

United ride their luck

Picture: ALL SPORT

By Christopher Davies

Luton Town 1
Manchester United 1

MANCHESTER United may well be on their way to the League Championship for the first time in 25 years, yet the feeling remains that they are simply the best of a pretty ordinary bunch in a far-from-vintage season for English soccer.

They were outplayed by Luton, a team who may not survive a fourth season of cliff-hanger finishes, and there was no arguing with Alex Ferguson's blunt assessment: "We didn't play at all."

While United have some of the most talented players in the country, the sum total is greater than the individual parts.

Webb was anonymous, upstaged by the improving Pembroke, while some of United's defending was less than secure.

United have scored only 59 goals in 38 games, and should they win the title — eight points from four games would be enough — they would be among the lowest-scoring champions in recent years. Their strength lies in their organisation, while players like Giggs, McClair and Kanchelskis are there to provide the unexpected.

Three defeats all season is good going, but United were very fortunate to come away from Kenilworth Road with a point.

The draw, United's ninth in 15 games, was not without a price. Parker will play no further part in the championship run-in after a recurrence of his hamstring problem. His participation in the European Championship must also be in doubt.

Hughes was booked after a scuffle with Kamara — "handbags at 12 paces," said the Luton midfielder — and the caution will rule him out of United's last game of the season against Tottenham, which may be televised live.

ITV are hoping to move the match from Saturday May 2 to the Sunday, along with Leeds' game against Norwich, and switch from one to the other in a double-header live broadcast.

David Pleat, whose Luton side are a credit to his football philosophy, believes United will win the title and rule English soccer for five years.

United lead Crystal Palace 3-1 after the Youth Cup final first leg and Mr Pleat said:



Manchester United's Brian McClair goes for the ball with Luton's David Preece

"They have the best bunch of kids coming through since the 'Busby Babes'.

"Alex Ferguson can sleep soundly for five years. Whoever made the decision to keep him got it right."

United took the lead when Sharpe shot through Chamberlain's legs in the 25th minute after Hughes had touched on Schmeichel's long clearance.

Luton equalised five minutes after the interval. Har-

ford had the luxury of finding himself marked by Irwin instead of Bruce or Pallister at the far post — Mr Ferguson was not pleased — and scored with a header at the second attempt.

United play Nottingham Forest at Old Trafford today in a rematch of the recent Rumbelows Cup final. It will be United's third game in five days and their tiredness may be offset by Forest's injury problems, which make the

Manchester team's worries seem trivial.

Luton, who have escaped relegation on the final day of the last three seasons, still have a glimmer of hope as they travel to QPR.

Their football would be a credit to the Premier League, but a club whose gate receipts of £1.5million compare with a wage bill of £2.9million must sell players to survive, and they will always be on the brink.