

Luton defy probability and critics

By John Ley

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

ON A BALMY afternoon in Derbyshire it was difficult to understand the apparent hostility towards a team who overcame enormous odds to complete a great escape from relegation which appeared well beyond the realms of possibility.

If no-one likes Millwall then few have time for Luton. Millwall have long since been consigned to Division Two, yet this was Luton's chance to antagonise further those who have built a strong dislike for the club who have dared to tamper with tradition.

The probability of both Luton winning and Wednesday, who occupied 13th place just 41 days earlier, losing were minimal.

Breacker repaid the votes of team-mates who last week awarded him their players' player of the year trophy with a goal after 66 seconds and Kingsley Black, outstanding on the wing, increased the visitors' reason for wondering: "Can we do it?" Derby offered a negative answer with first-half responses from Wright and Paul Williams but Black completed a deserved win with a 74th-minute goal.

That gave Luton another year to use their plastic pitch in the First Division, while fans who follow their team around the country must once again have at least one Saturday off because of the club's unpopular away-fan ban.

I have never seen a good game on plastic and the day they are dug up will be good for the First Division. Yet one cannot argue with the financial benefits for a club who, unlike Liverpool, Arsenal and the other bigger teams, do not bring in their revenue from the weight of their crowds.

That does not happen at places such as Wimbledon and Luton, making their continued survival in the same division so commendable. Luton's other rule gives them another advantage. One wonders whether Wednesday might have complained if the final game had been at Kenilworth Road.

Danny Wilson, once of Nottingham Forest and an inspiration in Luton's midfield on Saturday, said: "I cannot understand why people wanted us to go down.

"We are not a physical team, we don't hump the ball for-

RADDY Antic, whose goal for Luton at Manchester City seven years ago kept them in Division One, was celebrating again on Saturday.

Antic, who finished a two-year spell as coach at Real Zaragoza yesterday, listened to the match on BBC World Service from his home in Spain.

"When Derby came back I thought the psychological blow would be too much. But when the third goal went in and Wednesday had been beaten, I began celebrating," he said.

ward. When Jimmy Ryan became manager he said he wanted to get back to playing the way the fan wants, to return to the way David Pleat played."

Indeed, Luton's short-passing, positive approach, both against Crystal Palace a week earlier and at the Baseball ground, was good to watch.

Luton were 30 seconds away from going down. Dowie's last-minute winner against Palace had allowed the dream to live. Even Wednesday's fans, watching their team against Charlton, had danced a jig of delight when, a week ago, false information suggested Luton had only drawn.

Mr Ryan, who replaced Ray Harford as manager in January, is expected to sign a new contract on returning next weekend from a club holiday in Spain. He added: "Ron Atkinson is one manager I know and I had a moment to think about what he must be going through.

"But there is a body of negative opinion within the League and amongst fans because of our ban and our pitch. They don't take into account what a smashing little club this is. Our aims have often been miscalculated but on Saturday we did on real grass."

Wilson offered an interesting image: "Brian Clough has been kissing a few people recent weeks. I wish he'd be here so I could plant a kiss on his cheek!"