Sports News

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TOWN MATCH VERDICT

Middlesbrough.....0
Luton Town 0

★★★★

Brian Swain reports

Action pictures: John Sherwood

Battle to save point gives renewed hope

THE overdue but very welcome fresh point of the season lifted the Town off the bottom of the First Division at Ayresome Park, and gave renewed hope to the dwindling band of diehards who take to see better days.

It might just be turning point, the first signs that the Town might not, after all, be the easy touch opponents expect.

Middlesbrough had lost their last two games, and were mortified to be down at home to Stoke four days before the Town's visit.

The local paper's preview indicated the thought that Boro were lucky was Luton next.

By the end of the game, they had a different view. They had expected the Town to be pretty pretty with no punch.

Instead they saw a display that added stamina to some entertaining attacking, even if the Town did have a little dangerous gap.

On run of play the Boro should have won, but they were kept out by a mixture of poor finishing and tremendous goalkeeping by Jurgen Sommer.

The Luton keeper's Boro players and fans, and the frustration showed as much of the pitch as the Town fielded and scrapped.

In some ways, the performance could not be as good as what we saw in the 4-1 defeat at Tranmere.

But there was more discipline in defending, more hearts and more commanding and more effort to the second competitive game in succession.

Boro manager Bruce Rioch said the Boro's defence was one of the second half, but the performance could not easily have nicked an unpredictable victory.

At the interval, I felt the Town had taken the hard part. They had frustrated the home side at every turn, and should have been prepared to complete the job.

Instead, the Boro rebodied their efforts, and it became a case of everyone defending, in the hope of a lucky or awkward rebound power of Boro attacks.

The former Vicarage Road man was made to look like a Wimbledon player by Trevor Peake and John Hendrie who were in midfield despite cramp and injuries. Wilkinson got away with a rising rocket from the left, in the first incident, but Peake and Hendrie kept referee busy.

Wilkinson from behind, and was booked. I had a good view of Trevor Peake, because it was a case of meeting fire with fire.

The Town were on the defensive for most