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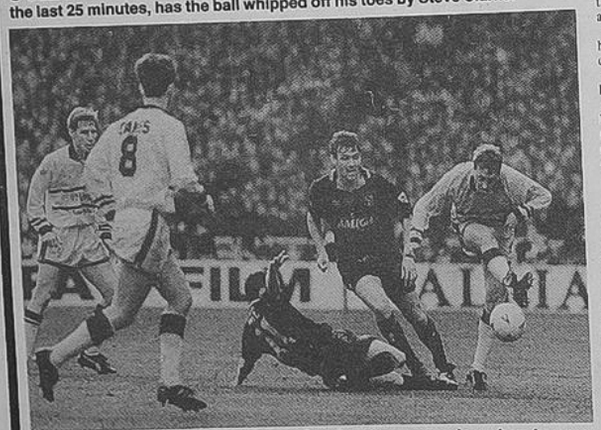
Sports News

TOWN WEMBLEY VERDICT

Sports Editor ... reports on the FA Cup semi-final
Action pictures by Mark Richards and John Sherwood

● CLEARED: John Hartson, who went on as sub when the Town gambled for the last 25 minutes, has the ball whipped off his toes by Steve Clarke.



● MIDFIELD BATTLE: Alan Harper breaks clear on a day when he was unable to stamp his usual authority in the centre of the park.

Dream over as the Davids meet one Goliath too many

SHATTERED was the word manager **David Pleat** used to describe his Luton Town team as they sat quietly with their thoughts in the dressing room at Wembley on Saturday night.

We thought a return trip for the final of the FA Cup beckoned.

But the Town were not able to reproduce the form that saw off Newcastle and West Ham.

Mr Pleat spoke often of his team relishing the role of David against Goliath.

But the biblical upset happened only once.

The giant of Gath didn't have a couple of mates of similar power and strength waiting for the chance to exact revenge.

DESERVED

Chelsea, the third Premiership club they had met in a marvellous cup run, deserved to go through.

I shall remember the Kenilworth Road glory nights long after the painful end of the trail.

Chelsea exposed the frailties of a Town defence. Twice when it mattered they could not cope with the basic aerial ability of Tony Cascarino, and his work led to both Gavin Peacock's goals.

The irony was that the lanky 31-year-old was being offered for sale on a cheap transfer a month ago, but was recalled by Glenn Hoddle because Mark Stein was unfit.

But for that injury, Chelsea's front pair would have been Stein and John Spencer, both 5ft 6ins tall.

You would back **John Dreyer** and **Trevor Peake** to hold them, but Cascarino, at 6ft 2ins, was a different matter.

It was the first time in the cup run that the difference between the Premiership and the First Division had shown.

Perhaps it asked too much for the underdogs to raise their game by so much for a third time.

At Wembley they could not. And if we dream of promotion in a year or two, it will be a matter of meeting a Chelsea side often something better, week in week out.

The Town were a pale shadow of the side that fared so well in earlier rounds.

Some of their football, particularly in the opening minutes, was smooth and effective, except in the matter of producing the end product.

But overall, **Alan Harper** and **David Preece** were unable to stamp their authority on midfield, and once Chelsea had scored defence in depth stifled the Town's attempts to get back.

Preece, the only survivor of the 1988 Wembley winners, kept battling to the very end, but **Scott Oakes** never got into the game, and on the flanks neither **Paul Telfer** nor **Ceri Hughes** could find the vital thrust in the last third of the field.

And **Kerry Dixon**, desperate to put one over his old mates in his first FA Cup semi-final, was not given the service he needed, and had a very quiet game after almost kicking the early goal that might have made such a difference.

In goal, **Juergen Sommer** might have done his USA World Cup hopes some good, because although he had little to do he made the best save of the match to deny Peacock a hat-trick. And the keeper was never a victim of Wembley nerves.

The Town manager said that none of his players suffered from that problem.

I thought **Des Linton** was the pick of the Town defence, with **Julian James** also doing well on the other flank.

But Chelsea produced the crucial moments of sharpness that divided the teams.

It might have been different if the Town had capitalised on their bright start.

LAST DITCH

They took the game to Chelsea for the first ten minutes, and Dmitri Kharine had to make a last-ditch blocking save with his feet when Dixon got past a slow back four from Harper's through ball.

On a cool but sunlit evening, Luton boaters added to a colourful theatre, but the lights dimmed after Chelsea's first attack.

