

Sports News



● **SPLASHBALL 1:** Scott Oakes trying hard to be a ball-player as the water spurts up.

Anglo-Italian Cup

MANAGER David Pleat was not too desolate about the exit from the Anglo-Italian Cup after only two poorly-attended preliminary round games.

He felt sorry for his players, who had done more than enough to win in everything bar putting the ball into the net. Phil Gray could have had a hat-trick with a little change of luck, Damien Matthew was robbed of a home debut goal by a post, and strong penalty appeals were turned down in a late rush of attacking.

The Town poured on the pressure for the last half-hour, after David Preece had gone on in place of Matthew, but could not add to Steve Claridge's 62nd minute equaliser. Wayne Allison had fired the visitors into the lead after 55 so-so minutes.

The consolation for a manager

LUTON TOWN 1 BRISTOL CITY 1

worried stiff about financial problems was that the club will not have to make two trips to Italy for midweek games, which would almost certainly be money-losers, and could also be expensive in terms of injuries to a small squad.

Match details

TOWN: Petterson; Linton, Salton, Dreyer, James; Rees, Matthew (Preece 57 mins), Kamara, Campbell (Oakes 57); Claridge, Gray.

BRISTOL CITY: Welch; Mitchell, Thompson, Bryant, Scott; Mellon, Harrison (MacIntyre, 80 mins), Reid, Edwards; Dziekanowski (Bent, 72 mins), Allison.

GOALS: Wayne Allison, sharp strike from Bristol City's first corner,

in the 55th minute; Steve Claridge, deflecting header, after John Dreyer, at the back of the penalty area, headed forward from a corner by David Preece.

OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town six saved, 11 wide and one hit a post; City three saved and four wide. Corners: 12-3 to the Town.

REF: Michael Reed, Birmingham. Had a fair game, but the Town were sure he should have given them an 80th-minute penalty when Martin Scott seemed to trip Steve Claridge to stop his run for goal.

ATTENDANCE: 2,538, lowest first team gate at Kenilworth Road since a visit by Bristol Rovers in 1933.

ENTERTAINMENT: Cracking stuff in the last half-hour, when the Town just about tore City to shreds, but did not have the luck or sharp finishing needed to put the winning touch to some excellent team play.

TOWN MATCH VERDICT

Luton Town....1
Portsmouth....4
(Half-time...1-3)



Brian Swain reports. Action pictures by Josh Levy

POWER-PLAY MAKES IT AN UNEVEN FIGHT

Pompey striker's treble piles on pain in the rain

Portsmouth their first away win of the season, which left the Town still seeking their first home win in five months.

When you have seen your team decimated by sales — and suffered extra pain as TV shows some of them staring at

the highest levels — it is almost impossible to criticise those who are left, and doing their best.

Like the fans, they too want support from the top, rather than being the models in the shop window.

The stuffing was knocked out of them when Pompey hit three goals in 11 minutes to earn a 3-1 interval lead.

And hard though Phil Gray and Steve Claridge tried, you could not see the Town matching Portsmouth's firepower,

especially that of Guy Whittingham, who gambled and won on the treacherous surface, and collected his second hat-trick of the season.

Lethal

He was lethal. The Town were powderpuff, lightweights who had no chance of doing their stuff on a pitch where the grass hid a sub-surface of water as the rain bucketed down.

Sometimes the ball



● **HELPING HAND:** Darren Salton wades in, and appears to be the subject of an unusual tackle from behind.



● **SPLASHBALL 2:** Phil Gray and Des Linton are sure the ball is in there somewhere.

skidded off at pace. More often it stuck, and the Town's passing game was doomed.

Conditions may have been farcical, but in the lottery they produced Portsmouth had unfair odds in experience and sheer strength.

Allied to clinical finishing, it ensured that the Town would have no way back after going in 3-1 down at half-time.

Rocky

The defence was always rocky when Portsmouth attacked, and the midfield could not make any kind of decisive impact, neither before nor after two substitutions.

As we may expect a little more rain between now and next May, the implications are frightening.

At least the plastic pitch loaded the odds a little more evenly!

Yet things started so well for the Town, and the overdue home win seemed likely when they drew first blood.

Saved

Whittingham had served notice in the game's first attack, when a solo burst caught the Town on the break.

