

Sports News



● **TAKING THEM ON:** Scott Oakes, who was put on as sub in an attempt to prise open Sunderland's strong defence.

THE SEASON SO FAR

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

BARCLAYS LEAGUE DIV I

AUGUST	
15 Leicester (a) 1-2 (Campbell)	17,428
22 Bristol City (h) 0-3	7,926
29 Charlton (a) 0-0	6,302
SEPTEMBER	
22 Newcastle (a) 0-2	27,054
5 Tranners (h) 3-3 (Claridge, Linton, Oakes)	8,601
13 Brentford (a) 2-1 (James, Gray)	7,310
19 Birmingham (h) 1-1 (Claridge pen)	8,481
26 Notts Co (a) 0-0	5,992
OCTOBER	
3 Portsmouth (h) 1-4 (Dreyer)	7,954
10 Barnsley (a) 0-3	5,261
17 Derby (h) 1-3 (Johnson)	8,848
25 Peterborough (a) 3-2 (Gray, Telfer)	7,125
31 Southend (h) 2-2 (James, Gray)	7,256
NOVEMBER	
3 Cambridge (a) 3-3 (Oakes, Gray 2)	5,715
7 Grimsby (h) 1-4 (Gray)	6,928
14 Oxford (a) 0-4	5,760
21 Millwall (h) 1-1 (Gray)	8,371
29 Watford (h) 2-0 (Benjamin, Oakes)	8,341
DECEMBER	
5 Bristol Rovers (a) 0-2	6,245
12 Wolves (a) 2-1 (Gray 2)	13,932
19 Sunderland (h) 0-0	8,286

APPEARANCES (as sub in brackets): Ever-presents, 21 each: James and Gray, Preece 20, Linton 16(3), Peake 16,

Rees 15, Salton 15, Petterson 14, Johnson 13(2), Dreyer 12, Kamara 12, Oakes 10(10), Hughes 8, Chamberlain 7, Telfer 6(1), Benjamin 4 (1), Campbell 2(7), Williams (2), BEFORE TRANSFERS: Claridge 15(1); Matthew (loan) 3(2).
Number of players used: 20 (32 last season).
GOALS: Gray 10, Oakes 3, Claridge 2 (1 pen), James 2, and one each by Campbell, Linton, Dreyer, Johnson, Telfer and Benjamin.
ASSISTS: Gray 4, Preece 3, Claridge, Rees and Kamara two each. One each by James, Linton, Hughes, Salton, Johnson and Dreyer.

THE COCA-COLA CUP

Round 2, first leg:
Sep 23 Plymouth (h) 2-2 (Claridge 2)..... 3,702
Second leg:
Oct 6 Plymouth (a) 2-3 (Claridge, Preece)..... 8,946
APPEARANCES: Two each by Petterson, Linton, Salton, Peake, Johnson, James, Kamara, Preece, Gray and Claridge. Oakes 1(1), Rees 1(1). One each as sub by Campbell and Dreyer.
GOALS: Claridge 3, Preece 1.

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).

TOWN MATCH VERDICT

Luton Town.....0
Sunderland.....0

★★★★

Brian Swain reports

Action pictures: Josh Levy

Stalemate: both sides bogged down

Pitch is too heavy for the lightweights

OPINION was divided over the quality of the football we saw as Luton Town dropped two more home points.

I thought it had been one of the better 0-0 draws, and was pleased that a very workmanlike Sunderland side had not taken all three points.

But I also felt for the fans who were worried by the Town's inability to get a grip on the game on a pitch which is no help to their ambitions of footballing their way to success.

The pitch was the real villain of the piece, with the Town groundstaff facing a big problem on and underneath it.

It was a miracle that Dave Chapman was able to get the match played at all.

On Friday it looked like a paddy field, and water-skiing was the only sport you could have staged on it.

The sticky top 24 hours later seemed to sap the brightness and energy of the Town's lightweight midfield.

And with Phil Gray facing a wily defender in Terry Butcher and Ian Benjamin also well held, the Town struggled to make progress into dangerous attacking positions.

They never stopped trying to work the ball forward, but Sunderland

had a beefier look about them, and at the end were the more likely winners.

I made Jason Rees the Town's man of the match for his mixture of truculent tackling and harassing, and his brave willingness to get up where it hurts.

Muscle

But as a unit the midfield threatened more than it achieved, and I worry about how many other teams will get close to brushing it aside through power and muscle on days when that counts for more than control and skill.

Sadly, that might be

the contest we will have to see unless a dry summer sets in next week.

A clean sheet is always welcome, and this was only the fourth the Town have managed in 21 league games so far this season.

Defending

For that the Town had to thank Alec Chamberlain for making the one difficult save he was asked to produce, and a mixture of Sunderland's poor finishing and the Town's good defending on the edge of the box.

Booking

Mr. Hackett got by with only one booking, for Gordon Armstrong's

did difficult jobs well, and dangerous visiting striker Peter Davenport was eventually subdued after getting almost nowhere.

