

Escape by two points

STUCK IN the third relegation place before Saturday's dramatic victory at Maine Road, Luton Town finished the season in 18th place in the First Division.

A draw would have left them relegated on goal difference, but Raddy Antic's priceless late strike condemned Manchester City to the drop, and enabled the Town to move above Coventry City as well.

The final table:

	HOME					AWAY					
	P	W	D	L	F A	P	W	D	L	F A	Pts
Liverpool	42	16	4	1	55 16	8	6	7	32	21 82	
Watford	42	16	2	3	49 20	6	3	12	25	37 71	
Man Utd	42	14	7	0	39 10	5	6	10	17	28 70	
Tottenham	42	15	4	2	50 15	5	5	11	15	35 69	
Nott'm Forest	42	12	5	4	34 18	8	4	9	28	32 69	
Aston Villa	42	17	2	2	47 15	4	3	14	15	35 68	
Everton	42	13	6	2	43 19	5	4	12	23	29 64	
West Ham	42	13	3	5	41 23	7	1	13	27	39 64	
Ipswich	42	11	3	7	39 23	4	10	7	25	27 58	
Arsenal	42	11	6	4	36 19	5	4	12	22	37 58	
West Brom	42	11	5	5	35 20	4	7	10	16	29 57	
Southampton	42	11	5	5	36 22	4	7	10	18	36 57	
Stoke	42	13	4	4	34 21	3	5	13	19	43 57	
Norwich	42	10	6	5	30 18	4	6	11	22	40 54	
Notts C	42	12	4	5	37 25	3	3	15	18	46 52	
Sunderland	42	7	10	4	30 22	5	4	12	18	39 50	
Birmingham	42	9	7	5	29 24	3	7	11	11	31 50	
Luton	42	7	7	7	34 33	5	6	10	31	51 49	
Coventry	42	10	5	6	29 17	3	4	14	19	42 48	
Man City	42	9	5	7	26 23	4	3	14	21	47 47	
Swansea	42	10	4	7	32 29	0	7	14	19	40 41	
Brighton	42	8	7	6	25 22	1	6	14	13	46 40	

Goals all the way

NO SUPPORTERS have seen more goals in the First Division than Town fans who have been lucky enough to see every game. At home they scored 34 and conceded 33, and in away matches they scored 31 and let in 51.

It adds up to 149 goals in 42 games. The average was 1.54 goals scored per match and 2 goals conceded. The home games average works out at 1.61 goals scored and 1.57 let in, and the away figures were 1.47 scored and 2.43 conceded per match.



● **SPARKLER:** The TV coverage, edited to show all of Manchester City's attacks and thus forced to omit some of the Town's, failed to do justice to Paul Walsh's performance. City tried to double-mark him and he still left them standing. Nicky Reid is the victim of Walsh's pace and control in this picture.

'WE'VE DONE IT!'



● **HAPPY AND PATIENT:** Luton fans were kept penned in at Maine Road for 40 minutes after the game ended while police moved local supporters out of the area, but the jubilation was unabated.

HEARTACHE ENDS IN TEARS OF JOY

WITH the team and their supporters high on emotion and elation at Maine Road on Saturday night, Luton Town manager David Pleat was one of the first to start to come down to earth.

No-one enjoyed the occasion more than he after Raddy Antic had struck the winning goal just five minutes before the Town would have been doomed to relegation.

The manager's victory jig across the pitch to greet the final whistle was captured for millions to enjoy on television. The emotion in the voice and the tears in the eyes conveyed the depths of feeling every Luton Town supporter had.

Three times I have cheered the Town to promotion to Division One. Never have I enjoyed an occasion as much as at Maine Road when the whole season was boiled down into 90 heart-stopping minutes.

The manager and team deserved their reward. Under near-impossible pressure, knowing that nothing less than a win was good enough, they managed to produce the right blend of resolute defence and inventive attacking.

Manchester City are relegated because they couldn't forget that a draw would be good enough for them. They lined up with only two forwards, and one of them, veteran Dennis Tueart, is no longer full of the pace and menace he used to have.

MEMORY

He scored the goal at Kenilworth Road eight years ago which gave City a draw and helped send the Town to relegation. This time he had two real chances to do it again. Once he got clear, but was caught by a marvellous tackle by Clive Goodyear. The second occasion Tueart headed wide when he might have killed the Town's hopes.

