

PROMOTION NEEDS A MIRACLE NOW

A chance to make history

WITH 24 more points to play for, the Town are down to tenth place in the Second Division, with 32 points from 30 matches, in a table which has five teams jostling for third place.

West Ham continued their stately procession towards the First Division with a 4-2 win over Cambridge in front of 36,002 fans at Upton Park. They have 47 points from 31 games, and are eight points clear of second-placed Notts County.

Jimmy Sirrell's team kept on course for promotion with a 1-0 win at Cardiff and are four points ahead of their nearest rivals.

Chelsea hold third place on goal difference after being beaten at Stamford Bridge, where Malcolm Poskett's goal was enough to give Watford their first away win for more than a year.

Grimsby also have 35 points and are bidding to make football history as the first team ever to shoot up from the Fourth Division to the First in consecutive seasons.

George Kerr doesn't think they will make it, and tips Notts County and Blackburn to go up with West Ham, although Blackburn dropped a home point in a 1-1 draw with Wrexham.

But that kept Blackburn up with the bunch, also on 35 points, along with Derby County, who were held 1-1 at the Baseball Ground by Orient, the Town's next opponents.

MANAGER DAVID PLEAT put on a brave face for the after-match meeting with Pressmen after Grimsby's teamwork and enthusiasm snuffed out the Town's talent advantage at Kenilworth Road. The Mariners inflicted the Town's fourth home defeat of the season, and have almost certainly sunk the Town's promotion chances.

Publicly the manager, as committed a Luton Town supporter as any who stand on the terraces, refused to concede the apparently inevitable. "Don't write us off yet," he said. "We still have a chance, even if it is getting much slimmer."

Unfortunately his players' actions fell far short of their ambition, and most Town supporters have now accepted that the great adventure into the First Division has to be postponed for another year. On the form against Grimsby, the Town would not be good enough, and only a miraculous run can push them back into contention.

Manager and players alike were at a loss to explain why things went so badly. Grimsby boss George Kerr brought his side south telling them that Luton had more individual skill and talent.

PRIORITY

Having stung his men with that, he followed up with the instruction to go out and play for each other, and make teamwork the day's priority.

They did exactly as told, and earned their just reward.

The Town looked classy and confident for the first 20 minutes only, during which David Moss curled a bender wide of the angle of bar and post, and Bob Cumming missed a sitter on the volley after a clever flick by Trevor Whymark.

PINCHED

Tony Grealish looked like taking charge of midfield, and Godfrey Ingram and Brian Stein threatened to cut through the middle

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with their deft footwork against Clive Wigginton and Kevin Moore.

Ingram forced Batch to make two saves, but the Town's early confidence drained away when Grimsby pinched a goal on the break in the 24th minute.

Joe Waters was given too much space in midfield, and threaded a pass from right to left on the edge of the penalty area. Cumming compensated for his earlier miss by scoring with a low drive which was deflected by Mark Aizlewood's heel on its way under Jake Findlay's body into the net.

Batch made another good save, this time from Moss, to preserve the lead at half-time, while Cumming blazed an opening wide after a mis-kick by Mal Donaghy.

FADED

Moss tried his luck on both wings with minimal success. Grimsby's hard work gave them control of midfield, and the Town's front line faded as Wigginton and Moore closed up the middle of the Grimsby defence.

Grimsby defended in numbers, but rarely looked like being hustled into mistakes, and they got the decisive goal six minutes into the second half.

Left back Dean Crombie



● **EARLY BURST:** Brian Stein goes hunting in vain for his 16th goal of the season during the Town's bright opening spell. But the defender blocked this shot, and the Town failed to score in a home match for only the third time this season.

hit a long clearance, Whymark touched it on and Waters rattled a cracking 25-yard shot into the far corner from the inside left position.

GAMBLE

It took the Town another 20 minutes to get organised again. Grimsby, to no-one's surprise, pulled back and defended well, and when the Town did get forward the attacks lacked width and shots failed to make goalkeeper Batch work for his living.

With 17 minutes to go the Town manager took a gamble, and at least showed that he would rather go down by four or

five goals than sit and do nothing about a 2-0 defeat.

Paul Price was taken off and Steve White put on as an additional striker, and his hustle and bustle at last injected life into the front line.

NEARLY

The gamble nearly paid off in the 81st minute when White made a determined run on goal and looked like scoring. He got past the goalkeeper but was stopped by a desperate tackle by Moore, and as White tried to hit the rebound home Batch punched the ball away for a corner.

A goal then might have provided the springboard for a point-saving finale, but Grimsby deserved to hold on to win. In fact as the Town stretched themselves with the accent on attack cooler finishing at the other end could have brought a couple more, with Kevin Drinkell and Wigginton missing chances they ought to have taken.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 0, GRIMSBY 2

Half-time: 0-1

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Price (White, 73 mins), Donaghy, Aizlewood; Hill, Grealish, West; Stein, Ingram, Moss.

GRIMSBY: Batch; Stone, Wigginton, Moore, Crombie, Waters, Brolly, Mitchell; Whymark, Drinkell (Kilmorrison, 88 mins), Cumming.

THE GOALS: Bob Cumming, 24 minutes, deflected shot after good run and pass by Joe Waters; Waters, 50 minutes, cracking 25-yard drive after long ball out of defence by Dean Crombie and touch-on by Trevor Whymark.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town 12 saved and six on target; Grimsby one saved and 14 wide, Corners: 5-0 to the Town.

REFEREE: Ron Challis, Tonbridge — not as good as his reputation, particularly in watching for linesmen signals. But his wasn't the worst off-day.

ATTENDANCE: 9,217 — only Shrewsbury had a lower Second Division gate.

ENTERTAINMENT: Reasonable for the first 20 minutes and for the last 15, but only Grimsby supporters enjoyed the rest.

CHOKER: This was the Town's fourth home defeat of the season, and is probably the one that finishes the promotion hopes for this season. David Pleat hasn't given up, though.



● **LATE FLOURISH:** Steve White went on as sub in a calculated gamble to boost the attack while taking off defender Paul Price. **ABOVE:** Goalkeeper Nigel Batch recovers well to stop the Town striker getting in a free shot after a determined run on goal. **RIGHT:** the build-up to the final effort, with White getting past the goalkeeper, only to be stopped by a tackle from Kevin Moore.