At right back Julian James seems to be settling into his best place, and did well to cut down the danger posed by Michael Gray on the left of Sunderland's four-man midfield.

On the other flank Marvin Johnson had to get stuck in to combat the menace of Brian Mooney, and did it with some abrasive tackling.

Fortunately referee Keith Hackett made kind allowances for the conditions, otherwise I thought the young defender was going to get into trouble with his mixture of enthusiasm and determination.

The foul that earned Armstrong his yellow card brought a free kick and a shot by Hughes which Tony Norman



● **OUTNUMBERED:** Deshaun Linton up against opponents two at a time.

trickle from behind on

David Preece to take the heat out of the situation when it threatened to get too hairy in the early stages.

The Town had their best spell in the first half hour, with Paul Telfer and Ceri Hughes showing a liking to play in the early ball from the better, sand-free parts of the pitch.

But the promise came to nothing, although Gray twice went close from right-wing crosses by Telfer. He headed the first wide, and toe-kicked the second the same way, under heavy pressure from two defenders as he went in among the flying feet for a near-post cross.

Mooney had put the first chance of the game wide, with a wild shot after a dodgy clearance header by Johnson.

The foul that earned Armstrong his yellow card brought a free kick and a shot by Hughes which Tony Norman

caught just under the bar, and a few minutes later Preece had a volley saved after Mooney's bad clearance set him up.

But that 30th-minute effort turned out to be the last real danger the Town posed to a Sunderland side that got better and more assertive as the game went on.

Chamberlain saved from Mick Gray and David Rush headed over the bar from a good position just before the interval, when John Kay, Shaun Cunningham and Davenport cut apart the Town cover down the visitors' right flank.

'Advantage'

The ref did the Town no favours when Rees went tumbling on the edge of the box from Butcher's challenge.

Mr. Hackett played an advantage which was not there, because the Town were further from the target as the ball broke.

● **CLOSE:** Phil Gray tries to convert a second-half cross.



● **SHADOW:** Phil Gray and his 'minder' Terry Butcher.

A free kick on the edge of the box might have been a better punishment for the foul.

The worry for Town fans was that by then we knew we needed a lucky break if Sunderland were to be beaten, and in the end it was not forthcoming.

Plenty of effort and commitment was there, but not the ability to make decisive openings.

Norman was hardly bothered in the second half, when Sunderland looked the more likely

Chamberlain made the best save of the game in the 60th minute to block a header by Davenport from Mick Gray's cross.

The introduction of both subs, Scott Oakes and Deshaun Linton did little to make the Town more potent in attack.

But at least they defended like men, and earned their point.

Managers' viewpoints

DAVID PLEAT admitted that when the game got into its last five minutes his main hope was that Sunderland did not score.

The Town manager said that the great need for his team was to pull the visitors out and score an early goal.

He thought they did well enough to deserve that, but after the first half hour Sunderland had begun to look good, with Terry Butcher doing a tremendous job in the centre of their defence.

The 33-year-old centre-half, who won 77 caps for England, was the unanimous Pressbox choice as man of the match, and his manager, Malcolm Crosby, agreed with that.

Mr Pleat said his team had found it difficult to put their passing game together on the muddy surface, but was pleased that when they had to battle they did that.

He was not too disappointed with the result in view of the knowledge that Sunderland could have won.

"We found it hard to create chances, and Sunderland were as strong a side physically as there is in the league," he said.

Both managers thought every player had done well to produce a good game on the heavy pitch.

The Sunderland boss was pleased with a 'very good team performance' by his men, and thought the draw was about right on a day when neither side deserved to lose.

"I thought it was a credit to both teams that we had such an entertaining game," he said.

Match details

TOWN: Chamberlain; James, Peake, Dreyer, Johnson; Telfer, Rees (Linton, 83 mins), Preece, Hughes (Oakes 69 mins); Benjamin, Gray.
SUNDERLAND: Norman; Kay, Butcher, Ball, Ord; Mooney, Armstrong, Cunningham, Gray; Davenport (Hawke 67 mins), Rush. Other sub: Smith.

GOALS ATTEMPTS: Town two saved and three wide; Sunderland three saved and seven wide. Corners: 4-4.

REFEREE: Keith Hackett, Sheffield. Had a very fair game except for a clanger when he tried to play an advantage after Jason Rees was fouled on the edge of the box. The free kick would have been more of a punishment for the offence than the 'play on' instruction.

BOOKED: Gordon Armstrong for a 'tackle' from behind on David Preece.

ATTENDANCE: 8,286 thanks to more than 1,000 coming to support the visitors.

ENTERTAINMENT: Better than the average 0-0 draw, with both sides doing well to pass snatches of passing football on an awful pitch.

