

Sports News



● WATCHFUL: Paul Futcher shadowing Steve Claridge.

TOWN MATCH VERDICT
Luton Town...1
Grimsby.....4
(Half-time.....0-3)
★
Brian Swain reports. Action pictures: Josh Levy

ALL TOO EASY FOR VISITORS

DESPAIR was into the pits of pain at Kenilworth Road as Luton Town's plight was ruthlessly exposed by Grimsby.

The first home win of the season was put out of reach before the game was half an hour old, and after that Grimsby took it so easy that their manager gave them an ear-bashing at half-time. Absolutely nothing went right for David Pleat or his men, and the best the diehards could think was that perhaps the visitors had a little luck with offside not given in the build-up to two goals.

But it was not luck which beat the Town.

It was a performance that would have looked little better on Sunday mornings on pitch Q at Lothian Road, where the local league Division Eight teams play.

The fans had their say loud and clear. MD David Kohler was away at a wedding, but his was not the only name chanted with some derision.

Jeering

For the first time there was an appreciable groundswell of jeering at the manager, and for players who simply did not do the business.

The optimists can only hope that the team reaction will be to roll up sleeves, take collective responsibility and put

things right, starting at Oxford on Saturday.

If the mood and spirit is right, it is by no means an impossible dream.

If you saw the first 70 minutes at Cambridge in midweek you would hardly credit that almost the same team could be so very different for the last 20, and keep that awful level of mediocrity intact again four days later.

There was hardly a single success in the Town side, which was left looking aimless and on tenterhooks by the early blows Grimsby dished out.

All over

It took the visitors only 27 minutes to finish the contest by easing into a three-goal lead. Cambridge, full of fire and a refusal to accept the apparent inevitable, can fight back from that sort of shock.

Luton Town couldn't. Tension and fear of failure seemed to permeate almost everything they did until a

goal by Phil Gray raised faint hopes of saving something.

The second half show was at least a little better than the first.

It could hardly have been otherwise. Perhaps the absence of flu victim David Preece played a major part.

There was precious little creativity in the Town midfield until it was too late to matter, when Grimsby eased off because they knew they had it in the bag.

A crisis of confidence seemed to strike every department in the Town side, with the defence having a nightmare start.

Close

The deputy for Preece, Jason Rees, at least shows enthusiasm and effort. Things might have been different if he had completed a sweet Town move in the first minute.

To prove that they can be good going forward the Town made progress

making his experience count to better effect, but he was not the only man below form. The defence was all over the place as good passing and pace carried Grimsby forward.

The composure and confidence evaporated in the 18th minute, when Tommy Watson got down the Grimsby right wing and crossed for Paul Groves to open his account for the club he joined in the summer.

Five minutes later a long ball by fullback John McDermott got past Trevor Peake and Clive Mendonça into a wide open space behind the skipper. Chamberlain did all he could, charging out to the edge of the area, but Rees kept cool and lobbed.

The Grimsby midfielder showed the class and brain that was sadly lacking in the Town ranks.

Long before the Chris Kamara, so the darling of the crowd at his other clubs, was getting the bird for

THE FULL MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Petterson; Linton, Salton, Peake, Johnson; Oakes, James, Kamara, Preece; Claridge, Gray, Subs: Campbell and Greene.
CAMBRIDGE: Sheffield; Fensome, Heathcote, O'Shea, Kimble; Rowett (Francis 55 mins), Raynor, Clayton (Ainsworth 59 mins), Philpott, Norbury, White.
THE GOALS: 0-1, 21 mins — Scott Oakes sidefooted flick from a cross by Marvin Johnson.
0-2, 48 mins — Phil Gray, deflected drive after taking on two men and shooting from just outside the box. 0-3, 54 mins — carbon copy by Gray, but without the deflection. 1-3, 73 mins — Lee Philpott drive under Andy Petterson from Devon White's cross. 2-3, 77 mins — substitute John Francis after Chris Kamara headed towards his own goal from the centre circle to set up Micky Norbury to put Francis clear. 3-3, 87 mins — spare man Francis, unmarked on the blind side from a left-wing cross by Norbury.
OTHER STRIKES: Town five saved and four wide; Cambridge five saved, four wide and a cross bounced onto the top of the bar. Corners: 5-4 to the Town.
REFEREE: Vic Callow, Solihull.
BOOKED: No-one.
ATTENDANCE: 5,715, including 1,144 from Luton.
ENTERTAINMENT: Lovely for the first 73 minutes. Wretched after that as a three-goal lead was thrown away.

It was his second game here since he left 14 years ago, and while he believes Grimsby are a good side he was surprised at how easily they took their current run of five games without defeat. "For half an hour we played some good stuff and got the goals, but I don't know whether they were the result of good play or bad defending," he said.