Andy Petterson did very well to time his advance and save at the striker's feet, although Pompey manager Jim Smith thought a penalty should have been awarded.

We stopped worrying about that when the Town's third corner of the game brought a goal to savour.

The kick was swung in by Jason Rees, and Chris Kamara's challenge prevented a clean clearance.

The ball bounced to the edge of the box, and John Dreyer hit a sweet left-foot volley into the top corner.

Trouble

Defenders were always going to be in trouble trying to turn and judge the pace of the ball, and Portsmouth used a sweeper, Gavin Maguire, to good effect.

They had the men to indulge in the classic away team plan: defend in depth, and rely on pace and quality at the other end to nick goals on the break.

And they did that so easily it was hurtful. A through-ball by Warren Aspinall sent Whittingham racing through for the equaliser in the 27th minute, with Des Linton unable to hold him off.

For the next nine minutes the Town tried without success to play good football, and then two goals in two minutes hammered them into submission.

First Whittingham went down the flank past Julian James, and his hard low cross was expertly turned in at the near post by Colin Clarke.

Back-heel

Then a clever back-heel by Alan McLoughlin set up Whittingham to make it 3-1 in the 38th minute, and the contest was as good as over.

Early in the second half optimists like me had the feeling that if the Town could get one goal the lottery might just turn the game round again.

But referee Brian Hill

missed what looked like an obvious penalty in the 54th minute, when Maguire held down Gray as the ball was played forward through the air.

We were left to think about what might have been, and David Preece, to many of us the best hope of springing the Pompey defence, was taken off with 20 minutes to go, and replaced by Jamie Campbell.

The manager said later that it was no day for men like Preece to do their stuff.

Sadly, and it is not his fault, it was hardly right for the inexperienced Campbell either. Portsmouth's first substitution was nearly devastating.

They sent on Mark Chamberlain in place of Paul Walsh, who had not done very well, and the former England winger's first touch was to start a move with Clarke which ended with him shooting just wide.

But it was a day when the Town got worse as the game wore on, and Portsmouth got better and more confident, and 15 minutes from time Whittingham completed an excellent hat-trick by racing clear again from another through-ball by McLoughlin.

By the time Gray hit the bar with a cross-cum-shot in the 85th minute the Town were well beaten.

Sodden

A lot of fans were already on their way out of the sodden stadium, with others staying on only for the pleasure of

staging another demo against David Kholer.

For the record, he too was very depressed at the result, but defiantly stuck to his guns about the need to do what he has done.

He may have improved relationships with the bank, but it has done nothing to enrich the team.

Drainage problem

GROUNDSMAN Dave Chapman had warned the Town in the summer that he had grave doubts over the pitch's ability to soak up heavy rain.

The surface, put down 18 months ago, uses the same foundations and drainage installed for the plastic pitch seven years ago.

But when that surface was ripped up heavy lorries and diggers were used, and compacted the underground drainage materials.

Parts of the pitch which escaped that very heavy traffic are still all right.

Elsewhere continual rain is like filling a bath: the water drains to a degree, but then the level rises until it reaches the surface — and there is no plug to pull.

Referee Brian Hill came in for criticism for starting the game.

People who saw him inspecting the pitch were surprised that he did not take a ball out with him.

Had he done so he would have seen that it was simply not running on the surface, and his decision might well have been very different.

Managers' viewpoints

TWO of the most experienced managers in the game, Jim Smith and David Pleat, agreed that the soaked pitch made football a farce, and turned the match into a lottery.

The Pompey boss thought Brian Hill was wrong to play on it, and he also felt the ref made mistakes during the game, when he refused Portsmouth penalty claims.

He added: "You should give credit to both teams for playing football in those conditions."

"I am glad that the ref didn't call it off once he had started, but really I didn't think the pitch was fit for play."

"It was a lottery, but every one of our goals was excellent."

The Town boss agreed with Mr. Smith's verdict that Guy Whittingham had been top class.

"We played quite well in the first half-hour," said Mr. Pleat. "But then the stronger men took over from the boys."

"Portsmouth looked stronger and got better as the game went on."

"And the difficult conditions suited the stronger side. We don't have big strong men, and we haven't got the power that was needed."

"It was men against boys."

