# Sports News

● HANDY CHALLENGE: Mick Harford gets airborne despite the crafty arm over the shoulder by Neil Ruddock.

# POWERLESS BREAKS PUT

## By Sports Editor Brian Swain

SHORT of the pace and power needed to build on a good start, Luton Town came home from Southampton smarting from an agonising defeat which owed much to controversial decisions by the referee.

Both sides knew Clive Wilkes was horribly wrong to allow Southampton's late winner, which should have been ruled out on two counts.

But the Town will also reflect on a recurring problem this season: even when they go ahead they rarely take the game by the scruff of the neck and impose themselves enough.

Instead their fans are on edge, fearful of one break, one bad bounce, or one dodgy decision.

Only twice all season have we seen a two-goal lead established to take pressure off a team that must know one is not enough.

### Boardroom

Perhaps the pressure can only be lifted by the certainty of relegation.

But that would be tragic. On football skill the Town have every right to a place in the Premier League. But they look like forfeiting it through failure to deliver the coupe de grace when opponents are groggy.

And that is something the boardroom should think about as well. David Pleat is aware of the shortages in the playing staff, and has to wait in frustration while the saga of control and re-financing drags on.

His players give him everything they can, but at Southampton the deficiencies were all too clear.

Most important is the lack of pace in attack, which restricts options when the team is going forward.

And at The Dell, well though Jason Rees and Daivd Preece played, no-one was able to get round the back of a muscular no-nonsense defence.

### Lucky

It was not a bad Town performance, and Southampton knew they were lucky to win.

But nor was it a day when the Town hit the vein of flowing form they are capable of.

Despite Mr. Pleat's efforts to make us believe otherwise, it was like a nerve-tingling cup-tie, a real six-pointer.

Without Phil Gray, Paul Telfer and Scott Oakes, the Town hit more trouble when Julian James was floored by Barry Horne after six minutes. He went off for treatment for double vision and a cracked cheekbone, and it was a miracle that he returned and did so well before being subbed.

Chris Kamara dropped into the right back slot, but that in turn reduced the physical strength of a small midfield on a day when Southampton got by with power and pace rather than skill.

### Stick

The Saints were behaving themselves after getting a lot of stick from a bruising FA Cup clash at Norwich in midweek, when they had two men sent off.

Ian Branfoot was stung by the criticism, and it was ironic that in his programme column he had a moan about refs, complaining about amateurs controlling a professional game.

By the end of the afternoon he was cheerfully agreeing that Mr. Wilkes was doubly wrong to allow Southampton's winner. But he didn't care, he added.

Mr. Branfoot had left out Matthew Le Tissier to bring back Michael Gilkes, his Simod Cup final star for Reading at Wembley in 1988.

