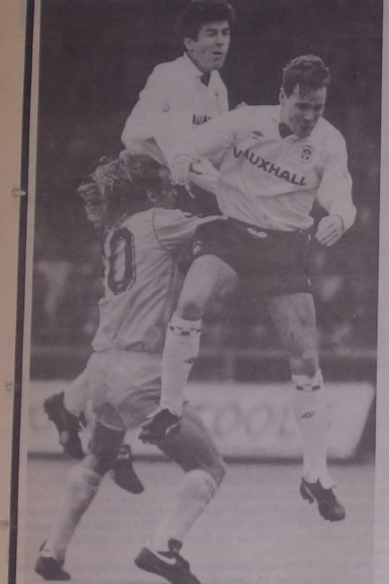


SPOTS OF BLOOD ALL ROUND AS HOME POINTS GO



● ON TOP: John Dreyer and Kingsley Black rise to the occasion over Paul Walsh, the former Town striker in the Spurs side because Gary Lineker was rested.

SOME OF THE CROWD had no doubt about where the blame lay when Luton Town dropped two more home points on Monday.

"Nekin out," was the cry after an inexperienced team had done its very best to beat Tottenham, and failed for the want of a good striker.

To hear that Iain Dowie had scored for West Ham while his old mates slipped deeper into trouble at the wrong end of the First Division added to the frustration.

The chairman will not be deflected from his course, but knows that the fans are not unanimously behind him in putting financial health above results.

John Ryan maintains a philosophical attitude to his predicament and is sure that the boys struggling in a man's world will survive, and be all the better for the lessons they are learning.

One point may have been better than nothing, but it was galling to realise that Spurs were not exactly fighting for victory.

Luck was with them: John Dreyer missed a first-half penalty and Marvin Johnson was sent off 18 minutes from time by a referee who earned no praise from either manager.

Luton was the team that had a stinker and Johnson, one of the Town's major successes, was a victim of incompetence.

But the angry fans were also well aware that hard though the team tried they were not good enough where it matters most, in the penalty area.

Lars Estrup was not a great help. He said his legs had gone at half-time.

I wonder if Mr. Ryan was right to accept that and send on Kurt Nogan for the second half. I know one former Town boss who would have snorted and told Estrup

The season so far

Williams 15 (1); Pembroke 12; Rodger 10; Rees 9 (8); James 9 (4); Farrell 7 (9); Nogan 1 (6); Nolsgrove 1 (1); Dowie 26 (9); Brasher 8. Number of players used, 33 games; 20. Last season's total: 27.

LEAGUE GOALS: Estrup 13; Dowie 7; Black 6; Dreyer 3; pence; Hughes 1; James 1; Pembroke 1; Rodger 1; Preece 1; OG 2 (Cundy, Chelsea; Mounfield, A. Villa).

THE FA CUP
January
5 Sheff Utd (a) 3-1 (Farrell, Elstrup 2)..... 13,897
26 W. Ham (h) 1-1 (Black)..... 12,087
30 W. Ham (a) 0-3..... 25,555

APPEARANCES: Three each by Chamberlain, James, Dreyer, Harvey, Pembroke, McDonough, Preece, Elstrup and Black; Farrell 21; Johnson 2; Dowie 1 (1); Beaumont 1. One as sub: Rees; Williams.

GOALS: Estrup 2, Farrell and Black one each.

THE RUMBLEOWS CUP
September
23 Bradford (h) 1-1 (Harvey)..... 5,120
October
10 Bradford (a) 1-1 (Black) - lost on pens..... 6,180

APPEARANCES: Chamberlain 2, Dreyer 2, Beaumont 2, Hughes 2, Preece 2, Black 2, Dowie 2, Harvey 2, Rees 1 (1), Nogan 1 (1), Brasher 1, McDonough 1, Williams 1, Johnson (1).

GOALS: Harvey and Black one each.

THE ZENITH DS CUP
December
19 W. Ham (h) 5-1 (Farrell 2, Rees, Elstrup, Black) 5,759
February
18 Chelsea (a) 1-1 (Dreyer). Won on pens..... 3,849
26 C. Palace (a) 1-3 (Rees)..... 7,170

APPEARANCES: Chamberlain 3, Dreyer 3, Elstrup 3, Rees 3, Pembroke 3, James 2 (1), Beaumont 2 (1), Harvey 2, Preece 2, Dowie 2, Johnson 2, Rodger 2, Farrell 1 (2), Black 1, Williams 1, McDonough 1. One each as sub: Nogan and Jackson.

