# SportsNews

● HEADING FOR A WIN: Lars Elstrup scores his and the Town's second goal at The Dell.

# A HINT OF SUPERMAC

**Brian Swain reports — Pictures: Josh Levy**

TWO GOALS BY Lars Elstrup, and smart cool work when necessary by the defence and goalkeeper Alec Chamberlain, gave the Town their first win of the season at The Dell.

And although they lived a little dangerously at times in the second half following an enforced re-shuffle, they well deserved the points.

Elstrup, rejuvenated by the switch to the left of the attack, grabbed the limelight, but everyone else played a part as well in sending well-fancied Southampton to their first home defeat since early March.

And it was in spite of the absence of the injured Kingsley Black, and a half-time change caused by Darron McDonough's cracked rib.

He had suffered the injury at Highbury, and had a pain-killing injection at The Dell. It was a blow to him as well as to the team when he had to sit out the second half, because McDonough was having by far his best game yet in midfield. He was not only tackling well, but also distributing the ball better than in the first two games of the season.

Richard Harvey went on as sub at left back, with Julian James moving from there into midfield.

Allied with the tongue-lashing Southampton had received from a niggled manager during the interval the changes were not entirely beneficial in terms of control of the game. But the style with which a team under the cosh broke to create chances was an extra pleasure, and the Town should have come away with three or four goals.

Elstrup might have had a hat-trick, with a last-minute drive crashing back into play off the crossbar as the demoralised Saints wilted in the hot sun.

Jason Rees deputised for Black and he and Ceri Hughes made important contributions to a team-work job which was superb until some of the players felt the pace and heat after the break.

There was not a lot wrong with the defence, with James showing signs of getting over his hesitant start to the season. Harvey, often better going forward then defending, must have been considered for the midfield role when he had to be sent on as sub. But he did everything asked of him as a defender, at a time when Southampton were well wound up and throwing in everything and everyone in the battle for an equaliser.

## BOSS OF THE BOX

Fortunately for the Town they wasted chances and possession, and when they did get it right Chamberlain was the boss of the box.

Matthew Le Tissier's skill and trickery was the most dangerous weapon in the home side's armoury, and he threatened to cause much embarrassment. His work produced Southampton's goal, but when the Saints had their most promising moments after the break the defensive covering and support was much better.

One tackle by Tim Breacker was a case in point. With five minutes to go Jimmy Cases's chip put Paul Rideout clear for a golden chance to equalise. Chamberlain produced an outstanding save to block the shot, and Le Tissier was set to lash in the rebound until Breacker miraculously made three yards and swept the ball away with a perfect tackle.

Southampton had made the brighter start, but Le Tissier flashed one drive wide and then had a header saved at full-length.

Iain Dowie was always a worry to Kevin Bond and Russell Osman, and the need to give them support resulted in Southampton's back four being drawn in closer in a flat formation which was prone to be caught by an accurate through pass.

David Beaumont and John Dreyer both produced several as the Town mixed their game, with short passing and patient progress the foundation.

## SQUARE DEFENCE

The balance of power swung in the 18th minute when after their encouraging start Southampton were caught by a pass down the left touchline by James. Elstrup took it in his stride, outstripped the flimsy cover, and shot left-footed on the run under the body of the advancing goalkeeper.

Six minutes later, after Chamberlain had made another excellent save from Le Tissier, Tim Flowers was left helpless by another bloomer: Breacker crossed from the right and Elstrup was the only man on the move into position to attack the ball.

He made it look easy with the header for his third goal in two games.

Southampton got back into it in the 31st minute when Le Tissier tricked Beaumont and David Preece with a lovely piece of skill and crossed to the far post for Rideout to accept the gift.

That set up a thorough examination of the Town's resilience and skill. Chamberlain passed with honours, tipping a Rideout drive round the post, while at the other end Preece was unlucky with a waspish drive which hit Barry Horne and went for a corner.

The pattern changed in the second half, but for all their pressure Southampton rarely looked like embarrassing Chamberlain and Co.