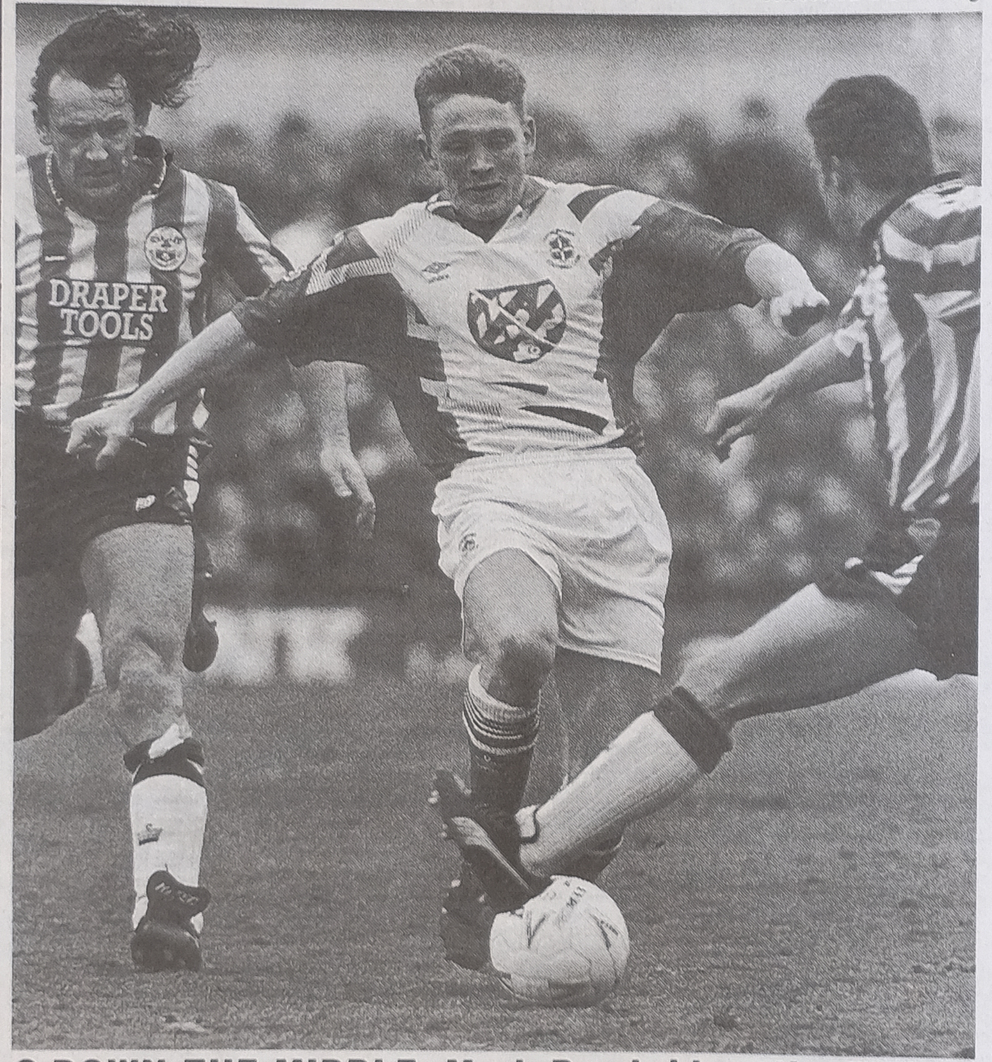
Gilkes could not do similar damage this time, with James, Kamara and later Jason Rees all handling him well.

Richard Harvey and Preece linked well on the left, and battling Mark Pembridge came though a bruising and testing time against Terry Hurlock and Glenn Cockerill.

John Dreyer and Trevor Peake are doing just about everything asked of them, but once more they were put under pressure much more than their opposite numbers.

### Unhappy

Mick Harford and Brian Stein are going through an unhappy spell, with Stein's deft touches and nimble brain now lacking the extra ingredient of pace.



● DOWN THE MIDDLE: Mark Pembridge, the Town's goalscorer, forges through midfield in competiton with two Southampton players.

## THE MATCH DETAILS

**SOUTHAMPTON 2 LUTON TN 1**
**(Half-time: 0-1)**

**TOWN:** Day; James (Hughes 58 mins), Dreyer, Peake, Harvey; Rees, Kamara, Pembridge, Preece; Stein (Williams 83 mins), Harford.

**SAINTS:** Flowers; Kenna, Moore, Ruddock, Benali; Cockerill, Hurlock, Horne (Powell, 56 mins), Gilkes; Dowie, Shearer. Other sub: Maddison.

**THE GOALS:** Mark Pembridge for the Town, 43 seconds, 25-yard free kick bent into the top corner; Alan Shearer for the Saints, 68 minutes, header from a corner after Mervyn Day had been penalised for carrying the ball outside his area; Iain Dowie for Southampton, 80 minutes, after Shearer's high challenge unsettled Day, with Shearer then offside as Dowie netted.

**OTHER ATTEMPTS:** Town four saved and six wide; Southampton five saved, three wide, and one hit a post, leading to a corner from which they scored. Corners: 3-3.

**REFEREE:** Clive Wilkes, Gloucester. Pity he had to have a bad day for such an important match.

**BOOKED:** Mick Harford for turning his back as the goalkeeper cleared; John Dreyer for a foul on Barry Horne; Mark Pembridge for a foul on Lee Powell; Mervyn Day, Ceri Hughes and Iain Dowie all for dissent by word or action.

**ATTENDANCE:** 15,315, the Dell's highest in the league since new year's day, with the Luton fans doing their very best to lift the Town.

**ENTERTAINMENT:** Wretched for the visitors, with little going right after the brilliant early strike by Pembridge. A second could have made it an away day to remember. The inept ref didn't help, and even Saints boss Ian Branfoot agreed the winner should have been ruled out on two counts, a foul and offside.

