

Sports News

TOWN MATCH VERDICT

Luton Town...1
Millwall.....1
(Half-time.....1-0)

Brian Swain reports.

Action pictures: Josh Levy

SHAKE-UP IS REWARDED

Red-hot Gray spearheads the best home display yet

AFTER weeks of gloomy fear, Luton Town fans were given real hope on Saturday that the team can fight its way out of trouble.

It was typical of their luck on the day that, having deserved more than a point against Millwall, their best home display of the season resulted in a drop to bottom but one of the First Division.

As their own manager admitted, Millwall, who had lost only three of their 16 league games, were lucky to snatch a point on a day when they were not allowed to play as well as they can.

They were given the run-around in the first half, when a new-look Town team tore them apart and looked more than good enough to

achieve its first home win for seven months.

The woodwork and a man of the match show by visiting goalkeeper Kasey Keller kept the lead down to one goal, and inevitably Millwall made the best of their luck by improving after the break.

David Pleat made major team changes and saw them vindicated, with the defence much more comfortable.

On the flanks John Dreyer was recalled at left back in place of Marvin Johnson and Julian James went to right back. Des Linton was rested for the first time this season.

That change was made possible by the return after injury of Ceri Hughes and he was part of an influential midfield which gave the Town complete control

of the first 45 minutes.

He faded a little later, as was to be expected after very little match practice following his long lay-off.

Alongside him Jason Rees buzzed like a worker-bee, and David Preece continued his good form.

On the right Paul Telfer is getting back to the work a holy excellence that makes him valuable without being dramatic.

The Town enjoyed plenty of possession, and new signing Ian Benjamin and striking partner Phil Gray forced the Lions to spend so much time covering and defending that little was seen of Millwall as an attacking threat.

Gray, so much better now that goals are giving him confidence to have a go more often, could

easily have had a first-half hat-trick.

In the first attack a through-ball by Rees sent him racing through in the inside right half for a drive which whistled just wide of the near post.

Dreyer, up to support the attack, played in a near post cross which Kasey Keller did well to reach an inch ahead of Gray, and from the corner, hit deep by Preece, Rees had a shot charged down before Benjamin netted a fifth second after the offside whistle had sounded.

Keller produced a tremendous flying catch to deny Dreyer a goal, then made another quality save from Gray's well-struck low volley, with that opening created by Preece.

Colin Cooper had a torrid time trying to keep tabs on Gray, and when he miskicked in the attempt to clear a through ball by Dreyer Keller again did his stuff, saving at Gray's feet.

The goal the Town and Gray so richly deserved came after 27

minutes, with Gray's seventh in six games a near-post header from a cross by James.

The only slightly worrying moment in the first half came shortly after half-time when a long free kick by Cooper bounced through a crowded penalty area into the side-netting.

Otherwise Trevor Peck and Darren Salton were well on top of John Byrne and Jamie Moralee, if only because the Millwall strike pair were starved of service by the Town's positive work with and without possession.

A through-ball by Preece set Cooper again on the edge of the box, beating him to the ball and cracking in a drive which left Keller helpless by its power. But the crossbar made the save.

Improve

Millwall could only improve after the break. They did, but not to the extent of having the comfortable control the Town had enjoyed previously.

The worry for home fans was that defending a lead has not been the Town's best ability this season, and there was almost disaster in the opening minute of the second half.

The central pair were by-passed by Kenny Cunningham's long ball, but Moralee and

Malcolm Allen got in each other's way and fell down together when the route to goal was wide open.

Millwall could not turn their improvement into consistent pressure, but a set piece brought them an equaliser after 59 minutes.

James fouled John Byrne on the Town's right flank, about ten yards inside the Town half.

Both teams filled the penalty area with bodies as Ian Dawes sent the free kick high into the danger zone.

One or two heads may have got touches as the ball reached Byrne on the far post. The veteran deftly headed his first goal for the Lions since his £250,000 transfer from Sunderland.

Stronger

But instead of wilting, the Town came back stronger and did more than enough to be on top, but not enough to make it count.

Rees curled a 20-yarder just wide and Preece was unlucky at the end of a slick passing move by Telfer and James with a quickly-taken drive from the edge of the box which swerved inches too high.

And in the last five minutes, it was business as usual for hard-working Keller, as he made saves from Preece and Gray.

At the other end Alec



● CRUNCH: Millwall's Ian Dawes goes in for the ball and Scott Oakes is about to suffer for being where it hurts. BELOW: The pain shows as the tackle bites.



