

Imps agony after demon Doc double

THE DEBATE rages on about whether Gary Doherty is a centre-back or a centre-forward.

After a string of excellent defensive displays this season, Lennie Lawrence and most Hatters observers had decided Doherty's right place was at the back. But Friday night's two-goal FA Cup salvo reopened the old argument. The truth is he is pretty useful at both ends.

In search of attacking inspiration, but without the injured and unavailable Phil Gray, Andrew Fotiadis and Neil Midgley, Doherty was sent forward with Luton trailing Lincoln City 1-0 at half-time in front of the Sky TV cameras.

And the Eire under-21 international responded with two face-saving equalisers that prevented the Hatters from becoming the first victims of a second round upset.

Lawrence believes Doherty is better used in defence but his country seem to be grooming him for an attacking role and, despite starting just eight games as a striker for Luton, Friday's brace took his tally to nine senior goals.

That's a proud record for any striker, let alone an emergency one.

About the versatile 19-year-old, Lawrence said: "I want him as a centre-back where he's done well but the fact that he's gone up front and done the business speaks volumes for his character."

Gavin Gordon fired the Imps in front on 15 minutes, racing on to an inadvertent pass from Matthew Spring to fire past Nathan Abbey.

Luton's efforts to force an equaliser before the break were limited to speculative Matthew Taylor strikes, a well-saved Liam George shot and a woeful Stuart Douglas miss. The presence of the Sky cameras and their multi-angle excellence did Douglas no favours when his three-yard 'faux-pas' was scrutinised at half-time.

At half-time, ineffective Adam Locke was replaced by Efetobore Sodje, freeing Doherty to link up with George and Douglas in a three-pronged attack. And all three were involved in the Hatters' 64th-minute equaliser.

Douglas chased George's through ball and away keeper Barry Richardson raced off his line to clear the danger only to see his clearance ricochet off Imps captain Terry Fleming and into the path of Doherty, who prodded the ball into an unguarded net.

Lincoln responded by throwing on 37-year-old veteran striker Phil Stant and the pendulum swung back in the visitors' favour.

Soon after, Sodje staked his claim for a regular place by racing back to execute a tackle that brought back memories of Tony Adams and Wembley.

The Nigerian defender's determination and timing were impeccable as he slid in to deny Lee Thorpe a certain goal after Stuart Fraser had raced out of

matchfacts

LUTON 2 LINCOLN 2

● **HATTERS:** Nathan Abbey, Stuart Fraser, Julian Watts, Gary Doherty, Marvin Johnson, Liam George, Paul McLaren (Michael McIndoe, 81), Stuart Douglas, Matthew Spring, Adam Locke (Efetobore Sodje, 46), Matthew Taylor. Subs not used: Emmerson Boyce, Tresor Kandol, Scott Ward.

● **LINCOLN:** Barry Richardson, Terry Fleming, Dave Barnett, Anthony Henry, Stuart Bimson, Paul Smith, John Finnigan, Paul Miller, Peter Gain (David Phillips, 46), Gavin Gordon (Phil Stant, 69), Lee Thorpe.

● **Shots on target:** Luton 7, Lincoln 7.

● **Off target:** Luton 5, Lincoln 4.

● **Corners:** Luton 12 Lincoln 6.

● **Top Hatter:** Doherty - saviour.

position to help Marvin Johnson deal with rampaging Stant.

Paul McLaren then hacked a Thorpe effort off the line before Johnson conceded a needless corner. Lincoln full-back Stuart Bimson delivers one of the best left-footed inswinging corners in the lower leagues and it was from such a set piece that the visitors got their noses back in front.

Abbey was left unprotected by his defence and, when he flapped at Bimson's corner, Dave Barnett bundled the ball over the line amid a posse of Lincoln players.

Barnett turned from hero to villain for the cash-strapped Division Three club two minutes later when his mistake conceded possession to Douglas.

The Hatters striker raced clear and, after his earlier blunder, unselfishly squared to Doherty who was the right man in the right place for the second time, tapping into an inviting, gaping goal.

In injury time, Doherty headed over as he searched for a hat-trick but victory would have certainly flattered Luton.

Lennie's verdict

“We wanted to get through the first time of asking but we are lucky to still be in the draw. We had a good 20 minutes in the second-half of attacking play but that was it. We've got ourselves a lucky, second chance. The second goal annoyed me. We've got to do better defensively at set pieces.”