## The First Division

| | | HOME | | | | | AWAY | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | P | W | D | L | F | A | W | D | L | F | A | P |
| Leeds | 35 | 10 | 7 | 0 | 32 | 13 | 8 | 7 | 3 | 33 | 18 | 68 |
| Man United | 33 | 10 | 6 | 1 | 28 | 9 | 8 | 6 | 2 | 25 | 15 | 66 |
| Sheff Wed | 34 | 11 | 4 | 3 | 35 | 24 | 6 | 5 | 5 | 19 | 21 | 60 |
| Liverpool | 33 | 11 | 4 | 2 | 26 | 14 | 3 | 9 | 4 | 12 | 15 | 55 |
| Man City | 34 | 10 | 3 | 4 | 24 | 14 | 5 | 5 | 7 | 21 | 28 | 53 |
| Arsenal | 33 | 9 | 6 | 2 | 35 | 17 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 21 | 20 | 51 |
| Nottm Forest | 32 | 9 | 5 | 3 | 32 | 23 | 4 | 3 | 8 | 17 | 19 | 47 |
| Everton | 35 | 7 | 8 | 2 | 25 | 13 | 4 | 5 | 9 | 20 | 27 | 46 |
| QPR | 35 | 4 | 9 | 4 | 21 | 18 | 6 | 7 | 5 | 20 | 21 | 46 |
| C. Palace | 35 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 21 | 24 | 5 | 7 | 5 | 23 | 29 | 46 |
| Chelsea | 35 | 5 | 7 | 6 | 26 | 27 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 17 | 22 | 45 |
| Aston Villa | 34 | 9 | 2 | 5 | 23 | 14 | 3 | 6 | 9 | 12 | 22 | 44 |
| Norwich City | 34 | 8 | 5 | 4 | 26 | 20 | 3 | 6 | 8 | 18 | 27 | 44 |
| Wimbledon | 34 | 8 | 5 | 4 | 25 | 16 | 2 | 8 | 7 | 14 | 25 | 43 |
| Oldham | 35 | 8 | 5 | 4 | 35 | 30 | 3 | 3 | 12 | 17 | 28 | 41 |
| Coventry | 34 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 17 | 13 | 5 | 4 | 8 | 14 | 20 | 40 |
| Sheff Utd | 33 | 6 | 5 | 5 | 20 | 19 | 5 | 2 | 10 | 30 | 35 | 40 |
| Southampton | 33 | 5 | 5 | 7 | 14 | 25 | 4 | 5 | 7 | 18 | 21 | 37 |
| Tottenham | 32 | 4 | 2 | 10 | 18 | 22 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 20 | 21 | 36 |
| Luton Town | 35 | 7 | 6 | 4 | 18 | 14 | 0 | 5 | 13 | 10 | 45 | 32 |
| Notts Co | 34 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 18 | 20 | 2 | 5 | 11 | 15 | 27 | 31 |
| West Ham | 32 | 3 | 6 | 7 | 14 | 21 | 3 | 4 | 9 | 14 | 27 | 28 |

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## Town match verdict ★★★

# AS THE BAD THE BOOT IN

## Action pictures by Josh Levy

"It's three years short," was Mr. Pleat's sad way of agreeing with that.

And it is not a moan about a player who has graced the First Division for so long, served Luton Town brilliantly, and still gives everything he can.

### Free kick

When the attacking spearhead is a little blunt, goals have to be supplied from other departments.

Pembridge responded with a tremendous free kick to give the Town a marvellous start.

The Pressbox was full of laughter when Southampton took all of seven seconds to commit the day's first foul, by Kevin Moore on Stein 25 yards from goal.

By the time the wall was assembled and pushed back by the ref, 43 seconds had ticked by as Stein dummied to take the kick, with Kamara standing in front of the ball to hide it from the defence's view.

In a similar position at Everton Pembridge had shot against the bar to give Stein a goal from the rebound. This time the Welsh midfielder curled in a perfect shot, into the top corner beyond the right hand of Tim Flowers.

The Saints, as desperate for points as the Town, were reeling for some time after that. And it took a quality save by Flowers to stop Pembridge doing him again from a similar free kick. This time the shot went to the top left hand corner, but Flowers tipped it away.

### Settled

The Town settled down to a controlled passing game to take the sting out of the more rugged and frantic Southampton attacks, and both goals had narrow first-half escapes.

Alan Shearer headed wide when he should have scored from a right wing cross by fullback Jeff Kenna.

Pembridge was also off target with a volley when he got through from a long punted clearance by Mervyn Day.

