

THERE was only one thing wrong with Cambridge United's emphatic victory at Luton. David Ruston was not there to see it.

Chairman for 16 years when United were always in the shadow of the flash club from the brash motor town, he would have loved to see the Hatters humbled like this.

During John Beck's controversial reign there were many times when he had to bite his lip.

United were not doing things his style, but he knew the club, which was a family for him, desperately needed such success.

Last night at Kenilworth Road United first showed the character they have always needed as perpetual Davids in a Goliath League.

Then they comprehensively outplayed a team built on manager David Pleat's unshakeable footballing principles.

There may have been only one goal but make no mistake, this was an overwhelming away win against a higher division side.

The shots-on-target log read: Luton 0, Cambridge United 7!

And what really delighted manager Gary Johnson was that it was the complete team performance.

Everyone could be proud of his contribution to a display which left the vastly-experienced Pleat clearly shaken.

"That was one of my worst experiences," he said. "We were second best, Cambridge fully deserved to go through."

It has to be said the game's first half-an-hour was not much of an experience for anybody at an unseasonably cold Kenilworth Road.

United did the initial job they had to with supreme professionalism. They tackled, harried and shut Luton out of the action.

They were unable to get their own attack going at the same time, however, and it produced a dreary stalemate.

But as half-time approached there were signs they were emerging the victors from the battle for control.

Steve Butler hit the post with a 20-yard drive, then a Steve Claridge shot forced a fumble from goalkeeper Juergen Sommer, who had to save well as Butler got to the rebound.

"We knew we had them at half-time," said Claridge. "They'd done all they could. To be honest, we always felt comfortable after the break. And to score in both legs against your former club is just perfect."

Luton had just one clear chance to rattle United in 90 minutes, but it was snuffed out by a remarkable piece of defending.

Martin Williams broke away three minutes before the break. He was into the box two yards ahead of Mick Heathcote and bearing down on Filan.

As he was about to snatch a seemingly certain goal, the United defender somehow got close enough to put in a solid, fair tackle to take the ball away, and leave a no doubt amazed Luton man on the deck.

After the break Heathcote and Liam Daish, rock solid either side of a very cool Danny O'Shea, had no such scares.

Full-backs Andy Jeffrey and Dean Barrick, who broke the hearts of the home wingers in the first half, took the attacking initiative.

And in midfield John Fowler was a powerhouse, playing way beyond his years alongside the irrepressible Gary Clayton.

With that depth and quality of support, Claridge, Butler and Michael Danzey rampaged through the Hatters' panicky defence.

Each one of them forced fine saves from Sommer — the only Luton man to emerge with any credit — before they all combined for an 81st minute goal which seemed inevitable.

Heathcote also got into the act with a power header the keeper did well to fingertip away.

Claridge puts it over his former club again

Just the one thing wrong . . .

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(PLC)

Match report: **RANDALL BUTT**. Pictures: **CYRUS DABOO**

Match facts

COCA-COLA CUP

First round, second leg

LUTON TOWN 0

CAMBRIDGE UNITED 1

(United won 2-0

on aggregate)

81 mins, 0-1: The goal United had worked so hard for. Steve Claridge robbed David Preece in midfield and slid the ball to battling John Fowler, who found Steve Butler free on the left flank.

The striker crossed, Michael Danzey's brave challenge ripped the ball away from the keeper, CLARIDGE pounced on it, took it wide to get a clear sight of goal, and lashed a shot into the net.

Luton Town: Sommer, Williams (Hartson (68 mins), Johnson, James, Peake, Dreyer, Benjamin, Preece, Hughes, Campbell (Oakes 55 mins), Houghton. Sub not used: Petterson (gk).

Cambridge United: Filan, Jeffrey, Heathcote, O'Shea, Daish, Barrick, Fowler, Clayton, Claridge, Butler, Danzey. Subs not used: Hunter, Rowett, Sheffield (gk).

No bookings.

Attendance: 3,861.

Referee: B Hill (Kettering).



GOAL . . . Steve Claridge rounds Luton keeper Juergen Sommer to score the only goal of the game.

It crossed my mind during the first half-hour that the United fans forced to go to the trouble by Luton's snooty policy of buying tickets for £11 were being badly short-changed.

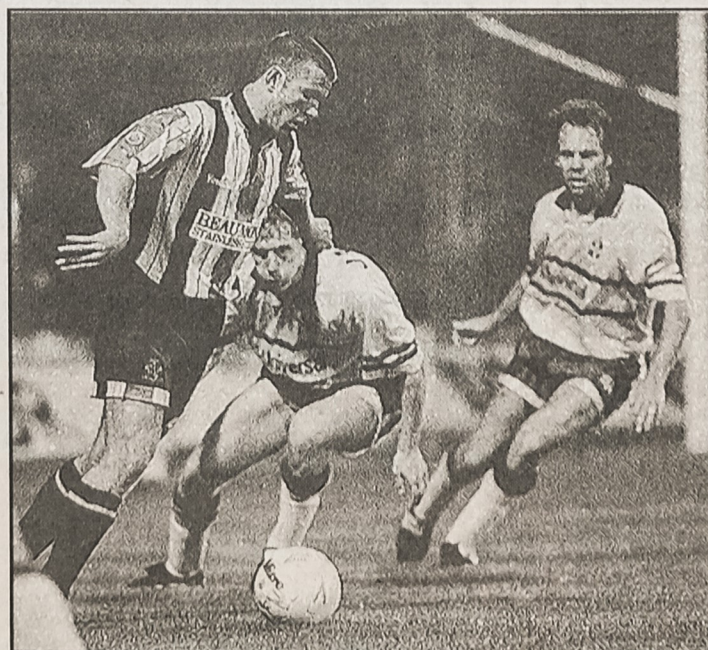
But sitting behind the goal their team were attacking so excitingly in the second half, all 200 or so would probably have paid double for the pleasure.

It was not very clear from the stand, but it even sounded as though they reinstated the man savaged on the last trip to Kenilworth Road with a chant of: 'Only one Stevie Butler.'

To make his night complete, the man-of-the-match trophy — usually given to a home player at a Coca-Cola Cup tie — was awarded to him.

There was barracking, though, before the final whistle.

'What a load of rubbish!' was the Hatters fans' verdict on their side, who resorted to hitting long hopeless passes to no-one in particular.



COME AND GET IT . . . United's John Fowler is confronted by Luton rivals.