Telfer was penalised for a late tackle on Dennis Wise, just inside the Chelsea half.

Frank Sinclair lofted the free kick to the edge of the Town penalty area, Cascarino was clear of Dreyer for the headed flick-on, and tiny Spencer beat Peake for the second header. The ball fell to Peacock, and despite an attempt by Telfer to close him down, the left-foot drive was despatched quickly and accurately beyond Sommer.

I think I knew then that it was not to be the Town's day, with the goal coming after 13 minutes.

The sparkle vanished from the Town's play, and it needed a smart tackle by Dreyer to stop Steve Clarke making it 2-0 after a strong run through the penalty area.

At the interval Mr Pleat was confident his side could turn things round, and Preece had half a chance to prove it in the 46th minute, but blazed his shot over the bar.

And the knife went into the heart of our cup dreams a minute later when Peacock struck his 13th goal of the season. Again Cascarino did the major damage, getting in the headed pass from a long punt upfield by his goalkeeper. The ball dropped to Peacock, who played a delightful tight one-two with Spencer to get past Peake before side-footing his shot wide of Sommer.

There was no way back after that, with the Town going for broke with 25 minutes to go. Linton was taken off, with **John Hartson** sent on to try to shake up the attack.

DANGEROUS

But Chelsea made it look easy: they were able to contain the less than inspired Town efforts to attack, and looked dangerous on the break.

A tackle by Harper stopped Spencer when a solo run looked like going all the way, while Sommer's 75th-minute save prevented Peacock completing a hat-trick, again from a header by Cascarino.

Our hopes rose briefly with seven minutes to go when the Town, 8-2 winners on the corner count, played one short and Preece crossed well. James popped up in the box, to the surprise of Chelsea, but having got into space for a free header put it well over the bar.

Chelsea manager Glenn Hoddle said that at half-time he felt the Town could yet cause his side a problem or two, and he wanted another goal, as early as possible, to kill them off.

He was spot on, and Mr Pleat agreed that over the 90 minutes Chelsea deserved to go through.

"We gave almost as good as we can give," he said. I wasn't too sure about that.

But the Town have given us immense pleasure in the FA Cup this season, far more than we expected. For that, I am grateful. Just to get to Wembley was a fabulous achievement, and if the groundwork leads to the continued development of the side today's pain could well turn into tomorrow's pleasure.

The match details

LUTON TOWN: Sommer; Linton (Hartson, 65 mins), Dreyer, Peake, James; Telfer, Harper, Preece, Hughes, Oakes, Dixon. Unused subs Thomas and goalkeeper Petterson.

CHELSEA: Kharine; Clarke, Johnsen, Kjeldbjerg, Sinclair; Burley (Barnard, 41 mins), Newton, Peacock, Wise; Spencer, Cascarino. Unused subs Donaghy and goalkeeper Hitchcock.

THE GOALS: Gavin Peacock, two sweet left-foot drives, 13 and 47 minutes, after the Town were unable to deal with the aerial power of Tony Cascarino, a 6ft 2in striker who was in the side only because 5ft 6in first choice Mark Stein was out through injury.

OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town two saved and five wide. Chelsea six saved and two wide. Corners: 8-2 to the Town.

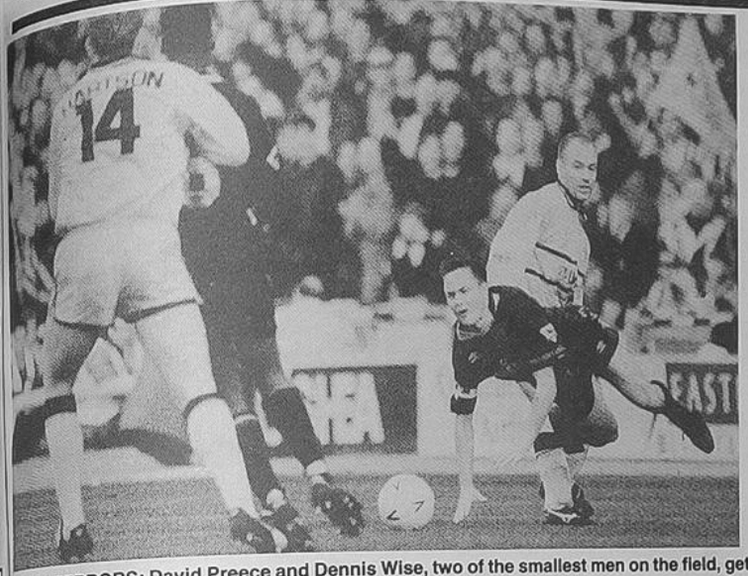
FREE KICKS AWARDED: 12 against Chelsea, six against the Town. Offsides: Town caught twice, Chelsea six times.

