

Harford double rewards Pleat

By Mike Stanforth

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Luton Town 2 Oldham Athletic 1

LUTON manager David Pleat finally gave his board of directors some justification for their callous sacking of Jim Ryan at the end of last season.

Mr Ryan was dismissed just one day after keeping Luton in the First Division against all the odds and on meagre resources. The club promised less nerve-racking times on Mr Pleat's second coming to Kenilworth Road.

An early-season record of just one win in seven games and 15 goals conceded to three scored hardly fitted the bill, but on Saturday Mr Pleat proved the inspired touch is still there.

First he brought back Mick Harford to the club and saw his £325,000 outlay rewarded with two match-winning goals in the final five minutes, the second a spectacular overhead effort.

But the victory owed even more to Mr Pleat's second-half tactical changes. Telfer gave the side width in place of McDonough and Nogan injected pace and directness, where Stein had been slug-

gish. Harford was the main beneficiary of both changes.

"The manager should take the credit," said Harford. "We were struggling and he made two astute substitutions which won us the game."

Luton's play prior to the substitutions showed the full extent of Mr Pleat's task. Harford's deft touches were largely lost on his team-mates and the 9,000 crowd could be forgiven for remembering fondly the surging runs of Black and the instinctive positioning of Elstrup.

Oldham should have won handsomely after leading through Marshall's fifth goal of the season, and against opponents in a different league from their three previous away defeats at Liverpool, Manchester United and Nottingham Forest.

"We blew it," said manager Joe Royle. "We went 1-0 up and stopped playing. Too many of my players thought it was too easy and just switched off, which is a Second Division mentality."