GOALS: Farrell and Rees 2 each. Elstrup, Black and Dreyer one each.

BARCLAYS LEAGUE DIV 1

August
25 C. Palace (h) 1-1 (Dowie)..... 9,583
29 Arsenal (a) 1-2 (Elstrup)..... 32,723

September
1 Southampton (a) 2-1 (Elstrup 2)..... 14,878
4 Man United (h) 0-1..... 12,576
8 Leeds Utd (h) 1-0 (Black)..... 10,185
15 QPR (a) 1-6 (Hughes)..... 10,196
22 Coventry (h) 1-0 (Dowie)..... 8,336
29 Norwich (a) 3-1 (Elstrup 3)..... 12,794

October
20 Sunderland (a) 0-2..... 20,025
27 Everton (h) 1-1 (Elstrup)..... 10,047

November
3 Derby (a) 1-2 (Black)..... 15,008
10 Liverpool (a) 0-4..... 35,207
17 Man City (h) 2-2 (Dowie, Dreyer pen)..... 9,564
24 A. Villa (h) 2-0 (Black, Elstrup)..... 10,071

December
1 N. Forest (a) 2-2 (Elstrup 2)..... 16,498
8 Arsenal (h) 1-1 (Dreyer pen)..... 12,506
15 C. Palace (a) 0-1..... 15,195
22 Spurs (a) 1-2 (Dowie)..... 27,007
28 Sheff Utd (h) 0-1..... 10,004
28 Chelsea (h) 2-0 (OG, Black)..... 11,050

1991
January
1 Wimbledon (a) 0-2..... 4,521
12 Southampton (h) 3-4 (Elstrup, James, Dreyer pen)..... 9,021
19 Leeds (a) 1-2 (Elstrup)..... 27,010

February
2 QPR (h) 1-2 (Black)..... 8,479
12 Liverpool (h) 3-1 (Black, Dowie 2)..... 12,032

March
2 N. Forest (h) 1-0 (Dowie)..... 9,577
5 Man City (a) 0-3..... 20,404
9 A. Villa (a) 2-1 (Mounfield OG, Pembroke)..... 20,587

13 Coventry (a) 1-2 (Rodger)..... 8,521
18 Norwich (h) 0-1..... 8,604
23 Man Utd (a) 1-4 (Preece)..... 41,752
30 Sheff Utd (a) 1-4 (Elstrup)..... 10,487

April
1 Spurs (h) 0-0..... 11,322

LEAGUE APPEARANCES, including as sub in brackets: Chamberlain and Dreyer ever-present, 33 each; Elstrup, Preece and Black 32; Beaumont 24 (4); Johnson 22 (2); Harvey 21 (3); McDonough 19 (4); Hughes 17;

Spurs let off the hook



● TRYING: Mark Pembroke lets fly.

to get out there and make the legs a lot more tired before a relief of their 18-yard line.

A lot of the Town's football was decent quality. But all too often little mistakes crept in at crucial times.

Jason Rees was recalled in place of David Beaumont to give the midfield more attacking power. He got stuck for wasting the ball too often, yet his crosses from the right could easily have led to the demolition of Spurs.

David Preece kept the Town on top so far as possession went, but the defence-minded Spurs

soaked up almost everything on or in front of their 18-yard line.

The young centre-forward, still learning his trade, chipped aside after intercepting back pass by Van den Hauwe and then set up Chance for Kingsley Black to shoot at target.

Mark Pembroke backed up attacks, and his run in the 70th minute when Rees set

and it looked a clear penalty in the 12th minute when Rees set

Thomas and Vinny Samways flattening him. The penalty was given this time but Dreyer hit the bar and then headed the rebound - his second consecutive touch, to give Spurs an indirect free kick to complete a lucky let-off.

Samways for a bad-tempered lunge at Rees and John Moncur, for dissent were added to the book before Johnson got the yellow card for a foul on Nayim in the 69th minute.

Three minutes later a long ball out of defence by Johnson in midfield. The red card was given for a second cautionable offence, although neither Mr. Ryan nor Terry Venables understood how that handball warranted a yellow card.

