

Cavalier approach papers over cracks

By Clive Ellis

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Southampton 6 Luton Town 3

SOUTHAMPTON'S determination to entertain is not guaranteed to win them honours this season, but as long as they maintain the same cavalier approach they will be high in the popularity stakes.

There were clues during an initially patchy but ultimately exhilarating destruction of Luton as to why attack is not just a commitment but the soundest way of protecting a potentially leaky defence.

Southampton may be the most prolific scorers in the First Division, but only three teams have conceded more goals. Chris Nicholl, the manager, explained: "We keep the game open, we try to score goals and that does leave you open at the back sometimes."

Luton came to The Dell intent on adopting a positive attitude. It paid off in part, but the handicap of yet another injury to a central defender — this time Marvin Johnson with a twisted ankle — proved too much against Southampton's increasingly exuberant front four.

Rodney Wallace, Le Tissier, Rideout and Shearer have between them scored 27 of the

30 goals amassed by Southampton in their last 14 matches and, although youth still spells inconsistency, they are all capable providers as well as finishers.

It took more than half an hour for Southampton to achieve fluency, but in the second half they gave the Luton defence in general, and goalkeeper Chamberlain in particular, a torrid time. Case continues to be an important, canny influence in midfield, and his pinpoint free kicks produced headed goals for Le Tissier and Rideout.

Ray Harford, Luton's manager, afterwards put the chaos down to "mitigating circumstances" and, to be fair, few teams could absorb injuries to four central defenders without feeling the pinch.

Beaumont could ease the crisis within two weeks by returning from a twisted ankle.

Scorers. — Southampton: Rideout (2, 85), Le Tissier (41), Rodney Wallace (53, 71), Shearer (72). Luton: Dreyer (25), Black (46), Elstrup (85).

Southampton: Flowers; Dodd, Benali, Case, Ruddock, Osman, Le Tissier, Cockerill, Shearer, Rideout, Rodney Wallace.

Luton: Chamberlain; Breacker, Harvey, Wilson, M Johnson (James 45), Dreyer, Preece (Wegerle 70), Elstrup, Dowie, Kennedy, Black.

Referee: R Groves (Weston-super-Mare).