

Luton escape with ease

GERALD PENNY

Harford own goal is perfect survival gift

Luton Town.....2, Derby County0 **Colin Maloney**



LUTON'S biggest crowd of the season—12,889—flooded on to Kenilworth Road's doomed plastic pitch to celebrate what turned out to be a surprisingly comfortable escape from relegation to the Second Division.

The Houdinis of the First Division certainly had more to spare this time than on the two other occasions in the last eight years they have had to win their last match of the season to stay up.

An own goal by Mick Harford, the former Luton striker, just before the interval calmed the home side's nerves, and a second goal, scored early in the second half by Lars Elstrup, made sure it would be Sunderland who went down with Derby.

Not many people, surely, can complain about Luton's survival. They have acquired an unwanted and undeserved reputation for unfriendliness because of their pitch and their ban on away fans. Both, however, will be gone come next season.

Not only that but, as manager Jim Ryan has pointed out often, Luton do try to play the game properly: to feet, in other words. Even under yesterday's pressure, they remained true to that creed and deserved their reward.

The circumstances obliged Luton to attack, but that is their natural game. They created numerous chances, but the ball just would not go into the net. Dreyer back-headed a Preece free-kick over the bar, Black side-footed wide after a marvellous run by Elstrup and Farrell spurned a trio of chances.

In their eagerness to score,

however, Luton had to be careful that Derby did not do them damage on the break. It nearly happened as early as the fifth minute, but Chamberlain tipped Harford's fierce half-volley over the top.

Two further scares, provided by dangerous shots from Paul Williams and McMinn, prompted renewed effort from Luton. After Wright had headed a Black lob off the line, it brought them their first goal four minutes from the end of the first half—with a little unintentional help from an old friend.

When Rees sought out Farrell's head with a flat free kick from the left, the ball skidded off the top of the challenging Harford's head and flew into the far corner of his own net. Shilton, 41, did not have a chance of saving in what could have been his last competitive match.

Farrell missed yet another chance before the interval shooting wide from six yards, but all was forgiven when Elstrup deservedly scored two minutes into the second half.

It emerged from a corner by Preece. Dreyer headed back and Black's deliberate, looping header seemed to be on its way into the far, top corner when Elstrup materialised at the far post to make sure with a firm nod of the head.

Luton were firmly in control from then until Wright gave them a couple of nasty frights 10 minutes from the end. First, Chamberlain saved miraculously with his foot when the England defender broke clear through the middle. Then, from the corner, Wright headed against the bar.

Peter Shilton missing out as Lars Elstrup heads Luton's second to secure First Division soccer next season