Telephone Advertising: (0462) 423423; Editorial (0462) 31288; Dunstable Editorial: (0582) 60...

Sports News

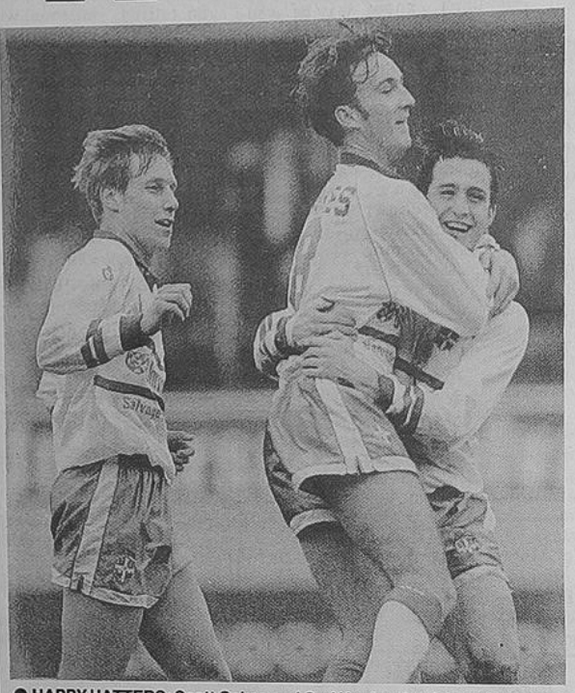
TOWN MATCH VERDICT

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

★★★

Brian Swain reports. Action pictures by John Sherwood.

Rejuvenated side switches target to promotion chase



● HAPPY HATTERS: Scott Oakes and Ceri Hughes lead the celebrations, with Julian James about to join in, after the Town's opening goal.

THE team struggling to claw its way above the relegation zone at the turn of the year is now starting to look at the play-off places in the First Division after its seventh consecutive home victory was achieved with something in hand on Saturday.

Luton Town could have been forgiven for being a notch below their very best against Sunderland.

But the team spirit and confidence that comes from a run of only one defeat in 14 outings was more than enough to see off the visitors.

It was not quite a stroll, because Sunderland shows signs of being able to get back into the game after the Town took an early lead.

And in the last minutes or so, after a defensive mix-up gave the visitors a consolation goal, there was a real danger that Sunderland might nick an equaliser they did not deserve.

In the event the Town earned their little bit of luck, with Sunderland's Martin Smith failing to get hold of an attempted volley after a corner, and justice was done.

The matchwinners were **Scott Oakes** and the two wide attackers, **Ceri Hughes** on the left and **Paul Telfer** on the right.

With the rest of the team also showing the confidence that is born of consistent success, it was a satisfying result, and performance to match.

And all the more so in view of the hard week the players had endured, at Cardiff and then at home to Portsmouth.

Resilience, and a newfound ability to make the telling early mark was in the forefront again, with the Town grabbing the lead from their first attack.

A corner by Oakes was half-cleared, and **David Preece** played the ball back to Oakes. He fired in a low cross which bounced around like a pinball before settling in the net behind prostrate Alec Chamberlain.

It got there via Hughes, Garry Bennett and Chamberlain, an own goal as Bennett tried to clear.

But Hughes, on his 23rd birthday, claimed it, and Bennett had no wish to argue.

There was no dispute over the second goal, after 34 minutes.

UNHAPPY

Hughes, marauding strongly, ran at Sunderland and their skipper, Kevin Ball, carefully got in his trip on the edge of the box, a second or two before it could be a penalty.

But Oakes made it as good as a penalty. Telfer went into the wall, nipped out as Oakes shot, and the ball went through the hole and past the mistimed dive of Chamberlain.

If the keeper had an unhappy return to his old stamping ground so did striker Phil Gray, who hardly had a look in against **Trevor Peake** and **John Dreyer**.

Sunderland's attack threatened at times without making any real impression, and they were lucky not to be much further behind before their 87th-minute consolation.

