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Sports News

TOWN EASTER VERDICT

Brian Swain reports on the holiday games

Action pictures by John Sherwood

★★★

● BACK IN BUSINESS: Jason Rees in action against Peterborough, on his return to the First Division after a three-month loan spell with Mansfield in the Third. He had a good run with Andy King's team, and helped them rise up the table, but has enough belief in his own ability to stay at Kenilworth Road and try to force his way into the Town's squad as they prepare for Wembley.

Stars missing and Mariners cash in

GRIMSBY TOWN 2 LUTON TOWN 0

DAVID Pleat ducked out of watching an under-strength Luton Town side at Grimsby on Monday.

He had his mind on the FA Cup semi-final, and so did his players at Blundell Park.

The Easter haul of four points from the games at Millwall and at home to Peterborough had given the Town relief from lingering pressure in the First Division.

The play-offs are not a realistic ambition, while relegation is a very small threat in view of games in hand, particularly home matches.

Players have gone through a gruelling schedule in recent weeks, so it made sense to give some of them a rest before the big test at Wembley.

The boss was in Newcastle, doing his homework on Chelsea, while at Grimsby five Town players expected to star at Wembley were left out.

And one thing it showed was that the strength in depth of the Town is more about quantity than quality.

Except for **David Greene**, who deputised for **Trevor Peake**, the players called up were less than brilliant, and a disjointed Town team was lucky to escape a heavier beating.

Spectators included **Kerry Dixon** and **Scott Oakes**, and without them the Town attack was threadbare.

And the midfield, without **David Preece** and **Alan Harper**, until the latter went on as a late sub, was short of creative attacking ideas and defensive strength, and at times swamped by Grimsby raids.

But at least **Des Linton** and **Ceri Hughes** were able to return, to get the match practice they need after injuries.

On a cold windy day, with the gale playing tricks with the ball, Grimsby were worth the points.

Paul Groves headed against the woodwork in the 15th minute and put the rebound wide when it seemed easier to score. But two minutes later David Gilbert gave Grimsby the lead with a firm left-footed cross shot into the far corner after a long free kick by Tony Ford had been flicked on from the edge of the box by Graham Rodger.

With the wind behind them Grimsby mounted a series of attacks and Greene and skipper for the day **John Dreyer** had to work overtime in the face of one way traffic.

Juergen Sommer made a good save to deny Gary Childs and Grimsby wasted half a dozen other chances.

But they settled it six minutes after the break. Sweet passing football gave Steve Livingstone the chance to shoot from the edge of the area.

He was out of luck as the ball hit the bar, but for the second time the Town failed to close down midfielder Gilbert in the penalty area and he netted the rebound.

It took the Town 57 minutes to produce their only scoring attempt of note, when **Mitchell Thomas** thumped over a cross from the left and Linton went diving in at the far post for a header which was well saved.

The game died quietly after that, with Grimsby well in control but wasting their superiority with profligate striking.

Grimsby manager Alan Buckley knew the Town were well under strength, and said: "All we could do was try and get the win, which we did very comfortably. We should have won by a wider margin."

John Moore admitted that he had not enjoyed the game.

He said: "If you take four or five senior players out of your team you will struggle. What we have seen highlights how important senior professionals are to the team.

"Those who were put in will be disappointed because they were playing for Wembley places but will know they have not done as well as they can."

And luckless **Geoff Aunger**, in the side for the fourth time, finished an unhappy afternoon with six stitches in a head wound sustained in a collision with Ford.

Crazy goals at the New Den

MILLWALL 2 LUTON TOWN 2

TWO OF the silliest goals seen in a long time were part of the mixed entertainment when the Town paid their first visit to the New Den.

They were well below form in the first half, and lucky to be level at the interval, but improved considerably after the break.

"When we went 2-1 down we stirred ourselves and played reasonably effectively in the last half-hour," said David Pleat.

One performance to admire came from Juergen Sommer, who settled down and did everything well after making a horrendous mistake for the first goal.

Kasey Keller, his opposite number who is also trying to get into the USA World Cup squad, punted a long clearance downfield.

Sommer advanced to meet it, went too far, and was stranded as the ball bounced over his head. Jamie Moralee nipped in to accept the gift.

Sommer made a good spreading save at Moralee's feet to prevent further disaster before the Town grabbed a surprise equaliser from their first corner, a minute before the interval.