BOOKED: John Dreyer, for the tenth time this season, for a 29th-minute foul on John Spencer.

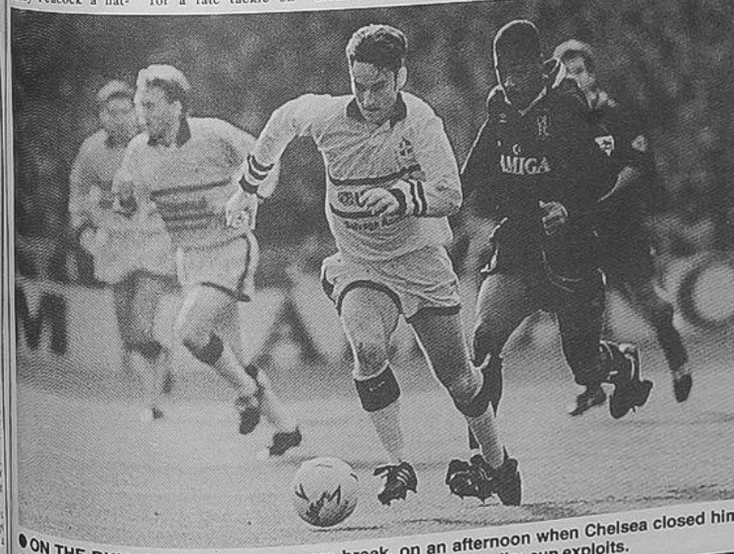
REFEREE: Roger Dilkes, Mossley: had an excellent game, particularly in playing the advantage law.

ATTENDANCE: 59,989, including 25,700 supporting Luton, the biggest crowd at a Town match since 76,130 saw them lose the Littlewoods Cup final to Nottingham Forest on April 8, 1989. Nice contrast with the Town's last FA Cup semi-final appearance, when only 25,963 saw the defeat against Wimbledon at White Hart Lane.

ENTERTAINMENT: Too much of it provided by Chelsea to make it a really splendid Wembley occasion for the 25,700 hoping another David v Goliath result was on. The Town looked the better side for the first 13 minutes, but never produced what they are capable of after Peacock scored with Chelsea's first shot at goal. The cup run that went before it will give us happier memories.



● TINY TERRORS: David Preece and Dennis Wise, two of the smallest men on the field, get to very close quarters, with the Chelsea skipper looking a little pained.



● ON THE RUN: Scott Oakes on a rare break, on an afternoon when Chelsea closed him down too effectively to give him the chance to repeat his earlier cup exploits.

THE WEEKEND'S FULL LOCAL SOCCER RESULTS

S. Midlands League

PREMIER DIV: Harpenden 2 Langford 0; Hatfield 5 Buckingham Ath 1; Letchworth 0 Biggleswade Tn 1; Welwyn GC 2 Arlesey Tn 2; Wingate 2 Shillington 4. **Midweek:** Buckingham 1 Brache 3; Arlesey 2 Luton OB 4.

SENIOR DIV Bedford Utd 0 Leverstock 0; Shefford 2 P. & Ivinghoe 0; Shenley 1 Ampthill Tn 0; Toddington 4 Totternhoe 3; 61FC 0 N. Bradwell 2; Winslow 2 London Colney 3. Midweek: Shenley 0 Shefford 0; Tring Ath 1 Winslow 1; London Colney 2 Leverstock 0; Winslow 1 Shenley 1. **CUP:** Risboro 1 Tring Ath 2.

DIV ONE: P. Bar Crus 6 E. Bray 0; Sandy 0 Mercedes Benz 1; Walden 1 Flamstead 4. Midweek: Caddington 1 Flamstead 1; De Havilland 0 Walden Rangers 4; Delco 3 Ashcroft 0; Emberton 4 Scot 3; Houghton Tn 4 M. Benz 2; MK County 2 E. Bray 3; Stony 3 Cranfield 1; Cranfield 0 Stony 5 **CUP, semi-final:** Caddington 1 Houghton Town 3.