It was a day to admire 12 Luton Town men who had the courage, stamina and expertise to make good Ricky Hill's forecast that the Town could and would win.

They were always the more positive side, and City were outplayed much more convincingly than the result suggests.

Every man in orange hit the right level of performance, and the absence of the injured Richard Money and David Moss was covered in spectacular style.

The huge army of Town supporters sweated for a long time as they worried that City might hold out for a goal-less draw. They never looked like beating Tony Godden, who made two inspiring saves in a brief second-half flurry when City looked dangerous for about 90 seconds.

But the City goal seemed to have a charmed life,

with shots whistling wide, and crosses just failing to find Luton heads as the home side packed their penalty area.

But the Town kept driving forward, despite being reshaped to cope with the injuries. Kirk Stephens marauded like a demon in defence and attack. Wayne Turner, so often the butt of Luton fans' jibes, blocked out City's right-wing danger, and Paul Elliott was superb, particularly in the air, alongside Goodyear.

Mal Donaghy, Ricky Hill and Brian Horton got the balance right between helping the defence and maintaining attacking pressure from midfield, and the front three of Brian Stein, Trevor Aylott and Paul Walsh were always far sharper than City's sporadic attackers.

Stein, playing his first

game for three months, willingly took the gamble after a pain-killing injection before kick-off, and was suffering agony after the game. But it was worth it, he beamed, enjoying the part he played in one of the most important goals the Town will ever score.

The manager played his final card with 26 minutes to go, taking off Turner and adding Antic to a team which was geared to attack.

Five minutes later we had the feeling fate was against us when a drive by Stephens was blocked by the goalkeeper, hit defender Nicky Reid and rebounded against the bar.

The goal the Town deserved finally arrived amid memorable celebration scenes with just five minutes of the season left.

Horton started it by winning the ball in midfield. It

was moved on to Aylott and he switched the attack to the right wing. Stein's first attempt at a centre was blocked by Tommy Caton. City skipper Paul Power tried to check the second, but Stein beat him and hammered a fierce cross towards the six-yard line. Williams dived, pushed the ball out, and Antic met the clearance first time with his right foot from just outside the penalty area.

Williams, well out of his goal, managed to get a touch as the ball curled past him into the net to set off celebrations which lasted many hours.

BATTLE

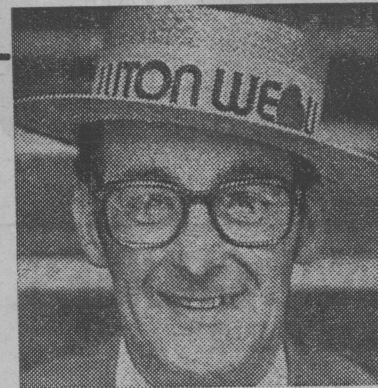
The reprieve, of course, is only one more stage in a never-ending battle for First Division survival. Mr Pleat knows his beloved Luton Town will always be one of the unfashionable outfits trying to beat the odds in that fight.

The other battle is looming off the pitch, with the Football League this week spilling the beans about Luton Town's plans to move to Milton Keynes.

Luton Council has been given the perfect excuse to rethink its miserly attitude to a club that had thousands of Luton people in raptures this weekend. Beating Manchester City may turn out to be the easy part of surviving. Councillors who apparently think Luton Town can be allowed to move out are the next lot to be taken on by the club and its supporters.

And sadly, if the club itself remains obstinate in its determination to go to Milton Keynes to say yaboo to local councils, some of us supporters will have to fight the most bitter battle of all.

Is there no-one in Luton Town Hall, or in Luton Town FC, prepared to pick up a phone and ask if a solution can't be worked out to satisfy all parties?



Reports:
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Match Details

Manchester City 0 Luton Town 1
Half-time: 0-0

TOWN: Godden; Stephens, Elliott, Goodyear, Turner (Antic, 64 mins); Hill, Horton, Donaghy; Stein, Walsh Aylott.

MAN CITY: Williams; Ranson, Reid, Caton, McDonald; Bond, Baker (Kinsey 86 mins), Hartford, Power; Tueart, Reeves.

THE GOAL: Raddy Antic, 20-yard first-timer, right foot, after Alex Williams palmed out a fierce cross from the right by Brian Stein.

OTHER STRIKES AT GOAL: Town eight saved, seven wide, one hit the bar; City three saved, four wide. Corners: 10-5 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 42,843, the day's highest in the country, the highest to watch any Town match this season, and Maine Road's second highest of the season, exceeded only by their derby clash with Manchester United.

