

Oakes guides Luton out of bottom three

By Timothy Collings

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Luton Town 1 Crystal Palace 1

PERSEVERANCE paid off for Luton at Kenilworth Road on Saturday as they moved out of the bottom three for the first time since New Year's Day with a hard-won point from an abrasive and stoppage-riddled game.

Having fallen a goal behind after only 24 minutes, when McGoldrick was given time and space to lift a looping header beyond Day, David Pleat's mixture of precocious talents and hardened veterans refused to give up their passing style and eventually gained reward with a glorious second-half equaliser from Oakes.

Now, as Mr Pleat pointed out afterwards, both Oakes and his teammates have to continue to deliver performances under pressure as he moulds a team for the future, starting with another important home match against Tottenham on Wednesday night.

"He played well and took his goal well," said Mr Pleat of Oakes, 19, whose father Trevor is a member of the pop group Showaddywaddy. "Now he has to keep it going. He's one of a group of young players we have who give me confidence."

For Mr Pleat, the biggest pressure is time as he watches such promising talents as Oakes, Campbell, Linton, Telfer, Pembridge and Salton

develop in an atmosphere filled with the constant threat of relegation.

Tottenham's visit this week will be the first of Luton's final 10 League games in a season in which, so far, they have managed to collect only four points from 16 away games. With visits to Southampton, Oldham and Notts County to come, their destiny is in their own hands.

Much may depend in the end on how well the experienced men like on-loan goalkeeper Day, Peake, Kamara, Stein and, when he returns from suspension, Harford, cope with the responsibility.

Harford was sorely missed in attack against Palace who, after a bright start, faded and finished scraping to hang on for a draw. "Harford would have frightened them more if he had played," said Mr Pleat. "But we're still there, fighting, battling and doing our best."

That was evident especially in the second period when Oakes, showing pace, skill and an eye for a telling cross, volleyed in Stein's return pass from an acute angle and Kamara hit a post from 20 yards.

Palace, with only two wins in their last 11 League games, looked unconvincing and should be glad of the points gathered earlier in the season.