

Luton drop out of the top flight after a stay of 10 years

Hatters run out of luck

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By Phil Andrews

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Neil Warnock, stays around to complete it remains to be seen, though he did not encourage speculation linking him with the Norwich vacancy.

But Rob Matthews, the 21-year-old Loughborough University student who is sitting his final exams this week, will figure strongly in County's plans.

A non-contract player who is paid only expenses, he earned every penny of his bus fare with two confidently taken goals on his first full appearance.

He tucked away the loose ball after John Dreyer had cleared

Craig Short's shot off the line, then chipped Andy Williams's cross neatly over Alec Chamberlain for the winner.

"Our greater freshness won the match. Luton had their chances but they looked tired," Warnock said.

The defeat gave the Luton manager, David Pleat, his first experience of relegation. "The Premier League has lost a good footballing side," he said. "We worked hard to get back in the race. A lot of people thought we were down at Christmas. It is time to stabilise the club and bring our younger players on in the lower division."

He does not expect to be able to dip into the transfer market to improve his squad. It is more likely that someone will make him an offer he cannot refuse for the skilful Pembridge, who is valued at £1.2m.

Goals: James (17) 0-1; Matthews (34) 1-1; Matthews (71) 2-1.

Notts County: Cherry; Palmer, Thomas, Craig Short, Chris Short, Draper, Williams, Harding, Agana, Matthews, Wilson (Devlin, 60).

Luton Town: Chamberlain; James, Salton (Gray, 72), Kamara (Rees, 74), Dreyer, Peake, Oakes, Stein, Harford, Pembridge, Preece.

Referee: R Nixon (West Kirkby).

EVEN before this match started, the bulldozers had begun digging up the Meadow Lane terracing. There was much concern about rebuilding when it ended, too, but on the field rather than off it.

The task may be easier for Notts County, whose workman-like victory condemned Luton to join them in relegation to the new First Division. The Hatters had spent 10 years in the present one, the last three of them by avoiding the drop on the final day of the season.

They were unable to do so again, despite Coventry, the only club they could overhaul, losing at Villa Park, and Julian James giving them a 17th-minute lead by converting Mark Pembridge's long throw.

It proved to be the last gasp of the weary side which had fought against adversity for too long. They played their admirably neat football to the end, but it was County who took control with a determined and disciplined performance which suggested that, for them, the reconstruction work has already begun.

Whether County's manager,