David Preece curled it in with his left foot from the right, Paul Telfer got the near post flick-on, and John Dreyer nodded his third goal of the season on the far post.

Dave Mitchell hammered a shot against the Town's bar before Greg Berry shot Millwall 2-1 up soon after the break.

The Town responded well, with some good football. Preece began to make an impact in the middle, with Ceri Hughes and Telfer making ground on the flanks.

But the equaliser was another freak. Ian Dawes was in position to clear, almost on the goal-line, half-way between the goal and corner flag. With John Hartson and Preece loitering in hope, Dawes gave the ball square to Keith Stevens, almost in front of goal. Millwall's skipper panicked, failed to get the ball under control, and gve it to Preece. He passed it on to Hartson, who eluded Keller's challenge and scored from close range.

MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Sommer; James, Dreyer, Peake, Thomas; Telfer, Harper, Preece, Hughes, Oakes; Hartson (Campbell 80 mins). Other subs Rees and goalkeeper Petterson.

MILLWALL: Keller; Huxford, Stevens, Cunningham, Dawes; Verveer, Allen, Roberts, Berry; Moralee, Mitchell. Subs not used: Beard, Kerr and goalkeeper Carter.

GOALS: 1-0, 10 mins: Jamie Moralee, gift after Juergen Sommer misjudged a bounce; 1-1, 44 mins: John Dreyer, far post header after a corner by David Preece was flicked on at the near post by Paul Telfer; 2-1, 48 mins: Greg Berry, crisp drive from a neat pass by Dave Mitchell; 2-2, 61 mins: John Hartson, after Millwall's defence gave the ball away and was punished by David Preece's pass to Hartson.

OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town three saved and one wide. Millwall five saved, five wide and one hit the bar. Corners: 3-2 to Millwall.

REFEREE: Alan Gunn. Very tolerant and determined not to use the book.

ATTENDANCE: 9,235, including 500 from Luton.

ENTERTAINMENT: Pretty good after an awful first half, with the Town looking as good as the promotion-chasing opposition who have not lost at home since their first match in their new ground.

Monday's Match Details

LUTON TOWN: Sommer; Linton, Dreyer, Greene, Thomas; Telfer, Rees (Harper 63 mins), James, Hughes; Aunger, Hartson (Campbell 77 mins). Goalkeeper sub, not used, Petterson.

GRIMSBY TOWN: Crichton; Ford, Handyside, Rodger, Agnew; Childs (Croft 82 mins), Shakespeare, Groves, Gilbert; Mendonca (Woods 88 mins), Livingstone. Keeper sub Willmot.

THE GOALS:

1-0 17 mins: Dave Gilbert, unmarked for crisp left foot drive after Graham Rodger headed on a long free kick.

2-0 51 mins: Gilbert again, from the rebound after Livingstone shot against the bar.

OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town one saved, seven wide. Grimsby six saved, eight wide, two hit the woodwork. Corners: 7-6 to Grimsby.

BOOKED: John Dreyer, John Hartson, and Grimsby's Paul Agnew, all for fouls.

REFEREE: Terry Lunt of Liverpool. Had a better game than most of the Town team. He wasn't terribly good.

ATTENDANCE: 5,542 including nearly 200 from Luton.

ENTERTAINMENT: Poor for the Town fans, with an under-strength side never getting to grips with the wind or a Grimsby side which played the better football and looked hungrier for a result.

● NUMBER ONE: Kerry Dixon whacks in the opening goal against Peterbrough, and three valuable points are on their way. The Town now have 47 from 37 games, and the Easter programme left them in 18th place in the league, nine points clear of the relegation zone.

Stunner finishes Posh

LUTON TOWN 2 PETERBOROUGH 0

IN THE LAST home match before the trip to Wembley, the Town looked a lot more interested in the league points than they had done in several recent games.

Two goals by **Kerry Dixon** eased our First Division worries and pushed Peterborough deeper into trouble, on a day when the former England striker expected to be rested in preparation for the FA Cup semi-final.

The Town were without **Ceri Hughes**, nursing a very bruised leg after the game at Millwall. **David Pleat** intended to bring in **Tony Thorpe** as his replacement, leaving **John Hartson** as the committed front man. But Thorpe picked up an injury in training the day before the game, so Dixon had to play.

And although Mr Pleat has doubts about using two strikers with similar styles, the Hartson-Dixon combination unlocked a dogged defence after Peterborough goalkeeper Fred Barber threatened to keep his side in the game.

