Sports News

TOWN MATCH VERDICT

Luton Town.....1
Birmingham.....1
(Half time 1-0)

Brian Swain reports. Action pictures by John Sherwood.

League form hit by the dream of Wembley glory

● BLOODY BRAVE: Steve Claridge's admiration is plain as he survys the bleeding wound that failed to stop David Greene continuing, even after ten stitches were inserted.

TRY as they might, some of Luton Town's players are finding it nearly impossible to turn on the style in top of the mill league games while the prospect of FA Cup glory is just the next season.

Wednesday's Kenilworth Road on Saturday, Birmingham City, rock bottom of the First Division with 13 league games without a win, were able to go home with a point, and could have snatched all three if their team of misfits included a goal finisher.

BELOW PAR

The Town, under strength and below par, will of course be a lot better tonight.

John Dreyer, one of the most impressive men in the team, said: "I had my mind on the game. But all players are different. We look at our recent league results and it is obvious that the cup run is having an effect.

"Well, Hatch is a big game, probably the biggest that a lot of the lads have ever played in, and it shows that in their mind had had their minds on it.

"But we had chances to beat Birmingham, we were the better team. The ball just didn't go in, but they are going to water it for the cup replay."

Manager David Pleat was unusually curt at a brief press conference, refusing to answer any questions.

He complained that his team had been asleep until Paul Telfer put the Town in front four minutes before the interval, and then failed to cash in after making enough chances to score.

Barry Fry, the Blues boss, admits his side's latest bowls blank draw was not enough for a relegation fighting, nearly certain unless Birmingham can find a drawn into wins.

He added that Andy Saville had missed three good chances in the first 20 minutes.

Fry came in a very nervy opening spell by the Town.

In central defence David Greene, who was outstanding at Upton Park, found Saville and Steve Claridge much more of a handful than Lee Chapman and Trevor Morley.

Saville nodded a clear chance over the bar in the seventh minute after a bout of head tennis in the Town goal area.

Then Claridge got round Julian James and crossed for Saville, who Saville heading straight at Andy Petterson, who was deputising for suspended **Jurgen Sommer**.

Finally, from a smart lay-back by Claridge, Saville fired a shot almost straight at the keeper.

At that stage the Town had managed to create one chance, with Telfer snooping side of the far post after a good through ball by Alan Harper.

But the overall quality of football was dull, to put it mildly, and neither side looking too pretty.

The Town missed the injured pair of Carl Hughes, who was rested, but were able to field, comfortably, even when crossed in for injured Kerry Dixon.

Birmingham were torn off a strip by their manager at half-time, and responded with a good four minutes into the second half.

Roger Willis, on the right of midfield, played the ball in to Claridge on the edge of the penalty area. He was on blind side of Dreyer, but saw Petterson slightly off his line, and curled in a quality goal over the keeper's head.

Claridge looked a better player than on his less than productive bout months with the Town a couple of years ago. But he was also the only manager Fry says he is worth a million pounds, but will take £950,000 of Steve Bull, who is good enough to cough up.

WASTED

Claridge, who also scored the Leicester goals that knocked the Blues out of the Coca Cola Cup, admitted he was surprised at such tally.

He was signed from Cambridge for £300,000 four months ago.

He thought that Birmingham did enough to beat the Town, recalling that Saville put a second-half header of the and Gary Cooper clipped the top of the bar with a free kick.

Sub Paul Moulden also wasted a good opportunity, when he fell over just in the way to pull scorned wide open.

Against that, and despite being well below par, the Town should have grabbed a late winner.

Martin Williams, on to sub for two minutes, sped past Chris Whyte in the 87th minute, but was denied by the one-to-one by Bennett's excellent save.

But on the whole it was no day for football highlights to stick in the memory.

Much as the manager keeps telling us that results are more important than the fans will settle for a point they show on Saturday if it is followed by the sight of an unforgiv tonight.

● BRIGHT SPOT: Paul Telfer puts the Town ahead with his sixth goal of the season.

THE WEEKEND'S FULL SOCCER RESULTS

S. Midlands League

PREMIER DIV: Aldersy 3 Biggleswade 1; Bedford Tn 2 Wolf 1; Leighton Tn 2 Northampton Sp 2; Lut Lt 1 Lidlington 2; Buckingham A 0, L P Rec Town 3 Milton Keynes 1.

SENIOR DIV: Tottenhoe 2 Toddington Rov 1; CLP Printers 2 Leverstock 4; L Colney 5 Raborn 0; KJFC 3 Tiling Ath 6; Ampthill 1 Bedford 3; Bedford Utd 1 Wim Bradwell 3; Stanley 0 Windsor 3.

