

SILKY SKILLS IN SHORT SUPPLY

IT WOULD be nice to come away from Kenilworth Road just once without listening to an opposing manager talking plastic.

Charlton's Lennie Lawrence, despite remaining upright and magnanimous in defeat, couldn't refrain from suggesting that his team might have reversed the result had the surface been more like his back garden.

But what Luton must learn — and quickly — is that it will never matter what the ground is made of if the ball does not come into contact with it.

By GREG FOUNTAIN

When the ball is on the deck Hatters look in different class

demonstrated a new-found aerial dominance that was almost flawless.

Danny Wilson, who was also cautioned for an uncharacteristic hatchet job on the talented but petulant Paul Mortimer, distributed and marshalled with tenacity and both Dave Preece and Mick Kennedy got through mountains of work.

But the delicious ball skills of Wegerle were what it was all about.

The striker's poise, balance, and turn of pace were again mesmerising and his day was only spoiled by a troublesome indifference when twice presented with one-on-one scoring chances.

Ironically, it was a clumsy and deliberate 59th minute shove by Mark Reid which deprived Wegerle of another such opportunity after a sizzling exchange with Elstrup, and Wilson won the game from the spot.

Had it not been for that and Alec Chamberlain's poleaxing of the dynamic Paul Williams when he was clean through seconds before half time, Wegerle's misses might have looked extravagant.

Chamberlain, who

saved Luton again with an outstanding block from Williams was booked for the foul, but in fairness Williams himself should have been cautioned for retaliating against Tim Breacker.

Luton warmed to the task but too often their crosses found areas of unmanned penalty area and both McDonough and John Dreyer were guilty of dismal distribution.

Chances at both ends were conspicuously few and this deficiency is certain to affect both sides in the coming months.

Yet Wegerle's wizardry, coupled with the hoped-for blossoming of Black and Elstrup, could prove the skeleton key to unlock even the heaviest defensive fortifications.

LUTON: Chamberlain, Breacker, Dreyer, Wilson, McDonough, Beaumont, Kennedy, Wegerle, Elstrup, Preece, Black. Subs: Harvey, Farrell.

CHARLTON: Bolder, Humphrey, Reid, Peake, McLaughlin, Pates, Lee, Williams, Jones (McKenzie 76), Walsh, Mortimer. Subs: McKenzie, Watson.

Attendance: 8,859.



• Take a tumble — Roy Wegerle goes down in the box.



• It's there — Danny Wilson's penalty beats Bob Bolder.



• Flying Dane — Lars Elstrup in the thick of things.

The game was noticeably typical of early-season point-grabbing affairs, but it burst into delightful life on the occasions when Hatters realised that their skills, rather than the bracing September wind, should be dictating matters.

During those tragically rare periods, Roy Wegerle and Kingsley Black exchanged first-time passes that reduced Charlton to scrambling point, and at times on his full debut, Lars Elstrup threatened to begin the task of justifying his price tag.

When the ball was on the deck, so were Charlton, but once it was back up in the air, so were Luton's hopes.

Despite a team performance bristling with pride and endeavour, a nagging lack of confidence held Town back and prevented the greater glories of which they must be capable.

Unbeaten Charlton are riding high this season and for a spell you could see why — but the new Luton are certainly resilient.

Darron McDonough showed guts and perception at full-back and his performance more than made up for one ghastly tackle on Robert Lee which earned a booking.

David Beaumont