

Luton strike it rich in Dibble's debt

THERE is no limit, it seems, to Wembley's inventiveness. Less than a year after the FA Cup classic between Coventry and Tottenham, and from less than promising material, the old stadium contrived a finish to yesterday's Littlewoods Cup final that was, if anything, even more inspired. And this time it did not need an extra 30 minutes, though that could hardly have been a closer run thing.

Only seconds remained when Brian Stein scored the goal that gave Luton Town their first trophy, stunning not only Arsenal, who had come ruthlessly from behind to lead with seven minutes left, but, it appeared, themselves; as, incredulously, the players set out on their victorious dance, they were joined by Darron McDonough. It was only when the injured man, who had been carried tearfully out of training on Saturday, returned to the bench that he realised he had left behind his crutches.

All in all, the way this match finished was about as close to miraculous as football can get. Luton's ability to play on grass was the least of it. Arsenal did not approach their best form until the last quarter, when Luton's tall and combative centre-forward Mick Harford, who had kept their defence on the hop, limped off with an ankle injury. But then the Londoners swept swiftly to a position of apparent command with goals from the substitute Martin Hayes and Alan Smith.

Luton's hopes, kept dimly flickering by a magnificent trio of saves from Andy Dibble, seemed to have died when they conceded a penalty. But, with the red hordes massed behind the stand-in goalkeeper preparing to celebrate, Dibble touched Nigel Winterburn's kick round a post. Two minutes later Luton were at the other end, their nippy forwards seizing on an error by Gus Caesar to give Danny Wilson the equaliser. At such times, you begin to realise that strange, obscure and wondrous forces are at work, and the most extraordinary

By Patrick Barclay at Wembley

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manifestation was to come when the substitute Ashley Grimes found himself tight on the right by-line and, lacking confidence in his right foot, took a stab with his left, the ball falling perfectly for Brian Stein to half-volley his second goal of the match. There was hardly time to restart. The trophy had been ripped from Arsenal's grasp. Their sixth successive penalty failure carried a heavy price.

The better team won, however, even if they took so long to prove it in a competition from which they were barred last season. Luton owed an immense debt to Dibble, who played because the manager, Ray Harford, was un-

willing to take a chance on the fitness of Les Sealey. The Welshman's resistance to Arsenal when they bared their teeth was breathtaking.

The even less experienced 19-year-old Kingsley Black also vindicated the manager's faith with an elegant display on the left flank, while Steve Foster and Mal Donaghy seldom wavered in defence, even during the short period when the pressure was severe. Brian Stein thoroughly deserved to crown his one-club career with a match-winning role at Wembley, and one's heart went out similarly to Ricky Hill, who gracefully went the distance on

Hero stands at the crossroads

Joe Lovejoy reports on the dilemma of Andy Dibble

ANDY DIBBLE, Wembley's man of the match, was sufficiently disenchanted with life at Luton two months ago to ask for a transfer back to Cardiff City and Fourth Division obscurity.

The 22-year-old goalkeeper from Cwmbran, capped by Wales at rugby union as a schoolboy, is still not ready to stay at Kenilworth Road beyond the end of the season. Aware of West Ham's interest in him, he is reluctant to commit himself to a new contract.

Dibble, who cost £175,000 when David Pleat signed him from Cardiff three years ago, said: "To save a penalty at Wembley and get a cup-winner's medal is dream-come-true stuff, but I still don't consider myself to be first choice, and I want regular first-team football. I have been banging my head against the wall in the reserves for too long."

Dibble had expected to be overlooked yesterday in favour of Les Sealey. He explained: "The manager still hadn't made up his mind on Saturday night and I rang my parents to tell them that I didn't think I would be playing. I didn't know I was in until lunchtime, just before the game."

Both managers made Dibble their man of the match. Arsenal's George Graham said: "He kept his team in it for 25 minutes in the second half, when we had our purple patch." Ray Harford, of Luton, said: "Dibble was absolutely brilliant. If he hadn't saved the penalty, we'd have been dead."

■ Steve Williams, the former England midfielder player, is likely to be fined a week's wages for failing to join up with the Arsenal squad. George Graham said: "I told him on Saturday that he wasn't playing and I haven't seen him since."

his return from a broken leg.

Luton took their early lead when a free-kick by David Preece, also back from prolonged injury, was won by Harford against three Arsenal players. Foster angled the loose ball through a rearguard that was looking for offside and ignored Stein, who rolled his shot wide of John Lukic.

The rest of the first half was unremarkable, but the second began hearteningly for Luton as Stein's header forced an outstanding save from Lukic. Hill found the side net. Black was making a monkey of Winterburn. All was set fair for Luton. Then Tony Adams fell on Harford's ankle. Almost immediately his replacement, Mark Stein, made a chance and then put it over the bar. But the barometer had taken a wild swing and Arsenal, hitherto unimaginative and woefully short of width, cut loose. Foster could not rid his penalty area of a free-kick from Paul Davis, Adams forced the ball on, and Hayes, who had replaced the almost invisible Perry Groves, put it home. Luton were still chasing red shadows when Smith, rounding off a splendid move, drove beyond Dibble. But the goalkeeper somehow managed to deflect two headers — the first coming back off the bar to Hayes, who struck a post — and thwarted Smith before his *pièce de résistance*.

Caesar's failure to clear when under no challenge — David O'Leary was badly missed — strengthened Luton's lifeline; after both Steins and Black had rattled the ball around the goalmouth, Lukic forcing out Brian's shot, Wilson found an unguarded net. With both sides tiring, it was Luton who summoned the strength for one last push, and Grimes was fresh enough to make their final ball count. To Brian Stein, it fell as if from heaven.

Arsenal: Lukic; Winterburn, Sansom, Thomas, Caesar, Adams, Rocastle, Davis. **Substitute (not used):** Smith, Groves (Hayes, 60 min), Richardson. **Substitute (not used):** Quinn. **Luton Town:** Dibble; Breacker, Johnson, Hill, Foster, Donaghy, Wilson, B Stein, Harford (M Stein, 64) Preece (Grimes, 77), Black. **Referee:** J Worrall (Warrington).

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Alas Smith: Luton's Tim Breacker, left, and Steve Foster combine to combat the menace of Alan Smith