

Student's double first sinks Luton

91/92

Notts County..... 2, Luton Town..... 1 **Colin Malam**

LUTON went tamely out of the expiring First Division, victims once too often of their chronic inability to defend a lead. Ahead as early as the 17th minute, the great escapologists were undone by two goals from a university undergraduate, Notts County striker Rob Matthews.

Coventry's problems at Villa Park offered the Bedfordshire club every chance of escaping relegation on the last day for the fourth season running, but they had neither the talent nor the will to extend their 10-year stay in the top flight.

Luton go down with County and, on this evidence, neither deserve to share in the promised riches of the Premier League next season. On a day that Luton, understandably perhaps, showed little of their normal passing game, they looked two poor teams.

There was even a lack of urgency at times, something that Luton's sizeable and noisy following did not deserve. About 5,000 fans — nearly half the crowd — travelled to Nottingham in an attempt to shout their favourites to salvation.

Everything seemed set fair for Luton's first away win in 14 months when the transistors among the boaters and balloons relayed the news that Aston Villa had scored in the first minute against Coventry, the team the Hatters had to overhaul to stay up.

The joy of the visiting fans was prolonged by two clean strikes from Mark Pembroke, the gifted young Welsh international midfielder. Luton are resigned to selling for £1.2 million this summer to clear off their debts in the club's time-honoured fashion.

Both chances came from corners pulled back to the edge of the penalty area by Oakes and Preece. Pembroke struck the first with his right foot and the second even more fiercely with his left, but the diving Cherry saved

each time, albeit with difficulty.

Undeterred, Luton kept pressing. They took the lead when Pembroke, ubiquity personified, sent a long throw-in to the near post. The ball dropped to Julian James from an aerial challenge between Craig Short and Mick Harford, and the full-back drove his second goal of the season into the bottom corner.

Stein should have made it 2-0 from Harford's headed pass, but headed over instead. It was a costly miss, since County had already begun to expose the frailty of the Luton defence, Agana lobbing the ball over the bar when put clean through by Draper.

Then, after 34 minutes, James foolishly committed a retaliatory foul on Thomas out on the left. When Thomas swung the free kick into the goalmouth, Craig Short's shot was blocked; but even a wall of defenders on the line could not keep out Matthews' shot from the rebound.

It was at the start of the second half, when they might have been expected to throw caution to the winds and attack, that Luton were at their most muted. Pembroke, Preece and Stein all shot narrowly wide, but the attacking was sporadic rather than sustained.

Luton were jolted out of this trance-like state after 70 minutes by Matthews' second and decisive goal. A fine one it was, too, the Loughborough University student chipping Chamberlain quite beautifully from the edge of the penalty area following a probing run by Williams.

Only after that did Luton send on both their substitutes and throw men forward. The change of tactics should have brought them an equaliser, but Cherry saved well from Stein and Rees, and Gray, unforgivably, missed the target altogether when Pembroke's pass put him clear.