

Pleat's special mix rise to the occasion

DAVID PLEAT'S mixture of old heads and impressionable youth combined last night to deliver Luton the FA Cup triumph they were made to wait longer for than they deserved.

A second go at Newcastle was the least the First Division side had merited from the fourth round and they confirmed amid jubilation that the opportunity was not laid to waste.

Newcastle were undone by two pieces of finishing which has been the hallmark of their headstrong progress through the Premiership. When it came to this replay on a heavily-sanded pitch, the youthful momentum of Luton's John Hartson and Scott Oakes made certain that another giant was slain.

All too often, the emphasis in the English game is placed solely on the Premiership but the evidence from Kenilworth Road last night is that the game will thrive so long as managers



By NEIL HARMAN

Luton Town... 2 Newcastle United... 0

like Pleat are encouraged to keep on fighting against the odds.

Pleat is a great disciple of more fairness in football. He believes the gap between the haves and the have nots is growing remorselessly but since the latest threat of takeover has subsided, Luton have put together an impressive run of 10 unbeaten games, are threatening to leave the bottom of the First Division behind and have reached the fifth round of the cup, at Cardiff on Sunday week.

There should be no misgivings in Newcastle. They secured passage to this cold night in Bedfordshire only by virtue of a controversial penalty at St

James' Park 10 days ago. If Luton were miffed at having to start all over again, they simply redoubled the expressive approach and played with a combined purpose which can only enrich their future. Pleat's sides have always preferred a game based on simple philosophies of neat inter-passing and subtle movement — even on a pitch which does its utmost to stifle initiative and put doubt in the minds of the best passers.

Fortunately for them, David Preece knows the surface intimately and it was his constant prompting which gave the younger men around him the desire to keep chasing and keep hoping.

Hartson, a Welsh Under-21 international, and Oakes made certain that Steve Howey and Barry Venison could not rest on their defensive laurels for a moment.

Luton's first goal emphasised the importance on this night and this pitch of not playing entirely with the heart. A 30-yard pass over the top, accurately played, can be as destructive as a flock of pretty ones.

So, Trevor Peake played a perfect ball beyond Newcastle's central defence, Hartson collected it, rounded Mike Hooper and rolled the ball in with a maturity which stamped him as a teenage striker of infinite promise.

That has long been known of Oakes, a young Englishman whose desire to show himself for Preece suggested he might break through and settle the tie long before he finally put the Magpies to flight 12 minutes from time.

When Oakes raced forward, knocked the ball past John Beresford and drew a blocking save from Hooper, the opportunity seemed to have been lost but Des Linton intelligently rolled the ball back across the area and Oakes had retained his momentum to side-foot home from six yards.

There can have been few matches this season when 30-goal Andy Cole has not even been allowed to set his sights on a goalkeeper. He had one clear opening, in the 73rd minute, when he outstripped Julian James, cut back outside two tackles but allowed the giant American goalkeeper Juergen Sommer to sweep the ball away from him before he was able to fix his sights.

Once that chance had gone, Newcastle did not threaten again.