The Town were by far the better footballing side, with speed of movement and good passing putting Peterborough under pressure from the first whistle. But Barber was in superb form.

He made a top class double-save from **Alan Harper** and Hartson, denied **David Preece** three times, and saw a 30-yard screamer by Harper, who was back to his best, whistle past a post.

But even Barber could do nothing to stop the Town taking the lead after 29 minutes. Hartson robbed Darren Baradshaw on the edge of the penalty area and fired off a shot which hit Barber's left-hand post. Peterbrough scrambled the ball clear, but the Town returned it quickly, via a throw-in by **Paul Telfer**, and Hartson hit the same post again, this time with a header. But from the rebound Dixon tapped in his first goal since January 15 at Notts County.

Chris Turner galvanised his side at the interval, and they looked a different proposition. For a time the Town were under pressure, and it was **Juergen Sommer's** turn to make some good saves to preserve the lead.

He was lucky when John McGlashan shot against the bar, and again when he misjudged his advance and Tony Adcock headed into the net from a cross by Lee Williams. The offside flag ruled that one out.

The revival ended with Dixon's second goal, six minutes after Sommer pulled off a super save to deny McGlashan an equaliser.

Oakes sent Telfer attacking down the right, and from the cross to the far side of the penalty area Dixon hit a magnificent volley which passed Barber like a shell. "A classic strike," said Peterbrough assistant boss Mick Halsall.

Mr Pleat agreed, well pleased with the way his side had won in the league for the first time in a month. But he also knew that it might have been different if Peterborough had equalised in their spell of supremacy early in the second half.

But he added: "I was very pleased with everyone in the team. We were terrific in the first 30 minutes."

THE MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Sommer; James, Dreyer, Peake, Thomas; Telfer, Harper, Preece (Campbell 83 mins), Oakes; Dixon, Hartson (Rees 72 mins). Goalkeeper sub: Petterson.

PETERBOROUGH: Barber; Greenman, Bradshaw, Welsh, Spearing; Iorfa, McGlashan, Williams (McGorry 68 mins), Hackett (McGee 68 mins); Adcock, Charlery. Goalkeeper sub: Cooksey.

THE GOALS: 1-0 29 mins: Kerry Dixon tap-in after John Hartson's header hit a post; 2-0 77 mins: thundering right foot volley by Dixon from right wing cross by Paul Telfer.

OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town six saved, six wide, two hit a post in the build-up to the first goal, and a long cross/shot by Jason Rees bounced on to the top of the bar; Peterborough five saved, four wide, one hit the bar and a header by Tony Adcock was netted but ruled out for offside. Corners: 6-3 to the Town.

REFEREE: Peter Jones, Loughborough. Prone to be a little finnicky.

BOOKED: Dominic Iorfa, dissent over the disallowed 'equaliser'

ATTENDANCE: 8,398 for the last home game before at least 20,000 will go to Wembley for the semi-final.

ENTERTAINMENT: Pretty good, with the Town well on top in the first half, struggling to survive for a spell early in the second, then worthy winners after Dixon's stunning killer goal.

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 Bolton 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	
9 Bristol City (h)	0-2	5,956	21	
16 Derby Co (a)	1-2 (Williams)	15,885	23	
19 Notts Co (h)	1-0 (Dickov)	6,366	21	
23 Sunderland (a)	0-2	13,760	23	
31 Oxford (a)	1-0 (Hughes)	5,161	19	
20 Leicester (h)	0-2	8,813	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	
18 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	18	
12 Leicester (a)	1-2 (James)	16,149	17	
22 Portsmouth (h)	4-1 (Telfer, Preece, Hughes, Oakes)	6,533	17	
26 Sunderland (h)	2-1 (Hughes, Oakes)	9,367	14	
MARCH				
4 Nottm Forest	0-2	22,249	16	
8 Middlesbro (h)	1-1 (Dreyer pen)	6,741	15	
19 Birmingham (h)	1-1 (Telfer)	7,690	18	
26 Barnsley (a)	0-1	6,289	18	
30 Millwall (a)	2-2 (Dreyer, Hartson)	9,235	19	
APRIL				
2 Peterboro (h)	2-0 (Dixon 2)	8,398	17	
4 Grimsby (a)	0-2	5,542	18	

APPEARANCES (as sub in brackets): Sommer 36. Telfer 35(1). Dreyer 34. Peake and Hughes both 33. Harper 31(1). Oakes 27(3). Linton 25(1). Dixon 23(1). Preece 21. James 20(4). Johnson 17. Hartson 16(1). Thomas 12(1). Rees 8(2). Houghton 6(8). Williams 5(10). Campbell 4(11). Aunger 4. Greene 3. Thorpe 1(5). Petterson 1(2). *On loan:* Dickov 8(7). Burke 2(1). *Before transfer:* Benjamin 2(1).