Kerry Dixon curled a delightful 30-yarder over Chamberlain, but on to the top of the bar, and despite some harsh tackling the Town kept looking for the third goal.

Oakes and Hughes were the victims as Andy Melville and Brian Atkinson were cautioned, with Preece later collecting his first yellow card for a year for a mistimed tackle on Martin Smith.

The loss of Oakes, six minutes into the second half, cost the Town their fluency, although **Tony Thorpe** did well as sub.

TIRED

Without Oakes the Town lost a lot of their pace, but they should have stretched the lead, with Dixon heading just over the bar from a cross by Oakes.

Not surprisingly, after a hard week and on a heavy pitch, the Town looked a little tired and less than composed as the final stages were reached, and a rare mistake in defence set up Sunderland for a grandstand finish.

They had committed three men to attack for the second half, and with three minutes to go Peake and **Juergen Sommer** got into a tangle.

Peake was shepherding the ball back towards goal, inviting Sommer to advance and collect. But the keeper did not, nor did he warn the skipper that Craig Russell was breathing down his neck.

The Sunderland man nipped in and Sommer blocked his shot. Gray followed up, but Peake got in the way of his shot, only for Lee Howey to score from that second rebound.

EXPECTING

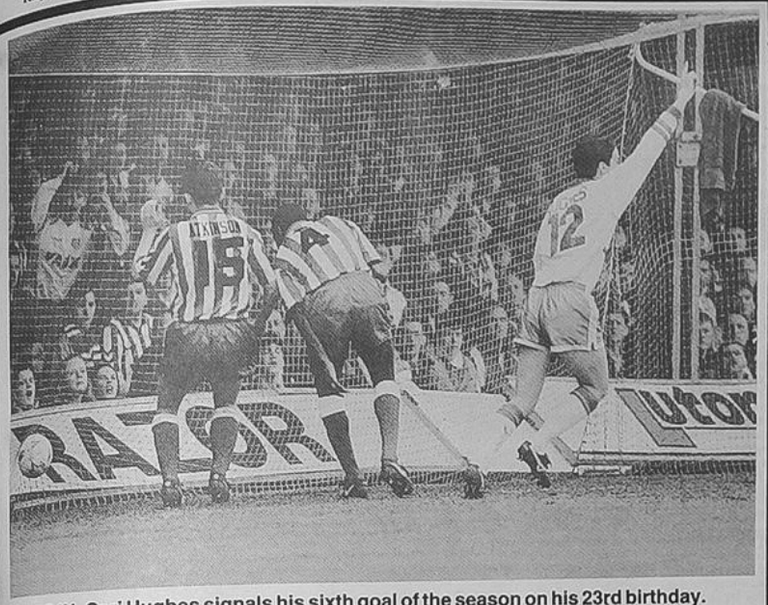
Sunderland poured forward after that, but failed to capitalise, and at the other end Chamberlain made a good save to deny **John Hartson**, sub for Preece, a third Town goal.

No matter, 2-1 was more than good enough for a crowd that is now turning up expecting to see a win, rather than fearing the worst.

The transformation in the Town side and outlook has been quite wonderful. Just before Christmas, when John Aldridge stole the points for Tranmere, the Town were in the bottom three.

Since then ten league games have yielded six wins and three draws, 21 points out of a possible 30.

Now it's promotion form, with three cup-tie wins a nice little bonus.



● IT'S IN: Ceri Hughes signals his sixth goal of the season on his 23rd birthday.

The match details

LUTON TOWN: Sommer; Linton, Peake, Dreyer, James; Telfer, Harper, Preece (Hartson 73 mins), Hughes; Oakes (Thorpe 52 mins), Dixon. Sub goalkeeper Petterson.

SUNDERLAND: Chamberlain; Owers (Ord 23 mins), Bennett, Melville, M. Gray (Smith 60 mins); Atkinson, Ferguson, Ball, Russell; P. Gray, Howey. Sub goalkeeper Norman.

