

S.O.S TIME, CITY

Board must give Osman extra cash

IT'S time for urgent action at Ashton Gate before City's season becomes a lost cause.

The board must give Russell Osman full backing — and the cash — to make new signings if he is to remain in charge for any length of time.

Failure to beat a Luton side with precious little to offer suggests City are firmly on course for the Second Division.

With four tough away games coming up, further delay in strengthening the squad could prove disastrous.

Midfield is the big problem area. Gary Shelton has his critics, but when he was forced out of this match at half-time by a thigh strain it almost cost City the match.

Luton, who hadn't mustered a goal attempt of any sort in the first half, began to take control as the experienced David Preece found more and more space.

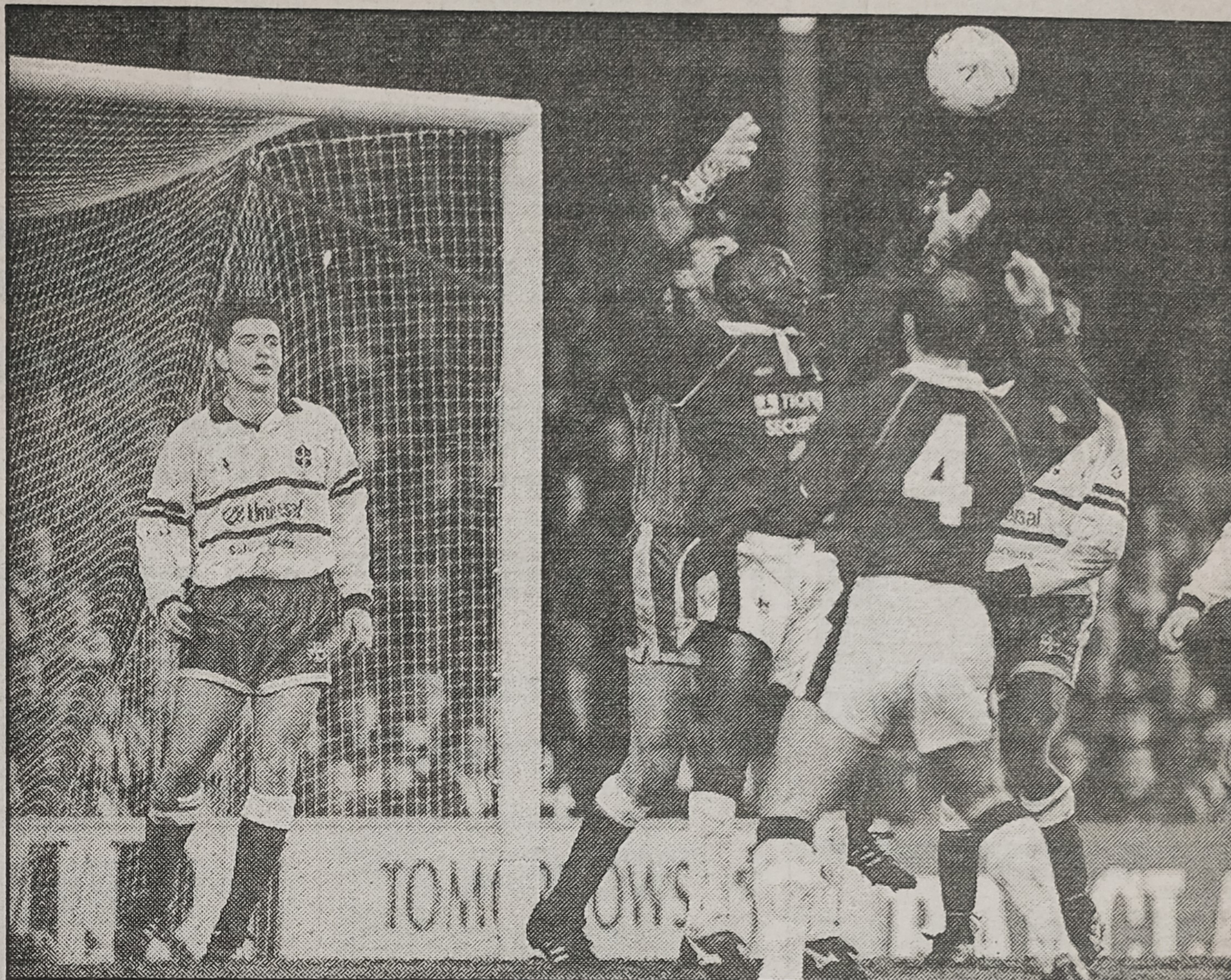
Only the thickness of the crossbar and the most important save of Keith Welch's City career denied David Pleat's team a rare victory.

