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Sports News

TOWN MATCH VERDICT

★ ★ ★

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

Brian Swain reports. Action pictures by John Sherwood

Blank run goes on as ref causes anger

A DISPUTED goal at one end and a continued lack of one at the other sent the Town tumbling to their sixth defeat on the trot at Molineux.

It was cruel and only half-deserved.

In footballing terms the Town were more than a match for a Wolves team that has a chance of reaching the Premiership via the First Division play-offs.

But it was a day when the rub of the green went against the Town, with a dodgy refereeing decision costing them dear, and a mixture of poor finishing and good goalkeeping adding to the hardship.

Wolves bullied their way to the winner a few seconds after they almost conceded a shock opener to **Des Linton**.

With 42 minutes gone, the Town, despite the absence of injured **Trevor Peake** and **Scott Oakes**, and of the suspended **John Dreyer**, were containing Wolves well on a very bumpy dry pitch.

The wind was playing tricks with the ball, but both sides produced spells of good football.

Wolves were the more direct, until the Town also became a little frenetic towards the end, when they were chasing the game.

But for the most part they were much the more composed passing side, without getting the final crosses on the spot consistently.

There was not a lot wrong with the defence, with **David Greene** and **Julian James** working with determination to block off the down the middle thrusts of Steve Bull and Guy Whittingham.

Eventually the two Wolves strikers got the lucky break to decide the game, with even manager Graham Taylor confessing that it stemmed from a vital decision by the ref that could have gone either way.

Until that 42nd- minute incident the Town had defended well and looked good on the break, with **David Preece** the link between attack and defence.

As the lone striker, with **Tony Thorpe** the midfielder in the Oakes role of close support, **Kerry Dixon** threatened often, and his work ought to have brought at least a couple of goals for others.

The full match details

LUTON TOWN: Sommer; Linton, Greene, James, Thomas; Telfer, Harper, Preece, Hughes (Houghton 73 mins); Thorpe, Dixon. Other subs Hartson and goalkeeper sub Petterson.

WOLVES: Stowell; Rankine, Blades, Shirtliff, Thompson; Birch, Burke, Bennett, Cook; Whittingham, Bull. Unused subs: Mills, Keen and goalkeeper Jones.

THE GOAL: Guy Whittingham, 42 minutes, classy strike after the ball ran loose following what looked like a foul by Steve Bull on Julian James.

OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town seven saved and six wide. Wolves six saved, eight wide and one hit the bar. Corners: 10-5 to the Town.

REFEREE: Ian Cruikshanks, Hartlepool. Had a good game except for the incident that turned it. The Town were convinced he should have given them a free kick in the build-up, and say video evidence proves it.

ATTENDANCE: 25,479, highest at any Town league game this season, and the third highest of the season in the magnificently rebuilt Molineux stadium.

ENTERTAINMENT: Could have been very good, except for the pain of seeing the Town robbed at one end and unable to do the business at the other. But much of their football was as good as anything promotion-chasing Wolves produced.

● SHOOTING STAR: Tony Thorpe lets fly with his right foot.

Gift puts City on the way

A FITFUL display in the first half led to the Town's blank run going into its fifth match at Ashton Gate.

"Once we gave City a goal that gave them a lift," said manager David Pleat. "For the first 20 minutes it was like a practice match, with not much happening and the crowd very quiet. We were much better in the second half.

The damage had been done by then, with City gifted their goal, and well able to defend the slender lead: it was their 24th clean sheet of the season, the best in the First Division.

The Town tried Geoff Aunger alongside Kerry Dixon in attack, but neither could find the room or service for a worthwhile shot, and Aunger was dropped for Saturday's trip to Molineux.

With David Preece and Alan Harper subdued in midfield, there was little for the Town's 111 fans to enthuse over.

City, with nothing to play for, were more inventive in attack, without troubling Juergen Sommer too much after his gaff led to the only goal.

He had one difficult save to make, to a shot by YTS boy Dominic Barclay, who was making his league debut. The only other scare was when Liam Robinson cracked a powerful 25- yard drive against the bar.

The decisive strike came in the 20th minute, when John Dreyer's weak headed back pass put Sommer in trouble. He had to go out of the area to confront two City men, and they got the better of him.