THE GOALS: 1-0, 4 minutes: Ceri Hughes credited with the final touch in a goalmouth scramble after Sunderland failed to deal with a hard low cross by Scott Oakes. Garry Bennett got the last touch, for an own goal, but agreed Hughes should claim it as a 23rd birthday present;

2-0 34 minutes: Scott Oakes, 18-yard free kick, for a foul by Kevin Ball on Ceri Hughes, driven through a hole in the wall made by Paul Telfer;

2-1 87 mins: Lee Howey after the Town defence got into a tangle with a misunderstanding between Juergen Sommer and Trevor Peake.

OTHER STRIKES: Town seven saved, three wide and clever 30-yarder by Kerry Dixon bounced on to the top of the bar; Sunderland three saved, five wide. **Corners:** 7-4 to the Town.

REFEREE: Kelvin Morton, Bury St Edmunds: put in a very good performance.

BOOKED: David Preece for a foul on Martin Smith; Andy Melville for a foul on Scott Oakes which put him out of the game; Brian Atkinson for a foul on Ceri Hughes.

ATTENDANCE: 9,367, including nearly 2,000 from Sunderland. So where are the thousands of cup-tie fanatics who haven't missed a game in years?

ENTERTAINMENT: Pretty good, although the Town, in their third match in seven days, looked a little tired in the later stages. But they had done the business early on, and deserved their seventh consecutive home win.

The First Division

	HOME					AWAY					
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	P
C. Palace	32	11	4	1	32	14	6	4	6	24	23	59
Charlton	31	11	3	3	25	10	5	4	5	16	17	55
Leicester City	31	10	5	1	37	20	5	3	7	15	19	53
Derby Co.	32	11	1	4	33	19	4	4	8	18	28	50
Stoke City	32	11	2	3	26	14	3	6	7	17	30	50
Millwall	29	10	4	1	26	11	4	4	6	15	22	50
Tranmere	31	10	2	3	30	16	4	5	7	13	21	49
Nottm Forest	30	6	7	2	23	15	7	2	6	24	19	48
Wolves	31	8	6	3	28	15	3	7	4	18	16	46
Notts County	31	11	1	3	28	17	3	3	10	17	34	46
Bristol City	32	7	4	4	19	15	5	5	7	15	22	45
Southend	31	7	3	6	25	20	6	1	8	20	23	43
Bolton Wdrs	32	7	5	2	24	15	4	5	9	16	23	43
Luton Town	30	10	0	5	29	16	2	5	8	13	22	41
Portsmouth	32	7	5	3	20	13	3	6	8	16	31	41
Middlesbrough	29	6	5	3	22	11	4	5	6	17	20	40
Sunderland	31	9	2	4	21	13	2	4	10	10	25	39
West Brom	32	6	6	4	28	22	3	3	10	17	28	36
Grimsby	30	3	10	1	17	11	4	4	8	19	25	35
Watford	32	6	4	6	29	28	2	3	11	18	36	31
Barnsley	29	4	3	8	16	21	4	4	6	21	24	31
Birmingham	33	6	6	5	19	20	1	3	12	14	32	30
Oxford Utd	31	6	3	7	20	27	1	5	9	13	30	29
Peterborough	30	5	7	4	17	13	1	3	10	10	24	28

● Not including last night's match, Notts County v Barnsley. Playing tonight: Nottingham Forest v Peterborough, Southend v Millwall.

Facts and figures of the Town's season so far

● CHART SHOWS Town score first, goalscorers, gates and league position.

