

Luton fail to convince

96/97

AFTER THREE depressing defeats on the trot, Luton finally halted the slide and claimed their first League victory of the new season. But they did little to convince their frustrated fans that better times are around the corner.

The near-empty Kenilworth stadium echoed to boos and shouts of rubbish as both teams contrived to produce a brain-numbingly dull performance.

"It was a mini-crisis today," said Lennie Lawrence, Luton's manager and one of the game's great survival experts. "After three defeats there was a bit of fear among the players and we had to try to lift it off them. In the end, we got what we deserved and it's a small step forward but it is important that we don't get carried away."

The deadlock was broken in the 57th minute when Lawrence pulled off £200,000

Luton	1
Rotherham	0

Frank Clough

striker Kim Grant, who had missed a sitter only three minutes earlier and had been the target for much of the abuse. Veteran Bulgarian Bontcho Guentchev replaced him.

Whether it was an inspired tactical move or compassion to prevent Grant taking further verbal punishment was immaterial. The substitution worked.

Guentchev, instantly lively and penetrative, was chopped down within three minutes by Rotherham's hard man Mark Monington. Graham Alexander curled in the free kick and defender Mitchell Thomas was unmarked as he steered his header purposefully past goalkeeper Steve Cherry.

Guentchev could have put Luton further in front four minutes later when David Oldfield sent him in but he was denied by Cherry's brave dive at his feet.

The home team had started enterprisingly enough but their failure to break down Rotherham's five-man defence — too little guile and not enough technique — soon had the fans baying. Rotherham, who have made an equally poor start to the season, attacked only sporadically and Luton goalkeeper Ian Feuer must have had the quietest afternoon of his career.

When Rotherham abandoned caution and sent Monington forward to add weight to their attack, they should have scored but his flick-on was somehow put over the bar from six yards by Steve Slawson, an 80th-minute substitute for Lee Glover. It was a finish that just about summed up the match.