Partridge shot for the empty net, but David Greene did well to get back and head clear. But from the corner Sommer jumped with arms at full stretch, caught the ball, then dropped it, and Rob Edwards helped himself to a simple goal.

Match details

LUTON TOWN: Sommer; Linton (Hartson 67 mins), Greene, Dreyer, James; Telfer, Harper, Preece, Hughes; Aunger (Thorpe 76 mins), Dixon. Goalkeeper sub Petterson.

BRISTOL CITY: Welch; Harriott, Munro, Edwards, Scott; Wyatt, Martin, Robinson, Hewlett; Barclay (Bent 76 mins), Partridge. Unused subs McKop and goalkeeper Rudgeley.

THE GOAL: Rob Edwards, 20th minute, close range gift after Juergen Sommer dropped a corner.

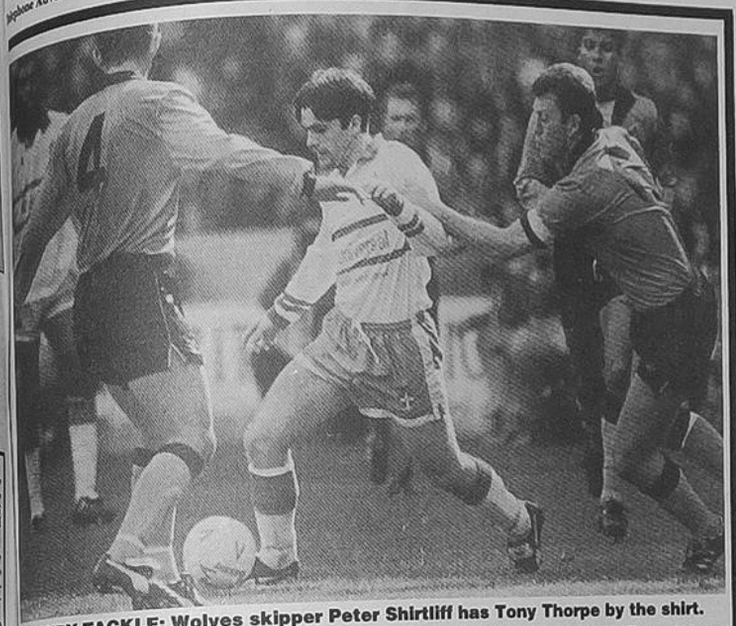
OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town six saved and seven wide. City five saved, nine wide and one hit the bar. Corners: 8-6 to Bristol City.

BOOKED: David Greene, Des Linton and John Dreyer, all for fouls.

REFEREE: Mike Reed, Birmingham. Awfully whistle-happy.

ATTENDANCE: 5,350, Ashton Gate's lowest of the season, with 111 of them from Luton.

ENTERTAINMENT: Very poor: an unreal atmosphere in a stadium with one end a building site and precious little action to get the crowd stirred up. The Town were well second best in the first half, improved after the break, but still rarely looked like finding their first goal in five games.



● HANDY TACKLE: Wolves skipper Peter Shirtliff has Tony Thorpe by the shirt.

In an early attack he flicked on a long ball from Linton into the path of Thorpe, who drove a whiplash shot wide from about 25 yards.

Wolves keeper Mike Stowell had to become the man of the match, starting with a superb save from **Paul Telfer** in the 16th minute, after Preece and **Alan Harper** had passed neatly to create the opening.

At the other end Mark Burke hit a tremendous volley over the bar from Paul Cook's free kick to the back of the penalty area, but the Town should have gone ahead in the 28th minute.

From a free kick routine by Preece and **Ceri Hughes** on the left, Preece played in a low pass to the edge of the box.

Dixon's deft side-foot lay-off was perfection, into the path of Thorpe, but he shot directly at Stowell.

Wolves were doing more attacking without getting to close quarters, although there was a roar of anticipation from the big crowd every time a long ball was played for Bull to chase.

But he was a spectator when Wolves were almost gifted a goal: Paul Birch hit a cross to the edge of the penalty area, and Linton and **Juergen Sommer** both went for it. Linton got the first touch, knocking the ball past the goalkeeper and towards the empty net, but raced back and hacked clear as the ball bobbled towards the line.