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE DIV I

1993

AUGUST
14 Watford (h) 2-1 (Telfer, Dixon) ..... 9,149 —
21 Portsmouth (a) 0-1 ..... 12,248 —
28 Nottm Forest (h) 1-2 (Hartson) 9,788 22

SEPTEMBER
11 Bolton Wdrs (h) 0-2 ..... 7,199 24
14 Tranmere (a) 1-4 (Benjamin) 5,871 24
18 Middlesbro (a) 0-0 ..... 12,487 23
25 Birmingham (a) 1-1 (Telfer) 11,081 23

OCTOBER
2 Barnsley (h) 5-0 (Oakes 2, Hartson, James, Houghton) 6,201 21
5 Bristol City (h) 0-2 ..... 5,956 21
9 Derby Co (a) 1-2 (Williams) 15,885 23
16 Notts Co (h) 1-0 (Dickov) 6,366 21
20 Sunderland (a) 0-2 ..... 13,760 23
23 Oxford (a) 1-0 (Hughes) 5,161 19
30 Leicester (h) 0-2 ..... 8813 21

NOVEMBER
2 C. Palace (a) 2-3 (Aunger, Hughes) 10,925 23
7 Charlton (h) 1-0 (Telfer) 6,327 18
14 Southend (a) 1-2 (Dixon) 5,567 18
27 Stoke (h) 6-2 (Dixon 3, Hughes, Oakes, Hartson) 7,384 15

DECEMBER
4 Charlton (a) 0-1 ..... 7,121 17
11 Tranmere (h) 0-1 ..... 7,075 19
19 Watford (a) 2-2 (Preece, Dreyer pen) 7,567 21
27 Peterboro (a) 0-0 ..... 9,522 20
29 Grimsby (h) 2-1 (Harper, Hughes) 7,234 18

1994

JANUARY
1 West Brom (a) 1-1 (Preece) 16,138 18
15 Notts Co (a) 2-1 (Dixon 2) 6,589 17
23 Derby Co (h) 2-1 (Telfer, Oakes) 9,371 17

FEBRUARY
5 Oxford (h) 3-0 (Oakes, Thomas, Thorpe) 7,366 16
12 Leicester (a) 1-2 (James) 16149 17
22 Portsmouth (h) 4-1 (Telfer, Preece, Hughes, Oakes) 6,533 17
26 Sunderland (h) 2-1 (Hughes, Oakes) 9,367 14

APPEARANCES (as sub in brackets): Ever-presents 30: Sommer and Peake. Telfer 28(1), Hughes 28, Dreyer 27, Harper 25, Oakes 23(3), Linton 21(1), Dixon 19(1), Johnson 16, Preece 15, James 13(4), Hartson 12(8), Rees 7(1), Houghton 6(8), Williams 4(8), Campbell 4(8), Aunger 3, Thorpe (4) Petterson (1). *On loan:* Thomas 9, Dickov 8(7). *Before transfer:* Benjamin 2(1).

Number of players used: 23, same as last season.

GOALS: Dixon and Oakes 7. Hughes 6. Telfer 5. Hartson and Preece 3. James 2. One each by Houghton, Williams, Aunger, Dreyer (pen), Harper, Thorpe, Thomas, Dickov, Benjamin.

ASSISTS: Oakes 10. Hughes 8. Dixon 5. Three each by Harper and Hartson. Johnson 2. One each by Linton, Telfer, Houghton, Preece, Williams and Thomas.

THE FA CUP

Round 3:
Jan 18 Southend (h) 1-0 (Telfer) 7,953
Round 4:
Jan 29 Newcastle (a) 1-1 (Thorpe) 32,25
Replay
Feb 9: Newcastle (h) 2-0 (Hartson, Oakes) 13,50
Round 5:
Feb 20: Cardiff (a) 2-1 (Oakes, Preece) 17,39

APPEARANCES: Four by Sommer, Linton, Peake, Dreyer, James, Telfer, Harper, Preece and Oakes. Dixon 3(1). Hughes 2. Thorpe 1(1). Campbell 1(2). Hartson 1. Houghton one as sub.

GOALS: Oakes 2 and one each by Telfer, Thorpe, Hartson and Preece.

GOAL ASSISTS: Two by Preece and one each by Houghton, Peake, Linton and Hartson.