Whittingham disclosed that he did not receive the usual present of the matchball as a memento of his second hat-trick of the season, because it had been kicked out of the ground.

But he was not moaning about that. He said: "The conditions were bad, but I enjoyed them. Sometimes the wet was holding the ball up, and sometimes it wasn't. You just had to gamble, and for me it came out right."

The season so far

● RESULTS showing Town score first, Town goalscorers, attendances and league position:

BARCLAYS LEAGUE DIV I

AUGUST

15 Leicester (a) 1-2 (Campbell) 17,428 -
22 Bristol City (h) 0-3 7,926 22
29 Charlton (a) 0-0 6,302 21

SEPTEMBER

2 Newcastle (a) 0-2 27,054 21
5 Tranmere (h) 3-3 (Claridge, Linton, Oakes) 6,801 23
13 Brentford (a) 2-1 (James, Gray) 7,310 19
19 Birmingham (h) 1-1 (Claridge pen) 8,481 21
26 Notts Co (a) 0-0 5,992 21

OCTOBER

3 Portsmouth (h) 1-4 (Dreyer) 7,954 22

ASSISTS: Gray 2, Claridge 1, Kamara 1, Linton 1, Hughes 1.

THE COCA-COLA CUP

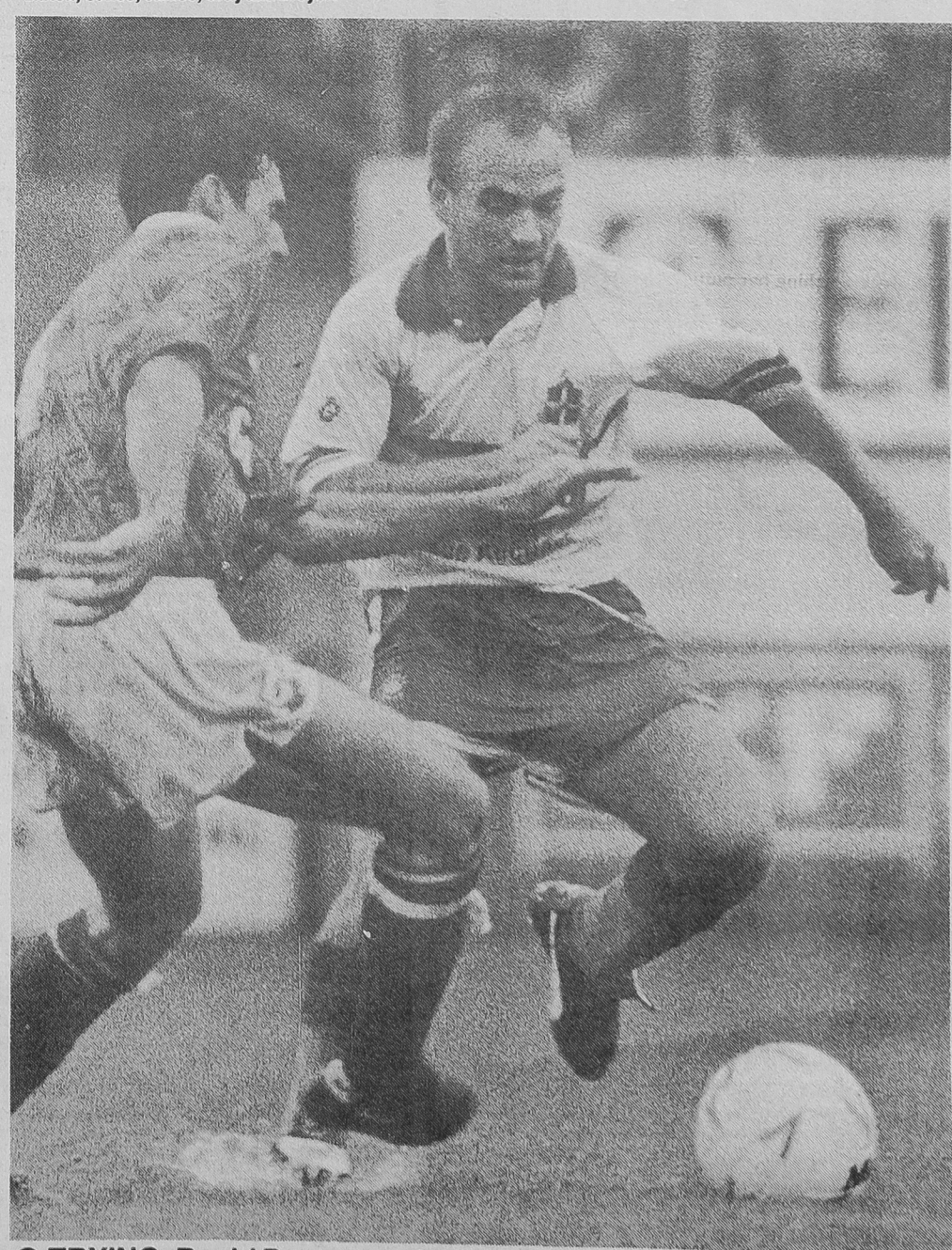
Round 2, first leg:
Sep 23 Plymouth (h) 2-2 (Claridge 2) 3,702