And Linton nearly scored at the other end, with a header after making a clever late blind- side run to a diagonal free kick by Preece. But Stowell saved, and Wolves broke to grab the winner.

It was a battering-ram job, with Bull trying to forces his way past James and Thomas. He did, but the pressbox view was that he shoved James out of way with a push in the back.

As James and Thomas both tumbled the ball ran loose. Whittingham, on loan from Aston Villa, hit a crisp drive into the net with the sort of instinctive classy finishing that has been beyond the Town in recent weeks.

In the second half the Town, despite an injury which restricted Hughes, took the game to Wolves, without showing the final punch that would upset a home team that, like its fans, got more and more nervy as the minutes ticked away.

Dixon wastefully headed over the bar from a cross by Preece, and Thomas set up a chance for Thorpe which was lost when Stowell dived at Thorpe's feet to smother the ball.

Hughes headed over from a Telfer flick-on after a corner by Preece, and Thorpe was tackled out of another chance by Paul Blades.

As time ran out the Town pushed everyone up, and Greene was only just off target with a header from another Preece corner.

The nearest the Town came was with seven minutes to go, when a frantic goalmouth scramble ended with Thorpe blasting a drive that looked a certain equaliser until Stowell flung himself full length to make a brilliant save.

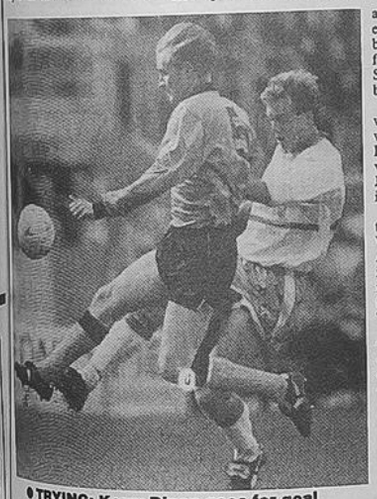
And if we worry about the goal famine, which passed the nine-hour mark at Molineux, I for one would be a lot more concerned if the Town's football was not getting them into the penalty area.

Wolves, a classy side, showed that they too can suffer at times.

When the Town gambled on all-out attack, gaps were bound to appear behind them, but Birch's cross-shot which hit the top of the bar was the nearest they came to scoring.

Even Bull wasted three decent chances to give Wolves a result they scarcely deserved, and would not have got but for the leniency of referee Ian Cruikshanks.

He was party to a case of daylight mugging.



● TRYING: Kerry Dixon goes for goal

Lucky break for the Wolves

EVEN Graham Taylor accepted that one lucky break might have given his team the points they desperately needed to stay in the race for a play-off chance.

The Pressbox view was that Bull had fouled Julian James to make the opening for Guy Whittingham.

Mr Taylor, manager of a Wolves side that has lost only two of the eight games since he was given the job, said: "Sometimes it goes for you, and sometimes it doesn't."

He accepted that nerves and tension had got to his players. They knew that if they lost their promotion dream would be as good as over.

Town boss David Pleat said his players had no doubt they should have had a free kick for the foul, and added that he had spoken to the ref, who said he would like to see it again. "I have," said Mr Pleat. "Julian James was bundled off the ball."

Both managers spoke of the difficult conditions, a dry bumpy pitch and a gusty wind. Molineux had the best surface in the league a year ago, but now the top has shifted following the installation of new under-soil heating last summer.

Mr Taylor's local Press were not impressed by the overall standard of Wolves.

But the former England manager said: "We played well at Millwall in midweek and lost 1-0.

" We have not played so well today, and have won 1-0. And I know what the fans would rather have. The only thing that really matters is the result. You cannot expect classic games at this stage of the season."

Mr Pleat said he was still not sweating about the Town's situation, five games without a win in the league and three points clear of the bottom three.

The team's effort and application had pleased him, but obviously he was concerned about the lack of firepower after six matches without a goal.

The problem was obvious, he said: the Town did not have a single player who had got double figures in the league scoring chart after more than 40 games.

