

Millwall shrug off non-league Luton to reach q3

John Aizlewood
at Kenilworth Road

IN THE end, it was a step too far. In their quixotic bid to become the first non-league team to reach the FA Cup quarter-finals since Southern League QPR went to Anfield in 1944, Luton had dismissed Wolves and Norwich City from this season's Budweiser FA Cup. Millwall were a more defiant, less romantic proposition and cruised to the last eight for the first time since they reached the 2004 final, with a display of focused certainty.

"Inside, you're apprehensive and you're kicking every ball" admitted the Millwall manager, Kenny Jackett, "but you have to show calmness to make decisions. This was a difficult tie but we were excellent today. Now we'd like one of the big boys at The Den." There were, though, wider issues at play. This was the first FA Cup meeting of these teams at Kenilworth Road since the society-changing quarter-final of 1985, at which violence flared. This time the tie sold out but there were no

LUTON TOWN

0

MILLWALL

Henry 12, Hulse 36,
N'Goussan 66

3

interlopers to smash through turnstiles: 1,530 fans travelled from SL6 and more than 300 police officers effectively sealed the town of Luton. Steel cordons were erected around the ground to ensure history did not repeat itself and a lunchtime kick-off reduced pre-match drinking time.

FA CUP DRAW

The draw for the sixth round of the Budweiser FA Cup will be made at about 5.55pm today and will be broadcast live on ITV, ESPN, Sky Sports News, Radio 5 Live and FANTV.

Even so, this was a contest between teams with other things on their minds. Luton are struggling to make the Conference playoff places as they stutter their way back to the Football League, while Millwall are in Championship mid-table, unsure whether to look up or down.

There were arrests yesterday but the generally safe passage of this game was proof writ large of how football and society have evolved in 28 years. While Rob Hulse spurned an early chance for Millwall, Luton's dandies were up from the off. J J O'Donnell was an old-fashioned orthodox winger and his eager sidekick, Andre Gray, a most mobile forward who cut in, fired low and brought the best out of David Forde.

Luton are not without a win in the Conference since January 8 for nothing and some distinctly non-league defending gifted Millwall their first goal, which both managers agreed was the afternoon's defining moment. Ronnie Henry's back-header lacked the strength to reach Mark Tyler but as Janos Kovacs lazily helped it on with his

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thigh, James Henry nipped in behind the Hungarian, rounded the keeper and rolled the ball home.

The goal calmed some of the more volatile terrace elements, but still Luton bubbled and Forde was soon in action again, saving splendidly from Arnaud Mendy. Millwall saw no need to hurry themselves as they assumed control and when Henry danced around Kovacs and crossed from the right, Hulse — who had already gone close with a bicycle kick — sent the ball away from goal with a mistimed header. But Hulse then turned and, as he fell, managed to loop the ball back over Tyler. As the Millwall players celebrated, a Coca-Cola bottle was hurled their way from the home support and handed to referee Lee Probert.

Luton mounted what proved to be one last charge at the beginning of the second period but Forde's afternoon was already over. Indeed, Millwall would have had a third had Andy Keogh not placed a simple header from another vicious Henry cross wide of Tyler's goal.

No matter. When Tyler split John Marquis's hardly



Mind the gap: James Henry opens the scoring for Luton.

palm-stinging low shot after a lovely Nadjim Abdou lay-off, Danny N'Goussan tapped in. As if anyone had doubted it for the previous hour, Millwall were through and Luton's fairy tale had turned grim.

"I'm very, very proud of our run," sighed the Luton manager, Paul Buckle. "I'm

frustrated; we have to do basics right and we didn't. Now we need realistic, roll up our sleeves and move the club forwards and out of the Conference."

Star man: James Henry (Millwall)
Fellow cards: Luton: Simon Mugg