DIV ONE: Dr Hardland 5 Emberton 1; Houghton Tn 0 Debo 2; MK Gt 1 Wrahton 1; M. Bosc 0 Ashcroft 1; Bus Cnrs 2 Cranfield 2; Stotfold 2 Ivinghoe 1.

TROPHY: Biggleswade 2 Oxford City 0; Langford 3 Bar Tn 1; BIV Ch. Barton 3 Portesbery Buckingham 3; Bedford 1 Ca; Cranfield 6 Potton 2; Tring Ath 1 KJFC 2; Tring Tn 3 Stotfold 1; BIV Ath. Ashcroft 3 Bracke Sports 2; Cuddington 1 Stony 1; Harpenden 1 Hatfield 1; Leighton Tn 2 Northampton Sp 2; Bletchley 2 Wolvers 1; Leckhamsth 0, BIV Sp. Rabsons 0 Ampthill 2; Stotfold 2 Ivinghoe 3; Tring Ath 4 Walden 1; Dr Hardland 2 Wrahton Utd Cnrs 1.

Luton District League

LUTON WNDSR FRIDAY'S CUP: Lowley 3 St Leon Old Boys A 1; O. Dunstablians 1 Kent A 0.

PREMIER DIV: Cedrus 4 Dragon 1; Flitwick Tn 2 Christians 6; Sport 2; Crawley Cross 2 Singh Sedna 1; Lowley Utd 4; Thorncroft 1 Sovereign Ath 1; Lowley 5 Pt Leon Old Boys A 1; O. Dunstablians 1 Kent A 0.

DIV ONE: Cedrus 1 Thiele 1; Harlington 2 Dc 2; Rut 1; Lea Sports Crawley Rec 1.

DIV TWO: Christians A 13 Hickford King 0; Flitwick A 1 E. Bury Park 1; Bury Park Res 1 Wilshmead 1; Thorncroft Res 2 EBUC 1; Sportsman Dunstable 7 First & Last 1; Cutgrass 1 Harlington 2; Harvey's Markyate Rut 1.

The NHC Sunday League

PREMIER DIV: Enterprise 1 Bracke Green Man 1 GIS Leagrave 0 Coral 2; Stag Sports 1 Heron 2; Crawley Sports 0 Sacred Heart 1.

DIV ONE: Stopsley Harriers 1 Lebway 3; St. Joseph's 1 Bedford Tn 2; Kingsway Rangers 1 Celtic Rov 1; NT Rail Lost 0 Hemdean Sports 1; Hyde 1 Rov.

DIV TWO: Wigmore 3 Wheathampstead Tn 0; Harrow Rov 1; Bowery 2 Chalton Sports 1; Chalton 2 Houghton Cuddington 1.

DIV THREE: Red Star 1 GIS Rov 0; Black Swan 2 Slater 2; Flitt & Lost 8 Borough Arms 4; Coral Rov 0 Stopsley 1; Lea Sports 2 Bedford Tn 0; Cutgrass 2 Sampsonians 1.

DIV FOUR: Celtic 3, Legion 2 Markyate 2; Stopsley WMC Rov 1 Thomas Utd 3; Vine 0 Bedfordshire Arms 1; Lowley Rov 1; Wigmore Ath 1; Kent 2 Rov 1.

DIV FIVE: Lower Sun & Royal Mail A 1; Cnr Blues 2; Lea Sports 1; Chalton Sundays 1 Wells Star 2; Stopsley Sampsons 1 Bowery Arms Rov 1.

DIV SIX: Swan Rgs 4 Wellington Arms 2; Chalton Sundays 2 Cuddington 1; Black Swan Res 1 Hoop Ath Angels 3 Houghton Tn Res 1.

DIV SEVEN: Chalton Sundays 2 Lea Sports 1; Lowley Utd A Thorncroft 1; Lowley 3 Rover 3; Lowsen 2 Red Star Res 1; Fabri 2 Magnum Res 1; Pinelock Sportsman 2.

Luton Sunday League

DIV ONE: Bun Out 0 Medi 2 (game awarded); Dunstablians 2 Kent 1; Rov 2 Lea Utd 1.

STEVE SMITH CUP: Chalton Sundays 2 Pudey Tav 2 at.

INVITATION CUP: Medical Albion 2 AFC Oldley 1; High Tech Road Cross 0.

