

Luton stay up with higher ambitions on their schedule

89/90

By David Powell

Derby County.....	2
Luton Town.....	3

WHO will wear the straight-jacket with Charlton Athletic gone, we wondered? The first division had looked short of an escapologist, but there was, after all, a Houdini in the house. Luton, last season's apprentice, came forward with an act as dramatic as the one seen at the top of the League a year ago.

Last season, a home win over Norwich City, in their final match, ensured Luton's safety. This time, they needed two away wins in their favour: their own victory at Derby and Nottingham Forest's at Sheffield Wednesday. Nothing less would have done.

Jim Ryan, the Luton manager, was asked what odds he would have offered had he been a bookmaker. He said that he did not know because he did not have a bookmaker's mind. Manager, or bookmaker, in either mind it was a good day: the Baseball Ground odds on a 2-3 result were 40-1; on Breacker scoring the first goal, which he did after two minutes, 33-1.

Luton celebrated unashamedly, though Ryan disappointed one supporter, whose banner read: "If Jim gets the chance, he will do a Dave Pleat dance." Nobody at Luton forgets 1983, when they needed to win at Maine Road to relegate Manchester City in place of themselves, and did; Pleat ran, in ecstasy, across the pitch to hug Brian Horton, his captain. Ryan's was a more sober response, but if anyone deserved hugging it was Black, his winger.

Black scored two goals, his second 15 minutes from time after Derby had equalized having been 2-0 down. His first — Luton's second — came from a Wilson cross touched into his path by Dowie and struck low into a corner. His second was from a shot which made up in direction what it lacked in pace, scraping in off the post. "You don't always

Barclays League

First division

Champions: Liverpool.
Relegated: Millwall, Charlton Athletic, Sheffield Wednesday.

Second division

Champions: Leeds United.
Also promoted: Sheffield United.
In play-offs: Newcastle United, Swindon Town, Blackburn Rovers, Sunderland.
Relegated: Stoke City, Bradford City, Bournemouth.

Third division

Champions: Bristol Rovers.
Also promoted: Bristol City.
In play-offs: Notts County, Tranmere Rovers, Bury, Bolton Wanderers.
Relegated: Walsall, Blackpool, Northampton Town, Cardiff City.

Fourth division

Champions: Exeter City.
Also promoted: Grimsby Town, Southern United.

In play-offs: Stockport County, Maidstone United, Cambridge United, Chesterfield.

Relegated: Colchester United.

GM Vauxhall Conference

Champions: Darlington.

B and Q Scottish League

Premier division

Champions: Dundee.

Relegated: Dundee.

First division

Champions: St Johnstone.
Relegated: Albion Rovers, Alloa Athletic.

Second division

Champions: Brechin City.
Also promoted: Kilmarnock.

PLAY-OFF DATES

Semi-finals: First leg May 13, second leg May 16. First-named team at home in first leg of semi-final. Finals at Wembley, May 26, 27, 28.

SECOND DIVISION: Blackburn Rovers v Swindon Town; Sunderland v Newcastle

THIRD DIVISION: Bolton Wanderers v Notts County; Bury v Tranmere Rovers.

FOURTH DIVISION: Chesterfield v Stockport County; Cambridge United v Maidstone United.

have to break the net," Black said.

Luton have appeared in the Littlewoods Cup final twice in the last three seasons, but nothing compared with Black's feelings now. "The fact that we have stayed up after we were in such a desperate state, I class as better than winning at Wembley," he said.

For nearly an hour it looked as though Derby's two England men, Wright and Shilton, would take the credit — for that is how the first division would have regarded their relegation — for sending Luton down. The ubiquitous Wright intercepted Luton attacks and propelled Derby ones; Shilton made good saves from Black and Dowie. Wright pulled back a goal with a volley on the half hour and Paul Williams made it 2-2 with an equally venomous shot on the stroke of half-time.

A public address announcement invited the spectator who had lost his heart tablets to reclaim them. If they belonged to a Luton follower, there was no need. In the last half hour Derby failed to trouble Chamberlain and the final few minutes were agony-free as Luton played cleverly,

if frustratingly for Derby, into the corners.

Luton, for all the criticism they have attracted for banning away supporters and playing on an artificial surface, are a joy to watch at times. Here, even when two goals to the good, they remained true to their attacking game. Ryan, who inherited a team heading for the second division when he replaced Ray Harford in January, said: "After today, people might think I regard this as success, but I do not. I want us to go on from here."

In the press room, Luton's local reporter looked as drained as any player. He was then asked to go into extra time when a Derby man reminded him of the things most people dislike about the club he covers. "It's only a reprieve," the Derby man said. "We were reprieved seven years ago," a voice in favour of Luton barked, "and we are still here."

DERBY COUNTY: P Shilton; M Sage, M Forsyth, G Williams, M Wright, F Hindmarch, J Davidson, D Saunders, M Harford, P Williams, C Ramage (sub: T Hebbard).

LUTON TOWN: A Chamberlain; T Breacker, D McDonagh, D Beaumont, J James (sub: M Kennedy), J Dreyer, D Wilson, J Rees (sub: L Elstrup), I Dowie, D Preece, K Black.
Referee: B Stevens.