He said: "For half an hour we played some good stuff and we looked in a different class."

"It was quick, bright and positive football, and Luton couldn't do anything about it. But then we started to take too long on the ball to deliver the passes."

"I was impressed by the way Luton kept battling on. They never threw in the towel and kept playing the game in the right way. They stuck to their beliefs, and if you do that things will turn."

Town boss David Pleat said: "I think I have got the worst job in football at the moment."

But whatever goes on in the background, it comes down to 11 men against 11 on the pitch, and



JUMPING TO IT: Substitute Jamie Campbell under pressure.

The third was from a set piece, with the Town complaining that offside should have been given.

Julian James was booked in the Grimsby half for a foul on Gilbert. The free kick was hit long and high, the Town back four pushed out. The offside they expected was not given.

Two clear

Gilbert and Groves were both in the clear behind the back four.

The defence got back well, but when Gilbert crossed Marvin Johnson's header went straight to Groves, who directed his header carefully wide of Chamberlain.

THE FIRST DIVISION

	HOME					AWAY				
	P	W	D	L	F	P	W	D	L	F
Newcastle.....	15	6	2	1	16	4	6	0	1	13
Swindon.....	16	6	2	1	19	9	2	2	3	9
Tranmere.....	15	6	3	0	19	4	2	1	3	8
West Ham.....	15	5	3	1	11	4	5	2	2	16
Milwall.....	15	5	2	0	19	5	2	3	3	6
Millwall.....	16	4	4	1	12	5	3	1	3	8
Charlton.....	16	3	4	1	17	11	3	3	2	8
Watford.....	15	2	4	10	12	5	1	1	14	8
Peterborough.....	16	5	2	2	10	8	2	1	4	8
Leicester City.....	15	5	0	1	13	2	1	4	4	15
Portsmouth.....	16	4	1	3	14	4	2	3	1	13
Watford.....	15	3	3	1	18	8	3	1	4	11
Grimsby.....	15	2	0	4	11	4	2	3	1	8
Derby.....	15	2	0	4	11	4	2	3	1	8
Oldham.....	15	2	0	4	11	4	2	3	1	8
Sheff Wed.....	15	2	0	4	11	4	2	3	1	8
Birmingham.....	15	4	0	3	9	11	1	4	3	4
Cardiff.....	16	4	1	3	11	13	0	4	5	16
Cambridge.....	15	2	2	4	8	8	2	1	4	0
Barnsley.....	15	3	2	2	9	7	1	1	6	5
Sunderland.....	16	1	3	3	5	9	2	2	5	13
Notts County.....	15	0	3	4	9	20	2	3	3	9
Luton Town.....	15	1	3	2	5	7	1	2	6	7
Sheff Wed.....	16	2	1	5	11	22	0	2	6	10

THE GOALS: 0-1, 18 mins — Paul Groves, once a Leicester reserve, by David Pleat, close range at the second attempt from a right wing cross by Tommy Watson, after the first had been played back to him by Chris Kamara; 0-2, 23 mins — Tony Rees after Trevor Peake and left looking ball passed an inch too high for Trevor Peake and left looking ball Chamberlain exposed and alone; 0-3, 27 mins — Groves again, headed from poor headed clearance by Marvin Johnson; 1-3, 70 mins — Paul Gray sixth goal in four games, far post header from left wing cross by Rees; Jason Rees; 1-4, 82 mins — Groves, completing the first hat-trick of his career with a careful low drive from a right wing run and pull-back by Marvin Johnson.

OTHER STRIKES: Town two saved and seven wide; Grimsby two saved and five wide. Corners: 5-4 to Grimsby.

REFEREE: John Martin, Hampshire. Used to be one we loved to hate, but there were other targets, in Town shirts, for the home fans this time.

BOOKED: Julian James for a foul on Gilbert, with the free kick leading to Grimsby's third goal.

ATTENDANCE: 6,928, second lowest league gate of the season, and a slump will continue if results do not pick up.

ENTERTAINMENT: Painful for the home crowd, with the match all over in less than half an hour.

PAUL FUTCHER, now 36 but still a class player, spoke sadly of what has happened at Luton Town since he was a Kenilworth Road star.

It was his second game here since he left 14 years ago, and while he believes Grimsby are a good side he was surprised at how easily they took their current run of five games without defeat.

"For half an hour we played some good stuff and got the goals, but I don't know whether they were the result of good play or bad defending," he said.

He said: "For half an hour we played some good stuff and we looked in a different class."

"It was quick, bright and positive football, and Luton couldn't do anything about it. But then we started to take too long on the ball to deliver the passes."