THE COCA-COLA CUP

Round 1 (1): Aug 17 Cambridge (a) 0-1 ..... 1,[illegible]
Round 1 (2): Aug 24 Cambridge (h) 0-1 ..... 3,[illegible]

APPEARANCES: Two each by Sommer, James, Johnson, Peake, Dreyer, Benjamin, Preece and Hughes. Oakes 1(1). Houghton 1(1), Rees 1, Telfer 1, Campbell 1, Williams 1, Hartson (1).

THE WEEKEND'S FULL LOCAL SOCCER RESULTS

S. Midlands League

O'BRIEN TROPHY: Biggleswade Tn 2 Shillington 2.
PREMIER DIV: Hatfield 3 Wingate 0; Letchworth 0 M. Keynes 1; Luton OB 1 Hoddesdon 0; P. Bar Tn 4 Bedford Tn 4; Welwyn 3 Langford 1.
SENIOR DIV: Bedford Utd 2 Toddington 7; London Colney 2 Shenley 1; Pitstone 0 61FC 0.
DIV ONE: Eaton Bray 2 Scot 3; Houghton Tn 4 Flamstead 2.

RESERVE SECTION
CHALLENGE TROPHY: Stony 2 Leverstock 3; Toddington 2 L. Colney 0. **DIV 1A:** 61FC 4 Pitstone 1; Tring Ath 4 Totternhoe 1. **DIV 1B:** Ashcroft 2 Caddington 3; Harpenden 0 Oxford 3; Shefford 3 Biggleswade 6. **DIV 2:** Ampthill 4 MK County 2; Deko 1 Mercedes 1; Potters Bar Cru 0 De Havilland 4; Walden 2 Houghton Tn 0.

Luton District League

WILLIAM PEASE TROPHY: Kent Ath 4 Stockwood Ath 0; Singh Sabha 2 Studham 4 aet.
PREMIER DIV: AC Cadoza 9 Flitwick 2; Dagnall 2 Crawley Green 9.
DIV ONE: Brickmakers 3 Thistle 8; Studham Res 9 Flitwick Res 0; Thresher 2 Crawley Gn Res 1; Luton Old Boys A 0 De-La-Rue 0.
DIV TWO: Thistle Res 2 Hockwell Ring 1; Harveys 3 Bray Res 1; Sportsman Dunstable 1 Whitbread 0; Flitwick A 0 Markyate Res 7; First & Last 2 Harlington 3.

Luton Sunday League

DIV ONE: Bridge Tavern 1 Lea Sports A 13; First & Last Utd 4 Meds 3; AFC Barn Owl 2 DFL 1;.
INVITATION CUP: Dukes Res 2 Round Gn 8.
DIV TWO: AMC 2 Hibbert Arms 0.
STEVE SMITH TROPHY: Purley Tav 6 Dukes 5.

The NHC Sunday League

PREMIER DIV: Celtic 6 Crawley 1; St. Joseph's 8 Limbury B. Swan 1; Brache G. Man 3 Heron 2; Coral 6 GIS Leagrave 3; Stag Sports 2 Enterprise 3.
DIV ONE: S. Heart Res 3 Stopsley Hrrs 0; Lewsey 1 St. Joseph's 4; NT Sugar Loaf 1 Stopsley WMC 6; Heron Res 3 Favourite 3.
DIV TWO: Boater 1 Chalton 2; FC Houghton 10 Stopsley Hrrs Res 0; Houghton Tn 9 TRW 4.
DIV THREE: Strawplaiters 7 O.Moat House 0; Black Swan 3 Coral Res 2; GIS 4 Coulter 2; Borough Arms 10 Vauxhall HT 0.
DIV FOUR: NT Sugar Loaf Res 1 Flint Utd 3; Wigmore Ath 0 Lewsey Res 2.
DIV FIVE: AFC Stopsley 1 R. Mail 3.
DIV SIX: Houghton Tn 1 Toddington 0; Houghton Regis 6 White Hart 3; Black Swan Res 2 Woodstock Wdrs 6; O.Moat House Res 5 Wellington 6.
DIV SEVEN: Postels 1 Magnum Res 1; H. Cab 12 Bedco OB 1; Limbury Utd 9 Luton Rover 0; Fidus 1 Sportsman 2; Red Star Res 3 Lynmore 4; Pulsebeat 12 Red Lion 1; Thameslink 0 Markyate Res 6.
SUNDAY LOWER JUNIOR CUP: Silsoe Rgrs 2 The Harrow 2; Magnum 1 Renhold Utd 0.