RESERVE SECTION

DIV 1A: Bedford Tn 2 Bedford Utd 1; Buckingham 4 M. Keynes 1; London Colney 0 Barton 1; Pitstone 0 Totternhoe 3; Tring Ath 0 Shillington 2; Tring Town 1 61FC Luton 2. **Midweek:** Pitstone 1 Potters Bar Tn 7; Totternhoe 1 Toddington 5; Barton 2 Shillington 0; Milton Keynes 1 Bedford Utd 2; Tring Town 3 Tring Ath 0. **DIV 1B:** Arlesey 2 Harpenden 1; Biggleswade 2 Oxford 4; Leverstock 5 Letchworth 2; Shefford 1 Welwyn 4; Stony 1 Ashcroft 2. **Midweek:** Biggleswade 4 Stony 1; Harpenden 0 Arlesey 1; Hatfield 4 Welwyn 1. **DIV 2:** Mercedes Benz 7 P. Bar Crus 0; Scot 5 MK County 1. **Trophy, Round 3, second leg:** Leverstock Green 0 Leighton Town 1 (Agg 0-1); Oxford City 5 Totternhoe 1 (agg 7-1).

Luton District League

PREMIER DIV: Ebony 1 Lewsey Pk 1; Crawley Gn 2 Studham 1; O. Dunstablians 3 Dagnall 0; Christians 2 Kent Ath 3. Midweek: Luton OB Res 3 Kent Ath 2; Old Dunstablians 6 Singh Sabha 1.

DIV ONE: Kent Res 2 L. Eagles 3; Thistle 3 Markyate 3; Monarch 5 LOB A 3; Lewsey Pk Res 4 Studham Res 2; Thomas De-La-Rue 2 Thresher 3. Midweek: Markyate 1 Monarch 0; Thresher 1 Crawley Green 1; Luton OB A 1 Thistle 3; Kent Res 0 Brickmakers 2.

DIV TWO: Christians A 0 Thistle Res 1; Hockwell Ring 0 Thresher Res 5; Sportsman Dunstable 3 Harlington 2; Old Dunstablians Res 1 Whitbread 0; Markyate Res 2 Eaton Bray Res 0; Flitwick A 1 Harveys 2. **Midweek:** Hockwell R 0 Harlington 10; Harveys 11 The Compasses 1; Thresher Res 1 Christians A 3.

The NHC Sunday League

PREMIER DIV: AFC Heron 2 Celtic 4; St. Joseph's 1 Coral 2; Enterprise 3 Hexion 1; GIS 4 Stag 0. **Midweek:** Sacred Heart 3 Crawley Sports 0.

DIV ONE: Horseshoe Saints 0 S. Heart Res 2; Heron Res 7 NT Sugar Loaf 0; St. Joseph's Res 1 Lewsey 0. **Midweek:** Horseshoe Saints 1 Celtic 3.

DIV TWO: The Boater 0 FC Houghton 8.

DIV THREE: Borough Arms 4 Black Swan 2; Dog and Duck 3 Strawplaiters 3; Red Star 0 Old Moat Hse 1; Coulter 2 First & Last 1; Magnum 4 Vaux HT 1. Midweek: Magnum 3 GIS Res 3; Borough Arms 4 Strawplaiters 6; Caddington 1 Silsoe 2.

DIV FOUR: Britannia 2 Laporte 3; Markyate 2 NT Sugar Loaf Res 1; Vine 2 Roman Legion 4.

DIV FIVE: Borough Arms Res 4 Crescent Social 0; FC Houghton Res 5 Chalton Strollers Res 1; R. Mail 3 Lewsey Soc 1; Wells Star 1 Lea Res 1. **Midweek:** R. Mail 2 Lea 3.

DIV SIX: Black Swan Res 2 Swan Rangers 4; Houghton Regis 4 Luton YS 2; Old Moat House Res 8 Barn Owl 3; Houghton Tn Res 5 Wellington Arms 1.

DIV SEVEN: Bedco OB 0 Sportsman 5; Magnum Res 0 Hansom Cab 3; Fidus 4 Luton Rover 1; Red Star Res 3 Thameslink 1; Lynmore 2 Pulsebeat 4.

Chef & Brewer League

CHALLENGE CUP: One Nation 2 DFL 0.

