

Luton denied by Wimbledon's powerful revival

96/97 (F-LC)

JOE KINNEAR'S gamble of resting Robbie Earle, Vinnie Jones and Oyvind Leonhardsen paid off as Wimbledon dug deep into their seemingly endless pit of determination to break Luton's hearts in an enthralling Coca-Cola Cup third round replay.

Stuart Castledine equalised in stoppage time and then Peter Fear's goal in extra-time earned Wimbledon a home tie against Aston Villa in the fourth round.

"Luck stayed with me after I made the changes," said Wimbledon's manager Kinnear. "It worked out well for us, because the two young lads I brought in both scored, although we had a battle from the word go."

Lennie Lawrence, the Luton manager, sank to his knees when Castledine's half-volley went in. While Luton had dominated the first half, the last 45 minutes were one-way traffic for Wimbledon, but Lawrence must have thought his team would hold out for a memorable victory.

"We did not see the real Wimbledon in the first game or the first half tonight," said Lawrence. "But, by golly, we saw them in the second half and they showed why they are where they are."

While Luton can look back with satisfaction on their display, Wimbledon once again underlined their growing stature.

Without four regular

By Christopher Davies

Luton T 1
Wimbledon..... 2
(aet; 1-1 at 90 mins)

choices — left-back Ben Thatcher was also out, injured — they advanced to the next round and, given their current form (they are unbeaten in 13 games) it would be unwise to bet against them in any match.

Yet, unusually, Wimbledon were forced back deep into defence in the first half and were even losing out in many of the physical challenges as Luton dominated the opening 45 minutes.

Neil Sullivan had made three outstanding saves from Steve Davis, Kim Grant and Paul Showler before Luton took the lead in the 28th minute.

Ceri Hughes' free-kick was floated into the Wimbledon penalty area and, as Sullivan came out, Dean Blackwell got his head to the ball, which went over his goalkeeper and into the empty net for an own-goal. It was not so much the Crazy Gang, more mad defending.

But it was a different story in the second half. Wimbledon chanced their arm and left only Blackwell and Chris Perry in defence as Kenny Cunningham and Alan Kimble pushed forward.

Just when it seemed Luton would ride their luck, Sullivan charged downfield to supplement a Wimble-

attack and, as the ball bobbed around the Luton penalty area, Castledine beat Feuer with a half-volley from 12 yards.

Nine minutes into extra time Neil Ardley sent over a searching cross from the right wing. The ball reached Kimble and, while his shot was blocked by Feuer, Fear's follow-up effort from the edge of the penalty area went just inside the left-hand upright.

Luton: Feuer; James, Davis, Johnson, Thomas; Hughes, Alexander, Waddock, Showler (Guentchev 90); Grant (McLaren 98), Thorpe (Douglas 85). **Booked:** Alexander.

Wimbledon: Sullivan; Cunningham, Perry, Blackwell, Kimble; Ardley, Castledine, Holdsworth (Harford 71), Fear; Ekoku (Reeves 116), Gayle (Clark 85). **Booked:** Fear.

Referee: M Riley (Leeds).



High riser . . . Wimbledon match-winner Peter Fear gets in a header over the top of the Luton defence at Kenilworth Road last night

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