APPEARANCES: One each by Petterson, Linton, Salton, Peake, Johnson, Oakes, James, Kamara, Preece, Gray and Claridge. One each as sub by Rees and Campbell.

ANGLO-ITALIAN CUP

Sep 15 Watford (a) 0-0 5,197
29 Bristol City (h) 1-1 (Claridge) 2,538

APPEARANCES: Two each by Petterson, Linton, Salton, Rees, James, Kamara, Claridge and Gray. Preece 1(1), Campbell 1(1), Peake 1, Johnson 1, Dreyer 1, Matthew 1, Oakes 2).



● **TRYING:** David Preece on the ball, looking for a dry patch.

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MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Petterson; Linton, Salton, Dreyer, James; Rees (Matthew 76 mins), Kamara, Preece (Campbell 65 mins), Oakes, Claridge, Gray.

POMPEY: Knight; Neil, Awford, Maguire, Symons, Daniel; Aspinall, McLoughlin (Burns 77 mins); Clarke, Whittingham, Walsh (Chamberlain 68 mins).

GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town eight saved, four wide and a Phil Gray cross-shot hit the bar; Pompey four saved and three wide. Corners: 8-7 to the Town.

REFEREE: Brian Hill, Kettering. Kept the game flowing, but perhaps he should never have started it on a water-covered pitch.

BOOKED: No-one.

ATTENDANCE: 7,954, not bad in view of the heavy rain and local disenchantment with what is happening to our football club.

ENTERTAINMENT: Splashball rather than football, with both managers agreeing that conditions made it farcical, and a lottery.

The First Division

	HOME					AWAY				
	P	W	D	L	F	P	W	D	L	F
Newcastle	9	5	0	0	15	3	4	0	7	3
Derby	10	3	3	0	10	3	3	1	0	4
Charlton	10	2	3	0	11	7	3	2	0	7
Wolves	10	4	2	0	13	6	1	1	2	7
Swindon	9	4	2	0	11	3	1	1	1	5
Tranmere	10	4	2	0	8	4	1	1	2	5
Leicester	9	1	1	1	3	5	1	3	1	4
West Ham	9	3	0	1	0	11	2	0	3	2
Birmingham	9	3	1	0	11	2	0	3	2	6
Millwall	9	3	1	0	3	7	3	0	1	9
Peterboro	10	2	1	2	6	8	1	1	3	8
Watford	10	2	0	1	5	1	1	2	3	9
Portsmouth	9	1	2	2	6	10	2	0	2	7
Bristol City	9	2	1	1	4	3	1	1	3	5
Sunderland	9	2	2	2	6	4	0	2	1	4
Oxford Utd.	10	0	2	2	3	6	2	1	3	10
Notts County	9	1	0	1	1	5	1	3	2	7
Derby	9	1	2	1	6	7	1	1	3	6
Grimsby	9	1	2	3	9	9	0	1	2	1
Brentford	10	2	0	3	4	8	0	2	3	10
Cambridge	9	1	1	1	3	2	1	1	4	5
Southend	9	0	2	2	5	11	1	2	2	3
Luton Town	10	1	1	3	8	13	0	2	3	6
Bristol Rovers	9	0	2	3	2	5	1	0	3	5
Barnsley	9	0	2	3	2	5	1	0	3	5