Number of players used: 25, two more than last season.

GOALS: Dixon 9. Oakes 7. Hughes and Telfer 6. Hartson 4. Preece 3. James 2. Dreyer 3 (2 pens). One each by Houghton, Williams, Aunger, Harper, Thorpe, Thomas, Dickov, Benjamin.

ASSISTS: Oakes 10. Hughes 9. Dixon 5. Hartson and Harper 4. Telfer 3. Preece and Johnson 2. One each: Linton, Houghton, 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)	32,216	
Replay				
Feb 9	Newcastle (h)	2-0 (Hartson, Oakes)	12,503	
Round 5:				
Feb 20	Cardiff (a)	2-1 (Oakes, Preece)	17,296	
Round 6:				
Mar 14	West Ham (a)	0-0	27,311	
Replay:				
Mar 23	West Ham (h)	3-2 (Oakes 3)	13,166	

APPEARANCES: Sommer, Linton, Dreyer, James, Telfer, Harper, Preece and Oakes 6. Peake 5. Dixon 4(1). Hughes 4. Thorpe 1(1). Campbell 1(2). Hartson 1(4). Greene 1. Houghton and Burke one each as sub.

GOALS: Oakes 5. One each by Telfer, Thorpe, Hartson and Preece.

GOAL ASSISTS: Two each by Preece and Dixon. One each by Hughes, Peake, Linton and Hartson.

THE COCA-COLA CUP

Round 1 (1): Aug 17	Cambridge (a)	0-1	4,065	
Round 1 (2): Aug 24	Cambridge (h)	0-1	3,861	

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 ANGLO-ITALIAN CUP

Aug 31	Watford (a)	1-2 (Preece)	2,854	
Sep 7	Southend (h)	1-1 (Dixon)	1,823	

APPEARANCES: Two each by Sommer, Hughes, Preece, Peake, Dreyer, Johnson, Houghton, Dixon and Hartson. Williams 1(1). James, Telfer and Linton one each. One each as sub by Oakes, Greene and Woolgar.

THE WEEKEND'S FULL LOCAL SOCCER RESULTS

S. Midlands League

SATURDAY O'BRIEN TROPHY: London Colney 0 Bedford Tn 0; Shenley 2 Langford 1; Houghton Tn 4 Biggleswade Tn 3.

SATURDAY PREMIER DIV: Brache 2 Milton Keynes 0; Hoddesdon Tn 1 Harpenden Tn 1; Letchworth 3 Arlesey Town 1; Luton OB 4 Potters Bar Tn 0; Shillington 0 Hatfield Tn 2; Welwyn GC 3 Wingate 2.

SATURDAY SENIOR DIVISION CUP: Totternhoe 2 Pitstone 1. SATURDAY SENIOR DIV: 61FC 4 Risborough Rgrs 0; New Bradwell 0 Ampthill Tn 2; Leverstock 2 Winslow 4; Tring Ath 3 Shefford Town 1. MONDAY: Shenley 0 Shefford Tn 0; Tring Ath 1 Winslow 1.

SATURDAY DIV ONE: Cranfield 3 Caddington 1; Flamstead 2 Eaton Bray 1; MK County 4 Sandy 1; Mercedes 0 Potters Bar Cru 4; Scot 1 Ashcroft 1; Stony 7 De Havilland 0; Walden Rgrs 0 Delco 1. MONDAY: Ashcroft 0 Delco 3; Caddington 1 Flamstead 1; De Havilland 0 Walden 4; Emberton 4 Scot 3; Houghton Town 4 Mercedes 2; MK County 2 Eaton Bray 5; Stony Stratford 3 Cranfield 1.

