

Sports News

PROMISE OF DAYS SHINES THE

FOR THE first time in weeks, and despite the stupid result, Luton Town fans at last saw real signs at White Hart Lane that there is enough quality in the side to beat the odds against relegation, despite dropping to bottom place in the table on Sunday when Sheffield United overhauled them.

Sure the old bugbear of playing well for an hour and then caving in returned like a nightmare, but this time it was different.

The performance in that first hour was the best by the Town this season, and Spurs were very grateful to be only one goal down.

They were reduced to a nervous shambles as the Town turned on smart football that cut through them with astonishing regularity.

Lights out

As the watch ticked towards 59 minutes I was already mentally writing this report: it was going to be a work of sheer delight, a wallow in the pleasure of the Town's first five-star

Reports: Brian Swain. Pictures: Josh Levy

show for a long time.

Then the lights of the West Stand went out, a minute after a worried Spurs manager had sent on both his subs. "I had to do something — we were dead," Peter Shreeves admitted later.

"Cheat, cheat, cheat," chanted the Luton fans as the gloom hid the embarrassment of Tottenham.

The ref had no choice but to halt the game while Spurs went to find a bob for the meter.

When the match

resumed after 16 minutes the change was heartbreaking for the Town and their fans.

A top quality goal five minutes after the restart by an Arlesley lad David Pleat signed for Spurs four years ago was bad enough.

A second by Gary Lineker two minutes later was the killer, and the two lucky goals that followed made it a poor taste bad joke result.

But at least we saw that the rebuilt team, despite the injury absences of Ceri

Hughes, Phil Gray and David Preece, is capable of producing the sort of football worth a place of considerable safety in the First Division.

The hard thing might be to reproduce it in every game, but the skill and application is there, for sure.

Doubts

Doubts still remain about the defence. When the Town bossed the first hour they were very comfortable, with Trevor Peake and John Dreyer playing Lineker

and Paul Walsh with great ease.

The midfield tackling of Chris Kamara was one of the reasons, and with Des Linton and Richard Harvey making hot and cold in earlier games, found space to use his speed to very good effect.

His clever chipped pass led to the first clear chance of the day. It was perfectly placed into the path of Pembroke, in the inside left channel. He set up Harford, who was in the clear, but drew the shot inches wide of the far post.

Saves

Goalkeeper Erik Thorstvedt saved twice in the first three minutes when Mick Harford caused panic in

the box, with Paul Telfer and Scott Oakes nearly cashing in.

Pembroke starred as the chief back-up forward, and Telfer was an effective midfielder on the right.

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Lucky

It was one-way traffic, and Steve Sedgley was lucky when a driven free kick by Oakes deflected off his head round the post when it might easily have been an own goal.

Brian Stein rose to the day's challenge as well as anyone. Intelligent positioning and running off the ball helped to create space and ever-growing nervousness in the Spurs defence. He also did a lot of good work in the air with flicked headers taking out Spurs defenders.

My only worry as half-time approached was that so much good work by the Town had failed to produce goals.

One up

But with 43 minutes gone, that fear eased.

Harford rose into the air magnificently to flick on a punted clearance by Alec Chamberlain to send Stein scampering through in the inside right position. Gudni Bergsson made a hash of a tackle and attempted back pass, and Stein waited for Thorstvedt to advance before squaring a pass that was easy for Harford to convert, faced by an empty net from 12 yards.

The London Press corps, who never want upstarts like the Town to do well, were scratching their heads and asking how on earth Luton could be second from bottom of the league table if this was how they played football.

Pattern

The Town kept up their pattern when the second half resumed, but Spurs improved a little.

Nayim and Scott Houghton were sent on in place of David Howells and Paul Allen, to stretch things sideways. A minute later the lights failed, and when they were switched on the game was stood on its head.

Quick

Walsh, another man Mr. Pleat once signed, and now playing for his place as deputy for suspended Gordon Durie, went on a marvellous run from midfield.

He was too quick for Peake, and also sped past Linton before crossing hard and low. Houghton, racing in on the blind side, netted after his first shot was blocked by Chamberlain.