S. Beds Sunday League

PREMIER DIV: Sundon Pk 2 Moor Pk 3; Green Man Clophill 0 Macom Eagles 3; Nurdin & Peacock 4 Leicester Arms 1.
DIV ONE: Painters Arms 2 Rose & Crown 3; Ramridge 0 Moor Pk Res 1; EG Chiltern 4 Inter-City 3; Beds Yeoman 2 Britannia 2.
DIV TWO: Suspension Systems 2 Engineer 1.
DIV THREE: Wigmore Sports 1 Air Express 2; Park Tn 3 Northside 0; Bromley Ath 5 Eddie's Bar 1.
BEDS CENTENARY CUP: W. Horne 4 Lea Bank 6.

Chiltern Youth League

UNDER 18: Leighton Tn 11 H Hatters 1; Sundon Pk 1 Icknield Ath 4.
UNDER 17 DIV ONE: Downside A 1 Limbury BC 2; Dunstable Tn 1 Foxes 9. **DIV TWO:** Ramridge B 0 Ampthill 8; Tring Tn 4 Leighton Cor 4; Manor 2 Griffin Brache 15; AFC Houghton 3 Mandeville 8.
UNDER-16: Putteridge 0 Warden Hill 6.
UNDER 15 DIV ONE: Ramridge A 6 Dunstable Tn 2; Lewsey 1 Foxes 1. **DIV TWO:** Ramridge B 4 Deko 0; L. Colney 3 Downside 1; Beaudesert OB 0 Icknield Ath 8 (aband). **LEAGUE CUP:** Scot 4 Aylesbury 1.
UNDER-14 LEAGUE CUP: E. Bray 0 St. Joseph's 9; Leighton Cor 1 Fairlands 7. **DIV ONE:** Astra 0 Lewsey 7; Foxes 2 Flamstead 2. **DIV TWO:** Houghton Tn 3 Warden Hill 2; S. Heart B 2 Markyate 5; Lea Sports 5 Pin Gn 1. **DIV THREE:** Downside 2 Barton Stars 9; Luton BC 1 Deko 2; Flitwick Eagles 4 Icknield Ath 4.
UNDER-13 CUP: Selby 0 Lewsey 3 aet; Ramridge A 2 Leighton Cor 1. **DIV ONE:** Dunstable Tn 7 Sundon Pk 1; Foxes 0 S. Heart A 5; Stony 9 Celtic 1; Wdn Hill 0 St. Joseph's 6. **DIV TWO:** Houghton Tn 9 Pioneers 1; Ampthill 1 Ramridge B 8.
UNDER 12 DIV 1: Lewsey 7 Celtic 0; Dunstable Tn 2 Foxes 4; Ampthill A 1 Dunstable Colts 9; Dragons 1 Limbury A 2; AFC Houghton 1 St. Joseph's 8. **DIV TWO:** Jets 2 Markyate 1; Redbourn 18 Parkside 3; Westoning B 0 Ampthill B 8; WL Saints 12 Gilders 2; Sundon Pk 4 Westoning A 1; Flamstead 3 Barton Stars 4; H Hatters 2 Bushmead 1.
UNDER 11 DIV ONE: Ampthill 2 Dunstable Tn 2; Sundon Pk 2 Lewsey A 3; Barnfield 0 Pin Gn 5; Foxes 1 St. Joseph's 6; Leighton Cor A 3 Ramridge 1; Dunstable Markyate 3 Leighton Cor B 10; Limbury 1 Dunstable Colts 3; Lewsey B 2 Barton 0; Celtic 7 Kensworth 1.
UNDER-TEN CUP: S. Heart 0 St. Joseph's 3; Aylesbury 3 Lewsey Cen 3; Leighton Cor 1 Dunstable Colts 1. **DIV ONE:** St. Mary's 0 Celtic 2. **DIV TWO:** Barnfield 6 WL Saints 0; Dunstable Tn 3 Sundon Pk 0; AFC Houghton 3 limbury 5; Flitwick 4 Ampthill 1.

