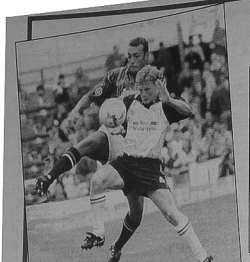
Hatters' bargain buys stun £13m men



WE MEET AGAIN . . . Former Town star Mark Pembridge, nearest the camera, in a tussle with the Town's Des Linton.

FRUSTRATION . . . David Preece leaves Craig Short floored and anxiously watching as Preece shot clears the bar.

THE crowd reaction at the Baseball Ground at 4.45pm on Saturday said it all. Those home fans who had already left greeted the final whistle with jeers and boos for a Derby team that had cost nearly £13million to assemble.

And the Luton Town fans, squeezed into a corner of one of the few standing terraces left in the First Division, cheered their heroes to the echo.

They could so easily have had a victory to cheer instead of a third consecutive draw, in the third match of the season.

The only blemish on a performance of rare control, composure and team discipline was the failure to convert one of the several good chances created.

And that by a team that cost just £500,000, for the only four members of it who came for a transfer fee.

Derby were under pressure from their own boardroom and from their crowd.

Owner Lionel Pickering has said publicly that after his big investments and the play-off failure to win promotion in May, he expects results this season.

His team was made to look nervous, and the tension grew as it became very plain that the Town were all but overnight at the back, after an early scare or two, and much more inventive in midfield and attack.

Derby's only period of partial domination was in the 15 minutes, when the pace of Tommy Johnson, Paul Kinson and Paul Simpson threatened to reduce cardiac arrests among some of us.

But David Preece settled down, despite a booking for holding back Simpson, and skipper Trevor Peake grew stronger by the minute as the football brain ensured that the 33-year-old legs were in the right place at the right time.

Peake was magnificent, and we can only wonder if the Town might have got the breakthrough the other end if Scott Oakes had taken a late withdrawal from the side.

He was injured in training 24 before the game, which enabled young from Plymouth, Dwight Marshall, enjoy his first start for the Town, beside Kerry Dixon.

And Marshall was often a useful foil for Derby, attacking from all points, and roaming wide to man the wings.

He fired in an early angled drive that went too straight, and into the path of Martin Taylor, after Kinson had lobbed over the bar from a similar position in front of Juergen Sommer.

It was to be 80 minutes of frustration for the home side before Sommer into his only serious test in the game, from a 20-yard drive by Kinson.

Derby had been unlucky in the minute when Kinson burst clear of the Hatters' defence, laid off a pass for James and pulled back a good pass for Hayward, put under pressure by two defenders, shot against the outside of the post.

Against that, the Town looked tight and confident going forward, but lacked cash in attack.

They won the corner-count 2-1, and Derby looked unlucky at times to be induced a better variety of Big Issue in their defence.

Derby looked vulnerable every time the Town attacked.

Ceri Hughes, getting back in his best, looked a better player than his old teammate, Mark Pembridge, and Tiffey, as ever, worked at his game 100 per cent on the right flank.

The defence settled down after the early worries, although Greene's lack of pace showed a couple of times, and some hearts were in mouths with 20 minutes to go when he fouled Johnson.

It looked perilously close to being the second yellow card offence, but referee Kevin Breen gave nothing more than the free kick, which Derby wasted.

The pity of it was that the Town could not find the final flourish, despite their very good football.

But we saw enough at Derby to know that if that can be put right we might well have that boring but rare luxury for Kenilworth Road, a safe mid-table position.

DERBY COUNTY 0
LUTON TOWN 0

Reports by BRIAN SWAIN
Pictures by ANDY HANDLEY

LUCKY ESCAPE . . . Derby scramble the ball clear off their line as the grounded Marvin Johnson goes close to giving the Town the lead.

Rams slammed by angry fans

WHILE Derby were being made to struggle, the near 700 following from Luton enjoyed themselves hugely, and when they chanted "What a waste of money" home fans applauded them.

And Derby manager Roy McFarland, calm and cool when he was a centre-half, fired off an angry "It's hell with the crowd" comment when he was asked about the fans giving his team the bird.

The local broadcast view was that it had been an unimpressive match, but McFarland said: "That's unimpressed match, but it was a good match, not how I saw it. I thought it was a good match. Luton came to play football and that gave us a good game.

"We cast it away in the final third, getting into some good positions but then losing the ball. But I thought we played some decent football.

Crafty David Pleat had caused an extra problem for Derby, keeping it secret that Scott Oakes would miss the game after turning an ankle in training the day before.

The Luton boss seemed to be on the same wavelength as the complaining Derby fans.

"I thought Derby were lucky to get the draw," he said.

