

Milton's mix'n match

by TONY GARNETT

SIMON Milton had a sweet and sour day at Kenilworth Road on Saturday.

He scored both Ipswich goals, in the fifth and 51st minutes, to bring his tally for the season to eight.

Then he limped off with a groin strain after 72 minutes and is involved in a desperate fitness battle for tomorrow's crucial match with Derby County at Portman Road.

The Ipswich players were shocked to find the pitch with standing water in many places. It hadn't rained - it was purposely flooded by the groundstaff until an hour or so before the start.

Ipswich started with a flat back four and it looked for a while as if they might run up a cricket score.

The opening goal was a good one. A free-kick taken by Richard Wright midway in the Ipswich half was nodded down by Ian Marshall.

Mick Stockwell, cutting in from the right, unleashed a low right foot rocket that Ian Feuer blocked but could not hold.

The ball flew to Milton on the left and his angled shot was well out of the reach of the 6ft 7ins goalkeeper as it flew just inside the far post.

The match was only five minutes old and the goal lifted the spirits of the lively band of 1,800 travelling fans who sensed it was destined to be their day.

There was much to like about the Ipswich first-half display, despite the squelchy underfoot conditions. It was great to see James Scowcroft and Geraint Williams dominate the central midfield.

Scowcroft is a recognised target man. He can play in midfield as a second string to his bow and won his share of high balls and provided good service to the front-runners.

Luton boss Lennie Lawrence later admitted: "We played with fear in the first half, you'd have thought we were facing AC Milan. We did well to get to half-time only 1-0 down."

Four minutes after the interval Luton were level. Stockwell lost possession in midfield and David Oldfield

Town goal hero Simon's sweet day ends on a sour note

played in new boy Kim Grant to beat Wright with a rising drive from the edge of the penalty area.

It was a thundering finish and Lawrence reflected: "It was a great goal out of nothing. I thought we'd got away with it when we were level with 41 minutes remaining."

Ipswich had other ideas. They were back in front two minutes later. Scowcroft played in Marshall whose fierce right foot drive was blocked by Feuer who was unable to hold the ball cleanly.

It seemed that the keeper would dive on the loose ball easily enough, but inexplicably right-back James tried to play it away. He rolled it straight into the path of a thankful Milton who rifled home a gift chance from close range.

"It was lovely," said Milton. "I could do with 20 of that sort a season. I was given the ball eight yards out so I scored with a big smile on my face."

Lawrence said: "The goals we are conceding are becoming more and more bizarre and that one takes the biscuit."

There was no further scoring but there was plenty more incident as Luton produced the passion and commitment in the closing stages that Lawrence said he had expected from the outset.

Strikers Paul Wilkinson and Grant, secured on transfer deadline day, will prove a handful when they develop an understanding.

On Saturday Ipswich coped with them well enough with Claus Thomsen, back from international duty with Denmark, and Steve Sedgley solid in central defence.

Wright again acquitted

himself well. What was impressive was he never lost his confidence even after he was once left stranded in a sortie off his line. Some keepers tend to be wary after that but Wright carried on as though nothing had happened.

The pre-match watering was explained by Lawrence who said: "It was to hold the pitch together, but quite possibly it was a bit overdone." That was something of an understatement.

Ipswich boss George Burley said: "I don't think it helped either side to have the pitch flooded for no reason. It did no-one any favours."

Milton felt the pitch did not help his groin strain. "While running 20 yards you would meet soft sand, a muddy squelchy area and a firm area. My groin has been a problem for the past couple of weeks and, as much as I wanted to stay on, I felt it better to come off to give me a chance of being fit to face Derby County. I am hopeful that I will play in that match."

Ipswich started the day in sixth position and consolidated their bid for a play-off place. Injuries permitting, there could be a rousing end to the season and Portman

Road gates should rise as a result.

It is seldom that Town fans are over-generous to players who have left them, but they gave a rousing reception to Bontcho Guentchev when he appeared as substitute - the Bulgarian was certainly a favourite with the Portman Road regulars.

Ipswich had some anxious moments even when on top before the interval. Mauricio Taricco was off for treatment for a twisted knee after 13 minutes but managed to complete the match.

In the 36th minute a corner from Scott Oakes, a player who has not fulfilled his vast potential this season, found Oldfield. His shot was aimed just inside the post but Gus Uhlenbeek was on hand to clear.

The Dutchman, who seems so much more confident in away games, defended well and had one of his best games.

Ipswich might have increased their lead after 68 minutes when Alex Mathie robbed Patterson when challenging for a through ball from Stockwell. Mathie was clean through with only Feuer to beat, but his confidence is low at present and he kicked the ball too far forward giving the goalkeeper the chance to take control. Mathie needs a goal to pep him up.

It was a happy away-day for Ipswich but in the closing stages it needed all Marshall's defensive qualities to help out a defence which was just starting to creak under heavy pressure.

The only player booked was James for a foul on Milton after 63 minutes, but generally the referee made allowances for the mud.



HAPPY DAYS: Simon Milton and Mauricio Taricco celebrate after Milton had put Town ahead



LEADS UP: The impressive James Scowcroft won several aerial battles throughout the match

LUTON TOWN			1	IPSWICH TOWN			2
Kim Grant (49 mins)				Simon Milton (5 mins, 51 mins)			
MANAGER: Lennie Lawrence			Match Rating	SATURDAY MARCH 30, 1996			MANAGER: George Burley
1	Ian Feuer	13		1	Richard Wright	17	Match Rating
2	Julian James	13		2	Gus Uhlenbeek	17	
3	Mitchell Thomas	15		3	Mauricio Taricco	16	
4	Gary Waddock	12		4	Claus Thomsen	16	
5	Steve Davis	18		5	James Scowcroft	16	
6	Darren Patterson	15		6	Geraint Williams	16	
7	David Oldfield	15		7	Mick Stockwell	16	
8	Scott Oakes	13		8	Steve Sedgley	16	
9	Paul Wilkinson	14		9	Alex Mathie	14	
10	Kim Grant	15		10	Ian Marshall	17	
11	Tony Thorpe	16		11	Simon Milton	17	
Substitutes	G Alexander (for Waddock 56)	14		Substitutes	S Slater (for Milton 72)		
	B Guentchev (for Oldfield 62)	14			N Gregory (not used)		
	G Tomlinson (for Oakes 73)				C Swales (not used)		
				REFeree GURNAM SINGH (Wolverhampton)			
				PLAYED AT KENILWORTH ROAD			
				CONDITIONS LIKE A PADDY FIELD			
				ATTENDANCE 9,151			
				GOAL ATTEMPTS 17			22
				CORNERS 8			6
				FOULS 6			5

TONY GARNETT'S VERDICT:

Points are more important to Ipswich at this stage of the season than the quality of the performance. The fact that Luton flooded their pitch before the start made it hard for both sides to be as fluent as they might have wished. Ipswich set about their task with enthusiasm and dominated the first-half. They let the Hatters back into the match but held out against a late onslaught for a victory that lifts them to fifth place in the table. Some 1,800 travelling fans must have enjoyed their day out although I'm told the seats behind the goal did not give a great view for a sum of £12.50. Richard Wright, Gus Uhlenbeek and Simon Milton caught the eye.

MAN OF THE MATCH

SIMON MILTON