"I was impressed by the way Luton kept battling on. They never threw in the towel and kept playing the game in the right way. They stuck to their beliefs, and if you do that things will turn."

Town boss David Pleat said: "I think I have got the worst job in football at the moment."

But whatever goes on in the background, it comes down to 11 men against 11 on the pitch, and

making his experience count to better effect, but he was not the only man below form. The defence was all over the place as good passing and pace carried Grimsby forward.

The composure and confidence evaporated in the 18th minute, when Tommy Watson got down the Grimsby right wing and crossed for Paul Groves to open his account for the club he joined in the summer.

Five minutes later a long ball by fullback John McDermott got past Trevor Peake and Clive Mendonça into a wide open space behind the skipper.

Chamberlain did all he could, charging out to the edge of the area, but Rees kept cool and lobbed.

The Grimsby midfielder showed the class and brain that was sadly lacking in the Town ranks.

Long before the Chris Kamara, so the darling of the crowd at his other clubs, was getting the bird for

LETTERS TO THE SPORTS EDITOR

Diversionary tactic?

I WOULD like to take issue with the morality of some of the comments in Mr. Walby's letter in the Luton News last week.

When questioned in public Mr. Kohler has stated that it would be unethical to discuss contracts of club employees, or dismissals or transfers.

However, these rules apparently do not apply when criticism is levelled at him.

Could it be that he wishes to divert the blame for the club's financial and playing position since he and his ex-partner took over Luton Town?

Mr. Pleat is also not beyond criticism for the decline. While agreeing that some players have been sold without his blessing, he apparently cannot motivate the remaining players, including those he signed to play for Luton.

If anyone doubts this you only have to look at the inability to maintain winning positions against Southend and Cambridge.

Disgraceful dismissals

Since the disgraceful dismissals of Jim Ryan and John Faulkner there has been no heart, commitment or spirit at Kenilworth Road. Mr. Pleat stated in the Depleted fanzine that three months prior to his dismissal from Spurs Scholar was talking to Tel. How ironic! The same situation applied to Jim Ryan, as Mr. Pleat has confirmed that he was approached by the Luton Town board three months before Jim was sacked.

Major changes are required at both board and managerial level as soon as possible if our club is to survive.

I know there are people waiting in the wings who care about Luton's future. Please come out into the open. You'll get all the help and support you need from the supporters who care.

PAM GRAY
Kingsdown Avenue, Luton.

Trying to talk the supporters round

THE LETTER from Gary Walby in last week's Luton News shows that Mr. Kohler is trying to talk round some of the supporters while a campaign against the rest of us takes place.

This campaign resulted in articles in Today, the Evening Standard and the Daily Mail, the gist of which was that a nasty, hateful bunch of people we are.

However, Mr. Walby's letter revealed the usual inconsistencies in anything Mr. Kohler says.

For example, losses £850,000 a year (Luton News Sep 23), £15,000 a week (Luton News Oct 21), wages £2.3m, gate income £1m (Luton News Oct 21), losing £1.6m a year (Today Oct 28), wages total £2.3m, which means a £1.6m loss a year (Mr. Walby's letter). What are we expected to believe?

The claim that low wage players mean high transfer prices is absolute rubbish as well.

Low wages simply mean that players will accept the first decent offer that comes along, because they are in no position to show loyalty to a club that makes it obvious they are not wanted.

Low wages also mean poor results and relegation, which brings a lack of confidence and loss of transfer value. Surprise, surprise. If you pay peanuts...

So Mr. Kohler is a shrewd businessman? Who will be the next player to go for £1m? No-one, because a player's value also reflects the level he has played at.

On the subject of selling the club, Mr. Walby reports that Keith Haslam was ruled out due to having insufficient funds to prevent player sales.

Another case of Mr. Kohler's inconsistency.

"If a deal is done, I will walk away, no strings attached," (Luton News Aug 26). "I will walk away as soon as there is a buyer" (Luton News Oct 7). Mr. Haslam a buyer, no sale due to strings? — "I will not leave unless someone with more money than me can come in..." (Luton News Oct 21). Those strings again?

So Mr. Kohler is a nice chap? Presumably he has been misquoted with alarming regularity. Or is it more sinister?

For a man who wants to sell the club, he is making it very difficult for himself, or is that the intention?

This man must go, and go now, before our club is totally destroyed. The campaign against him must continue to the bitter end.

Finally, if Mr. Kohler wants to answer my points I am sure the supporters club would be happy to organise an open meeting so that he can do so.

KEITH HAYWARD
(co-editor, Mad As A Hatter)
Icknield Way, Luton.

Present team is a disgrace

I HAVE been a Luton supporter for 40 years and this present team is a disgrace.

This is all due to lack of effort by both management and players.