"We are not going home with our tails between our legs," he said. "Today we have made chances, and we have seen some good goalkeeping. Stowell was very good, particularly with the saves against Thorpe and Telfer.

"And if we play in the last few games with the same verve we had here there will be no problem."

THE WEEKEND'S FULL LOCAL SOCCER RESULTS

THE MINERVA SOUTH MIDLANDS LEAGUE

O'BRIEN BUTCHERS TROPHY: Bedford Town 1 London Colney 2 (agg 1-2); Houghton Tn 2 Shenley 1

PREMIER DIV: Arlesey 2 P. Bar Tn 2; Brache 1 Hatfield 2; Langford 0 Biggleswade 0; Luton OB 0 Harpenden 3; Shillington 2 Hoddesdon 4; Welwyn 3 Letchworth 0. **Mldwek**: Bedford Tn 3 Letchworth 1; M. Keynes 1 Shillington 1; Brache 3 Arlesey 1.

SENIOR DIV: Bedford Utd 1 Winslow 2; N. Bradwell 1 Leverstock 3; Risboro Rgrs 0 Ampthill 1; Toddington 5 Shefford 0; Totternhoe 3 Tring Ath 2; 61FC 2 Pitstone 2. **Mldwek**: Pitstone 0 Tring Ath 3; Shefford 4 Leverstock 1; Totternhoe 1 L. Colney 0; Winslow 1 Risboro 2; Shefford 0 Ampthill 3.

DIV ONE: Ashcroft 0 Delco 2; De Havilland 1 Cranfield Utd 1; MK County 1 Flamstead 2; Sandy 0 Caddington 1; Stony 3 Mercedes 2; Walden 3 Eaton. Bray 1. **Mldwek**: Delco 0 Walden 4; Houghton Tn 3 MK County 1; Cranfield 0 Flamstead 2; Emberton 3 Sandy 0.

RESERVE SECTION

CHALLENGE TROPHY: Risborough 0 Barton Rov 4; Tring Tn 3 P. Bar Tn 0; Hatfield 1 Oxford City 1; Buckingham Ath 0 Leighton Tn 4.

DIV 1A: M. Keynes 1 P. Bar Tn 2; Pitstone 2 61FC 4; Totternhoe 2 Bedford Utd 5; Tring Ath 2 Cranfield 0; Tring Tn 1 Shillington 2. **Mldwek**: Cranfield 0 Toddington 1; Bedford Utd 12 Pitstone 1; M. Keynes 3 Bedford Tn 2; 61FC Luton 1 Barton 0; L. Colney 0 Potters Bar Tn 0; Tring Ath 1 Tring Townn 2.

DIV 1B: Ashcroft 0 Arlesey 3; Biggleswade 4 Leighton Town 4; Harpenden 2 Brache 5; Hatfield 5 Stony 1; Letchworth 2 Welwyn 3; Oxford City 5 Shefford 0; Shenley and Loughton 2 Caddington 3. **Mldwek**: Leverstock 5 Shefford 2; Biggleswade 1 Harpenden 4.

DIV 2: Flamstead 0 De Havilland 0; Mercedes 5 Sandy 0; Scot 4 Delco 1. **Mldwek**: Flamstead 1 P. Bar Crus 0; Risboro 1 Scot 2.

LUTON DISTRICT LEAGUE

PREMIER DIV: Kent Ath 2 Old Dunstablians 2; Luton OB Res 1 Christians 0. Midwek: AC Cadoza 5 Crawley Green 4.

DIV ONE: Lea Sports 3 Thresher 2; Thistle 3 Crawley Grn Res 0; Monarch 3 Studham Res 0. Midwek: Kent Res 3 Lewsey Park Res 2; Markyate 2 Luton OB A 1; Thistle 0 Flitwick Res 1.

DIV TWO: Flitwick A 2 Thresher Res 0; E. Bray Res 0 Compasses 3; Markyate Res 0 Harveys 5; Old Dunstablians Res 3 61FC 1; Whitbread 1 Sportsman Dunstable 2. **Mldwek**: O. Dunstablians Res 4 Thresher Res 0; Compasses 1 Whitbread 2; Markyate Res 1 First & Last 2; Flitwick A 2 61FC 1; Hockwell Ring 0 Thistle Res 1; Sportsman Dunstable 4 Christians A 1; Old Dunstablians 1 Harlington 0; Whitbread 2 Thresher 0; First & Last 3 61FC 0.

