

Sports News

FRUSTRATED THEIR BACKS SOCCER HAS



● **YOUNG HOPEFULS:** Paul Telfer, above, and Paul Holsgrove, below, were both given outings at Selhurst as the Town juggled their injury-hit squad. Each was given 45 minutes, and manager David Pleat had another look at them on Monday night when they were in the Town reserve side which beat Charlton in the Football Combination.



WITH A COMPLETE front line ruled out before kick-off, Luton Town were well short of First Division quality at Selhurst Park, once their early resistance had been broken.

Wimbledon, simple, direct and very mobile, were much too powerful on another day when the visiting supporters were hoping that boys would be able to do a man's job.

Record low attendance

In an unreal atmosphere, with the lowest-ever First Division attendance of 3,231 sunbathing in a stadium that holds nearly 30,000, the Town were lucky to escape a real drubbing.

Thank goodness we now have two home games to come, and to those fans at Selhurst who made a point of coming round to the Pressbox at the end of the game to vent their frustration, I can only say that the team needs support more today than it has done for a long time.

And Monday's signing of Steve Thompson may be only the start of the reinforcing of the side that is needed if David Pleat and his men are to defy the odds - little of what we have seen so far this season does much to back the bookies' verdict of Luton for relegation.

The few plus points from another miserable afternoon were about promising youngsters.

Matthew Jackson, still only 19, had made a good debut against Southampton, and he continued the good work at Selhurst.

Paul Telfer, another 19-year-old, went on for his second taste of league football as a second-half sub for Paul Holsgrove, and his pace and willingness to work was a refreshing bonus.

But they are lads who need time, and with the pressure to stay in the First Division so much greater this season, that is in short supply.

Records

The Town hold two miserable records at the moment: the fewest goals scored in the First Division, and the most conceded.

Brian Swain reports

We hardly expected a hatful against Wimbledon.

Sean Farrell was suspended, and Lee Glover and Brian Stein were out injured.

That left Philip Gray to batter away at a big Wimbledon defence with no real support.

Kurt Nogan came in for his first full appearance of the season without making much impact, although I cannot see what help it was to him or the team to hear Town supporters having a go at him.

The manager's response to the lack of fit experienced forwards was to opt for a five-man defence, and at times it looked a good idea as Jackson and Richard Harvey pushed forward on the flanks.

Graham Rodger, who was dropped against Southampton, was on the bench, with David Beaumont out in the cold.

Passing

David Preece was again at the hub of the Town's best passing, but the old style for which Luton Town and David Pleat were famous was never able to rise to the surface with any consistency.

And when the ball was given way to halt Town moves, the home side were adept at banging it swiftly into the holes behind the fullbacks.

Wimbledon used the wings well, and made the crosses count.

And the lads were not responsible for the trials

we suffered after a reasonable opening spell.

Support

Without John Fashanu, who was suspended, Wimbledon relied on 31-year-old Alan Cork to win the ball in the air, and lay it off to men who arrived quickly in support.

The veteran did just that in the 23rd minute, when Gary Elkins slung over a cross from the Town's right. Cork was left with plenty of time and space to knock down the header, and Andy Clarke drilled in a hard low drive from the edge of the box into the bottom corner of the net.

By that time it should have been 2-1 to the home side.

Off target

The Town had made the first opening, with Preece feeding Mark Pembroke down the left. He laid the ball back into space and Philip Gray volleyed over the bar.

The former Spurs man always looked the Town's best hope of nicking something, but was given nothing like the sort of support Cork received as he bobbed up and down to such good effect at the other end.

Wimbledon might have gone into the lead when Pembroke sliced a clearance attempt to let in Elkins, but he shot wide.

There was another let-off when Carlton Fairweather went down the left wing after

Jackson had been stranded upfield.

The quick cross was spot on, but Cork had to shoot wildly over the bar. It was the foreman of several more alarms as Wimbledon's defence and very simple set took command.