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
Oxford City	18	14	3	1	61	19	45	London Colney	22	13	6	3	79	29	45
Brace Sparta	20	14	3	3	50	19	45	Potters Bar Town	20	13	3	4	54	28	42
Arlesey Town	22	12	6	4	51	25	42	Letchworth GC	17	11	3	3	46	31	36
Biggleswade Town	22	12	4	6	57	28	40	Barlow Rovers	17	10	4	3	27	15	34
Widgates	19	11	6	2	45	22	39	Arlesey Town	18	9	6	3	44	22	33
Hatfield Town	18	12	3	3	42	19	36	Hatfield Town	18	10	3	5	55	31	30
Hatfield Town	23	10	6	7	63	45	36	Brace Sparta	16	8	6	2	40	22	30
Harpenden Town	22	10	3	9	37	23	33	Leighton Town	19	10	3	6	47	31	30
MK Borough	17	9	3	5	38	20	30	Welwyn GC	21	8	5	8	32	47	29
Potters Bar Town	19	8	5	6	35	33	29	Biggleswade Town	17	7	5	6	24	42	26
Welwyn GC	22	7	8	7	24	35	29	Leverstock Green	17	5	9	3	33	26	24
Letchworth GC	18	8	4	6	33	22	28	MK Borough	17	6	5	3	38	33	24
Shillington	18	7	4	7	28	27	25	Langford	17	7	3	7	32	30	23
Totterhoe	21	8	6	10	28	35	21	Toddington Rovers	19	7	2	10	34	37	23
Leverstock Green	17	6	2	9	25	31	20	61FC Luton	21	5	6	10	33	45	21
61FC Luton	21	5	4	12	24	62	19	Shillington	17	4	7	6	26	30	19
Langford	20	3	9	8	30	41	18	Buckingham Athl	16	4	5	7	31	37	17
Luton Old Boys	19	5	2	12	19	35	17	Harpenden Town	19	3	5	11	28	40	14
Buckingham Athletic	19	4	4	11	26	46	18	Pitstone	21	4	2	15	25	64	14
Pitton	19	3	4	12	20	50	13	Totterhoe	16	2	5	9	19	41	11
Pitstone	20	4	1	15	15	61	13	Shefford Town	20	3	2	15	29	63	11
New Bradwell	16	0	2	14	9	62	2	Pitton	16	3	2	11	19	51	8

*Three points deducted.

DIVISION ONE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
Bedford Town	23	21	2	0	88	18	65
Shenley & Loughton	20	12	5	3	54	28	41
London Colney	16	13	1	2	57	15	40
Bedford United	17	12	3	2	55	23	39
Risborough Rangers	20	11	5	4	40	26	38
Tring Athl	23	10	7	6	44	40	37
Winslow United	18	11	2	5	66	30	35
Toddington Rovers	20	10	5	5	50	28	35
Potters Bar Cru	22	10	2	10	46	42	32
Shefford Town	20	9	4	7	39	23	31
Amphill Town	21	8	4	9	37	34	28
Amphill Town	22	8	4	10	47	28	28
Caddington	15	8	7	7	34	27	24
Stony Stratford	18	6	4	8	31	36	22
Flamstead	20	5	6	9	32	65	21
Cranfield United	21	5	4	12	28	54	21
Sandy Albion	21	5	4	11	31	53	18
*De Havilland	20	5	2	13	31	49	17
Delco	19	4	2	13	24	55	14
Embsay	20	3	3	14	23	63	12
Walden Rangers	19	2	1	15	15	69	7
Ickleford	17	1	1	15	16	66	4

*Three points deducted.

DIVISION FOUR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
Celtic Supporters	12	7	2	3	35	14	15
Enterprise	10	7	1	2	24	15	15
Sacred Heart	9	5	2	15	7	12	12
AFC Heron	10	5	1	4	27	22	11
St. Joseph's	6	5	0	1	18	5	10
FC Coral	8	3	3	2	20	18	9
Crawley Sports	8	3	2	4	14	18	8
Brace Green Man	9	1	4	1	19	7	7
TRWSS	10	3	1	6	24	33	7
Lewsey	5	2	1	2	11	7	5
Stag Sports	6	1	2	3	10	18	4
Limbury Black Swan	10	0	10	18	52	0	0

*Three points deducted.

DIVISION FIVE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
Sacred Heart Res.....	10	5	4	1	24	8	14
Horsehoe Saints.....	8	4	2	2	13	9	10
Stopsley Harriers.....	8	3	3	2	16	13	9
St. Leagrave.....	6	4	1	1x	15	10	9
Stopsley WMC.....	9	3	3	3	12	9	9
St. Joseph's Res.....	5	3	2	0	14	7	8
Wawley Sports Res.....	7	2	2	3	11	20	6
St. James'.....	6	1	3	2	7	14	5
St. Hilcs Res.....	6	1	2	3	10	14	4
Wawley.....	6	1	1	3	15	15	4
St. James' Hightown.....	7	0	1	6	6	42	1