Chamberlain had little to concern him, and was part of a much more confident look that had spread through the team from the first whistle.

He made every save he had to, with the most important a very good one from Phil Barber's late 25-yarder.

Millwall went home knowing they were lucky to escape a beating. Town fans know that if we see the same again on Sunday the first home win of the season is in the bag against Watford.

Managers' viewpoints

MILLWALL manager Mick McCarthy went home very grateful for his side's point.

"It's a sign of a good team that you can pick up a point without playing well," he said.

"Luton played well, and at the same time they didn't let us play. And they worked harder than us in the first half.

"David Pleat must be disappointed with the result, but not with the performance of his team.

"They are certainly not the worst team we have played, and if they work and compete I am sure they will get out of trouble."

The Town manager agreed with that, and felt sorry for his men that they had only a draw to show for a good performance.

He added he was pleased that the fans had been treated to a high quality game, and was only sorry that more goals had not come from the Town's excellent effort.

Ian Benjamin's Luton debut gave him pleasure, and the form of Phil Gray was now showing why, at £325,000, he had been a bargain buy.

Full fitness and the touch of confidence that comes from scoring meant that Gray was a constant problem to Millwall's defenders, and Mr Pleat forecast he would be to others as well.

THE FIRST DIVISION

	HOME					AWAY					
	P	W	D	L	F A P	P	W	D	L	F A P	
Newcastle	17	7	1	18	4	7	0	1	16	9	32
Swindon	18	7	2	12	11	2	3	3	11	14	32
Tranmere	17	4	1	21	6	2	1	4	18	13	31
West Ham	17	4	1	21	6	5	2	3	17	9	30
Millwall	17	6	2	21	6	2	4	3	7	9	30
Wolves	18	4	1	19	12	3	4	2	10	7	29
Grimsby	17	4	3	13	9	4	1	4	14	10	28
Leicester City	18	5	3	12	10	3	1	4	10	12	28
Portsmouth	17	6	0	17	2	1	5	4	9	10	26
Charlton	18	4	2	13	8	3	1	4	9	10	26
Peterborough	16	2	3	11	13	5	1	1	14	8	25
Derby	17	2	0	15	11	3	2	16	9	24	
Oxford Utd	17	3	2	14	14	2	3	4	11	15	23
Watford	18	4	3	15	14	2	0	6	11	24	21
Bristol City	17	3	2	9	8	3	1	4	12	9	21
Barnsley	17	3	2	4	9	8	3	1	4	12	9
Brentford	17	4	2	18	14	1	2	4	7	9	19
Birmingham	18	4	0	3	9	11	1	4	4	13	19
Cambridge	16	4	1	12	15	0	5	4	7	18	18
Sunderland	17	3	2	10	9	2	1	6	6	18	18
Notts County	18	1	4	3	7	11	2	2	6	14	27
Southend	17	2	3	2	8	8	1	2	3	4	9
Luton Town	18	2	1	6	12	24	0	3	6	11	23
Bristol Rovers	17	2	1	6	12	24	0	3	6	11	23

● A BRIGHT GRAY DAY: Jason Rees is first to congratulate the Town's goalscorer, who has just headed his seventh in six games.

Local soccer tables

Campri South Midlands League

PREMIER DIVISION						RESERVE DIVISION ONE								
	P	W	D	L	F A P		P	W	D	L	F A P			
Brace Sparta	17	12	2	3	45	18	38	18	11	5	2	64	22	38
Wingate	17	10	6	1	42	17	36	17	10	4	3	27	15	34
Hoddeston Town	17	11	3	3	39	18	36	17	9	5	3	43	21	32
Arley Town	18	10	4	4	40	17	34	16	9	3	4	30	23	30
Orford City	14	10	3	1	44	15	33	13	9	2	2	34	20	29
Hatfield Town	19	9	5	5	54	34	32	14	8	4	2	35	17	28
Biggleswade Town	19	9	4	6	45	24	31	17	9	3	5	50	30	27
Harpden Town	20	8	3	8	31	20	30	17	7	4	8	28	25	25
Potters Bar Town	17	8	5	4	34	27	29	15	5	7	3	30	23	22
Letchworth GC	17	8	4	5	33	19	28	14	6	4	4	17	27	22
Welwyn GC	19	7	6	6	19	26	27	14	7	3	4	33	21	21
Leighton Town	19	7	6	6	19	26	27	14	7	3	4	33	21	21
MK Borough	15	8	2	5	34	18	26	15	6	3	6	27	27	30
Shillington	19	7	4	7	28	27	25	16	6	2	8	23	31	21
Tottenham	17	5	7	5	26	26	20	15	4	6	5	33	31	18
Leverstock Green	16	6	2	8	24	28	20	16	4	5	7	31	37	17
Luton Old Boys	18	5	1	12	18	34	16	18	4	10	28	42	16	16
61FC Luton	17	4	4	9	22	40	16	14	5	8	20	14	15	14
Langford	16	3	6	7	23	33	15	17	4	2	11	22	45	14
Buckingham Athletic	18	4	3	11	24	44	15	15	5	8	20	29	11	11
Pitstone	19	4	1	14	13	58	13	17	3	12	26	53	11	11
Pitton	17	2	3	12	15	48	9	14	2	4	8	16	35	10
New Bradwell	15	0	2	13	9	57	2	15	3	2	10	17	48	8

