

Le Tissier proves to be perfect on plastic

By Ivo Tennant

Luton 3

Southampton 4

SOUTHAMPTON know that the best-laid plans can come to nothing. Twice under Chris Nicholl's management they have prepared themselves for Kenilworth Road by training on an artificial pitch, only to lose 7-0 and 6-1. Last week they kept to grass and duly won.

Even though Southampton had an eye on their Rumbelows League Cup quarter-final against Manchester United on Wednesday and omitted Dodd, Case and Osman, they were uninhibited in everything they did.

The margin of their victory should have been greater, but no-one could carp after such an open game. Jim Ryan, Luton's manager, who played alongside Mr Nicholl at Kenilworth Road 20-years ago, suggested the blame lay with his defence, but was soon showering Southampton with praise.

England B internationals Matthew Le Tissier and Rodney Wallace were simply too good for Luton. Le Tissier claims not to like playing on artificial surfaces and that defenders are giving him less room than last season, but this was not evident on Saturday.

Sadly, Southampton's cup commitments meant he could not be chosen to play for the League XI in Naples on Wednesday. The Italians would have taken to the strutting skills that are increasingly reminiscent of Rodney Marsh.

Three of the four goals Le Tissier and Wallace scored between them were through wonderfully sharp first-time shots. Wallace's opening goal admittedly went through Chamberlain's legs. His second, from another low cross, was clinically placed.

Le Tissier's first came from a left-footed drive, his second, which gave Southampton a 3-2 lead, through turning Harvey in the penalty area and wrong-footing Chamberlain with nonchalance.

He knows that he has to maintain such goalscoring consistency to make an impression on England manager Graham Taylor. He and Wallace have now scored 28 goals between them this season.

Ryan, who has reached the first anniversary of his appointment as Luton's manager, reckons the most satisfying aspect of his year has been the introduction of several young players into his team.

Two of those he had in mind, Farrell and Pembridge, made their debuts recently and were included on Saturday. What they lacked was not talent but the presence of an older player such as Brian Horton to provide the necessary guidance. There was no-one in their side who looked prepared to take command in midfield.

For in spite of one spectacular goal, Elstrup volleying in Farrell's left-wing cross, a second by James which kept them in the match and a third through Dreyer's penalty that ensured a barnstorming finish, Luton were stymied by lack of sagacity as well as the brilliance of Le Tissier and Wallace.