

Black's day spurs Luton to survival

Derby 2 Luton 3

by Neil Hallam

LUTON were measured for the noose weeks ago but sensationally escaped from their condemned cell, roared on by a massive band of fans who refused to let hope die.

They made the perfect start with a goal from Tim Breacker after only 66 seconds.

But this seemed likely to be only a tantalising glimpse of First Division survival when Derby struck twice in the first half to draw level.

Much of the First Division was far from unhappy about the prospect of avoiding Luton's notorious plastic pitch next season.

There was nothing synthetic however about this magnificent survival success or about the full-blooded support for their efforts.

Luton came out primed to take the relegation issue

right to the finishing post and the massive bonus of Breacker's goal came with a thundering, 25-yard shot following a tapped free kick by David Preece.

And Derby, whose own survival had been secured only a week earlier, were stunned again in the 19th minute when Kingsley Black added a second.

Craig Ramage lost possession in midfield and sloppy defending enabled Black to wriggle through and prod the ball past the exposed Peter Shilton.

But a tactical switch by Derby, pushing skipper Mark Wright into midfield, changed the direction of the match.

Mick Harford, sold to Derby by Luton for £480,000 earlier this season, created a chance on the edge of the box and Wright powered in to score handsomely.

Then with only injury time left in the first half, a linesman spotted an incident involving Ramage and David Preece, and the free

kick brought a stunning equaliser from Paul Williams.

But as hundreds of radios gave the news of Sheffield Wednesday's problems, Luton knew the great escape was still on.

The crucial goal fittingly came from Black, now rated at £1 million and the scourge of Derby fullback Mel Sage for 90 minutes.

Again he ghosted away from Sage and two other floundering Derby defenders to ignite another wild celebration with a shot which cannoned in off the inside of Shilton's left hand post.

The game had been packed with drama but for the last 15 minutes Luton put the lid on it with delaying tactics

DERBY: Shilton; Sage, Forsyth, G. Williams, Wright, Hindmarch, Davidson, Saunders, Harford, P. Williams, Ramage.

LUTON: Chamberlain; Breacker, McDonough, Beaumont, James, Dreyer, Wilson, Rees, Dowie, Preece, Black.

Ref: B. Stevens (Gloucester).