

HATTERS' INJURY BLUES



OLD BOY Steve Claridge came back to haunt Hatters for the second time this season in a match which plunged David Pleat's side into an injury crisis five days before their FA Cup quarter-final replay with West Ham.

Claridge, whose goals for Cambridge earlier in the season knocked Hatters out of the Coca Cola Cup, did it again yesterday.

He crept in unnoticed to grab an equaliser for bottom club Birmingham, repaying some of the £350,000 it cost to move him across the country.

But the result hardly mattered as Pleat faced up to an injury crisis which could wreck his team's hopes of an FA Cup semi-final trip to Wembley.

Hatters went into yesterday's match without skipper Trevor Peake, striker Kerry Dixon, Welsh international Ceri Hughes and suspended goalkeeper Juergen Sommer.

They came out of it with defenders David Greene, Julian James and John Dreyer nursing head wounds.

Greene, the stand-in for Peake and a hero at West Ham, played much of the match with blood pouring down his face after a clash of heads.

He was off the field for 10 minutes,

after having 10 stitches in the wound and James also had needle work after another clash of heads.

Now the battle is on to get them fit for Wednesday's replay and Pleat was a worried man last night.

He said: "We've got a lot to sort out before the cup replay. I don't know what the side will be. But I do know David Greene played like a lion today."

Pleat's team were looking for a confidence-boosting win against Barry Fry's doomed club and they looked to be on the way after a super solo goal by Paul Telfer in the 41st minute.

Harper pushed the ball through to Telfer and he rounded goalkeeper Ian

Bennett and centre back Chris Whyte before coolly slotting home.

But Claridge stepped up four minutes after the break to score his third goal against Luton this season and give his side a chance of getting out of trouble.

Verdict: Injury-hit Hatters looked to have their minds on Wednesday's cup replay and there was little to cheer the crowd in this drab affair.

They are sure to see something better when West Ham come to Kenilworth Road.

● League table and match facts - see page 2.