The goal galvanised Spurs and their fans, and two minutes later Vinny Samways also got past Linton, who had been excellent until then, and crossed to the near post for Lineker to put Spurs ahead.

You knew then that the fates had once more decided to dump cruel misfortune on the Town, and the third goal was a real freak.

Luckless

Houghton whacked in a 35-yarder from well outside the angle of the penalty area. It looked like a badly-placed cross, but luckless Chamberlain had got into position to deal with a high centre and was beaten as the ball swung into the net between him and the near post.

To compound the agony of three goals in seven minutes, Lineker got his 19th of the season in the 83rd minute, almost unwittingly as a shot by Walsh was blocked by Chamberlain but bounced in off Lineker's leg.

At the other end, as the Town still looked capable of pulling something back, the shots were deflected to

the wrong side of the woodwork. Perhaps that's how luck goes when you're down.

But if the Town can turn the White Hart Lane 60-minute show into an hour and a half consistently, the climb up the league table will not be long delayed.

MATCH DETAILS

TOTTENHAM 4 LUTON T. 1 (Half-time: 0-1)

TOWN: Chamberlain; Linton (Nogan 78 mins), Peake, Dreyer, Harvey; Telfer, Kamara, Pembroke, Oakes; Stein, Harford. Other sub: James.

SPURS: Thorstvedt; Van den Hauwe, Bergsson, Mabbutt, Edinburgh; Allen (Houghton 58 mins), Sedgley, Samways, Howells (Nayim 58 mins); Walsh, Lineker.

THE GOALS: Mick Harford for the Town, 43rd minute, after good work by him and Brian Stein; Scott Houghton for Tottenham after a brilliant run down the left and low cross by Paul Walsh in the 68th minute, nine minutes after play resumed following a 16-minute interruption caused by a floodlight failure; Gary Lineker, 70th minute, from Vinny Samways left wing cross; Houghton again, 75 mins, 35-yard effort which looked an attempted centre but crept into the net between Alec Chamberlain and his near post; Lineker again, 83 mins, in the right place when Chamberlain parried a shot by Walsh — the ball bounced back into the net off Lineker's leg.