And while the Town's reshaped midfield was not as dominant, the classic recipe for more surprise goals should have cooked up a better result.

# Best performance

**THE only away winners in the First Division had to be something special at The Dell. It was the day's best performance anywhere in the Football League.**

Town fans knew it, and so did England manager Graham Taylor, who chairs the panel which selects the Barclays Performance of the Week award.

Arthur Cox, David Pleat, Mick Buxton and George Graham joined Taylor in a unanimous vote for Luton.

## A DOUBLE

The prize is a complete football strip in Barclays colours, worth about £350, and £300 in cash, to be given to Bedford Boys Club, who were nominated by the NABC.

They will collect the goodies at a double presentation ceremony at Kenilworth Road on September 22, before the match against Coventry.

The Town won last season's final Performance of the Week Award at Derby, and the lucky beneficiaries for that one are Limbury Boys Club.

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# Town match verdict ★★★★★

● ON ITS WAY: Elstrup starts the run that ended with a left-foot drive for the Town's opener.

# Tactical switch a simple case of observation

ANGRY SAINTS manager Chris Nicholl dismissed his team as one that simply had not performed against the Town.

Deeper analysis was not forthcoming, but the groundsman was unpopular — Nicholl and he were seen in very animated confrontation after the game, with the manager apparently complaining that the grass was too long and too wet.

There were no complaints from Jim Ryan. He had complained at Arsenal that the Town started well, went ahead, and then changed their attitude and became less positive.

They learned the lesson at The Dell, he said, and kept looking for more goals after they had gone two up, and that pleased him.

The change in the flow of the game at half-time was inevitable, he said. Darron McDonough had done well until he got a knock on his cracked rib ten minutes before the break, while it figured Southampton would want to raise their game.

"We were nice and compact in the first half and were handling the game well. When we came under pressure as Southampton started playing more direct football — high balls into the box and looking for knock-downs — the defence and goalkeeper had an excellent game."

## Manager's viewpoint

And the perfectionist manager had a grumble about one aspect of the result: "We should have scored at least once more!

"But winning away from home like this is the best feeling you can get in your day-to-day football."

The boss felt that the way Richard Harvey, Ceri Hughes and Jason Rees played was a bonus, as was Julian James's performance in midfield to replace McDonough.

Lars Elstrup spoke of his appreciation of the different attacking role he now has, with a little more space on the flank.

His manager turned down the chance to claim it as an inspired tactical decision: "It's only observation. We looked at Lars and saw that when he played at centre-forward he tended to drift out to the left, and he looked confident there. Then it was a case of looking at the tactical formation, and seeing if we could accommodate that. We found a way to do it, but a lot of credit goes to Lars. Coaches can make decisions, but in the end it's up to the player and he did very well."

# THE OLD MAGIC

The defence settled down to a long hard battle to frustrate the home side and their fans, and every counter-attack had the Saints on edge.

Rees ought to have scored the first league goal of his career in the 55th minute. Elstrup went to the by-line past a defender and as Flowers came out pulled back a perfect pass. Rees shot for what seemed like an empty net, but somehow Moore got in the way to deflect the drive for a corner.

And in stoppage time the Town went close three more times. Elstrup had a shot saved, sub Kurt Nogan put a chance wide, and finally Elstrup whacked in an 18-yarder which hit the bar.

It didn't matter too much by then, but what a delight it was for the Town's followers to see how the team turned on the style, typified by Elstrup.

## ENJOYING THE SPACE

He was done no favours when he was signed by a manager who told us the Dane was another Malcolm Macdonald. He's not — but the left-foot goal would have done credit to SuperMac.

The difference, as Elstrup confirmed, is that Jim Ryan has decided Elstrup's best position is wide on the left and Arsenal and Southampton will confirm that judgement.

Elstrup enjoys the extra space and time he gets, with the ball being delivered to feet by a passing team instead of in the air down the middle.

● HEY REF! Coach John Faulkner leads the protests as Jimmy Case puts the boot in on Iain Dowie.

