

SPORTS NEWS 1

Well clear at the top

FOUR points clear of Watford, and with two games in hand, Luton Town are today still on course for promotion and the Second Division championship. They are nine points ahead of fourth place, with four games in hand.

Cambridge did the Town a favour on Saturday by holding Watford 0-0 at Vicarage Road, although Watford found their scoring touch again on Tuesday night with a 4-0 home win over Queens Park Rangers. Rangers and Leicester were busy on Saturday carrying the Second Division's colours into the FA Cup semi-finals, but Leicester also had an adverse league reaction — they were hammered 4-1 at Chelsea on Tuesday.

The week's major change in the top places hit Oldham. Rotherham, with two goals by former Town player John Seaman, collected their ninth consecutive victory, with a 3-0 success at Boundary Park to move into third place.

● The mathematics that forecast promotion for the Town: Page 4.

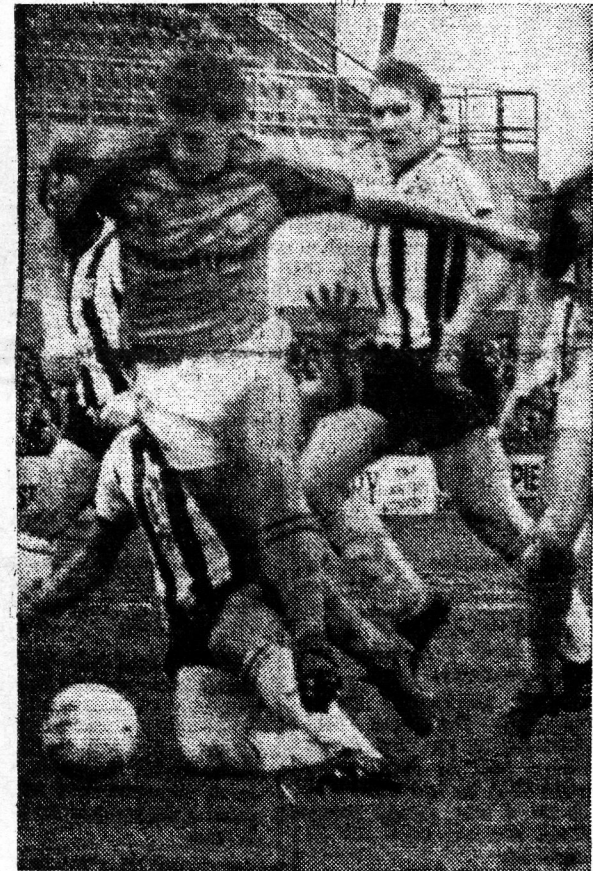
FIGHT FOR PROMOTION

	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
Luton Town	26	17	6	3	53	25	57
Watford	28	15	8	5	47	28	53
Rotherham	29	15	3	11	44	34	48
Blackburn	30	13	9	3	31	27	48
Sheff Wed	30	13	8	9	36	37	47
Oldham	30	12	10	8	36	33	46
QPR	28	13	5	10	34	37	44
Newcastle	28	13	5	10	36	29	44
Charlton	30	11	10	9	35	39	43



● NEARLY: Steve White bursts through a gap between two defenders as the Town put on the pressure in the second half at Blundell Park. Goalkeeper Nigel Batch was beaten but the ball flashed wide.

STRUGGLERS MAKE IT A HARD-WON POINT



● ESCAPE: David Moss went tumbling in this tackle by Dean Crombie, and the Town believe it should have brought a first-half penalty, but referee Robert Nixon disagreed.

EXCEPT FOR the frustration of not getting the goals they might have scored, Luton Town and manager David Pleat were well pleased to come away from a wet and miserable Blundell Park with a point from Grimsby.

The 0-0 result was no reflection on the standard of soccer served up, as top

team met bottom. At the end of a game that was a credit to the Second Division I agreed with Mr Pleat — this was a point gained rather than two lost.

Grimsby, who face probable relegation, delighted their dwindling support with the way they tackled one of their hardest jobs of the season. I always had the feeling that if the Town had made a breakthrough Grimsby might fold completely, but the home side held on, and I felt they deserved to avoid defeat.

The locals assured us that it was the best Grimsby performance in months, and certainly they looked a better organised outfit than the one that was hammered 6-0 at Kenilworth Road.