DIV TWO: Wigmore 4 AFC, Luton Dukes 0 Jickwood 3; Emerald 1 GIM. Cosmetics 4.

S. Beds Sunday League

SUNDON PARK TROPHY: Lea Utd 0 EC Chalton 2.

FERNANDES CERAMICS TROPHY: Bromley Ath 2 Pastors Arms 1.

PRESTON CUP: Cranfield Rov 2 Sundon Park Pioneers 4; Sundon Social 2 Maulden Athletic 1.

PREMIER DIV: Bromley Ath 2 Clophill 4; Eaton Bray Moor Park 1.

DIV ONE: Ramridge 3 Soda Yeomen 2; Stag Hotel 1 Brunswick 1; Pastors Arms Res 2 Moor Park Res 1.

DIV TWO: Eagle 2 Tophill 1; V. Griffin 4 Sundon Sp Sportsman 2; Eaton & King's Walker Caulk 0; Sportsman 2 Cranfield 1; Brunswick Res 2 Ramridge 1.

DIV THREE: Lea Stadt 3 Wigmore 2; NV Ath 3 Ale Express 1.

Chiltern Youth League

UNDER 18: Sundon Pk Eggs 1 Hitchmen 1.

UNDER 16: Ampthill 2 Ramridge 4; Ampthill 2 Bromley 3; Wootton 9 Houlton 5; Sw. Bean 1 Lanbury 4. DIV TWO: Maulden 2 Barton Town 0; AFC Houghton 4 Leighton Cor 5; Ampthill A Bedford Pavilion 10 2 Colmer 0.

UNDER 14: Potterhdge 0 Ampthill 2; Joseph's 1; Leighton Cor 1 Ampthill 2; Lea Utd 1 Sandon Pk 2.

UNDER 13: Lea Utd 1 Sundon Pk 2; Ampthill 2 Joseph's St. Joseph's 0 Ramridge A 0; Fosco B Dunstable 3 Aston Bech Hill 1. DIV TWO: Ampthill 10 Houlton 0; Ickleford 1 Dolce Dynamo 3; Tring Tn 2 Brunswick Ramridge 3 Houlton 4.

UNDER 8: DIV ONE: S. Heart A 5 Dunstable 2; Tring Tn 1 St. Joseph's 1; Ampthill 4 Flitwick 2; Aylesbury 0 Fairlands 11; Astra 1 Foxes 1; Lea Utd 2 Bar. DIV TWO: Lea Utd White 10 Lea Utd Dragons 1; Pin Cor 2 Markyate 1; Sundon Pk 1 Dunstable Vis 0. DIV THREE: Barton Town Dolphins 1 Pastor Eagles 0 Luton Dc 1; Ickleford 0 Wh. Lion 3.

UNDER 7: DIV ONE: Ampthill 2 Houlton 0; Ramridge 2 St. Joseph's 1; Tring Tn 2 Ramridge 1. DIV TWO: Ampthill 2 Houlton 0.

UNDER 12 GIRL: Lanbury A 4 Lowley 1; Sundon Tn 1 Astra 1; Lowley 0 St. Joseph's Houlton A 0 Leighton Cor 0; St. Joseph's Ramridge 1 Houlton 2; Flamstead 1 Sundon Pk 1; Lowley 2 Astra 2; Ampthill 1 Sundon Pk 1; Pinelock 4 Barton Stars 2 Hitchmen 5.

UNDER 11 GIRL: Lanbury A 2 Lowley 1; Sundon Tn 1 Astra 1; Lowley 0 St. Joseph's Houlton A 0 Leighton Cor 0; St. Joseph's Ramridge 1 Houlton 2; Flamstead 1 Sundon Pk 1; Lowley 2 Astra 2; Ampthill 1 Sundon Pk 1; Pinelock 4 Barton Stars 2 Hitchmen 5.

DIV TWO: Houlton 2 Ramridge 1; Lowley A 2 Astra 0; Lowley 1 Astra 1; Houlton 2 Ramridge 1; Flamstead 1 Sundon Pk 1; Lowley 2 Astra 2; Ampthill 1 Sundon Pk 1; Pinelock 4 Barton Stars 2 Hitchmen 5.

UNDER 10 GIRL: Lanbury A 2 Lowley 1; Sundon Tn 1 Astra 1; Lowley 0 St. Joseph's Houlton A 0 Leighton Cor 0; St. Joseph's Ramridge 1 Houlton 2; Flamstead 1 Sundon Pk 1; Lowley 2 Astra 2; Ampthill 1 Sundon Pk 1; Pinelock 4 Barton Stars 2 Hitchmen 5.

