

Sports News

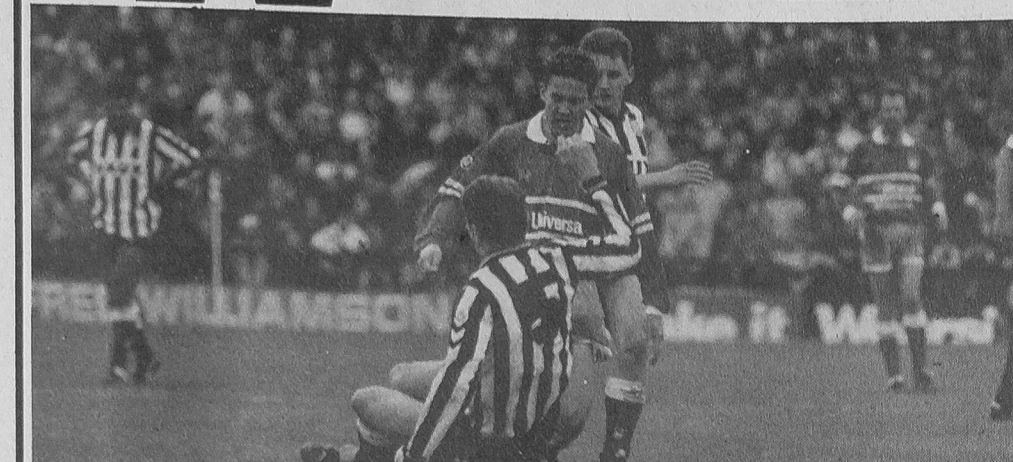
TOWN MATCH VERDICT

Sunderland.....2
Luton Town.....2
(Half-time.....1-0)

★★★★★

Action pictures: Josh Levy

Brian Swain reports



● **CRUNCHER:** Paul Telfer feels the full force of a tackle by Terry Butcher. It was later discovered that the result was a cracked toe for the Town midfielder, but he stayed on the field, and headed the injury-time equaliser.

Skill has last word over intimidation

ANY DOUBTS we had about Luton Town's ability to stay in the First Division were swept aside at Roker Park, by the team's performance and by the result.

Four days after beating promotion-chasing West Ham, the Town stood up to an intimidating ordeal at Sunderland, against a team battling to avoid relegation.

And battle was the aim of the home

side, with their uncompromising and often physical style which matched the bleak windy day and the mood of their tough supporters.

Ball-players needed bodyguards as the Rokerites harnessed the wind in the first half with a blitz of powerful long-ball attacks, backed up by tackling that was sometimes more than fierce.

They looked for the head of Mick Harford, but also used the wings, with defenders and midfielders slinging long passes out to the flanks.

By contrast, the Town tried to keep on playing their football, and having survived the first-half battering with only one goal conceded reduced the big crowd to angry frustration in the second by showing that passing man to man is more than a Southern softstyle.

Sunderland won the first half and the Town had much the better of the second, and with two goals in the last four minutes adding to the excitement it was a match to enjoy for the visiting fans.

The players had every right to enjoy the result, if not the physical threat that Sunderland posed.

The Pressbox man of the match honours went unanimously to David Preece, who dropped a delightful goal into the middle of a canny holding and passing game in midfield.

But manager David Pleat offered a judgement that Paul Telfer had also been outstanding, and not only for his injury-time equaliser which gave the Town the point they so richly deserved.

Left back Marvin Johnson suffered a knee

ligament injury in a crunching tackle to stop Shaun Cunningham. After lengthy treatment, conducted to a storm of booing from blinkered home fans, he hobbled on for nine minutes before limping off in the 20th minute.

That forced a big change, with Scott Oakes going on as sub.

Telfer switched to right back, with Julian James moving to the left.

Oakes went to the left of midfield and Jason Rees switched to the right.

If the two lightweight youngsters struggled a little, they kept plugging away on duties foreign to their real skills.