ENTERTAINMENT: The loveliest day out Town fans have had since Wembley in 1959—nail-biting for 85 minutes, then heart-stopping for five minutes. It was better than winning the Second Division championship, and a more emotional moment than when Harry Haslam's team won promotion nine years ago.

REFEREE: Arnold Challinor, Rotherham—did a difficult job well, tried hard to keep the game flowing, and was right to book Paul Walsh for a niggly show of dissent when it was still 0-0 in the 73rd minute.



● **SUPER-GOAL:** Raddy Antic is part-hidden on the extreme right as he lashes in the goal that kept Luton up and relegated Manchester City. Goalkeeper Alex Williams is on the extreme left, but the others in view are all Hatters players, defenders Paul Elliott and Kirk Stephens, attacker Trevor Aylott and midfielder Mal Donaghy.

The things they said...

"THE MANAGER told me to go on and score, so I did. I think it was the best goal I have ever scored."

— RADDY ANTIC

"LUTON never stop coming at you, do they? We didn't defend deliberately. We didn't have much choice."—Paul Power, Manchester City captain.

"THE lads deserve it. I'm more pleased for them than for myself because they deserve a future in the First Division."—Skipper Brian Horton.

"I JUST feel like crying."—City defender Tommy Caton.

"I KNEW we were going to win when I was taken off!"—Wayne Turner.

"We WANT our backsides kicking."—John Benson, City manager.

"I LOVE Luton but I wanted City to win. I'll probably get the sack now."—John Ryan, City youth coach, and Town full-back and skipper the last time they built a promotion side.

"WE'VE STILL got a lot of work to do next season. We'll always be one of those eight or nine little clubs who have to battle to survive in the First Division."—David Pleat.

"I'M HAPPY for Luton and sick for City. But Luton deserved to win on the day."—Manchester-born Harry Haslam, manager of the Town last time they were in the First Division.

"GOING DOWN, going down, going down..."—City fans to the Luton following until the 85th minute.

"GOING DOWN, going down, going down..."—Luton fans for the last five minutes.

"I'M NOT a religious man, but perhaps someone up there decided that justice should be done. I'm just happy for the team, for the club, and for the town itself—I think of myself as a Lutonian now."

—DAVID PLEAT.

THE third double of the season clinched safety, and evened up the year's doubles count. Birmingham and Brighton were the other teams beaten twice, but three did the double over the Town—Coventry, Everton and Norwich.

The Town took four points off Notts County and three each from Aston Villa, Nottingham Forest, Swansea, Watford and West Ham.

Two points were taken from Southampton, Stoke and Spurs and one point from Arsenal, Ipswich, Liverpool, Manchester United, Sunderland and West Brom.

The best win was 5-0 at home to Brighton in

FACTS AND FIGURES

September and the worst defeat was by the same score at Everton three months later.

The longest unbeaten run was from September 9 to October 16, with three wins, including one in the Milk Cup and five draws. The best league run started with the home win over Aston Villa in April, with three wins and three draws before the home hammering by Everton.

The worst run was four consecutive defeats ending with the Easter failure at Watford.



● **GOOD NEWS:** Raddy Antic phones his wife to tell her about "the best goal I have ever scored."



● **ESCAPE:** City goalkeeper Alex Williams falls and Paul Walsh's 61st-minute shot hits his body instead of the net.

Top scorer keeps crown

BRIAN STEIN, pictured right, is the Town's leading scorer for the third consecutive season, despite missing half the campaign through injury. His total was 15 (including a penalty) in the First Division, plus a penalty goal in the Milk Cup against Charlton.

Paul Walsh hit 13 league goals plus one in the FA Cup.

David Moss scored nine league goals, one a penalty, plus one in the Milk Cup, and Ricky Hill also scored a total of ten, one of which was in the FA Cup.

The Town benefited from four own goals in the league, two scored by Spurs in separate games, and two at Brighton.

Other goal statistics: Brian Horton 4 (2 pens) plus 1 pen in the FA Cup; Mal Donaghy 3; Clive Goodyear, Trevor Aylott and Raddy Antic 2 each; Wayne Turner and Paul Elliott 1 each.

Lil Fuccillo and Billy Kellock, since transferred, both scored two Milk Cup goals, and Frank Bunn one.

