final) we will get beaten six or seven nil.

"Our back four were a wavy line in the first half — we should have gone into the grocery business.

"Reading never respected us — they closed us down and gave us a mauling."

Harford said Hatters deserved to lose 4-0 and concluded: "It was the lowest moment of my career."



● Top, Luton despair as Michael Tait (third left) and Neil Smillie (number 11) celebrate another Reading goal. Middle, Mick Harford (number nine on ground) scores Luton's goal. Above, Luton's Mark Stein is beaten by a Reading defender.