In the end with the

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Town's Easter Verdict ★★

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TOWN: Chamberlain; Johnson, Rodger, Dreyer, Harvey; Rees (Beaumont 74 mins), Pembroke, Preece; Elstrup (Nogan HT), Farrell, Black.
SPURS: Thorstvedt; Thomas, Tuttle, Mabbutt, Van den Hauwe; Allen, Samways, Moncur, Nayim; Stewart, Walsh. Subs: Sedgley and Gray.
GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town seven saved, six wide and a penalty hit the bar; Spurs one saved and three wide. Corners: 7-5 to the Town.
ATTENDANCE: 11,322, fourth highest of the season.
REFEREE: Roger Wiseman, Borehamwood. The name's a joke!
BOOKED: Graham Rodger, Vinny Samways, John Moncur and Marvin Johnson for fouls, and Sean Farrell for dissent.
SENT OFF: Johnson for handball seen by the ref as a second cautionable offence.
ENTERTAINMENT: Would have been reasonable if the Town had been able to score goals against a team that was there for the taking.

WORRY
"I took them for this club myself - so long as I wanted to. If John feels confident, then he will take them in future."

"Our overall team performance was pretty good. We had a good share of the game."

"Lack of goals is a worry but the big bonus will be that we have young players who are gaining experience."

The ref's unrelenting contributions started in the first ten minutes. Graham Rodger's booking for flattening Paul Walsh was probably OK.

But there were shades of the mayhem at White Hart Lane in December when Pat Van den Hauwe chattered Johnson and was not penalised.

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● TRIP: The moment the Town were convinced they should have had a penalty in the tenth minute, with Marvin Johnson about to tumble over Erik Thorstvedt's challenge.

Second-half misery

SHEFFIELD U2 LUTON TOWN 1

AT HALF-TIME at Bramall Lane on Saturday the Town were within sight of at least a draw, and very possibly their fourth away win of the season.

But as in other recent away games the good work was wasted because the Town were found wanting when the opposition stepped up the pace and power after the break.

Manager Jim Ryan said he felt sorry for his men because they did not deserve their fourth consecutive defeat. He also spoke about inexperience being exposed, and I felt that remark was more to the point.

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Defeat at Bramall Lane

The problem is that however nice the Town's football — and some of it at Bramall Lane was excellent — you cannot see where the goals will come from. I also worry about the inability to press home an advantage. The Town's scoring attempts in 90 minutes: a early goal by Lars Estrup, a free kick by Kingsley Black which was deflected in, and a late volley by Elstrup which was hit too hard and well off target.

United's simple soccer, a lot of kick and rub backed up by quick tackling, was more effective than the Town's. And the only time the Town looked like saving it in the second half was in the last ten minutes when they roused themselves for a determined final assault, with caution thrown to the winds and Graham Rodger used as an extra attacker.

The final whistle was greeted with relief by the home fans as they saw their side continue its remarkable recovery. Bottom of the table when the Town beat them in the FA Cup in January, United's victory took their run to eight wins and a draw in their last nine games.

They have strengthened their squad, and Glyn Hodges, on loan and likely to be signed permanently, was their main through once they achieved parity and better in terms of possession.

At the other end Sheffield United looked much more likely to break through once they achieved parity and better in terms of possession.

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Match details

TOWN: Chamberlain; Johnson, Rodger, Dreyer, Harvey; Rees (Beaumont 74 mins), Pembroke, Preece; Elstrup, Farrell, Black (Nogan 67 mins).

UNITED: Tracey; Pemberton, Beesley, Hill, Barnes; Bradshaw, Jones, Horsland, Hodges (Marwood 89 mins); Deane, Bryson. Other subs: Whitson.

GOALS: Lars Estrup for the Town, 10th-minute header from Mark Pembroke's left-wing cross; Ian Bryson for United, 55 minutes, deflected shot after collecting an indirect free.

OTHER STRIKES: Town three saved and four wide; United five saved and three wide. Corners: 11-3 to United.

ATTENDANCE: 18,487, 5,000 more than for the cup tie in January when United were bottom of the First Division and had won only twice in 19 league matches.

BOOKING: John Martin, Allen - mellowing with age, and played well.

GOALKEEPING: Brian Deane for knocking over Graham Rodger from the back.

ENTERTAINMENT: A familiar story in town after games they looked good at half-time when they were one up, but fell away after the interval.

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● OVER THE TOP: Sean Farrell lifts a shot clear of goalkeeper Erik Thorstvedt — but over the bar as well.

Sports Editor Brian Swain reporting

Action photographs by Josh Levy

● MISSED: John Dreyer's penalty has just hit the Spurs bar and as he meets the rebound with his head referee Roger Wiseman blows up for playing the ball twice.