## Match details

**SOUTHAMPTON 1 LUTON TOWN 2 (Half-time:1-2)**

**TOWN: Chamberlain; Breacker, Beaumont, Dreyer, James; Hughes, McDonough (Harvey HT), Preece; Rees (Nogan 71 mins), Dowie, Elstrup.**

**SAINTS: Flowers; Cherednik, Moore, Osman, Adams; Horne, Case, Cockerill (Ruddock 65 mins); Le Tissier, Rideout, Rod Wallace (Shearer 65 mins).**

**THE GOALS: Lars Elstrup twice: left-foot drive on the run from an 18th-minute through-ball played down the left wing by Julian James and carefully placed free header from Tim Breacker right wing cross in the 26th minute. Paul Rideout for Southampton, 31 minutes, close range opening at the far post made by Matthew Le Tissier's brilliant footwork to take out David Beaumont and David Preece.**

**OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town seven saved, three wide and late drive by Elstrup hit the bar; Southampton seven saved and ten wide. Corners: 6-5 to The Saints.**

**REFEREE: Martin Bodenham, Sussex. Another who didn't look as good as he used to.**

**ATTENDANCE: 14,878, an increase of 800 on the gate last season.**

**ENTERTAINMENT: Brilliant for the Town follow ers — two wins in the last three away games is almo too good to be true. And the performance was as go as the result.**

# Let off the hook

**ARSENAL 2 LUTON T 1**

THE SEEDS of success at The Dell were sewn at Highbury.

For half an hour the Town were the better footballing side, although Arsenal looked more powerful.

Lars Elstrup scored his first of the season and if the Town had stuck to the positive style which put them ahead the Gunners would probably have been shot down.

Manager Ryan was niggled at the way the Town let Arsenal take the initiative.

"We seemed to think 'Great, we've scored, so let's hold it,' and that let Arsenal back into it."

In an all-action first half the Town deserved the lead given to Elstrup with a near post header from a cross by Preece, who had an outstanding game.

Levelled in the service and support he got from Preece, but Kingsley Black was out of sorts on the right, and limped off at half-time with a thigh strain.

Arsenal, roared on by a big crowd, eventually deserved to win. Paul Merson got the equaliser and Michael Thomas the winner with a cracking 20-yarder.

Alec Chamberlain needed to be the Town's star man and but for him the result would have looked much worse, even though the Town's general performance was highly encouraging.

Referee Brian Hill won few friends on either side with some surprising decisions and a laid-back attitude to offences which warranted yellow cards. Both sides might have collected a couple but Mr. Hill apparently didn't want to get his pencil wet.

## THE MATCH DETAILS

**TOWN:** Chamberlain; Breacker, Dreyer, (Beaumont), James (Harvey 70 mins); Hughes, McDonough, Preece; Elstrup, Dowie, Black (Rees HT).

**GUNNERS:** Seaman; Dixon, Bould, Adams, Winterburn, Rocastle, Davis, Thomas; Merson, Smith, Limpar (Groves 63). Other sub: Pates.

**THE GOALS:** Lars Elstrup, 12 mins; Paul Merson 36, Michael Thomas 65.

**OTHER ATTEMPTS:** Town three saved and four wide; Arsenal six saved and eight wide. Corners: 5-4 to Arsenal.

**REFEREE:** Brian Hill from Ketteringe, not up to his usual standard.

**ATTENDANCE:** 32,723 for Arsenal's first home game of the season, 4,000 higher than for the Town's last visit, in December.

**ENTERTAINMENT:** Cracking first 35 minutes, when the Town more than matched a collection of multi-million pound talent.

## The First Division

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| C. Palace | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| Tottenham | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Man United | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| Coventry | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| Luton Town | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| Sunderland | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| So'ton | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| QPR | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Wimbledon | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| Chelsea | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Man City | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Norwich | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 3 |
| Derby Co | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Nottm For | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 2 |
| A. Villa | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Sheff Utd | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
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● Not including Town v Manchester United last night.

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