The Town defence lived dangerously, but survived without further first-half disasters.

We might have seen surprise equaliser three minutes before the break.

Preece played a delightful diagonal into the box, and Nogan was clear for a shot from the inside-right position, but he hit the side netting.

Holsgrove, on the right of midfield, and the ground where his father was a popular centre-half, was not allowed to enjoy his start in a league match.

Pace

I suspect the pace and power of it was much for him, despite a few elegant touches.

Telfer replaced him for the second half, and had a more attack-minded air about him.

But the quality football entertainment was dire as Wimbledon battered away without finding the finished touch.

They Fairweather, on the hour, stretched after twisting his knee a heavy fall on the turf, but even without him the Dons caused too much firepower to the Town.

Trevor Peake

Town match verdict ★★

FANS TURN AS POWER LAST WORD

Pictures: Josh Levy

Dreyer and Darron McDonough were all put under pressure they found hard to take, and a tackle later described by the manager as stupid led to Wimbledon scoring the goal that guaranteed the result in the 65th minute.

move involving Preece, Gray, Nogan and Telfer.

For a time the Town threatened to get the passing right, but not enough of the team had the accuracy that was wanted, and they were flattered to deceive.

Deflected

McDonough brought down Terry Phelan five yards outside the box. Warren Barton laid off the free kick short and square, and Vaughan Ryan let fly.

A deflection off the wall was enough to leave Alec Chamberlain helpless.

Five minutes later the Town got their first shot on target, Pembroke driving at Hans Segers from 20 yards, at the end of a good passing

Penalised

The formation was changed for the last 15 minutes, with Rodger sent on in place of Harvey, and partnering Peake, with Dreyer at left back.

Rodger was unlucky to concede a free kick with one of his first challenges. Mr. Pleat thought it was a fair one as he went wide to compete with Cork in the air.

If Wimbledon were lucky to get the verdict, their use of the free kick

was expert. Barton played it into the middle, and Cork and Paul McGee pulled away to confuse the Town defence. Ryan made a late run to dart into the space and power a header into the net.

Indignity

With the points wrapped up, and on a very hot afternoon, Wimbledon took their foot off the pedal after that. The Town wore a few pretty patterns which were worth little without any punch at the end of them.

Pembroke produced another long-range drive which was saved, but the final indignity for the Town followers was to hear laughter echoing around the ground at an attempted shot by McDonough from an obviously rehearsed free kick routine. The miscue was horrible, as had been too much of the Town's play.

The corner count was 16-0 to Wimbledon, and so did the rare sight of most of the Town's 350 fans turning their back on the team as the final whistle blew.

If they are not offered better performances soon, many more are likely to do the same.

Match details

WIMBLEDON 3 LUTON TN 0
Half-time: 1-0

TOWN: Chamberlain; Jackson, Peake, Dreyer, McDonough, Harvey (Rodger 75 mins); Holsgrove (Telfer HT), Preece, Pembroke; Gray, Nogan.

WIMBLEDON: Segers; Joseph, Scates, Fitzgerald, Elkins; Barton, Ryan, Phelan, Fairweather (McGee, 60 mins); Cork (Newhouse, 78 mins), Clarke.

THE GOALS: Andy Clarke, 23 minutes, crisp drive after Alan Cork beat the Town defence to head down a cross by Gary Elkins; Vaughan Ryan, 65 minutes, deflected drive from a short free kick conceded just outside the box by Darron McDonough; Ryan again, header after late run from deep to meet a free kick by Warren Barton.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town two saved, four wide; Wimbledon six saved and nine wide. Corners: 16-0 to Wimbledon.

BOOKED: Vaughan Ryan of Wimbledon for smashing the ball into the Luton dug-out; Graham Rodger, as sub, for reacting angrily.

REFEREE: Alan Bennett, Sheffield; enjoyed an easy afternoon, perhaps because it was so one-sided.

