

Barnes close to laying the Luton bogey

LUTON 0

(4-4-2): Chamberlain; Breacker, McDonough, Beaumont, Dreyer; Wilson, Williams (sub: Elstrup 54min), Kennedy (sub: Harvey 72min), Preece; Wegerle, Black.

LIVERPOOL 0

(4-4-2): Grobbelaar; Gillespie, Hysen, Hansen, Burrows; Nicol, McMahon, Whelan, Barnes; Beardsley (sub: Aldridge 74min), Rush.

Weather: humid and rainy. Ground: plastic. Referee: A Gunn (Sussex).

by Brian Glanville

FOR ONCE in a while, Liverpool did not lose at Luton. In fact, they had enough dominance, enough chances, to have won, and will not be very pleased with themselves that they did not. When Aldridge's shot rebounded from the wood with less than a minute to go, it was as close as Liverpool came.

Liverpool, as we all know, detest playing on Luton's plastic pitch; a dislike which seems almost to have developed into a phobia. The admirable John Barnes apart, they made awfully heavy weather of a tedious first half in which Luton's lightweight attack, deprived of the terrifying presence of Harford, set the visiting defence few problems.

Wegerle is beautifully balanced and very fast. There were one or two early signs that he might be a little too quick at times for the Liverpool defence, in which Gillespie, somewhat surprisingly, was used at right-back.

There was little Luton were able to do with Barnes when he attacked them. After 25 dull minutes, he cleverly threaded a free-kick to Burrows, whose shot slid just wide of the right-hand post. Then he put a ball on Rush's foot, bang in front of goal, but when Rush netted the goal was given offside. Later, with a beautiful chip, Barnes had Chamberlain, who had just previously grasped his centre at the near post, stretching to tip over the bar.

Elstrup, Luton's new and expensive Danish centre-forward, eventually came on early in the second half, allowing Luton to push Black into his correct left midfield position, but by this time Liverpool were settling down.

You might even say they were raising their game, encouraged no doubt by the noisy support of all those fans of theirs who, technically, were not meant to be at this ground where visiting fans are banned. Evidently it had taken them, too, until then to feel sufficiently sure of themselves to sing and shout.

At this point Luton's clumsy back four, deprived of the old bulwark of Foster in his headband, struggled to contain the swifter, more adroit, Liverpool attackers.

Round about 15 minutes into the second half, there was

a veritable bombardment of the Luton goal. Dreyer carelessly gave the ball away to Nicol, whose cross was wallopped by Rush, at last showing something of his old incisiveness. Chamberlain saved it with difficulty for a corner.

From this, Hysen, who had made a couple of excellent saving tackles already in defence, got in a header which Dreyer, making atonement, cleared by the right-hand post. Then Rush sent Nicol splendidly away for another cross to which Rush himself got his head; the resourceful Chamberlain again turning the ball over the bar.

Luton made almost compulsive use of their offside trap, and equally compulsive use of long passes which were of as little avail as high crosses without Harford to get on the end of them, but they must take credit for their courage. In the second half, their two toughest midfield players, first Williams and next Kennedy, gave way to players more likely to bring them the goal they needed.

Not that Elstrup had much chance to show us what he could do. Come to think of it, those who have seen him play for Denmark know quite well what he can do, but he won't be able to do it unless he gets a more intelligent service, especially to his feet.

When Harvey appeared, Black went to a deep right-wing position, which in turn allowed Wilson to move into the middle, where he is more happy and influential.

As for Liverpool, they seemed to run suddenly out of inspiration and drive after that short spell of extreme pressure early in the second half. Not until the very last minute did they again look as threatening, and then they came so close to winning.

Barnes, who, much to the relief no doubt of Breacker, saw somewhat less of the ball in the second half, dribbled Luton to distraction. The home defence just could not get the ball clear, and eventually Whelan, always diligent rather than inspired in midfield, found Aldridge, whose shot rebounded from the top of the post.

Note that when Aldridge got off the bench, it was Beardsley he replaced and not the recently criticised Rush.