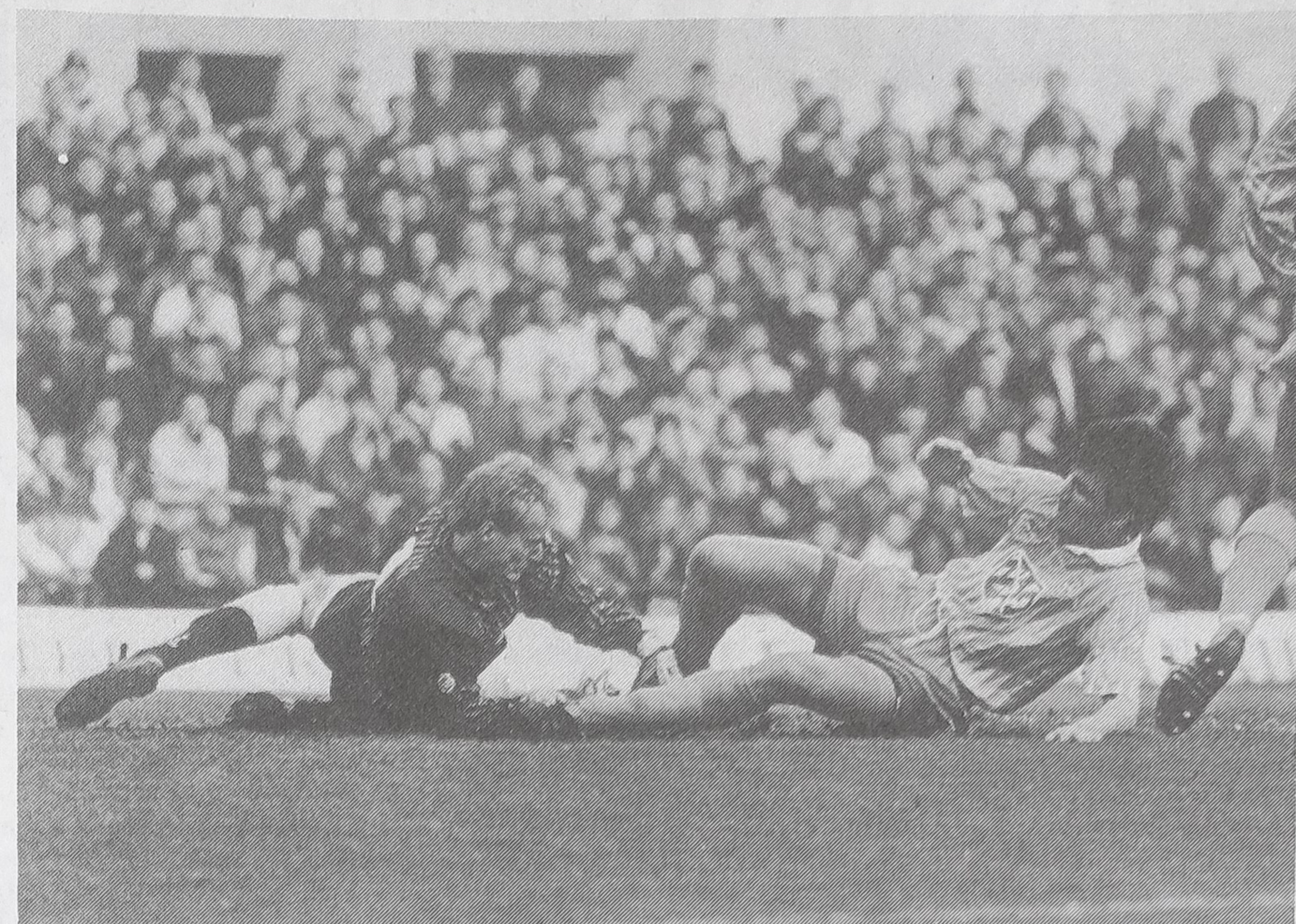
OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town ten saved and eight wide; Spurs eight saved and seven wide. Corners: 4-2 to Spurs.

REFEREE: David Frampton, Dorset; played well, but the Town thought he was too quick with the book.

CAUTIONED: Mick Harford for a three-minute foul on Howells; Gudni Bergsson of Spurs for dissent.

ATTENDANCE: 27,543, White Hart Lane's lowest league gate of the season so far.

ENTERTAINMENT: An unbelievable mixture: the Town's best football of the season played Spurs off the Park for nearly an hour. Then half the floodlights went out, and after a 16-minute delay Spurs, with both subs on to add width to midfield, were transformed and unstoppable. But the margin of their victory was a massive injustice.



● **CLOSE:** Mick Harford, the Town's man of the match, gets into the danger zone to force Erik Thorstvedt to another desperate save.

Lights failure a vital factor

CONVINCED THAT his men would have achieved their first away win of the season but for the blackout interruption, David Pleat was encouraged by the Town's performance at White Hart Lane.

"I was feeling pretty confident until the lights went out," he said.

Praise for fans

He paid tribute to the way Town fans kept backing the team throughout, and added: "My message to them is this: keep faith. Don't despair. We are building a good team. But along the way we are going to have some setbacks."

He thought the crunch came when Spurs scored their second goal so quickly after the first.

"If we could have held it at 1-1 we were playing well enough to get back into the game," he said.

"We still believed that at 2-1, and were still going forward."

The boss added that he had seen enough in the early part of the game to be optimistic about better days ahead.

But the Spurs decision to throw on both subs and make more use of the flanks had been important.

Nayim and Houghton had opened things up with more early crosses.

The sudden surge of form Paul Walsh found was also crucial in turning the match against his old team.

Houghton, 20, born at Hitchin, was known to the Town when he was a schoolboy. Mr. Pleat moved to White Hart Lane the year the lad left school, and persuaded his Arsenal-mad parents to let him join Spurs instead of the Gunners.

"I wish I had signed him for Luton!" said the boss.

Gary Lineker admitted that until the lights went out Luton were by far the better side, and had made Spurs look 'really diabolical.'

