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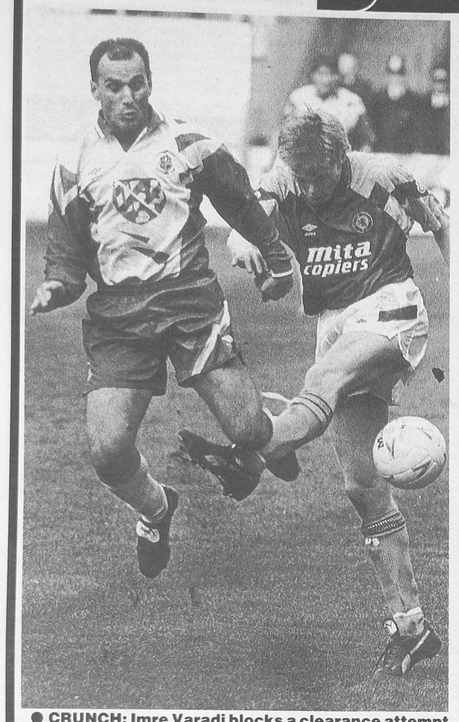
Sports News



● CRUNCH: Imre Varadi blocks a clearance attempt by Steve Staunton in a spell of late pressure as the Town looked for a third goal.

VILLA SEEN SCENE FOR LAST GAME

By Sports Editor Brian Swain

THE miracle workers of Luton Town have set the scene for another incredible last day of the season.

They wound up the home campaign with a crucial victory against Aston Villa.

Defied

It defied all the odds, because on a day when there was every reason for their nerves to be wound up to breaking point the all-round team performance was composed and very confident.

We didn't even suffer the last-quarter nerves that have cost so dear in earlier games.

It is a pity that the away results have left the Town still needing to hope for a helping hand if Saturday is to bring delight instead of despair.

And it is ironic that it should be Aston Villa we rely on to do the business against Coventry.

Ability

I only hope they play with a lot more fire and ability than they were allowed to show at Kenilworth Road.

They were second best by a long way on a day when every Town man buried his nerves, kept his cool, and did what was required.

It very nearly became a stroll, with Villa lucky to go home without suffering a real pasting.

But for two blinding saves by 20-year-old debut goalkeeper Mark Bosnich, Mick Harford and Mark Pembridge would have had first-half goals to add to the beauty Brian Stein headed in before the game was ten minutes old.

Tonic

That early strike to settle the nerves was a real tonic.

So was the cracker Pembridge lashed in three minutes into the second half.

The other bonus at a club where stars have to be reared to be sold was the full debut of Darren Salton.

The 20-year-old Scot came in because Richard Harvey was ruled out by injury.

He played alongside Trevor Peake, with John Dreyer going to left back, and the rearguard was much too strong for Cyrille Regis and Ian Olney.

Worthy

An early tackle to rob Regis set up Salton for a debut worthy of his growing talent.

His only worrying moment was when he slid in to bring down Tony Daley, but Villa's half-hearted penalty appeals were turned down.

The nice part of the day was the way the Town stuck to their game plan despite the pressure.

Pembridge stamped his style on things throughout, and while he was the man of the match David Pleat was right to remind the Pressroom that Chris Kamara and David Preece also played their parts in giving the Town the upper hand against a strangely static Villa midfield.

Contender

Another of the many contenders for man of the match honours was Stein, who has hit a lovely run of form just when it is needed.

A deft touch and a nimble brain keep him going, and his crucial early goal was a gem, a perfect example of the instinctive art of one of the best finishers we have ever seen at Luton.

Pembridge laid it on, firstly with a long throw which Villa cleared back to him, then with a powerful cross back into the box.

Stein's flicked header was timed to perfection and Bosnich had no hope of saving.

But he did well twice in a concerted attack which ended with a foul by Paul McGrath on Harford.

Pembridge blasted the 25-yard free kick towards the corner, and Bosnich flew across goal to tip the ball round the post.

From the corner he made a good block to a piledriver by Harford.

At the other end Alec Chamberlain had one hard save to make, from a header by Shaun Teale from a left-wing cross by Steve Staunton.

Miskick

Garry Parker miskicked when Daley's pace and cross looked like producing an equaliser, but with Julian James getting to grips with Villa's only pace merchant the Town were rarely in trouble after that.

Pembridge killed off Villa with a superb drive three minutes after the break.

Preece fed Oakes on the right, the short pass was played into the path of Pembridge, and the left foot rocket saw the ball travel into the net like a ground-hugging flying missile.

Easy

The rest of the 90 minutes looked almost too easy for the Town, with Oakes missing a great chance to make it 3-0 when he miscued in front of goal after a quick passing move and cross engineered by Harford and Pembridge.

McGrath whipped in an angled drive wide of the far post when he tried to spur the Villa attack, and Regis had a snap shot which rose too high, but the Town were very comfortable winners.

● WE LOVE YOU: Mark Pembridge has just hit the second goal, and his teammates are rather happy about it.

Angry boss is lost for words

ANGRY RON Atkinson, the manager relegated at Hillsborough two years ago by a Luton Town win at Derby, was a bit upset again on Saturday.

He did not hang about to talk about his team's performance, and nor did they. The Villa boss marched them straight out of the dressing room into their team bus, without going anywhere near the players' bar.

A bit upset

"I think he was a bit upset about the lack of leadership in his team," said David Pleat.

