

'Numbed' Pleat denies Norwich link

WHERE relegated Luton and their manager, David Pleat, go from here is anybody's guess. Speculation in Norwich has linked Mr Pleat with the managerial vacancy at Carrow Road, but he insists he is thinking only of stabilising the Kenilworth Road club.

Mr Pleat seems an ideal candidate for the Norwich job. He shares their belief in a passing game and he can wheel and deal with the best. However, he denies categorically a story that he has applied for the post vacated last week by Dave Stringer.

"I wouldn't do a thing like that when Luton were fighting for their lives," he said yesterday. "My job now is to stabilise my own club, and it's not going to be easy. At the moment I'm really numbed by what has happened."

"We've got to train our thoughts now on another era, an era in which players will be able to develop in slightly less difficult surroundings. We'd have continued to be under pressure in the Premier League if we'd stayed up."

"It's a horrible feeling leaving the First Division after competing with the best teams in the country for 10 years, but we've got to fight to

Colin Malam on how Luton's perennial struggle to avoid relegation finally ended after 10 years in the top flight

get back. It's going to be a real test of character for everyone, and I have to give a lead.

"Much as I enjoyed the elation and the thrill of taking Luton into the First Division 10 years ago, this hurts. But I've got to get on with it and build the team again. I sincerely hope our fans will stay with us, and I'd like to thank them for all their support."

Unfortunately, those supporters are not numerous enough to make Luton sol-

vent. More than a £1 million in debt and losing £30,000 a week, the club are resigned to selling their major asset, Welsh international midfielder Mark Pembridge, for at least £1.2 million.

According to Mr Pleat, the player is wanted by several clubs, but Tottenham, who have watched him on several occasions, including at Meadow Lane on Saturday, appear to be the most interested in buying him.

"Unless you are a well-sup-

ported big city club or someone puts in millions of pounds, staying with the game in the First Division is a financial nightmare," reflects Mr Pleat.

"Despite that, though, Luton have played with some style under me and their other managers during the last 10 years. In fact, the Premier League have lost one of the clubs who play the game properly."

Sadly, too little of that style was evident in the 2-1 loss to

Notts County. After a confident opening period, in which Cherry twice denied Pembridge a goal and James opened the scoring following a long throw by the Welshman, Luton just faded.

They were strangely passive during the 25 minutes after the interval. Mr Pleat pointed to the knocks sustained by Kamara and Harford, but Neil Warnock, County's manager, blamed fatigue. "They had some opportunities in the second half," he said, "but I thought they looked tired."

Mr Warnock felt his team had won because of the sort of self-belief and enthusiasm shown by Rob Matthews, 21, a geography student at Loughborough University, who scored both of County's goals during a remarkable full debut for the club.

Matthews, a non-contract player who wants to join County once he has completed his studies this summer, equalised from the rebound after Kamara had blocked a Craig Short shot on the line after 34 minutes.

Then, 20 minutes from the end, he took Luton down with County by chipping the ball over Chamberlain.