

Blackwell's anguish as Derby send Luton down

06/07

By Martin Smith

DERBY COUNTY	1
LUTON TOWN	0

LUTON TOWN'S failure to beat Derby County was the final straw in a season in which they have fallen stone-like through the Championship, from near the top to the very bottom. The relegation that duly arrived last night had been inevitable since Mike Newell was sacked as manager a month ago.

The arrival of Kevin Blackwell has made no discernible change to results – they have collected just one point in his five games in charge as part of a run of 30 games in which

they have managed 15 points and fallen from a play-off place.

Their fans appear to have little stomach for the last rites to the season: just 288 – they counted them all – made it up the M1 to camp in a corner of Pride Park. Their players made slightly more of a fist of it, and went down fighting; they just weren't good enough in the final analysis.

"I thought it was more than a battling performance," Blackwell said of his young team. "They showed a bit of quality as well. They caused Derby all sorts of problems and I am proud of them. But believe me it hurts to be relegated."

Derby, who moved past Luton on

an upward swing on late autumn, have made heavy weather of securing a promotion place. Their first win in three weeks carried them into second place but they will be overtaken again tomorrow if Birmingham gain so much as a point at Wolves. The nerves are jangling.

"There's a lot of tension and pressure on these young players," Billy Davies, the Derby manager said. "And now we have put pressure on the others around us. I will watch with baited breath."

Derby had hit the crossbar and had a shot cleared off the line before the unlikely figure of Lewin Nyatanga scored the decisive goal.

Nyatanga, recalled from a loan at Barnsley to solve a centre-half crisis, bundled the ball home eight minutes before the break after Dean Brill blocked Dean Leacock's header.

The takeover last week of Luton by chairman David Pinkney has lightened the mood. "He wants to build the club from top to bottom," Blackwell said, "and you don't get that chance often." Luton, though, will have to start from the bottom.

Derby County (4-4-2): Bywater; Edworthy, Nyatanga, Leacock, McEveley; Teale (Pearson 73), Oakley, Jones, Currie (Lupoli 65); Howard, Barnes (Fagan 80). **Subs:** Grant (G), Mears.

Luton Town (4-4-2): Brill; Foley, Barnett, Coyne, Emanuel; O'Leary (Langley 73), Helkinnen, Spring, Belt; Andrew, Talbot (Idrizaj 65). **Subs:** Perrett, Boyd, Keane. **Booked:** Idrizaj.

Referee: R Beeby (Northamptonshire).