Portsmouth are snowed under

LUTON TOWN 4 PORTSMOUTH 1

BLISTERING starts at the start of each half, and another excellent team performance warmed up a cold night at Kenilworth Road.

The value of the new pitch cover was underlined by the fact that the game was played at all, on a soft surface after snow had been cleared away.

Portsmouth, at one time favourites for a play-off place at the very least, were made to look second best to a Town side full of incisive passing side and excellent work in supporting each other.

"We got it right in midfield and released our runners," said manager David Pleat.

He conceded that Portsmouth suffered for the absence of two of their best players, Paul Walsh and Alan McLaughlin, but added: "I was delighted with the inventiveness and the application we showed."

Midfielder David Preece, perfectly balanced to tip-toe over the soft surface, was the man of the match.

He might even have had the first hat-trick of his careeer, scoring once and seeing two other excellent drives very well saved.

Pompey looked beaten in the first half hour, with Paul Telfer heading in at the far post from a cross by Scott Oakes after five minutes, and Preece smacking in the second after a corner by Oakes was not cleared by a defence that was under pressure from Kerry Dixon.

Gerry Creaney was denied by John Dreyer when he should have converted an easy close range chance two minutes after the Town went two up. The opening was made by a 30-yard cracker by Tondy Dobson which Juergen Sommer stopped but could not held.

In the first minute after the interval Ceri Hughes netted an angled drive, but was given offside. Four minutes later there were no doubts when he cracked in another good shot, from the edge of the box, under the body of Alan Knight.

And with 51 minutes gone it was 4-0 with a clever goal by Scott Oakes.

Goalkeeper Knight advanced to the edge of his penalty area to give Kit Symons the option of a clearance or a pass back.

He tried to clear, and was robbed by Dixon, and from his knock-back Oakes floated a 30-yarder over the confused defenders into the net.

Symons replied with a free header from a corner, but the visitors never looked like getting back into it.

Their manager, Jim Smith, admitted: "Luton handled the conditions a lot better than we did. And we suffered for some kami-kazi defending."

MATCH DETAILS

TOWN: Sommer; Linton, Peake, Dreyer, James; Telfer, Harper, Preece, Hughes; Oakes (Thorpe 81 mins); Dixon (Hartson 74 mins). Sub keeper Petterson.

PORTSMOUTH: Knight; Neill (Wood 53 mins), Gittens, Symons, Daniel (Durnin HT); Kristensen, Blake, Dobson, Powell; Hall, Creaney, Keeper sub Phahavou.

GOALS: 1-0 5 mins; Paul Telfer far post header, left wing cross by Scott Oakes;

2-0 28 mins: David Preece, 20-yard left foot drive after corner by Oakes was half-cleared to him;

3-0 50 mins: Ceri Hughes, low drive inside left slot edge of the box;

4-0 51 mins: Oakes, 30-yard flooter after Pompey defence got into a tangle on the ege of the box;

4-1 54 mins: Kit Symons, free header from a corner.

OTHER STRIKES: Town six saved, five wide and one netted by Hughes but ruled out for offside; Pompey four saved and four wide. **Corners:** 6-5 to Portsmouth.

REFEREE: Gurnam Singh, Wolverhampton: Excellent.

ATTENDANCE: 6,533, on a night when the game was in doubt because of the snow until less than an hour before kick-off.

ENTERTAINMENT: Top quality, with the Town's confidence red hot despite a blizzard in the first half.