Preece curled a 25-yarder just over the bar, and Peake made a good block-tackle when Shearer found a little space in the penalty area.

### Nerves

At half-time, with the lead intact and Southampton nerves showing, there was every reason to hope the Town would clinch that elusive first away win for a year.

Southampton had to find more than they had produced in the first half to turn things round, and the referee and linesman did it for them.

Strident claims for a penalty had been turned down when Iain Dowie fell over Pembridge on the edge of the box, and Day rescued the Town with a good block when Dreyer's slip let in Shearer.

The Saints had upped the pace and power without threatening to take command until the 68th-minute boost that came courtesy of a linesman.

### Routine

Day disputes that in making a routine clearance he carried the ball over the penalty area line. But the linesman was in the right position to judge, and signalled the offence, and Mr. Wilkes had no option but to give the free kick.

I can only report that Day was very close to the line, as he usually is when he launches big clearances deep into the other half of the pitch.

The free kick was touched off and Neil Ruddock's shot hit the post before the Town conceded a corner from the ensuing scramble.

Lee Powell, sub for Horne, took it from the left, and Day believes he was fouled as he missed making contact. Shearer headed in, and suddenly you feared for the Town.

The circumstances of a goal can often be a bigger blow than the goal itself, and this was one of those occasions.

But the Town settled again to soak up the muscular challenge, and were on their way to a point until the ref made a real boob with ten minutes to go.

### Foot up

A long free kick down the middle by Francis Benali somehow got all the way to Day. Shearer followed in, raised his foot high in front of Day, and a free kick seemed inevitable.

It was not given, Day was unable to hold the ball, and Dowie scored against his old mates. He realised that by then Shearer was offside, on the goal-line, and the celebration jig was delayed for a second or two until Dowie realised that the goal had been given.

Mr. Wilkes played five minutes of injury time, during which Day tipped over a drive by Shearer and Harford's best shot of the match was well saved by Flowers.

### Bookings

But it was never going to be Harford's day. Earlier he had collected another booking, a real joke job, for standing with his back to Flowers as a clearance was hit at him. "He was booked for being on the pitch," was one neutral Pressman's comment.

The other five yellow cards waved by Mr. Wilkes should not be allowed to label the game as dirty.

It was hard and in the end too fast for the Town, but the only cautions for fouls went to Pembridge and Dreyer, and they were nothing worse than mistimed tackles.

### Speechless

Day, Hughes and Dowie were cautioned for dissent, with Day's the unusual one: he made a public protest over the free kick goal by running to the centre circle, but he insisted that he did not say a word to the ref.

I know how he felt: it was hard not to be speechless at the cruel fate the Town suffered at The Dell.

## Winger's debut

**MARTIN WILLIAMS, 19, a former Challney High School boy, became the 31st player used by the Town in the First Division this season when he went on for his league debut as sub for Brian Stein for the last seven minutes at Southampton.**

# A manager who didn't give a cuss

**SOUTHAMPTON MANAGER Ian Branfoot had the good grace to admit that his team's controversial winner should have been ruled out.**

**He agreed that Alan Shearer was guilty of dangerous play when he raised his foot high in a challenge on Mervyn Day, and was then in an offside position when Iain Dowie netted. But on a day when he thought the result was all-important, he added crudely: "I don't give a f***."**

**Day was furious about both Southampton goals.**

**He disputed the linesman's decision that he had carried the ball outside his area to concede a vital free kick. And he added that when the corner came over, he missed the ball because he was fouled before Shearer netted.**

### Dissent by deed

**He had not said a word to the ref when he demonstrated his displeasure by running upfield before the game could be restarted. But David Pleat agreed that it could be seen as dissent by action.**

**Day was angered again by the winner, seeing it as everyone in the ground did, with the exception of the referee, Clive Wilkes.**

**The Town manager gave a remarkably relaxed performance in the Pressroom.**

**He said everyone connected with Luton felt shattered by what had happened, but he concentrated on his hopes of a brighter future for Luton Town because of the talent on its way up through the ranks.**

**He was careful in his response to questions about the part played by the ref in the Town's downfall.**

**"I feel for our lads," he said. "I thought we played some good football in the first half.**

**"I wasn't too worried at half-time, although Southampton came with a bit of a surge in the second half."**

**The injury to Julian James had resulted in less strength in midfield, when Chris Kamara had to go to right back.**

**Hughes, Rees, Pembridge and Preece were four lightweights up against stronger and more powerful opponents, and Cockerill and Hurlock began to impose themselves.**