The Town boss was pleased with the way his men had done an excellent job in difficult circumstances.

The things they said

The debut of Darren Salton was one of many factors which left him in fairly jovial mood as he enjoyed the winning finale to the home season.

And he struck a very serious note when he pointed out that the Town would not be in their precarious position if they had just done a little better in away games.

Mick Harford made a similar point. "I thought we deserved the victory over Villa," he said. "Now we are all hoping Villa do us a favour against Coventry.

"But even if they do it is in our hands as well at Notts County.

"On the football we play, and perhaps you didn't see too much of it today, I think we are good enough to be in the top division."

Brian Stein enjoyed the Villa game, and agreed he had not scored a lot of goals lately, but added: "I do seem to get the goals when they matter, and that was one of my best.

All out to win

"And I think we have a chance to do it next week."

Chris Kamara promised: "We will go out to win at Nottingham, and keep our fingers crossed for the Villa Park result."

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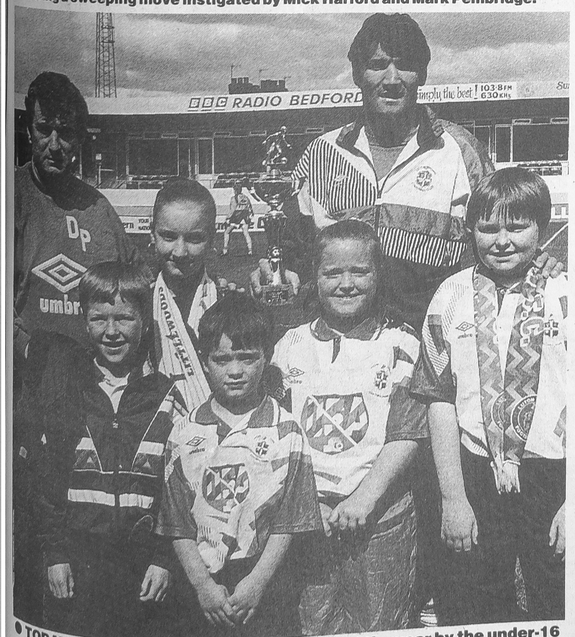
Town match verdict ★★★★

OFF TO SET THE USUAL SHOWDOWN

Action pictures by Josh Levy

● SO CLOSE: Scott Oakes miscues when a third Town goal looked likely following a sweeping move instigated by Mick Harford and Mark Pembridge.



● TOP MAN: Mick Harford was voted player of the year by the under-16 section of the Luton Town Supporters Club, and found time before kick-off to meet some of the young fans and accept their trophy.

● FLYING HIGH: John Dreyer rises well above Ian Olney, the Luton-born Villa striker who was eventually substituted after a miserable afternoon.

THE FULL MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN 2 ASTON VILLA 0 (Half-time: 1-0)

TOWN: Chamberlain; James, Salton, Peake, Dreyer; Oakes (Varadi 85 mins), Kamara, Pembridge, Preece; Stein, Harford. Unused sub: Gray.

VILLA: Bosnich; Barrett, Teale, McGrath, Staunton; Cox, Richardson, Parker, Daley; Olney (Atkinson, 52 mins), Regis. Unused sub: Small.

THE GOALS: Brian Stein, tenth minute, flicked header from hard right wing cross by Mark Pembridge; Pembridge, 48 minutes, thundering left-foot 25-yarder, shelled into the net like a low-flying missile.

OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town eight saved and three wide; Villa four saved and five wide. Corners: 7-3 to the Town.

REFEREE: Graham Pooley, Bishop's Stortford — was given a game to enjoy by both sides, and played well.

BOOKED: David Preece for a mistimed tackle on Tony Daley; Villa debutant goalkeeper Mark Bosnich for hanging on to the ball to stop the Town taking a quick throw-in when he was on the touchline 30 yards from goal.

ATTENDANCE: 11,178, fifth highest at Kenilworth Road this season, with the fans responding well to David Pleat's 'Don't desert us' plea.

ENTERTAINMENT: Remarkable, with the Town able to stick to their football beliefs despite the pressure on them to get a victory. Villa were made to look poor, and how nice not to concede goals in the last ten minutes.!

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

APRIL

4 Wimbledon (h)	2-1 (Varadi, Preece)	7,754	20
11 Oldham (a)	1-5 (Harford)	13,210	20
14 Nottm Forest (h)	2-1 (Harford, James)	8,014	20
18 Man Utd (h)	1-1	13,410	20
20 QPR (a)	1-2 (Pembridge pen)	10,749	20
25 A. Villa (h)	2-0 (Stein, Pembridge)	11,178	20

APPEARANCES (as substitute in brackets): Ever-presents, 41 each, Dreyer and Pembridge; Peake 37, Preece 33(4), Stein 31(7), Harvey 31(1), Harford 28, James 27, Kamara 27, Chamberlain 23, Telfer 17(3), Oakes 14(6), Gray 9(4), Hughes 6(12), Nogan 6(8), Varadi 5(1), Campbell 4(7), Rees 3(1), Linton 2(1), Salton 1(1), Williams (1).

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

Number of players used: 32, eleven more than last season.

GOALS: Harford 12, Pembridge 5(2 pens), Stein 3, Preece 3, Gray 3, Dreyer 2(1 pen), Harvey 2, Oakes 2, Varadi 1, Nogan 1, Telfer 1, James 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.