

SEVEN'S HEAVEN AS HISTORY IS MADE

THE MATCHBALL which has become part of Luton Town history this week joined three others in the personal souvenir collection of Brian Stein as an everlasting keepsake of an unbelievable football occasion.

The club's biggest-ever victory in the First Division, with Stein's hat-trick leading the way, could easily have been pushed into double figures as Southampton's terror-struck defence left it all to the best goalkeeper in the world.

Three days after becoming the most-capped goalkeeper in England history and keeping a clean sheet at Wembley against Turkey, the over-worked and under-protected Peter Shilton was roasted by the Town's sparkling performance.

Stein collected the fourth hat-trick of his career, by courtesy of Mick Harford whose domination of England centre-half Mark Wright helped to shatter the Southampton rearguard.

Poor Glenn Cockerill, making his First Division debut after Chris Nicholl beat the Town for his signature, spent the afternoon in frustrated isolation, watching his defenders take a pasting and hardly seeing the ball at close quarters.

The Town's domination, and the clinical finishing, was so complete that manager David Pleat needed to add no words at the Press conference. "Just write about the football, it spoke for itself," was his view.

Report by Brian Swain Pictures: Mark Richards

The only Southampton man to emerge with any sort of credit was Nicholl, the former Town centre-half in his first season as a manager. If only one defender had played with the skill and spirit he used to show the victory margin might have been less extravagant.

Wright and Kevin Bond in central defence were by-passed by superb passing, instinctive positional play, and an inter-changing of attackers that bewildered them.

Harford dragged the alleged strong men all over the place, and Stein was just one who stormed through the gaps created.

Nicholl exempted none of his players from criticism although I thought Shilton was given no chance with six of the goals. Ray Daniel's, the Town sixth, was the only scoring shot anywhere near the goalkeeper's body.

It was the first time Shilton had conceded seven since he was a 19-year-old learner with Leicester at Everton 16 years ago.

The Kenilworth Road mortification left him unwilling to comment as his manager was making arrangements for a video of the humiliation to be taken to The Dell. Southampton were made to look so pathetic that Nicholl decided to run through the recording with the team, analysing the excellence of every Town move.

The football was irresistible, reaching heights of simplicity, pace, accuracy and above all marvellous team-work.

The goals illustrated it:

● **Five minutes:** Harford and Stein passes cut through the middle, Meka Nwajiobi shoots past Shilton's right hand from 12 yards.

● **32 minutes:** Ricky Hill and Harford combine for Stein to hit his first from 18 yards, aided by a lucky deflection off Wright which sent the ball looping over the advancing Shilton.

● **35 minutes:** Hill side-foots the Town's third after Mitchell Thomas went down the left and pulled back a low pass.

● **55 minutes:** Steve Foster, joining constant attacks, takes a flick-on from Harford, sees his shot blocked and Stein pounces from 12 yards for his second.

● **59 minutes:** David Preece, having done much to prompt attacks, makes it 5-0 from Harford's low cross to the far post.

● **88 minutes:** Hill sets sub Ray Daniel free through a square defence and he takes on and beats Shilton in a one-to-one confrontation.

● **89 minutes:** Wright is harshly adjudged to have pushed Harford in the back, Stein is invited to take the penalty, and completes the fourth hat-trick of his career.

The Town's elegant passing was so outstanding that Southampton were lucky to go home with the score in single figures.

The most magical moment of many was one that did not produce a goal, when Stein outpaced Wright down the inside right position, watched Shilton advance and chipped him almost perfectly. It was an inch or two wide of the woodwork when it could well have been the goal of the match.

Shilton made a marvellous full-length save to a drive from Harford late in the first half, and in the second was brilliantly acrobatic to tip a dipping 25-yarder by Stein over the bar.

The goalkeeper was left floundering by another thrusting move when Hill put Nwajiobi clear. He danced round Shilton, but Mark Dennis, the only defender in sight, cleared off the line.

There was a succession of narrow squeaks as Southampton were demoralised, and even if they are not one of the best teams in the land, far better sides will be taken care of if the Town can produce similar skill at places like Anfield and Old Trafford.

In previous games they have often threatened this kind of result. It was Southampton's bad luck that they arrived on the day the threat was carried out when all 12 Town men got it together.

The potential customers who stayed away must be kicking themselves for missing a treat. Those of us lucky to be there will store this one in the memory for a very long time.

THE FIRST DIVISION

A RUN OF four league games without defeat and the continued unbeaten home record saw the Town rise two places to 12th in the First Division table by Saturday night.

But Spurs won 3-2 at Coventry on Sunday to shoot up from 13th to seventh, with the Town among the sides to drop a place.

Today's First Division table:

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Man Utd	13	11	2	0	31	5	35
Liverpool	13	7	4	2	28	14	25
Chelsea	13	7	3	3	18	13	24
Arsenal	13	7	3	3	16	12	24
Sheffield Wed..	13	7	3	3	22	22	24
Everton	13	7	2	4	25	15	23
Spurs	12	6	2	4	26	15	20
West Ham	13	5	5	3	23	16	20
Watford	13	6	1	6	27	25	19
Nottm Forest...	13	6	1	6	21	19	19
Newcastle	13	5	4	4	20	21	19
QPR	13	6	1	6	15	17	19
Luton Town	13	4	6	3	22	16	18
Birmingham	12	5	1	6	11	18	16
Coventry	13	3	5	5	20	19	14
Aston Villa	13	3	5	5	17	19	14
Oxford	14	3	5	6	20	27	14
Southampton ...	13	2	5	6	13	21	11
Leicester	14	2	5	7	16	30	11
Manchester C..	13	2	4	7	12	22	10
Ipswich	13	2	2	9	7	21	8
West Brom	13	1	3	9	12	35	6