

ACTION STATIONS: Phil Gray goes close for Luton (this picture) during Sunday's FA Cup tie at Boreham Wood and (right) strike partner Stuart Douglas feels the pain of the Wood defensive work.



Boreham Wood v Luton pictures by JANE SHERLOCK



HATTERS MATTERS...Kenilworth Road update

Gray days fine again!

WHAT a difference a year makes!

This time last season Luton striker Phil Gray was down in the dumps and the £400,000 fee paid to Dutch club Fortuna Sittard for his services looked costly.

Now Gray is Luton's top scorer with nine goals, he's back in the Northern Ireland squad and looking forward to a trip to one of his old clubs, Sunderland, in the quarter-finals of the Worthington Cup.

Gray was last night hoping to get into European Championship action for Northern Ireland after his goals against Barnsley and little Boreham Wood secured more lucrative cup pay-days for Hatters.

It's a dramatic turnabout for Gray, whose injuries last season kept him sidelined for all but 19 games.

Speaking from Northern Ireland this week after his two-goal show in Sunday's 3-2 FA Cup win at Boreham Wood, Gray paid tribute to his Luton team-mates.

He said: "The team are playing very well and creating chances and I have been able to get on the end of them."

"I am over my back trouble and I am confident that I can do the business for Northern Ireland against Moldova if called."

Coach Joe Jordan was at Kenilworth Road when Gray's 81st minute strike against Barnsley secured a quarter-final tie at Sunderland, the club Gray joined from Luton in an £800,000 deal.

Northern Ireland boss Lawrie McMenemy had also tried to check the form of Gray, turning up for the Luton game against Chesterfield on October 31. Sadly, the game was rained off.

But Jordan was impressed and when St Johnstone striker George O'Boyle cried off injured last Wednesday Gray got the call to rejoin the Northern Ireland squad for the first time in two years.

McMenemy said: "Phil's the logical replacement for O'Boyle. They are a similar type of player."



UP AND AT 'EM:

Former Luton Town favourite Kerry Dixon in the thick of the action during Sunday's FA Cup first round tie at Boreham Wood. Now the player-coach at Meadow Park, Dixon said defensive blunders cost the Ryman League club a replay.

'You'll beat Hull' says Dixon

KERRY Dixon wished his old club Luton the best of luck after they knocked his latest team Boreham Wood out of the FA Cup on Sunday.

Dixon, Wood's player-coach, said: "I hope they do well in the competition and I am sure they will beat Hull."

"We had our moments on Sunday but, really, we couldn't

get near Luton after they went 2-0 up and then 3-1.

"I was a bit disappointed in our performance after we started well."

"We didn't expect to beat Luton but I think we deserved a replay."

"However, our inadequate marking cost us dear. Two of the Luton goals must be put

down as defensive blunders, while our two goals were well taken."

"Luton are a neat enough side with some good youngsters and I am sure that, with a bit of luck, they can maintain a promotion challenge."

"They excelled against Coventry and Barnsley and they seem to have found the

consistency they lacked last season."

"I haven't seen much of the side this season but players like Sean Evers haven't done themselves any harm."

"The youngsters seem to be hold their own and that augurs well for the future."

Phil Gray (2) and Steve Davis got the Luton goals.