What good has David Pleat done since his return to the club? He has signed a bunch of players whose

careers finished years ago, including Stein, Harford, Peake and Kamara. No wonder Leicester gave him the boot.

Now is the time to call a boycott. All supporters should stay away from the rest of the home matches.

J. HARRIS (ex-supporter),
The Cedars, Stopley.

Blame players, not the management

I HAVE to support the letters by Mr. Gage and Mr. Walby supporting David Kholer and David Pleat.

How can you blame them, when the players have a two-goal lead against Southend, and a three-goal lead against Cambridge, and then throw it away?

I think that is terrible. It is the players who want a good tucking off.

I can't imagine Billy Schwer or Everton Blake slacking off after winning the first rounds.

I hope the players take a leaf out of their books, and then they would be champions as well.

Congratulations to Billy and Everton. Luton is proud of you!

PHIL BURGESS
Florence Avenue, Luton.

Abysmal defending has to be put right

● The following letter arrived too late for publication last week, and was written after the Southend game.

DAVID KHOLER may well be the underlying reason for Luton Town's decline, but the immediate problem lies with the performances on the pitch, and not in the boardroom.

Despite the loss of Harford and Pembroke, which were major setbacks, we still have a team capable of maintaining a position in the top half of the division.

However the game against Southend was a disgrace. After taking a two-goal lead, quite a rare occurrence by Town standards, Luton defended abysmally, looking as though they wanted to let Southend back in the game, and nearly handing them all three points.

Southend should have been dead and buried when it was 2-0, and most Town fans must have hoped for a 3-0 or 4-0 win.

The problem does not seem to be scoring goals, as Gray and Claridge are beginning to look a useful partnership, and five goals scored in two games can't be bad.

Kick up the backside

But the defending was inexcusable, and all of the back four should be given a kick up the backside.

Des Linton, in particular, had an awful game. However he is still fairly young and inexperienced.

However, who was John Dreyer, one of the most experienced squad members, allowed to sit through the game on the substitutes bench?

Other questions: why was Jason Rees dropped, after playing the best football of his career so far? Why in recent matches has Jamie Campbell been brought on as substitute to play on the wing when surely his height is needed in the middle?

What on earth is David Pleat playing at?

I pity poor Andy Petterson, who has looked in excellent form this season, and obviously must be a man of great self-confidence not to let an average of two goals conceded a game destroy his confidence.

This is not meant to be a criticism of the whole team as some players cannot be faulted for their efforts and always give 100 per cent, Claridge, Preece, Petterson, Rees and a rejuvenated Gray.

However I just wish some of the other players would play with their hearts for the club.

David Pleat has constantly pleaded for the fans to get behind the team, which they faithfully do week after week.

Get a grip

However it is about time that Mr. Pleat took a grip of the situation because as a long-standing supporter, I for one am rapidly losing my patience with the club, and am reluctant to renew my season ticket next season to watch the likes of Hull, Wigan, Stockport etc. This is where we will be if things don't improve.

As for Mr. Kohler, surely the best way he could highlight the club's financial plight would be to publish details of the audited accounts in the Luton News so we can see for ourselves exactly where all the money has gone.

I don't expect miracles overnight, but the likes of Liverpool and Arsenal playing at Luton must not become memories replaced by constant relegation battles through the lower divisions.

The players of the club are capable of performing better than our present position would suggest, so stop the rot now!

J. COOK
Rudyard Close, Luton.

● We have received other letters from correspondents who did not give names and addresses, and which were therefore not considered for publication. In answer to a question raised by many readers, the letter from Gary Walby last week, a report on a conversation he had with David Kohler, was checked with the MD before publication, and he confirmed it was an accurate report of what he had said to Mr Walby. — Sports Ed.

SELL YOUR CAR FAST—USE A MOTORBOX

CHOOSE YOUR AREAS AND SELL YOUR CAR!

Luton, Dunstable, Mid Beds and villages — News, Gazette and Leader	LD	1 week	£12.00
		2 weeks	£18.00
Luton, Dunstable, Mid Beds, Leighton Buzzard, Linslade and surrounding villages	LDO	1 week	£15.00
		2 weeks	£22.00
Hitchin, Letchworth, Stevenage, Baldock, Biggleswade, plus surrounding villages	C2	1 week	£15.00
		2 weeks	£22.00
Any 2 of the above combined		1 week	£25.00
		2 weeks	£37.00
Luton, Dunstable, Mid Beds, Leighton Buzzard, Linslade, Hitchin, Stevenage, Letchworth, Baldock, Biggleswade, St Albans, Harpenden, Borehamwood, Radlett, Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield plus villages		1 week	£30.00
		2 weeks	£40.00

TICK APPROPRIATE BOX