RESERVE SECTION

SATURDAY CHALLENGE TROPHY: Tring Ath 0 Barton Rovers 3; Potters Bar Town 3 Langford 2. SATURDAY DIV 1A: Bedford Tn 5 61FC Luton 0; Bedford Utd 0 Tring Tn 0; Buckingham Ath 1 Totternhoe 0; Pitstone 0 London Colney 5; Toddington Rov 4 Cranfield Utd 2. MONDAY: Pitstone 1 Potters Bar Tn 7; Totternhoe 1 Toddington Rov 4. SATURDAY DIV 1B: Arlesey Tn 1 Welwyn GC 1; Ashcroft 1 Stony 0; Brache Sparta 0 Leighton Tn 4; Caddington 1 Leverstock 4; Hatfield Tn 2 Harpenden Tn 0; Oxford City 1 Biggleswade 1; Shefford Tn 0 Letchworth GC 3. SATURDAY DIV 2: De Havilland 3 Mercedes 3; Delco 0 Walden 1; Flamstead 2 Scot 2; Risborough 6 Potters Bar Cru. 1; Sandy 1 Ampthill Tn 2; Winslow 0 Houghton Town 2.

Luton District League

PREMIER DIV: Kent 8 Cadoza 1; Luton OB 3 Stockwood 1; S. Sabha 1 O. Dunstablians 5; Studham 1 Lewsey Ath 1. Midweek: Kent 7 Flitwick 5; Studham 3 Christians 2.

DIV ONE: Lewsey Park 2 Markyate 3; Flitwick 4 Studham 0; Thistle 3 LOB A 0; Thresher 3 De La Rue 2. Midweek: Studham Res 2 Luton OB A 2; Kent Res 2 Thistle 3; Luton Eagles 0 Markyate 1.

DIV TWO: ODs Res 5 Flitwick A 0; S'man Dunstable 3 61FC 1; Compasses 4 Christians A 3; Whitbread 0 Eaton Bray 2; Harlington 0 Harveys 3; Markyate Res 5 Hockwell Ring 2. Midweek: Markyate 0 Compasses 2; Harveys 3 Thresher Res 1; ODs Res 5 Thistle Res 0; Christians A 6 61 FC 1; E. Bray Res 3 Hockwell Ring 0.

The NHC Sunday League

PREMIER DIV: Enterprise 0 Sacred Heart 5; Celtic 3 St. Joseph's 1; Heron 3 Stag 1; Coral 3 Hexton 1.

DIV ONE: Crawley 2 Lilley 0; S. Heart Res 6 NT Sugar Loaf 1; Horseshoe Saints 3 Stopsley Harriers 2; Celtic Res 3 St. Joseph's 3.

DIV TWO: Wheathead 16 Caddington 0; Stopsley Hrrs Res 0 Lea Sp 6; AFC Wigmore 0 FC Houghton 2.

DIV THREE: Caddington Res 0 Borough Arms 3; Magnum 3 Coral Res 1; Red Star 0 Silsoe Rgrs 2; Old Moat House 3 Coulter 1; Strawplaiters 6 Dog & Duck 0; Black Swan 10 First & Last 2.

DIV FOUR: Laporte 2 Vine OB 1; Lewsey Res 3 Thames 0; SWMC Res 6 Markyate 2; Wigmore Ath 4 Flint Utd 2.

DIV FIVE: C. Bianca 1 R. Mail 1; Boro Res 2 Wells Star 0; Lea Res 4 Chalton Res 0; FC Houghton Res 1 Lewsey Social 1.

DIV SIX: Htn Regis 1 B. Swan Res 3; Toddington 1 W. Hart 0 (aband 70 mins); Swan Rgrs 12 Barn Owl 1; Houghton Tn 5 Woodstock Wdrs 2.

DIV SEVEN: Limbury Utd 10 Thameslink 0; Markyate Res 0 Magnum Res 1; Luton Rover 7 Bedes OB 2; Hansom Cab 2 Fidus 0.

Luton Sunday League

DIV ONE: Meds 2 Purley 8.

LEAGUE CUP semi-final: AMC 4 Luton Dukes A 1.

DIV TWO: One Nation 1 GML Comets 3; Hibbert Arms 8 Emerald 1.

INVITATION CUP semi-finals: Lea Sports B 3 Oakley Res 0; High Tn 3 DFL 2.

S. Beds Sunday League

CHALLENGE CUP: Nurdin & Peacock 1 Leicester Arms 0.

SUNDON PK TROPHY: EG Chiltern 0 Painters 3

PREMIER DIV: Macom 3 Sundon Park 1.

DIV TWO: Sundon Park Res 1 Tophill 1; Cosmopolitan 6 Vauxhall Griffin 1.

DIV THREE: Park Town 3 NV Ath 2.