

LUTON..... 1
ALBION..... 1

Bob Taylor gave Albion the perfect start at Kenilworth Road, but Luton refused to surrender in an enterprising contest.

Taylor, last season's top scorer with 18 goals, opened his account with a tremendous finish from 12 yards in the fifth minute, and Albion should have been further in front by the interval.

But Luton hit back four minutes after the break with a thunderous header from Scott Oakes, to set up an enthralling finish.

Albion paraded two debutants in this First Division curtain raiser — new skipper Mike Phelan and young centre back Craig Herbert.

Keith Burkinshaw preferred 18 year-old Herbert to fit-again Paul Raven, who was one of the substitutes alongside Kevin Donovan and Tony Lange.

Albion survived a scare in the third minute following a long throw from Oakes on the right. The ball fell loose inside the six-yard box and Naylor was forced to make a brave save.

But it was Albion who took the lead just two minutes later through the irrepressible TAYLOR.

He scampered on to an astute Edwards' through ball and shook off the challenge of Greene, before rifling a low left-foot drive underneath the advancing Sommer from 12 yards.

It was just the start Burkinshaw's men needed to steady any early nerves.

But Luton threatened to hit back immediately.

Oakes proved a threat, but Herbert was superbly positioned to cut out a ball hit towards the unmarked Houghton just inside the penalty area.

Luton were still putting Albion under heavy pressure, and around 2,000 travelling supporters were relieved to see Dixon head a Telfer cross over the top from point blank range.

But Albion always looked dangerous on the break, and never more so than in the 16th minute when McNally inspired a fierce spell of pressure.

He stormed clear after running on to Taylor's great lay-off, but his shot from inside the area was blocked by Sommer.

Heggs picked up the rebound and crossed to the far post where James seemed to push Hamilton, but the midfielder retained possession to feed Edwards, with Taylor heading his fine left wing centre straight at 'keeper Sommer.

In a swift and enter-

BOB'S FLYING START

Steve Tudgay

SPORTS ARGUS MATCH ACTION



taining contest, Luton responded two minutes later with a dipping James drive that Naylor tipped away at the far post.

Luton right back James was the game's first victim of the new FIFA crackdown on time wasting, when he was shown the yellow card for holding on to the ball for too long for an Albion throw in.

Albion were now enjoying far more possession in midfield and forced a succession of corners around the 36th minute, but 'keeper Sommer held firm.

Naylor preserved Albion's lead with a spectacular one-handed stop from Houghton in the 40th minute — an early contender for save of the season.

Albion were creating plenty of opportunities and Luton looked ripe for the taking, but Taylor flashed an 18-yard drive fractionally wide in injury time.

Half-time:

Luton.....0
Albion.....1
Naylor again came to Albion's rescue in the opening minute of the second half, pulling off a finger tip save underneath the crossbar to keep out a well-placed Dixon header.

Albion had made a slow start after the in-

terval and they were punished in the 49th minute when OAKES equalised with a bullet of a header at the near post.

Telfer got in behind Edwards to collect James's chipped through ball, and he sent over an inviting centre which Oakes' finish gave Naylor no chance.

Luton looked a yard sharper, but Albion finally managed to break out of their own half and Taylor was only stopped in his tracks by a lunge by Sommer on the edge of the penalty area.

Taylor was then involved in an angry exchange with team-mate Ashcroft. Within seconds, the fiery winger was substituted and replaced by Donovan.

Herbert was booked for time wasting in the 55th minute as Albion came under heavy pressure.

McNally cleared off the line from James two minutes later.

Albion were starting to settle down and show signs of fight, and Hamilton strode forward in the 65th minute to power a left foot effort narrowly over Sommer's crossbar from 20 yards.

Albion were sensing victory and pushed for-

**MAN OF
THE MATCH:
Taylor (8)**

**TEAM RATING:
Fair**

LUTON: Sommer; James, Johnson, Skelton, Greene, Peake, Telfer, Oakes, Dixon, Preece, Houghton. Subs: Marshall, Linton, Barber.

WEST BROM: Naylor; Parsley, Edwards, Phelan, Herbert, Burgess, Ashcroft, Hamilton, Taylor, Heggs, McNally. Subs: Donovan, Raven, Lange.

Referee: Mr G Pooley (Bishops Cleeve).

ward in numbers in the 70th minute. McNally made space on the right and produced a superb cross that Greene headed over his own crossbar under pressure from Taylor.

McNally was again involved in a useful build up which ended with Phelan hammering a low drive straight at Sommer.

Donovan had a great chance to restore Albion's lead when Taylor picked him out in space in the penalty area. The midfielder took his time, but 'keeper Sommer spread himself to block his shot from ten yards.

Luton sent on Linton for Skelton and, shortly after, Dixon came within a whisker of giving his side the lead with a header that skimmed the crossbar.

Albion survived an 88th minute shock, Dixon blasting over.