DIV TWO: Houlton 2 Ramridge 1; Lowley A 2 Astra 0; Lowley 1 Astra 1; Houlton 2 Ramridge 1; Flamstead 1 Sundon Pk 1; Lowley 2 Astra 2; Ampthill 1 Sundon Pk 1; Pinelock 4 Barton Stars 2 Hitchmen 5.

DIV THREE: Ampthill 2 Houlton 0; Ramridge 2 St. Joseph's 1; Tring Tn 2 Ramridge 1. DIV TWO: Ampthill 2 Houlton 0.

UNDER 9: DIV ONE: Ampthill 2 Houlton 0; Ramridge 2 St. Joseph's 1; Tring Tn 2 Ramridge 1. DIV TWO: Ampthill 2 Houlton 0.

UNDER 8: DIV ONE: Ampthill 2 Houlton 0; Ramridge 2 St. Joseph's 1; Tring Tn 2 Ramridge 1. DIV TWO: Ampthill 2 Houlton 0.

Facts and figures of the Town's season so far

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

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE DIV 1
1993
AUGUST
Bristol R 2-1 (Telfer, Dixon) 9,149
Portsmouth (a) 0-1 12,248
Bristol C (a) 1-2 (Hartwell) 9,788
SEPTEMBER
10 Bolton Wdrs (h) 2-2 7,199
14 Middlesbrough (a) 1-4 (Benjamin) 5,671
18 Swindon (h) 1-1 (Telfer) 12,487
25 Tranmere (a) 1-1 (Telfer) 11,081
OCTOBER
2 Grimsby (h) 3-0 (Dixon 3, Harper) 7,208
9 Stoke City (a) 1-1 (Dixon) 8,261
16 Bristol City (a) 0-2 8,858
23 Leeds Utd (a) 1-2 (Williams) 15,885
30 Charlton (h) 1-1 (Dixon) 7,208
NOVEMBER
6 Oldham (a) 1-2 13,760
13 Wolves (h) 1-1 (Dougherty) 8,161
20 Swindon (a) 0-2 8,913
DECEMBER
4 Portsmouth (h) 2-0 (Hunger) 7,211
11 Bristol C (h) 1-1 (Hughes) 10,925
18 Bristol R (h) 1-0 (Hughes) 6,327
26 Bristol City (h) 1-1 (Dixon) 10,108
27 Bolton Wdrs (a) 1-1 (Dixon) 9,000
JANUARY
1 Grimsby (a) 0-1 7,384
15 Stoke (h) 0-1 7,121
22 Leeds Utd (h) 2-1 (Dixon, Hunger) 17,171
29 Charlton (a) 0-1 7,567
FEBRUARY
5 Oldham (h) 2-0 (Harper, Hughes) 9,522
12 Wolves (a) 1-2 (Harper, Hughes) 7,254
1994
JANUARY
1 Bristol Rovers (a) 1-1 (Peacock) 19,138
15 Bolton Co (h) 2-1 (Dixon 2) 8,500
23 Derby Co (h) 2-1 (Telfer, Dixon) 9,371
FEBRUARY
5-0 (Dixon, Thomas, Harper) 7,366
12 Leicester (a) 1-2 (Jones) 16,149
22 Portsmouth (h) 4-1 (Telfer, Peacock, Hughes, Dixon) 8,332
26 Sunderland (h) 3-1 (Hughes, Dixon) 9,367
MARCH
4 Stoke Forest (a) 0-2 22,248
9 Middlesbro (h) 1-1 (Harper pen) 7,211
19 Birmingham (h) 1-1 (Telfer) 7,092
APPEARANCES (as sub in brackets): Sommer 32, Telfer 31(2), Peake, Hughes, Harper, Dixon 29, Williams 27, Thomas 26, Peacock 19(1), Preece 18, Jones 17, James 15(1), Hartson 13(8), Ford 11, Sampson 2, Sellars 2, Thomas 4(10), Campbell 4(8), Hodgkiss 4(2), Harper 1(5), Patterson 1(2), Ge Sampson 2, Sellars 2, Thomas 4(10), Campbell 4(8), Hodgkiss 4(2), Harper 1(5), Patterson 1(2), Ge Bickerton 1(1), Bickerton 1(1), Burke 2(1), Hartson 1(1), Bickerton 1(1), Burke 2(1), Hartson 1(1), Bickerton 1(1), Burke 2(1), Hartson