NHC SUNDAY LEAGUE

PREMIER DIV: Enterprise 0 Heron 0; Limbury Black Swan 0 St. Joseph's 8; Crawley Sp 2 Brache G. Man 1.

DIV ONE: Lewsey 3 Heron Res 2; St. Joseph's 3 Stopsley Hrrs 0. Midwek: Stopsley Hrrs 1 Lilley 4; S. Heart Res 1 Celtic Res 1.

DIV TWO: Stopsley Hrrs Res 6 Houghton Town 0; Chalton Strollers 3 Luton Brewery 1.

DIV THREE: Magnum 0 Dog & Duck 0; Strawplaiters 4 Red Star 0; Coulter 4 Vauxhall High Tn 0; First & Last 2 Coral Res 5; Borough Arms 2 GIS Leagrave Res 3; Black Swan 3 Caddington Res 0. **Mldwek**: Magnum 3 Parkside 1; Coulter 1 Caddington Res 3; Caddington Res 3 GIS 6.

DIV FOUR: Lewsey Res 2 Britannia Airways 1; Vine 1 Laporte 2; R. Legion 7 Flint Utd 1; NT Sugar Loaf Res 1 Oakley 7; Wigmore Ath 1 Stopsley WMC Res 5. **Midwek**: Markyate 0 Vine 2; Britannia 0 Stopsley WMC Res 2.

DIV FIVE: Lea Sp Res 2 Borough Arms Res 1; Lewsey Soc 3 Streatley Chequers 0; Chalton Strollers Res 0 Barbarians 3. **Midwek**: Lea Sp Res 0 Crescent Soc 1; Borough Arms Res 1 Lea Sp Res 3.

DIV SIX: Swan Rgrs 3 Houghton Tn Res 2; Black Swan Res 14 Barn Owl 1.

DIV SEVEN: Postels 3 Pulsebeat 3; Luton Rover 2 Limbury Utd 3; Red Star Res 3 Bedco OB 5; Lynmore 6 Hansom Cab 1; Magnum Res 2 Sportsman 2; Fidus 3 Thameslink 0.

CHEF & BREWER LEAGUE

DIV ONE: Meds 4 LDukes 1; Oakley 3 Bridge Tavern 2.

DIV TWO: Icknield 0 One Nation 8; Round Green 3 Emerald 3.

S.BEDS SUNDAY LEAGUE

CHALLENGE CUP: Coach & Horses 5 E. Bray 0.

PREMIER DIV: Leicester Arms 3 Farley Eagles 0.

DIV ONE: Painters Arms 3 Britannia 1; Beds Yeoman 6 Inter-City 3. **Midwek**: Britannia 0 Beds Yeoman 2.

DIV TWO: Cosmopolitan 2 S. Systems 3; Engineer 0 Vauxhall Griffin 1; Sportsman 3 Robin Hood 4.

DIV THREE: Northside 2 Lea Bank 4; Cosmopolitan 0 Bromley 10; Painters Arms 2 Park Town 4. **Midwek**: Air Express 1 Bromley 6; Northside 0 Bromley 5.

CHILTERN YOUTH LEAGUE

UNDER-18: Park Town 3 Leighton Tn 1. Midwek: H. Hatters 1 Leighton Tn 1.

UNDER-17 DIV ONE: Limbury 3 Wootton BC 2; Ramridge A 1 N. Pagnell 1; Foxes 2 Hitchin 1.

DIV TWO: Ampthill Tn 6 Leighton Cor 2; Barton Stars 4 Warden Hill 1; Griffin Brache 4 Manor 3. **Midwek**: Barton Stars 0 Griffin Brache 1.

UNDER-16: Leighton Cor 1 W. Hill 2; Putteridge 1 St. Mary's 3; Valley Park 4 Sundon Park 1. **Midwek**: Leighton Cor 3 Sundon Pk 5; W. Hill 1 Dunstable Tn 1.