DIV ONE: High Town 4 Barn Owl 4.

DIV TWO: Hibbert 0 Icknield 1; AMC 5 Emerald 1; Round Green 2 Lea Sports B 2.

S. Beds Sunday League

PREMIER DIV: Nurdin & Peacock 6 Bricklayers 2; Farley Eagles 0 Leicester Arms 3; Macom Eagles 1 Eaton Bray 0. Midweek: Bricklayers 1 Nurdin and Peacock 2; Leicester Arms 2 Eaton Bray 1.

DIV ONE: Beds Yeoman 3 Painters 1; Inter-City 1 Slip End 3.

DIV TWO: Engineers 5 Sundon Pk Social Res 0. Midweek: Vauxhall Griffin 5 Cosmopolitan 3; Emerald 1 Sportsman 1.

DIV THREE: Lea Bank 7 Air Express 1.

CHALLENGE CUP: Sundon Pk 0 Coach & Horses 1.

B. PEARCE TROPHY: Bromley 2 Eddie's Bar 3.

Chiltern Youth League

UNDER-18: Icknield 0 Leighton Town 3; Park Town 9 H Hatters 0.

UNDER-17 CUP: Foxes 2 Downside 3. **DIV ONE:** Wootton BC 4 N. Pagnell 1. DIV TWO: Ampthill 2 Barton Stars 2; W Hill 8 Ramridge B 0.

UNDER-16: Midweek: St. Joseph's 2 Warden Hill 0.

UNDER-15 CUP: Beech Hill 5 St. Joseph's 1. DIV TWO: Downside 0 L. Colney 5; Ramridge B 4 Ampthill 6.

UNDER-14 DIV ONE: Aylesbury 5 Ampthill Tn 4; Aston Fairlands 7; Dunstable Townn 1 Leighton Cor 4; S. Heart 1 E. Bray 2. **DIV TWO:** Dragons 5 Lea 5; W Hill 2 P. Green 3; Houghton Youth 7 S. Heart B 1. **Midweek:** Ramridge 0 Dragons 1; Lea 0 Sundon Pk 4. **DIV THREE:** Downside 1 Flitwick 13; Copenhagen 5 Barton Stars 10; Delco 0 Linmere Boys Club 3.

UNDER-13 DIV ONE: Stony 2 Ramridge A 2; Lewsey 1 Sundon Park 1; St. Joseph's 0 Leighton Cor 4; S. Heart A 1 W. Hill 4. **Midweek:** St. Joseph's 6 Sundon Pk 2. DIV TWO: Pioneer 8 Icknield 3; Kempston 5 St. Mary's 2; Pioneer 1 Icknield 3; Kempston 5 St. Mary's 2; Houghton Yth 4 Markyate 2. **Midweek:** Kempston 8 Westoning 0.

UNDER-12 DIV ONE: Celtic 3 Ampthill A 1; Limbury AFC Houghton 2; Lewsey 3 Limbury A 0; Dunstable Colts 1 Dragons 0; Leighton Cor 3 Barnfield A 1. **Midweek:** AFC Houghton 1 Limbury B 2; Ampthill A 3 Leighton Cor 1; Barnfield A 2 Dunstable Colts 7; Dunstable Tn 0 Lewsey 4. **DIV TWO:** Redbourn 3 Ampthill B 3; Westoning 1 Flamstead 1; WL Saints 2 Bushmead 0; Jets 8 Westoning 1; Parkside 4 H Hatters 1; Gliders 3 Sundon Pk 6. **Midweek:** Ampthill Tn 2 Westoning A 0; Redbourn 6 Gliders 1; Westoning B 3 H. Hatters 4; Parkside 3 Bushmead 3.

UNDER-11 DIV ONE: Barnfield 0 St. Joseph 1 Dunstable Town 3 Sundon Park 5; S. Heart 0 Lewsey 7. DIV TWO: Markyate 1 Celtic 11; Dunstable Colts 2 Dragons 6; WL Saints 4 Barton Stars 2; Leighton Cor 2 Redbourn 1.

UNDER-TEN DIV ONE: Ramridge 2 Dunstable Colts 3; St. Mary's 2 Aylesbury 3; Celtic 8 Leighton Cor 0. DIV TWO: Ampthill Tn 7 WL Saints 0; Sundon Pk 2 Flitwick 4; Sacred Heart 4 AFC Houghton 0.