Gunners glad to go home with a point

88/89

BOTH MANAGERS were happy to walk out of Kenilworth Road on Tuesday night with a point. Arsenal were pleased to have survived a severe battering in the second half, while Town manager Ray Harford was grateful for the big improvement that made it possible.

"Luton are a good side, and play quality football," said the Gunners boss, who was generous in defeat the last time the sides met, at Wembley. "We dominated for an hour, but it was a great equaliser, and then Luton gave us a pounding.

"I'm quite pleased to come here and get a draw."

Town fans were pretty pleased as well. At half-time Arsenal were so much on top, and in control, that they looked in little danger of losing the lead Alan Smith had given them with his 13th goal of the season in the 13th minute.

The Town, forced to change their formation before and during the first 45 minutes, looked disjointed and at times dispirited.

LUTON T. 1 ARSENAL 1

Darron McDonough, deputy for flu victim Steve Williams, twisted an ankle in the warm-up kick-about. Within ten minutes it was clear he would have to be taken off — except that by then the Town were without Steve Foster, who was in the dressing room having eight stitches put into a horrifying gashed mouth and lip.

With John Dreyer injured, Rob Johnson switched to left back, with Tim Breacker returning on the other flank.

But Arsenal held the midfield, and Mick Harford, keen to impress watching England boss Bobby Robson, was given no service at all.

Roy Wegerle was brought in ahead of David Oldfield and after he, like everyone else, had struggled for half a match he looked a very good player indeed after the break.

Arsenal's goal against the ten men came when Brian Marwood got down their left past Breacker, crossed accurately, and Smith rattled in a sweet left foot volley.

Arsenal then seemed to be content to keep command without putting on real pressure.

MORE SETTLED

Oldfield replaced McDonough with 38 minutes gone, and after Foster's 15-minute absence the Town looked more settled at the back.

Arsenal showed a lot of respect for the men who had proved they can fight back in big games, and seemed happy in the knowledge that they were in command, even if they were not threatening a lot more goals.

But they had a shock when Ricky Hill, still capable of a quick burst and flash of skill, cracked a low 25-yard shot against a post with John Lukic beaten, just before the interval.

In the second half, it was a different story. The Town seemed to adopt a free-wheeling attitude, the quick passing came back, and Arsenal were vulnerable.

Smith missed the chance of a header that might have made it 2-0 before a series of bruising and niggling clashes added brief venom into the proceedings.

A foul by Steve Bould on Harford 25 yards from goal in the 56th minute led to the equaliser. Tony Adams had to be pulled away by colleagues when he went to argue with the ref. Arsenal built their wall, Danny Wilson dummied over the dead ball, and Kingsley Black struck a purler of a curler into the corner of the net.

It raised crowd and team alike, with the Town side confident, quick to get forward, and weaving some very attractive patterns on both flanks.

CONFIDENT PROSPECT

Marvin Johnson, tentative in his first few games last season, has suddenly emerged as a confident young prospect.

At Middlesbrough he produced the positive attitude his play needed. At Kenilworth Road it positively bloomed, and he had the crowd right behind him with a couple of storming runs deep into Arsenal territory.

Wegerle delighted the fans as well, with some determined running and shooting. One thunderbolt cleared the bar by inches, and another gave Hill half a chance. Arsenal were lucky to survive penalty claims as Hill was shoved off the ball.

Lukic spread himself to save at Wegerle's feet and Black put another free kick over the bar, and if it was a disappointment to lose two home points, the tremendous second half was more than adequate compensation. Football like that will surely see off Queens Park Rangers on Saturday.

THE MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Sealey; Breacker, Foster, M. Johnson, R. Johnson; Wilson, McDonough (Oldfield, 38 mins), Black, Hill, Wegerle, Harford. Other sub: Allinson.

ARSENAL: Lukic; Dixon, Bould, Adams, Winterburn; Rocastle, Richardson, Thomas, Marwood; Merson, Smith. Subs: Groves and Hayes, not used.

THE GOALS: Alan Smith volley for Arsenal, 13 minutes. Kingsley Black, 25-yard curling free kick for the Town, 56 minutes.

OTHER STRIKES: Town five saved and six wide; Arsenal two saved and four wide. Corners: 2-0 to Arsenal.

ATTENDANCE: 10,548 — nearly 2,000 up on Arsenal's visit last season.

REFEREE: Mike Reed, Birmingham. Did well to keep things quiet when there was a brief period of niggle.

ENTERTAINMENT: A cracking match in the second half, with Arsenal glad to go home with one point after looking good enough for three in the first half.