

Hammers hold-up



Pleat's eager beavers keep Cup flag flying for First Division

By NEIL HARMAN

West Ham United.....0 Luton Town.....0

LUTON denied the Premiership its third day of strutting arrogance with an FA Cup performance which emphasised the degree of quality the elite has contemptuously left behind.

In the fourth round, Luton drew the venom of Kevin Keegan's Newcastle at St James' Park, then outplayed them with a swirling, jaw-jutting conviction at Kenilworth Road. They will not be daunted at the prospect of a repeat performance against West Ham tomorrow week in the pursuit of a Wembley semi-final against Chelsea on April 9.

FOILED: Luton's Paul Telfer has a shot blocked by West Ham's massed defence

Picture:
ANDY HOOPER

What they achieved last night, they can undoubtedly better next week as they strive to uphold the dignity of the Endsleigh League. Where Bolton, Charlton and Wolves had fallen, Luton picked up the standard, and carried it courageously forwards.

West Ham manager Billy Bonds said: 'They made it difficult for us, playing five across the middle and denying us the space we wanted to

get our passing games going. We didn't get any decent balls into their area from good positions — they had done their homework.

'It will probably be the same at their ground. I think there was a lot of expectation built up tonight, because we'd drawn Chelsea in the semi-finals and the fans knew it would be played at Wembley. When the early goal didn't come, it all got a bit frenetic.'

But where it mattered, Luton had an infinitely surer touch on the ball, exemplified by midfield player David Preece, who not only looks spikey, but plays spikey as well. Wherever the ball emerged around the centre circle, so Preece appeared as a calming influence, not fazed by the occasion, nor scared of putting a degree of control on the ball to defy a vicious wind.

When they saw how expertly Preece might guide them, Luton's young innovators, Paul Telfer, Scott Oakes, and Ceri Hughes, were released to indulge the confidence which has marked their individual progress.

West Ham, true to their contradictory League form, could scarcely mount an attack of conviction. American goalkeeper Juergen Sommer, a solid New Yorker, had two scares — once when he collided with Trevor Morley after four minutes and then, four minutes before the break, when Mike Marsh struck the outside of the post with a right-foot drive.

Marsh's chance came after the ball brushed the head of Lee

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Chapman, who had scored for West Ham in each of their previous three rounds. It was one of those nights when Chapman could not get a formidable touch to anything.

Much of the credit for that must go to David Greene, Luton's Republic of Ireland Under-21 centre-half David Greene. He was given his second game by Pleat last night in place of their injured captain Trevor Peake and responding with an authority of a battle-hardened pro.

Luton may have knocked the ball around securely in difficult conditions but they created only one serious opening, in the second half, when Mike Marsh cleared off the line from Des Linton's diving header.

Otherwise, Luton provided

little serious threat to the erratic tendencies of goalkeeper Ludek Miklosko. It is unlikely he will have such a secure night next week.

Pleat said: 'It would be crazy to start believing we have done the hard work, because we haven't. But there is disappointment too, because we felt we might have edged the game.'

'You think you're going to get only one bite of the cherry against a higher grade club and now we have a second. We live to fight another day, the season is extended a little bit more, and that's lovely for the club and its supporters.'

West Ham: Miklosko; Breacker, Potts, M Allen, Morley, Bishop, Holmes, Martin, Chapman (C Allen, 84min), Burrows, Marsh.

Luton: Sommer; Greene, James, Dreyer, Telfer, Oakes (Burke, 86), Preece, Hughes, Linton, Dixon (Hartson, 89), Harper.

Referee: B Hill (Leics).