### The things they said...

**Mr. Pleat said he believed linesmen and referees were honest. But on the Day handball incident, he said: "It is unusual for a linesman to prosecute a goalkeeper for that unless he has had a word with him first."**

**Asked about the winning goal, unanimously seen as a ref's mistake, Mr. Pleat said: "We are determined not to feel sorry for ourselves. We have got seven games to go, and bigger clubs than us have lost today."**

### Offside on the line

**"We can't dispute the winning goal because it was given. But Shearer was in an offside position on the line and the question is was he interfering with play?**

**"We thought he was. He was on the goal-line. And our goalkeeper was impeded by a foot-up by Shearer.**

**"We have been the victims of two unfortunate decisions. But it's spilt milk..."**

**Too often this season, said the Town boss, his side play good football in front of the opposition, but are short of pace. "Then when the other team comes for us, and tries to mug us, in the nicest possible way, we can't push the ball over the top.**

**"Harford and Stein can't outpace their defence, so we are reluctant to play that ball."**

# The season so far

● Results showing Town score first, home and away, Town scorers, attendances and league position:

## Barclays League Div One

### 1991

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **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 |
| 28 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 |
| 26 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 |
| 23 Man City (h) 2-2 (Harford, Dreyer) | 10,031 | 22 |
| 30 Sheff Utd (a) 1-1 (Telfer) | 21,804 | 22 |
| **DECEMBER** | | |
| 7 Leeds (h) 0-2 | 11,550 | 22 |
| 20 Coventry (h) 1-0 (Harford) | 7,533 | 22 |
| 26 Arsenal (h) 1-0 (Harford) | 12,655 | 22 |
| 28 Chelsea (h) 2-0 (Harford, Dreyer pen) | 10,738 | 20 |

### 1992

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **JANUARY** | | |
| 1 Nottm Forest (a) 1-1 (Pembridge) | 23,809 | 19 |
| 11 Liverpool (a) 1-2 (OG Tanner) | 35,095 | 20 |
| 18 West Ham (h) 0-1 | 11,088 | 22 |
| **FEBRUARY** | | |
| 1 Sheff Wed (a) 2-3 (Preece, Oakes) | 22,281 | 22 |
| 8 Norwich (h) 2-0 (Preece, Harford) | 8,554 | 21 |
| 15 Man City (a) 0-4 | 22,137 | 21 |
| 22 Sheff Utd (h) 2-1 (Stein, Harford) | 9,003 | 20 |
| 25 C. Palace (a) 1-1 (Pembridge pen) | 12,109 | 20 |
| 29 Leeds (a) 0-2 | 28,231 | 20 |
| **MARCH** | | |
| 7 C. Palace (h) 1-1 (Oakes) | 8,591 | 19 |
| 11 Tottenham (h) 0-0 | 11,494 | 20 |
| 14 Everton (a) 1-1 (Stein) | 16,707 | 19 |
| 21 Southampton (a) 1-2 (Pembridge) | 15,315 | 20 |

APPEARANCES (as sub in brackets): Ever-presents, 35 each, Dreyer and Pembridge; Peake 31, Stein 27(5), Preece 27(4), Harvey 26(1), Harford 22, James 21, Kamara 21, Telfer 17(3), Chamberlain 17, Oakes 11(6), Gray 9(2), Hughes 6(9), Nogan 6(8), Campbell 4(7), Day 4, Rees 3, Linton 2(1), Salton (1), Williams (1).

Before transfers: Sutton 14 (loan), Rodger 11(1), McDonough 9, Jackson 7(2), Beaumont 6(3), Thompson 5, Black 4, Farrell 3(1), Holsgrove 1, Glover 1 (loan).

Number of players used: 31, ten more than last season.

LEAGUE GOALS: Harford 9, Pembridge 3(1 pen), Gray 3, Dreyer 2(1 pen), Harvey 2, Preece 2, Oakes 2, Stein 2, Nogan 1, Telfer 1, OG 1 (Tanner, Liverpool).

## FA CUP, THIRD ROUND

Jan 4 Sheff Utd (a) 0-4 .......... 12,201

APPEARANCES: One each by Chamberlain, James, Peake, Dreyer, Harvey, Telfer, Kamara, Pembridge, Preece, Oakes and Stein. One as sub by Campbell.