Better side

And Peter Shreeves, the Tottenham manager, said: "Football can be a very hard game. Luton were the better side for the first hour, until the lights went out."

"You have to feel for Luton. It's hard to understand how they could play so well and lose 4-1."



● **FOILED:** Paul Telfer close to giving the Town the lead in the opening minutes, but thwarted by Spurs goalkeeper Erik Thorstvedt.



● **CHASE:** Brian Stein, always bright and alert at White Hart Lane, gets past David Howells.

The First Division

	HOME					AWAY				
	P	W	D	L	F	P	W	D	L	F
Leeds	16	6	2	0	15	6	3	4	1	8
Man Utd.	15	5	3	0	15	2	4	2	1	8
Man City	16	4	1	3	11	0	5	1	2	11
Aston Villa	16	5	1	2	13	5	4	1	2	13
C Palace	15	4	2	1	12	12	4	1	2	14
Arsenal	15	5	1	2	16	9	2	3	2	14
Sheff Wed	16	6	1	1	19	9	1	3	4	7
Norwich City	16	3	4	1	8	6	2	4	5	9
Everton	16	4	3	1	14	7	2	1	5	10
Chelsea	16	2	4	2	14	13	3	3	2	10
Liverpool	14	4	2	1	10	6	4	2	2	14
Tottenham	13	2	0	3	8	7	2	1	5	11
Nottm F	15	4	1	2	14	12	1	1	4	5
Coventry	16	4	1	4	11	6	2	1	4	10
West Ham	16	2	2	3	7	8	2	4	2	10
Wimbledon	16	4	1	3	14	10	1	2	5	8
Notts Co	16	3	1	4	11	16	1	0	6	12
Oldham	15	3	4	1	15	11	2	4	0	13
QPR	16	1	4	3	8	11	2	2	4	9
Southampton	16	1	2	5	4	16	0	1	7	12
Sheff Utd	16	3	2	3	10	10	0	1	8	2
Luton Town	16	2	3	2	7	7	0	1	8	2

THE SEASON SO FAR

THE TOWN'S record in league and cup competitions to date:

Barclays League Div One

Results, Town scorers, attendances and league position:	
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
14 Oldham (h) 2-1 (Harford 2)	9,005 17
17 QPR (h) 0-1	9,185 19
21 Man Utd (a) 0-5	46,491 21
24 Notts Co (h) 1-1 (Gray)	7,629 20
October	
5 A. Villa (a) 0-4	18,722 21
19 Sheff Wed (h) 2-2 (Harford, Nogan)	9,401 21
25 Norwich (a) 0-1	10,514 21
November	
2 Everton (h) 0-1	8,002 21
16 Tottenham (a) 1-4 (Harford)	27,543 22

6(3), Thompson 5, Black 4, Holsgrave 1, Glover 1.

Number of players used: 26, five more than last season's total.

LEAGUE GOALS: Harford 4, Gray 3, Harvey 1, Nogan 1.

The Rumbelows Cup

Round 2(1):	
September	
25 Birmingham (h) 2-2 (Gray, Nogan)	6,315
Round 2(2):	
October	
9 Birmingham (a) 2-3 (Gray 2)	13,252

APPEARANCES, including as sub in brackets: Two each by Chamberlain, Jackson, Beaumont, Pembroke, Thompson, Preece, Telfer and Gray 2, Stein 1(1). One each by Peake, Harvey, Dreyer, Rodger and Harford. Nogan (2), Salton (1).

GOALS: Gray 3, Nogan 1.

Zenith Data Systems Cup

Rd 2: Oct 22 Ipswich (a) 1-1 Telfer (lost on pens) 5,750

APPEARANCES, including as sub in brackets: one each by Chamberlain, Telfer, Rodger, Salton, Allpress, Pembroke, Chamberlain, Telfer, Rodger, Salton, Allpress, Pembroke, Nogan, James, Hughes, Williams and Harford. One each as sub: Rees and Campbell.



● **FLYING WINGER:** Scott Oakes, who had his best game yet on his third appearance for the Town, is too quick for Vinny Samways.