

Town score, then lose again

Reading 3 Luton 1

By PETER KENYON

Dwight Marshall walked the ball 30 yards into an empty net to give Hatters their second dream start in successive weeks.

But as against Derby last Saturday the rest of the match was played in a daydream as last year's play-off finalists ran rings round Luton's shoddy defence.

Hatters will claim - with total justification - that Des Linton's 60th minute lunge from behind on an otherwise clean through Mick Gooding, was, in fact, a perfectly timed tackle.

But the one man whose opinion counts for anything - in yesterday's case referee Ken Leach - preferred the lunge definition and awarded the penalty.

Michael Mekaer made no mistake from the spot kick and Reading were 2-1 in front.

Moments later Graham Alexander curled a corner kick directly onto the bar with Simon Sheppard flapping at thin air, and Hatters fans were all but ready to lynch Mr Leach when he waved away a penalty appeal for a push on Marshall.

For their over exuberant pains the embittered Hatters faithful spent the rest of the match surrounded by a sea of yellow jacketed police officers and stewards.

To make the already sour taste even more repugnant Lee Nogan added Reading's third a minute later after bursting clear on the right edge of Luton's box and sliding coolly home under the body of the advancing Kelvin Davis.

When the opener came - on just five minutes - it came in bizarre fashion.

Gavin Johnson hooked a long ball out of defence and Marshall darted after the lost cause like Linford Christie from the starting blocks.

With Dariusz Wdowczyk covering back there was no need for keeper Sheppard to race 30 yards off his line. He did and it turned out to be a kamikaze mission.

As the only three players inside Reading territory rendezvoused at a spot somewhere between the goal-line and half way Marshall got the crucial first touch, Sheppard crashed into Wdowczyk at full steam - rendering the latter unconscious - and Marshall casually dribbled the ball 30 yards and into the net.

Not surprisingly Wdowczyk left the game five minutes later - he will probably still be seeing stars at training tomorrow morning.

But the goal proved to be one of Hatters rare forays upfield.

On 17 minutes Davis made a tremendous



● *Dwight Marshall worries home defence*

double save - first from Stuart Lovell, who found himself all alone on the penalty spot, then from Nogan following up the parry.

But Davis had hardly had time to recover from a heavily patted back before Nogan fired the equaliser. Adrian Williams fired in a long ball and with Julian James and Nogan the only two outfield players in the Hatters box, James' tackle had to be made.

It wasn't. Nogan brushed him aside like he might an irritating flea, before ramming home past the helpless Davis.

From the comfort of his seat on the turf James smashed an arm against the ground - in footballing terms a signed confession of guilt.

After rounding Davis Lovell could have made it 2-1 just before the half hour, but Richard Harvey made a desperate but effective last ditch flying tackle to take the ball off the Reading striker's toe at the critical moment.

Meaker then wasted a glorious chance after finding himself all alone in Hatters six yard box, but he volleyed weak and high.

Hatter survived the last first half onslaught that followed - but by the end of 90 minutes looked well beaten by the better side.



● *David Oldfield gets stuck in*