## THE RUMBELOWS CUP

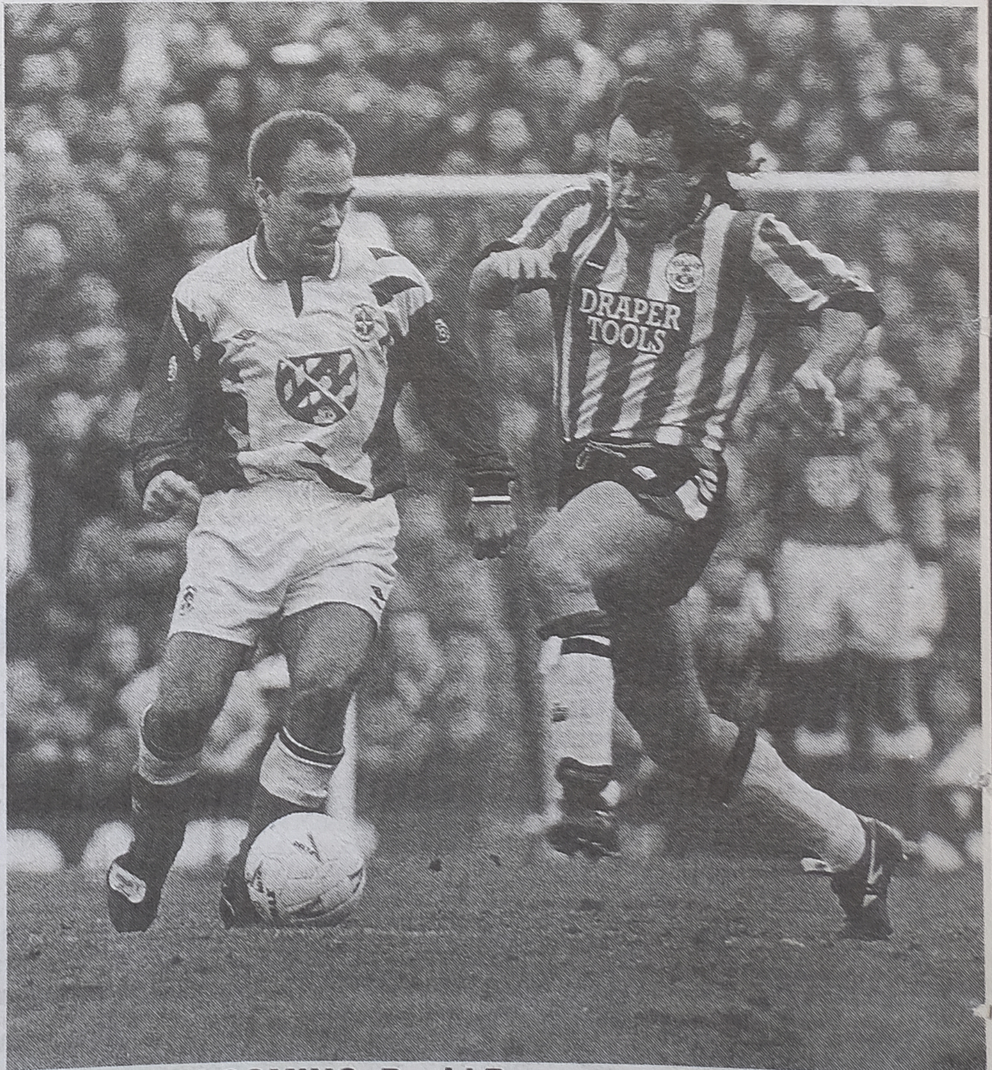
Rd 2(1) Sep 25: Birmingham (h) 2-2 (Gray, Nogan) .......... 6,315
Rd 2(2) Oct 9: Birmingham (a) 2-3 (Gray 2) .......... 13,252

APPEARANCES: Two each by Chamberlain, Jackson, Preece, Beaumont, Pembridge, Thompson, Telfer and Gray. Stein 1(1). One each by Peake, Harvey, Dreyer, Rodger and Harford. Nogan two as sub. Salton one as sub.

## Zenith Data Systems Cup

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

APPEARANCES: One each by Chamberlain, Telfer, Rodger, Salton, Allpress, Pembridge, Nogan, James, Hughes, Williams and Harford. One each as sub: Rees and Campbell.



● CRUNCH COMING: David Preece on the ball, with Terry Hurlock about to launch a tackle.