

Preece has last laugh on fans

By PETER KENYON 95/96

Luton 1 Derby County 2

TERRY WESTLEY'S new look Luton crashed to defeat - after the dream start of a goal inside 30 seconds.

And unless someone in a white shirt starts to provide some inspiration there will be many more defeats to follow.

Had Bontcho Geuentchev poked home a two yard sitter just six minutes after the opener it might have been a different story.

But Hatters wilted and were in this game for precisely ten minutes at the start and five minutes at the end.

In between Derby ran the show, scoring twice and hitting both post and bar.

Trevor Peake may not figure among Westley's long term plans, having been relegated to the sub's bench but when he entered the stage with ten minutes remaining, at least Luton showed some spite. Right at the death Hatters might have snatched an undeserved draw. But both edge of the box free kicks in the dying seconds came to nothing.

Ironical that Derby's first win this season should come at Kenilworth Road - ex-Hatter's David Preece's hunting ground for the decade prior to his summer departure to the Baseball Ground.

With just 15 seconds played the midfield maestro, who had a poor game, discovered just how popular he now is at Luton; not very!

A volley from the edge of the box was predictably enough greeted with a barrage of boos - a pattern which would continue throughout.

Fifteen seconds after that the boos were forgotten as Dwight Marshall latched onto an exquisite pass into space from Guentchev.

With just Russell Hault to beat, Marshall made no mistake.

Hatters were buzzing and six minutes later should have doubled their lead.

Marshall, in the action once again, robbed Hault on the right edge of his six yard box but from the square pass back across goal, Bonzo, sorry Bontcho Guentchev missed the open net from two yards.

Inevitably Hatters were made to pay and for the rest of the half the visitors upped a few gears and started to get an attacking grip on the game.

On the quarter hour, Kelvin Davis handed



● Marshall gets in a midfield tackle

the visitors the equaliser - literally.

The novice keeper - now Luton's undisputed number one after the £600,000 midweek departure of butterfingering Juerger Sommer to Queen's Park Rangers - elected to punch a harmless looking ball at his near post.

Under pressure from 5ft 6ins Preece and the equally imposing 5ft 8ins frame of Dean Sturridge one wonders why Davis didn't just clutch the ball to his chest.

One can only speculate that Sommer gave Davis some handling tips as a leaving present.

Fist seemed to miss ball and Sturridge stuck out a boot to net from all of a yard.

After the assault from the boo boys, scarce wonder that Preece led the celebrations.

Seconds before the interval John Harkes smashed against an upright from the acutest of angles.

Then 18 minutes into the second period Derby snatched the winner - which would have been controversial had any of the Hatters players noticed that the move started with sweeper Robin Van Der Laan striking a moving ball from the free kick.

The ball sailed out wide to Shane Nicholson whose deep cross found Sturridge all alone inside the box.

Under no challenge whatsoever he stooped to head powerfully beyond

the grasp of the helpless Davis.

Where was the defence?

Substitute Paul Simpson sent a dipping volley on to the roof of the bar with Davis caught hopelessly off his line.

Westley drew on all three of his substitutes but the move never looked likely to succeed.

With five minutes remaining Jamie Woodford forced a parry from Hault - but the luck was on the keeper's side and the ball bobbled into the path of a grateful defender.

Then came the free kicks - the second of which ended with a mad scramble and Marshall getting a last touch which skidded just wide.