

Blistering blunder!



• Thanks, Millwall! The moment (left) leading up to the own goal which put Luton in front and (right) Mick McCarthy's header hits the net.



BLACK'S MAGIC DOES THE TRICK

**Ryan:
Nerves
hit us**

LUTON boss Jimmy Ryan admitted his troops had suffered from nerves during this tense encounter.

He said: "We were very nervous in the first 20 minutes but as the game went on I felt we always looked the more likely to score."

"Perhaps we are allowing the players to feel the tension and we looked ill at ease — similar to last week."

"If they are feeling the pressure it's up to us to get them in a better frame of mind."

"Millwall are in the same position, probably worse, but they did not start as poorly as we did. Sometimes we get caught up in motivation."

IN A SENSE it didn't matter what happened so long as Luton beat Millwall. The result was everything — the points vital.

To that extent Jim Ryan's young men did what they had to do and can rate the outcome of Saturday's gruesome tussle a triumph, but I'm afraid there will be no point surviving unless they can do better than this.

Good-hearted endeavour — of which there was plenty — will only go so far, and Ryan will know that more experience, more plain ability and more aggression must be found if there is to be a long-term top-flight future for Luton.

That said, Kingsley Black's 77th-minute pile-driver which whistled past keeper Keith Branagan and consigned Millwall to the foot of the division, was worthy of any arena and probably enough to make victory deserved on a day when quality was detained elsewhere.

His contribution was doubly welcome in a week when Brian Clough had reportedly bid £850,000 for his services and been turned away.

But what came before that was a shocking mixture of aimless passing and desperate challenges, briefly dominated by Millwall in the

LUTON TOWN 2 MILLWALL 1 By GREG FOUNTAIN

LUTON: Chamberlain, Breacker, Harvey, Kennedy, James, Dreyer, Wilson, Gray (Rees), Dowie, Preece, Black. Other sub: McDonough.
MILLWALL: Branagan, Stevens, Dawes, McCarthy, Thompson, McLeary, Reid (Briley), Hurlock, Allen, Goddard, Stephenson (Sheringham).
• Attendance: 9,027.

early stages and thereafter by nobody at all, which left the overwhelming fear that there could never be any goals.

Wesley Reid seemed poised to lay that fear to rest when he emerged from a 25th-minute one-two with Terry Hurlock 15 yards out, but Alec Chamberlain blocked decisively and the Lions lost their appetite.

Luton's occasional forays down the flanks were usually Black's

prerogative, but it became increasingly clear that his service was unlikely to be converted by either Iain Dowie or the struggling Paul Gray.

As if to prove the point, Millwall's veteran debutant Mick McCarthy opened Luton's account a minute before the break, heading powerfully into his own net after Branagan had flapped idiotically at Preece's corner.

Rough justice perhaps, but since McCarthy was largely dedicated to off-the-ball obstructions and niggling professional fouls it was hard to feel sympathy.

The grave hostilities continued into the second-half, but somehow Hurlock and Mick Kennedy contented themselves with only verbal abuse while the referee's back was turned, allowing occasional glimpses of football to emerge.

Things didn't really pick up until Black's goal, the creation of which was helped by Tim Breacker's willingness to run at full-backs and supply dangerous crosses, something which everybody else seems to have forgotten how to do.

But no sooner had Millwall's net stopped rippling than sub Les Briley came on to the field, strolled into the penalty area and thumped home Malcolm Allen's cross from the byline to make it 2-1.

Luton, to their credit, declined to panic, and instead launched a major counter attack which saw sub Jason Rees beat two men and supply a low cross for Dowie theoretically to tap into the empty net.

How he contrived to put it over we can only speculate.

On the positive side Luton can take heart from the efforts of David Preece, who distributed well and kept Branagan occupied with a series of worthy long-range efforts, and from another solid showing from John Dreyer (though the less said about his passing the better).

Ryan's team continue to demonstrate with pride that their manager's philosophy is studied build-up through the middle, but that cannot always thrive on stages where the opposition are intent on total shutdown at all costs.

Kennedy looks distinctly uneasy having to run about so much, and neither Dreyer nor Julian James are ideal candidates for initiating clever passing moves.

Apart from Black's strike the final whistle was the highlight of the day, but at a time when survival is the only issue Luton should not be too ashamed of that.

Indeed, if nothing else, the fact that they are prepared to scrap for that survival is reason to be a little proud and a little hopeful.



• Kingsley Black (out of picture) fires Luton's vital winner.

Faces of relief . . .



• What a relief! Luton have picked up three vital points and it shows on the faces of Alec Chamberlain, Jim Ryan and physio Dave Galley.