ATTENDANCE: 3,231, lowest-ever in the First Division. The previous record was 3,496 when the same teams met at Plough Lane in February last year.

ENTERTAINMENT: Grim for the 350 in the Luton end.

The season so far

THE TOWN'S record in the Barclays League First Division:

August		
17 West Ham (a) 0-0.....	25,079	—
21 Coventry (a) 0-5.....	10,084	—
24 Liverpool (h) 0-0.....	11,132	—
27 Arsenal (a) 0-2.....	25,898	21
31 Chelsea (a) 1-4 (Gray).....	17,457	22
September		
4 Southampton (h) 2-1 (Gray, Harvey).....	8,055	19
7 Wimbledon (a) 0-3.....	3,231	20

APPEARANCES, including as sub in brackets: Seven each by Chamberlain, Dreyer, Pembroke, Preece, and McDonough; Stein 6; Gray 5(2), Beaumont 5(1), Rodger 5(1), Harvey 5, Peake 4, Farrell 3(1), Jackson 2(2), Nogan 1(2), Glover 1, Holsgrove 1, Telfer (1), Black 4. Number of players used: 18. Last season's total: 21.

LEAGUE GOALS: Gray 2, Harvey 1.

Saints are seen off

COSTLY GOALS

THE WORST goal difference in the First Division leaves the Town back in the bottom three

relegation places of the First Division today. They had moved up to 19th with the home win

over Southampton in midweek.

The only consolation after conceding their 14th goal in five away games was that other struggling teams also dropped points.

But the minus 12 goals difference puts the Town a place below Southampton, who are also on five points from the first seven matches.

The Saints drew 2-2 on Saturday, at Loftus Road against QPR, who have not yet won a game. Rangers come to Kenilworth Road on Tuesday evening. They play at White Hart Lane on Saturday.

Sheffield United are, as a year ago, the slowest starters of all. Their record is two points from the first seven games after defeat at Oldham.

The First Division

	HOME					AWAY				
	P	W	D	L	F	P	W	D	L	F
Man Utd.....	7	3	1	0	7	1	2	1	0	3
Liverpool.....	6	3	0	0	6	1	1	1	3	13
Man City.....	7	3	0	0	7	1	1	2	2	13
Leeds.....	6	2	2	0	7	1	1	0	5	12
Chelsea.....	7	1	2	0	8	2	1	1	5	12
Coventry.....	7	2	0	2	8	1	1	1	4	10
Wimbledon.....	6	2	0	1	6	1	1	1	5	10
Sheff Wed.....	6	3	0	1	0	0	1	2	3	10
C. Palace.....	5	2	0	0	5	3	1	0	7	10
Tottenham.....	5	0	0	1	3	3	1	0	7	10
Oldham.....	7	3	1	0	9	0	0	3	2	6
Notts Co.....	7	2	0	2	4	1	1	1	4	10
Nottm For.....	7	2	0	1	6	1	0	3	6	9
A. Villa.....	7	1	2	3	3	1	1	1	5	8
Arsenal.....	7	2	1	1	6	0	1	2	4	8
Norwich.....	7	0	2	1	2	3	1	2	1	6
West Ham.....	7	1	2	1	4	0	1	2	1	7
Everton.....	7	1	3	0	6	0	0	3	7	6
So'ton.....	7	0	1	2	3	1	1	2	5	5
Luton Town.....	7	1	0	2	1	0	1	4	14	5
QPR.....	7	0	3	1	3	0	1	2	2	4
Sheff Utd.....	7	0	1	2	1	4	0	1	3	9

LUTON TOWN 2 SOUTHAMPTON 1

A team which might then have folded produced the perfect reply, with Philip Gray scoring his second of the season with a far post shot from a left wing cross by Pembroke.

Against ten men, with Southampton playing three centre-halves, and but for looked the better side, and but for goalkeeper Tim Flowers Glover and sub Kurt Nogan might easily have made the welcome victory even more decisive.

