

News 3 HOPES HIGH FOR IN NEW DECADE

Top sides
begin to
pull away

THE Town go into the New Year with every chance of going back into the First Division in four months' time. They hit manager David Pleat's year-end target of 30 points, and are now second in the Second Division, with the top four pulling clear.

Another 23 points from the last 18 games could well be enough to go up, and the Town's fixture list makes 25 or 26 look well within reach.

Chelsea manager Geoff Hurst believes that Newcastle will be one of the promoted teams, and that any two from the next six or seven could go up with them.

Today's leading positions in the Second Division:

	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
Newcastle	24	13	7	4	39	24	33
Luton Town	24	11	9	4	43	27	31
Chelsea	24	14	3	7	40	28	31
Leicester	24	11	8	5	40	27	30
Birmingham	23	12	5	6	31	23	29
Underland	24	11	5	8	36	29	27
Exham	24	12	3	9	30	25	27

ORIENT DETAILS

ORIENT 2, LUTON TOWN 2
Half-time: 0-2

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Donaghy, Saxby, Price; Grealish, Hill, West; Stein, Hatton, Moss (White, 80 mins).

ORIENT: Day; Fisher, Smith, Gray, Taylor; Moores, Hughton, Coates; Chiedoie (Godfrey, 81 mins), Mayo, Jennings.

THE GOALS: David Moss, 29 minutes, left-wing centre which went in off the far post as Mervyn Day watched; Moss again, 38th minute, penalty after Brian Stein was tripped; Billy Jennings, 57th minute, from back pass by Bob Hatton; Kevin Godfrey, 87th minute, back pass supplied by Kirk Stephens.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Orient nine saved and seven off target; Town three saved and six off target.

ATTENDANCE: 9,292, well above Orient's average thanks to the loyal following from Luton.

REFEREE: Darryl Reeves, Middlesex—neither manager rated him highly, but he dropped fewer clangers than the Town.

ENTERTAINMENT: Some spells were very good indeed, but only Orient fans enjoyed the knock-about comedy routines of the second half.

Pantomime goals cost point at Brisbane Road

THE PANTOMIME season opened at Brisbane Road on Saturday as the Town and Orient took it in turn to give away barmy goals. One was scored from the penalty spot and the three others were down to stupidity in defence, so justice was probably done when the points were shared.

It was slapstick fun for the home supporters, because the Town moved into a two-goal lead by half-time, and at that point the game seemed over.

Certainly it should have been, and the change of fortunes after the break saw a point lost by the Town rather than a point won by Orient.

Two bad back passes received the punishment they deserved to let the Londoners back in the game, leaving Town boss David Pleat to draw consolation that a point away from home is better than nothing.

Orient's bonus was that as they struggle to attract crowds, their last home match of the decade provided good clean fun and plenty of entertainment for the customers.

But I couldn't agree with manager Jimmy Bloomfield when he claimed: "We didn't deserve to be two down at half-time."

Both goals had come from David Moss, who was much more effective than he had been in recent away matches. He showed more willingness to get involved in the action, and helped at both ends of the pitch.

CUT OUT

Orient's creative danger-man was John Chiedoie, but Moss helped to cut out some of the service to him in midfield, and when the speedy coloured winger did get going Mal Donaghy was superb.

For all his pace and trickery, Chiedoie was denied the chance to get round the back by Donaghy's sensible positioning and tackling.

Tony Grealish revelled in his first return to the ground where he used to be skipper to give Mr Bloomfield further confirmation that the league tribunal did Orient no

favours at all when they pegged his transfer fee at a bargain £150,000.

The Town looked much the better balanced side, particularly in the first half, but the opening goal was pure fluke.

Moss carried too much speed for Orient's right flank, and provided a regular series of centres for Bob Hatton and Brian Stein.

Mervyn Day rarely looked like taking charge of his goal area, and made an astonishing error of judgement to give away the first goal in the 29th minute.

Moss scampered past two opponents down the left wing, and crossed a swirling centre towards the far post.

ROOTED

It should have been the goalkeeper's ball, but Day stood rooted to the ground and turned in dismay as the ball looped over his head and bounced gently into the net off the inside of the post.

Nine minutes later the Town seemed to be in easy street when Bobby Fisher mistimed a tackle as Brian Stein's trickery put him under pressure. Stein went down and Moss stepped up to score his 16th goal of the season from the penalty, his eighth consecutive success from the spot.

At the start of the second half Orient really got stuck in, and Jake Findlay had to make a good save from Ralph Coates, with Mike Saxby and Kirk Stephens both clearing off the line in another concerted attack.

But just when it seemed that the storm would be weathered an amazing mistake by Hatton cost a goal. A corner had been cleared, and the Town defence started to move out as

Hatton collected and controlled the ball on the edge of the penalty area.

He had time and space to kick it anywhere, but decided on a pass back to Findlay, and sent the ball straight to Billy Jennings.

Jennings and Mayo had found Saxby and Paul Price too good for them until that 57th minute, but Jennings accepted the gift pass to score and give Orient new hope.

BETTER

The Town still looked the better side, always willing to knock the ball around, and should have been well able to keep their lead.