UNDER-15 DIV ONE: Astra 0 Foxes 2; B. Hill 0 Scot 0; St. Joseph's 3 Lewsey Cen 1. **Midwek**: Lewsey 1 B. Hill 3; Foxes 0 Aylesbury 0.

DIV TWO: Ampthill 2 L. Colney 3; Sundon Pk 2 Beaudesert 0; Tring Tn 3 H. Hatters 4. **Midwek**: Ampthill 5 Park Tn 2.

UNDER-14 DIV ONE: Dunstable Tn 0 Celtic 5; Leighton Corinthians 2 Lewsey 6; Leighton Foxes 0 St. Joseph's 6; Aylesbury 7 E. Bray 3. **Midwek**: S. Heart 1 Fairlands 1; Leighton Cor 0 Flamstead 0; Aylesbury 6 Flamstead 2; Eaton Bray 2 Celtic 1; St. Joseph's 7 Dunstable Tn 0.

DIV TWO: Sundon Pk 6 W. Hill 1; Dragons 1 Pin Green 1; Ramridge 3 Markyate 3. **Midwek**: Houghton Yth 3 Ramridge 0; Dragons 5 W. Hill 2; Sundon Pk 5 Markyate 1.

DIV THREE: Delco 2 Barton 4; Luton BC 8 Copenhagen Colts 0. **Midwek**: Barton Stars 1 Flitwick Eagles 2.

UNDER-13 DIV ONE: Stony 3 Foxes 0; Leighton Cor 1 Dunstable Town 1; Sacred Heart A 3 Celtic 2. **Midwek**: Foxes 0 Leighton Cor 6; Leighton Cor 1 Sacred Heart 2; Warden Hill 2 Celtic 1; Warden Hill 0 Ramridge 4; Celtic 1 Lewsey 1.

DIV TWO: Selby 1 Arrows 0; Houghton Youth 1 Ampthill 0; Markyate 8 Icknield 3; S. Heart B 9 Pioneers 1; Ramridge Rgrs B 8 St. Mary's 2. **Midwek**: Markyate 1 Selby 4; Pioneers 1 Westoning 7.

UNDER-12 DIV ONE: Limbury A 7 AFC Houghton 0; Foxes 0 Celtic 3; Ramridge Rgrs 1 Dunstable Colts 1; Leighton Cor 0 Limbury B 4; St. Joseph's 8 Barnfield 1. **Midwek**: St. Joseph's 1 Limbury A 1; Ramridge 1 Dunstable Colts 3; Foxes 2 Ampthill A 1; Ramridge 1 Dunstable Tn 2.

DIV TWO: Ampthill B 1 Barnfield B 1; Redbourn 1 Barton Stars 0; H. Hatters 2 Sundon Park 6; Westoning B 3 Gliders 1; Flamstead 5 Bushmead Wdrs 3; Markyate 1 Westoning A 6. **Midwek**: Ampthill B 3 WL Saints 1; Bushmead 5 Redbourn 8; Flamstead 2 Markyate 1; Westoning B 1 Westoning A 1; Jets 2 Sundon Pk 0.

UNDER-11 DIV ONE: Pin Green 2 Lewsey 4; St. Joseph's 5 Dunstable Tn 0; Leighton Cor A 7 S. Heart 0; Houghton Tn 4 Ramridge 4; Sundon Pk 2 Foxes 4. **Midwek**: Dunstable Tn 3 Barnfield 6; Leighton Cor 5 Foxes 1; S. Heart 1 St. Joseph's 5.

DIV TWO: Redbourn 1 Toddington 4; WL Saints 1 Dragons 3. **Midwek**: Leighton Cor B 4 Toddington 1; Markyate 0 Redbourn 4; WL Saints 2 Kensworth 1.

UNDER-TEN DIV ONE: Aylesbury 3 Dunstable Colts 4; Leighton Cor 2 St. Joseph's 1; Foxes 1 Ramridge 1. **Midwek**: Foxes 1 Leighton Cor 2. **DIV TWO**: Ampthill 1 Sundon Park 3; Dunstable Tn 7 Flitwick 3.