Dreyer, Trevor Peake and Julian James were magnificent defending against Sunderland's aerial bombardment.

Alex Chamberlain did all that was necessary, with Sunderland helping by not putting too many of their efforts on target.

And having got to half time slightly fortunate to be only one down, the Town had the resilience to take the game to the opposition in the second half.

The crowd, loud and passionate in praise or criticism, got more and more restless as they saw things changing.

Goalkeeper Tony Norman had to fly across goal to push a snap-shot by Gray round the post, but four minutes after the break he was caught flat-footed by the quick thinking of Preece.

Gray was returned by Ball nearly 30 yards from goal.

As Sunderland prepared to defend the obvious floated free kick

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Match details

Sunderland 2 Luton Town 2

LUTON TOWN: Chamberlain; James, Peake, Dreyer, Johnson Oakes, 20 mins; Telfer, Kamara, Preece, Rees; Dixon, Gray (Williams 85 mins).
SUNDERLAND: Norman; Kay, Butcher, Ball, Gray; Owers, Armstrong, Cunningham, Atkinson; Goodman, Harford (Davenport, 77 mins). Other sub: Colquhoun.

THE GOALS — 1-0: 31 mins: Don Goodman, curling drive into top corner after skipping round Paul Telfer; 1-1: 49 mins: David Preece, brilliant wide-assisted 30-yard free kick after spotting Tony Norman off his line; 2-1: 86 mins: Goodman again, close range from headed pass by Gary Owers. In behind the defence but played inside by Scott Oakes out wide; 2-2: In injury time: Paul Telfer near post header from corner by Preece.

OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town five saved and seven wide; Sunderland seven saved and eight wide. Corners: 7-5 to the Town.

REFEREE: Steven Bell, Huddersfield: did well to stay in command as the home side showed a rugged approach at times, particularly Kevin Ball.

BOOKED: John Dreyer, Kicking the ball away; Trevor Peake, Gordon Armstrong, both dissent.

ATTENDANCE: 16,493, with 314 from Luton doing well to make their voices heard in face of the intimidating Roker roar.

ENTERTAINMENT: Very good, with Sunderland close to blitzing the Town in the first half, but with Luton getting back by playing better passing football. The draw was the right result.

into the box, Preece saw Norman off his line and very carefully placed the free kick into the air, perfectly weighted for the wind to help it swirl over the goalkeeper into the top corner.

It was a touch of brilliance that knocked the heart out of Sunderland and their fans.

Oakes cut inside and let rip with a scorching drive which Norman tipped round the post, and when the Town were in danger at the other end Dreyer took the ball off the toes of Brian Atkinson as he prepared to shoot for goal.

As the Town's passing toyed with the home side their fans were going potty.

It got so bad that when their own Gordon Armstrong was being booked they actually chanted 'Off, off, off.'

Goodman got a goal as Dreyer headed a pass over the top. He looked offside, until it was seen

'It felt like a victory'

MANAGER David Pleat summed up why he and the Town fans at Roker were so delighted with the 18th draw of the season.

The point looked safe until four minutes from time, when Sunderland went 2-1 up against the run of second half play.

But Paul Telfer struck with his second goal of the season in injury time, and that, said the manager, felt just like a winning goal.

Sunderland player-manager Terry Butcher said he was gutted because his side should have won and didn't.

Mr Pleat gave a far more cheerful Press conference.

He said: 'Apart from a couple of minutes before Sunderland's second goal we were much the more composed.'

Told that David Preece was everyone's nomination as man of the match, Mr Pleat said he would not argue, but added: 'I thought Paul Telfer was magnificent, but I was pleased with them all.'

'Sunderland were very strong, and our strikers got real stick. We had to resist tough physical play, and did.'

'At half time I thought that if we could keep the ball down and relax we would be OK, and we did that.'

'But it was a very hard game, and I am delighted with the draw.'

By contrast, the Luton contingent, crammed into a tiny corner of a terrace, stayed to applaud their team. They had a far better day out than the home fans.

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