Phil Gray crashed a 57th minute header against the underside of the bar before being presented with the chance of the match nine minutes from time.

Spectator

City were caught with too many defenders forward as substitute Scott Oakes broke away on the right. His cross found Gray in yards of space, but Welch reacted brilliantly to block the close range shot.

Mark Aizlewood's return to match fitness is a timely boost for Osman. Matt Bryant



HEADS: Andrew Cole and Mark Aizlewood are in the thick of it with Luton keeper Alec Chamberlain

MATCH FACTS

Entertainment rating (maximum 5 stars)

★ ★

City form

Punchless

Man of the Match

MARK AIZLEWOOD

(City) ... another solid display

Referee

JOHN CARTER

(Christchurch) ... poor

Goals

CITY None

LUTON None

Corners

CITY 11

LUTON 5

Shots on target

CITY 5 (Aizlewood, Scott, Rosenior, Cole 2)

LUTON 2 (Dreyer, Gray)

Off-target

CITY 11

LUTON 2

Fouls

CITY 13

LUTON 12

Offsides

CITY 9

LUTON 3

Bookings

CITY Harrison (foul, 26 mins)

Dziekanski (dissent, 44 mins)

LUTON Dreyer (time-wasting, 65 mins)

Chamberlain (dissent, 88 mins)

Teams

CITY (5-2-1-2): Welch;

Llewellyn, Osman (sub

Allison, 70 mins),

Bryant, Aizlewood,

Scott; Shelton (sub

Mellon, 45 mins),

Harrison, Edwards;

Cole, Rosenior.

LUTON (4-4-2)

Chamberlain; James,

Peake, Dreyer,

Johnson; Telfer, Rees

(sub Oakes, 71 mins),

Preece, Hughes;

Williams (sub

Benjamin, 85 mins),

Gray.

Attendance: 8,877

Weather: Mild

Pitch: Soft



RICHARD LATHAM reports from ASHTON GATE

benefits from having experienced players either side of him and the return to three centre-backs has given the team more solidity.

But in all other departments there are problems. With Martin Scott about to start a three-match ban, City have no naturally attacking full-back to get forward and supply crosses.

Gerry Harrison's

energy and enthusiasm are too often misdirected, while cover for Shelton lies in inexperienced players lacking consistency.

Up front Andrew Cole has lost the yard of pace that comes with confidence and sharp thinking. Leroy Rosenior is rendered ineffective if the team fail to feed his aerial strength.

And what of Jacki

Dziekanski? Even on a quiet day, he was arguably City's most creative player.

But the Pole still has an infuriating tendency to spectate when the opposition are in possession. That increases the workload for less gifted teammates and creates gaps in mid-field.

It was Dziekanowski's pass that sent Scott through to fire wide from one of only two clear chances created by City's first half dominance.

The other saw Aizlewood's firm downward header from a Dziekanowski corner smothered and well held

on his line by Alec Chamberlain.

Scott went close with a thunderous 25-yard volley, but too many attacks ended with poor final passes or players straying offside.

Osman bravely withdrew himself and sent on Wayne Allison for the last 20 minutes — a substitution that almost paid immediate dividends.

The wholehearted striker burst clear on the right and crossed early for Cole, whose low shot at the near post was palmed away by Chamberlain.

Cole also had two shots blocked in a goalmouth scramble.



AERO FIGHTERS: Cole gets the better of Trevor Peake. Pictures: CHARLES BRETON



Osman says...

Nice to keep a clean sheet

RUSSELL Osman's decision to take himself off for the final 20 minutes had nothing to do with injury.

"I felt we had to sacrifice a defender to go for the three points and going off myself caused the least disruption," he said.

"While we needed to win, it was satisfying to keep a clean sheet and again I thought the effort put in by the players couldn't be faulted.

"We are just not turning pressure into goals. There was some good goalkeeping and some poor finishing, but at times the ball didn't run for us.

"Keith Welch made a vital save, but hardly had anything else to do. That suggests we are getting more solid and have a base on which to build."