

Luton revel in the fight

LUTON are getting more of a buzz out of their relegation battle than Derby County did from their lame tilt at the play-offs. A pin coming out of the hand is better than one going in.

They now look certain to be playing each other again next season, even though they have different ideas about their proper station in life. Both have serious cash problems; but Derby are buyers, Luton sellers. The Baseball Ground expects, Kenilworth Road hopes.

Derby, their side put together by high finance and lofty aspirations, have had a season of rumbling frustration. Their fans are not a happy lot.

Luton, relegated last season and since obliged, they say, to sell to survive, seemed nailed to the bottom in January. But, stoutly, they have lost only one of their last seven games and, bar-

By Bryon Butler

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ring some very curious results in the next fortnight, they will survive.

The two clubs produced, between them, a game which reflected their seasons. It was riddled with errors and omissions, studded by stoppages and, ultimately, it pleased no-one.

It was certainly not David Pleat's sort of game. The Luton manager clings to his ideals through thick and thin and, afterwards, he aimed darts at his own side, Derby and the referee, Ian Cruickshanks, with something approaching impartiality.

There was, of course, a high degree of frustration in his words. Luton were leading by a first-half goal from David Preece with only a minute and injury time left

and victory would have guaranteed their survival.

But then Mark Pembridge, sold by Luton to Derby for £1,250,000 last summer, floated the ball to the far right post and Craig Short headed Derby's equaliser.

Pembridge has been a pain to his old club. He scored his first senior hat-trick when Derby beat Luton 5-1 in the fourth round of the FA Cup. Derby, however, were short of authority this time. Their game was shaped more by expediency than calculation.

Luton might have scored at least two more in the second half but, in the end, they allowed themselves to be caught up in a scramble.

Derby County: Taylor; Patterson, Nicholson, Forsyth, Short, Pembridge, Sturridge, Kuhl (Coleman 30), (Stallard 84), Kitson, Gabbiadini, Simpson. **Booked:** Short. **Goal:** Short (89).

Luton Town: Chamberlain; Dreyer, James, Johnson, Hughes, Peake, Telfer, Kamara, Dixon, Gray, Preece. **Subs not used:** Oakes, Williams. **Booked:** Hughes. **Goal:** Preece (36).

Referee: I Cruickshanks (Hartlepool).