

Hatters get on road to Wrack and ruin

LUTON found themselves on the road to Wrack and ruin as they took on mighty Walsall.

However, the division's third-placed club were still forced to hang on desperately at the end and Matthew Spring almost made them pay for some bad mistakes.

Luton skipper and man-of-the-match Marvin Johnson had a scooped shot just turned round a post by a defender's leg in injury time.

The difference between promotion contenders and one of the division's also-rans was graphically illustrated by the performances of these two sides in the second half.

After a first period where Luton showed they were a match for Walsall and probably ahead on skill level, the home side showed much more determination after the interval and it eventually paid off.

Little midfielder Dean Keates was the prime example. Outclassed in the first half, he rolled up his sleeves, got stuck in and won countless balls he

**Walsall 1
Luton Town 0**
By BILL COLE

had no right to win after the break.

And it was one of his determined runs that led to the winning goal. He took the ball, quickly got into his stride, and fed an intelligent ball to Colin Cramb whose pass inside the full-back left Mitchell Thomas stranded. He stood in an all-too-typical pose, arm raised in an offside appeal as Darren Wrack fired in a shot to score from an angle.

On a difficult pitch only passed fit for play 90 minutes before kick-off, and with boggy patches all down the middle, Luton started like

world-beaters. The Walsall defence, a commanding, hard working unit in two wins over the Hatters already this season, had just countered one threat from a Phil Gray flicked-on header, when Luton picked up the half-clearance and created a great opportunity.

Liam George made inroads down the left wing and his cross was brilliantly dummied by Gray. It totally threw the defence leaving Spring with the ball at his feet and the net yawning open in front of him. But he tried to measure a side-foot shot that went well astray wide of Walker's left hand post.

Still without Sean Dyche, Luton welcomed back Marvin Johnson to the centre of defence to partner Alan White, with Chris Willmott dropping

to the substitutes' bench.

After an unmarked Cramb had directed a header directly at Davis, Stuart Douglas again came close for the visitors. He took advantage of a hesitation between defender and keeper to loop a header goalwards, only to be denied by former Everton star Neil Pointon who coolly kicked off the line.

Adrian Viveash brought a diving save from Davis with a header before Phil Gray did the same down at the other end with a speculative 30 yard shot.

Douglas got clean through but took the ball too wide to make any effect, before Darko Mavark blazed an excellent chance for the home side wildly over Davis' crossbar from 10 yards out.

Luton hadn't registered a



■ Phil Gray in action in yesterday's clash at Walsall

second-half shot at all before boss Lennie Lawrence brought on Gavin McGowan in place of George to line five men up across his back line.

Davis had kept the Hatters in the game with a couple of solid saves but if Luton were aiming to hold on to a point, the substitution had the opposite effect. Within three minutes, Wrack gave the Saddlers a lead they were not to surrender despite some

belated Luton pressure and some desperate defending, Matthew Spring firing McGowan's late cross narrowly over with Walker grasping at thin air.

Luton: Davis, Alexander, Thomas, Spring, White (booked 59), Johnson, Harrison (McLaren 76), McKinnon, Douglas, Gray (booked 58) George (McGowan 66). Attendance 4,508.



■ Luton players are down and out as Walsall take the lead



■ Stuart Douglas is brought down as Gerry Harrison takes the ball forward