DIVISION ONE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
Bedford Town	19	17	2	0	67	16	53
London Colney	16	13	1	2	57	15	40
Bedford United	17	12	3	2	55	23	39
Rushmore Rangers	17	11	1	5	37	15	38
Shenley & Loughton	17	11	3	3	47	23	36
Toddington Rovers	17	9	4	4	45	24	31
Potters Bar City	19	10	1	8	42	36	31
Winstow United	17	9	2	5	56	29	29
Tring Ath.	20	7	2	7	35	38	28
Shefford Town	17	7	3	7	33	21	24
Caddington	14	8	0	6	33	25	24
Amphill Town	17	7	3	3	27	15	24
Ashcroft	19	6	9	3	40	22	22
Framstead	19	5	6	8	32	61	21
Sandy Albion	17	4	5	8	26	38	17
Cranfield United	18	4	3	11	25	37	15
"De Havilland"	18	5	5	9	27	40	14
Delco	16	4	2	10	20	44	14
Stony Stratford	15	3	4	8	22	33	13
Embsay	18	3	2	13	22	60	11
Walden Rangers	17	2	1	15	15	48	7
Isleford	16	1	1	14	16	60	4

*Three points deducted.

RESERVE DIVISION TWO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
*Oxford City	12	10	1	1	40	11	28
Framstead	12	9	0	3	26	16	27
Shenley	11	7	2	2	30	23	23
Bedford United	9	6	1	2	29	14	19
Cranfield	9	6	1	2	17	7	19
Ashcroft	11	5	4	2	23	13	19
Tring Ath.	12	5	4	3	20	16	19
Rushmore	13	5	2	6	28	21	17
Delco	14	4	3	7	29	27	17
Stony Stratford	11	4	3	4	17	18	15
Winstow United	8	4	1	3	17	15	13
Caddington	8	3	3	2	15	11	12
Potters Bar City	13	3	1	9	29	39	15
Amphill Town	12	3	1	8	15	37	10
Walden Rgrs.	11	3	0	8	14	30	9
*De Havilland	12	3	2	7	20	24	8
Sandy Albion	12	0	4	8	14	34	4
Isleford	9	1	1	7	10	37	4

*Three points deducted.

A & B Sports NHC Sunday League

PREMIER DIVISION						DIVISION FOUR								
	P	W	D	L	F	A	P		P	W	D	L	F	A
Enterprise	8	5	1	2	19	13	11	Blackburn	6	4	0	2	13	14
Celtic Supporters	9	4	2	3	27	11	10	Chesham	7	3	3	1	18	12
St. Joseph's	6	5	0	1	18	5	10	Britannia Airways	5	2	3	0	9	5
Heart of Midlothian	7	4	2	1	13	5	10	Caddington Res.	4	2	2	0	11	6
Heron	8	4	1	3	20	17	9	Magnum	4	3	0	1	12	7
Highland F.C.	7	3	3	2	15	8	8	Marleygate	5	3	0	2	12	7
Green Man	7	3	3	3	15	13	7	Silstone	6	3	2	1	15	10
Weymouth Sports	7	3	1	3	10	12	7	Cavallier	7	1	3	3	10	14
Tottenham	5	2	1	2	11	11	5	Lewsey Res.	6	1	2	3	11	22
WSS	8	2	1	5	17	27	5	Laporte	3	0	2	1	7	8
6 Sports	6	2	2	2	10	4	4	AFC Stapleley	7	1	0	6	9	25
Blackburn	0	0	0	8	15	45	0							