

Rioch's men are given runaround by Luton

94/95

By William Johnson

Bolton Wanderers 0

Luton Town 0

MANY of the friends Bolton have won during more than two years of thrilling cup exploits will be lost, if this kind of disappointing performance is repeated too often during what will be a tense finale to a highly competitive First Division promotion race.

What might appear to be two points surrendered by Bruce Rioch's talented team in their quest to claim the single automatic place in next season's Premiership was in reality a point gained as they were outplayed by mid-table Luton.

Bolton, who ran Liverpool so close at Wembley in the Coca-Cola Cup final, were on this occasion run ragged by David Pleat's skilful side who, with more composure and better finishing, could have inflicted more damage on the credentials of the Burnden Park outfit.

Pleat, who stated that most of the managers in the division believe Bolton have

best represented the standard required to go up, said: "Their luck ran out tonight. They've been scoring a lot of crucial late goals but it didn't work for them this time."

It so nearly did, though. The closest Bolton came to breaking the deadlock was in the final moments when an Alan Thompson header clipped the inside of an upright before the ball was hacked clear by Trevor Peake.

It would have been unjust on Luton, who were also aggrieved when Alan Stubbs was allowed to stay on the field after committing what in most eyes was at least a second bookable offence.

Harsher referees would have regarded the pulling back of John Taylor by Stubbs, cautioned in only the third minute for fouling Paul

Telfer, as a sending off in its own right. Luton, at that 35th-minute stage, could have been well in command. Keith Branagan in the Bolton goal had already made excellent saves from Julian James and Rob Matthews and before the interval went on to make another crucial stop from Scott Oakes.

And Oakes should have clinched the points for Luton when, early in the second half, he created an outstanding shooting opportunity which he wasted from the edge of the penalty area.

It proved to be Luton's last chance of any consequence as Bolton, restricted to a single Jason McAteer shot on goal before the interval, at last began to carve out chances of their own.

Bolton: Branagan; Bergsson, Stubbs, Seagraves, Phillips; Green, McAteer, Sneekes, Thompson; Paatelainen, De Freitas (McGinlay 67). **Subs:** Davison (g), Dreyer. **Booked:** Stubbs, McAteer.

Luton: Davis; James (Linton 72), Peake, Johnson, Harvey; Telfer, Waddock, Preece, Matthews (Marshall 72); Taylor, Oakes. **Subs:** Sommer (g). **Booked:** Peake, Taylor.

Referee: U Renni (Sheffield).