Each side had its chances on a muddy pitch that might have caused nightmares for defenders. Grimsby had the better of the first half hour without making that spell count, while the Town gradually improved as the minutes went by.

The major difference was that the Town created more clear-cut openings, and the only possible criticism of their performance was that they might have taken the other two points with more consistent marksmanship.

Against that, Grimsby supporters are almost certainly saying the same about their team.

Grimsby coped with the conditions better for the first half hour and slips in the mud in midfield and

Match Details

GRIMSBY TOWN 0, LUTON TOWN 0

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Goodyear, Donaghy, Aizlewood; Hill, Horton, Antic; Stein, White, Moss. Sub: Johnston, not used.

GRIMSBY: Batch; David Moore, Cooper, Kevin Moore, Crombie; Waters, Brolly, Mitchell; Ford, Drinkell, Cumming. Sub: Beacock, not used.

GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town eight saved, six wide. Grimsby six saved, seven wide, one hit the post. Corners: 9-6 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 7,733—boosted by a good following from Luton, but depressed by miserable wet and windy weather.

ENTERTAINMENT: The best 0-0 draw the Town have played in years.

REFEREE: Robert Nixon, West Kirby—played well although the Town believe he should have given them a penalty when David Moss was brought down in the first half.

BOOKINGS: Bob Cumming of Grimsby for a foul on Brian Horton, and Jake Findlay for hands outside his area. Findlay's fourth caution of the season, and puts him top of the Town's disciplinary points table.

Report by Brian Swair.
Pictures: Mark Richards

defence by the Town gave Kevin Drinkell two good early chances. He shot wildly off target from the first, then powered a header against the outside of the post from the second.

Both the Town flanks looked vulnerable to the early direct running from Mike Brolly and Bob Cumming, but the back four settled into a compact and effective unit which looked better and better as the game progressed.

Mark Aizlewood in particular came through what might have been a testing match with much credit — his third consecutive good performance, and the cynics might wonder if that is a coincidence. His improvement started with the news that the Town had been looking at Steve Buckley as a possible recruit. Who's a crafty manager then?

Clive Goodyear, always watched and supported by Mal Donaghy, looked a good player again, and Kirk Stephens found the physical approach of Bob Cumming a severe test. He coped admirably, but was unable to make as many forward runs as usual.

I thought that Lil Fucillo's absence through injury was felt at times. Raddy Antic deputised, and did some good work going forward with the ball, but Brian Horton was the pick of midfield. His tackling was sure and steady, and kept the town on an even keel when Grimsby's enthusiasm threatened danger.

MARKING

Ricky Hill was as delightful to watch as ever, and Brian Stein, Steve White and David Moss posed plenty of problems for a Grimsby defence which clearly believed close marking and consistent tackling was an absolute priority.

Jake Findlay had to make an important save from Cumming in the 26th minute and another from Drinkell eight minutes later, but Nigel Batch at the other end had much more work to do in the second half.

He had been lucky before the interval when Moss side-footed a reasonable chance wide after a low and hard far post cross by Stein, and he made a good save from Moss from an opening created by Stein and Horton.

TOUCH OF CLASS

The best chance of the match came three minutes into the second half when a sweeping move involving Aizlewood and Moss put White clear — Batch came off his line and was stranded as White blasted a shot wide.

Grimsby were forced back for long periods, and although they occasionally threatened danger on the break the Town always looked to have a touch more class in attack.

SMOTHERED

Hill had a shot hacked off the line after a poor clearance punch by Batch, and Moss wasted another reasonable opportunity when a clever pass by Antic put him through. Batch got out quickly to smother the shot.

The best moment of all came in the 70th minute when Antic set off on a dizzy run down the middle. It looked like being an action replay of Ricardo Villa's Cup Final goal at Wembley, with Antic beating four or five men with his close ball control, until Batch made another vital save.

BOOKING

Findlay's only serious work after the interval was to make a save from Cumming after a midfield error by Antic, and then to collect a booking when the Town had been over-stretched.

The goalkeeper raced out of his area to do a sweeper's job as Drinkell chased a long clearance, and palmed the ball out of harm's way. The booking for Findlay was his fourth caution of the season, and he is in danger of becoming the first goalkeeper in history to be under suspension when his team wins the Second Division championship.



● EYES LEFT: Grimsby defenders, beaten by a far post cross from Brian Stein, watch in relief as David Moss, on the right, puts an angled shot wide of the target.