A screaming drive by Grealish, deflected narrowly wide, was balanced at the other end when Findlay saved well from Mayo.

Moss went off with a bruised instep in the 80th minute, to give new boy Steve White ten minutes of limited opportunity, and disgruntled home supporters were already filing out of the stadium when Orient's second gift goal was presented to them three minutes from time.

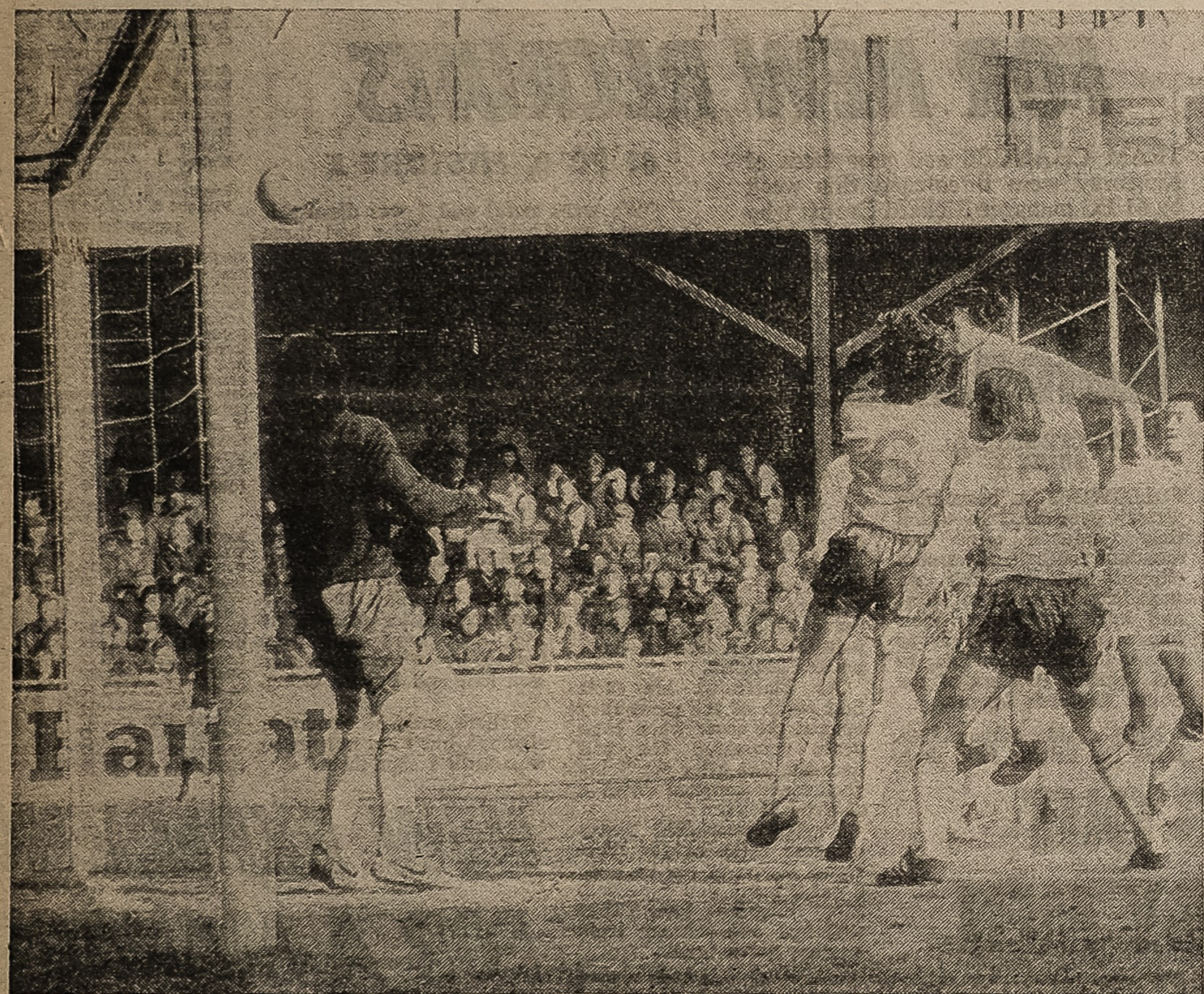
FAILED

Kirk Stephens had put in another impressive performance, but failed to learn the lesson of Hatton's error earlier. Under no pressure, and just outside his penalty area, he too decided to try a back pass.

Kevin Godfrey, who had come on as sub for Chiedoie, duly accepted the second belated Christmas present to score the equaliser.

The draw was not disaster. It gave the Town five points out of three Christmas games, and left them still bang on schedule for promotion.

But we may not know until the last match of the season—away to Newcastle, who went back to the top of the table on Saturday—just how important the lost point could be.



● MOSS AHEAD: The Town's leading scorer evades his markers to head the third goal, after a long throw-in by Paul Price had bounced into the area.

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● FLASHPOINT: Ricky Hill hammers in a shot which the Town thought had put them 3-1 up just before the interval. But offside by Bob Hatton ruled out the goal.