Match details

TOWN: Chamberlain; Jackson (Beaumont 85 mins), Peake, Dreyer, Harvey; Pembroke, McDonough, Preece; Stein, Gray, Glover (Nogan 74 mins).

SOUTHAMPTON: Flowers; Dodd, Hall, Ruddock, Adams; Lee (Benali 67 mins), Cockerill, Horne, Le Tissier; Shearer, Dowie. Other sub: Moody.

GOALS: Matthew Le Tissier penalty for Saints, 30 minutes, after David Preece tripped

Glen Cockerill; Philip Gray for the Town, 32 minutes, far post shot from Mark Pembroke's left wing cross; Richard Harvey for the Town, 40 minutes from a free kick routine worked by Preece and Pembroke following a foul which led to a red card for Richard Hall.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town four saved and four wide; Southampton four saved, two wide, and a free kick netted and disallowed because it was taken too quickly.

SENT OFF: Richard Hall for pulling back Philip Gray on a run for goal in the 39th minute.

BOOKED: The Town's Trevor Peake and Lee Glover for fouls; Ruddock for disputing his pal's red card.

REFEREE: Arthur Smith, Birmingham; the Town had no complaints, but Saints boss Ian Branfoot was furious over his belief that Peake should have gone the same way as Hall for the second-half foul that produced a yellow card. But Iain Dowie got away with a nasty challenge on David Preece which the ref and linesman missed.

ATTENDANCE: 8,055, lowest for a league match at Kenilworth Road since Sheffield Wednesday's visit in March 1989.

ENTERTAINMENT: Just what we wanted after the very poor first half-hour. The result was right, and the bonus was a top class debut by 19-year-old right back Matthew Jackson.



● **SEA OF SEATS:** Kurt Nogan faces John Scates in a picture which illustrates unreal atmosphere of a near-deserted ground.



ODETERMINATION: Mark Pembroke on the ball.

Former boss enjoys beating his old club

RAY HARFORD smiled when he was asked after the match if he had been disappointed at the poor display put up by his former club.

"Not at all... I was delighted. Usually we struggle to get points early in the season, so everything we get now is a real bonus. My only disappointment was that we missed a lot of chances."

Flat atmosphere

"No-one" can doubt that the result was right. The atmosphere in the ground was flat, but we never relented."

David Pleat searched for the bright spots, and came up with

Managers' viewpoints

praise for youngsters Paul Telfer and Matthew Jackson. He would not respond to suggestions that the defeat was self-inflicted, through unforced errors. But he admitted: "Wimbledon were better than us, and stronger."

He added: "We have got three or four players coming through, but I have got to get more. Our team is either too young, or not strong enough - not enough power. And there is not enough passing ability in it."

Brian Stein, who missed the game because of a knee injury, agrees with the boss about

today's growing accent on power.

He said that in the three years since he left, he has noticed a change in league football.

He finds it a tougher, more physical game, with fewer and fewer teams opting to play the way he believes football should be played.

Too physical

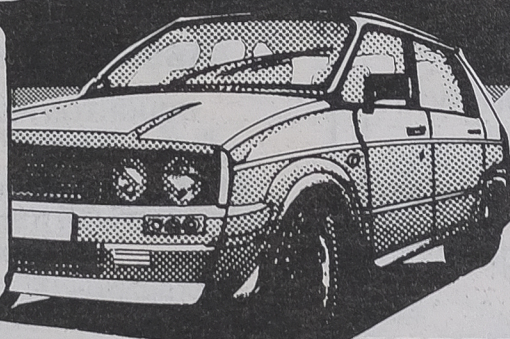
"I can't believe how many sides are more concerned with physical power and strength rather than playing to feet," he said.

"Teams are compressing the midfield, and it is hard for real footballers to play the ball there. I can't help wondering if that's what crowds really want to see."

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