"Juergen Sommer had only one hard save to make, and we were quite bright going forward. Marvin Johnson and Dwight Marshall both had efforts cleared off the line.

"We should have won the game. The team played well, from one to eleven, and stuffed Derby."

David Preece, who had another excellent game in midfield, agreed.

"It was a very good team performance," he said. "We are just disappointed that we did not win, but we showed we can play well. We will get amongst a few teams if we keep playing like that."

RISING STAR . . . Kerry Dixon gets in front of his markers to go for a flick-on across the face of the Derby goal.

OUTNUMBERED . . . Dwight Marshall, on his full Luton debut, is well covered by Derby defenders as he crosses by-passes him and reaches goalkeeper Martin Taylor.

THE COCA COLA CUP ACTION

Extra shooting practice after Cup flop

LUTON TOWN 1 FULHAM 1

MANAGER David Pleat was furious at his team's inability to kill off dogged Third Division opposition in the Coca Cola Cup last night.

He kept them in the dressing room to voice his displeasure, then cancelled their scheduled day off and ordered extra training, concentrating on going for goal.

When he eventually went to the Press room, he said he gave no hint of the tone of his private meeting with the players.

He said he believed nerves and anxiety overcame a side which on known form should have imposed its quality on the lowly visitors in the first leg of the final round.

A stunning 25-yard drive by Scott Oakes lifted the Town after 81 minutes of frustration, but an injury time approached two golden oldies combined to deny the Town their first win of the season. Alan Cork flicked on a near post corner and defender Kevin Moore headed the equaliser.

Until then goalkeeper Jim Stannard had stood between the Town and a humiliating defeat.

The Town's goal was a fitting reward for a third consecutive draw, in the third match of the season.

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THE DETAILS AT A GLANCE

LUTON TOWN: Sommer, James, Peake, Greene, Johnson, Tiffey, Linton, Hughes, Marshall, Dixon. Subs: not used, Slough, Houghton and goalkeeper Barber.

COLNY: Taylor, Cox, Charles, Short, Wood, Forsyth, Hayward, Cowan, Kinson, Simpson, Johnson (Gabbiadini 54 mins), Kinson. Other subs Kuhl and goalkeeper Sutton.

GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town 7 (two saved, seven wide). Derby two saved, 12 wide, one hit the outside of a post. Corners: 12-2 to the Town.

REFEREE: Kevin Breen, Liverpool. Had a good game.

BOOKED: David Greene and Marvin Johnson, for fouls on Paul Simpson and Steve Hayward.

ATTENDANCE: 13,060, a mere 5,000 less than Derby's break-even figure, but boosted by 700 from Luton.

ENTERTAINMENT: One of the better 0-0 draws, with the Town unlucky not to win, and their fans enjoying the day much more than Derby's.

Big match facts

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England ace turns down YTS chance

ENGLAND schoolboy soccer international Andrew Fotiadis has turned down an offer to be a YTS boy with Luton Town.

Instead the 16-year-old striker will stay at school at Hitchin, there decide when he is 18 whether he should gamble on football glory, or go to University. He is currently waiting for the results of his ten GCSE exams, which he will hear tomorrow (Thursday).

His father Leon, Chief Engineer at British Aerospace, said: "He has been training with Luton and playing for their youth team, and would like to be a professional footballer.

"But we have decided not to accept their offer for him to be a YTS boy. He will stay at school to do his A levels, and then we will see what is best.

"While he is at school, football and academic work can go ahead in parallel. He can study, and train with Luton at the same time.

"If, when he is 18, Luton offer him a contract, he could take a year off from education and see how it goes. If he does well in football, so be it.

"But he could still have the option of going to university at 19 if he has his A levels."

Other league clubs have been keeping tabs on the schoolboy star, but his father said: "Andrew is a Luton Town supporter. He used to be a member before he joined them on schoolboy forms.

ANDREW FOTIADIS . . . Turned down YTS chance with Luton

"Luton is a very friendly club, and it's close and convenient. Of course he is made a big fuss of in Hitchin."

Andrew has made an early impact as a member of Luton Town's youth team.

In their first game of the season the lanky striker went on as a substitute for the last 30 minutes, and notched a hat-trick in a 4-2 win over Crystal Palace, one of the most hotly contested games in the South East Counties League.

Andrew, of Mansfield, Hitchin, was away at a training course with the England under-18 squad at Keele University last week, and coaches at Luton Town will not be at all surprised if he soon wins more international honours to add to the eight England schoolboy caps he already has.

But chief coach John Moore applauds the family's decision to keep his career options open by going for education first and football second.

He said: "Andrew is one of those lucky people who does well without really having to try. Everything comes to him naturally and easily.

"But that means that in football he might have a hard lesson to learn, that you have to work hard to be a success, whatever your natural ability.

"He has a very strong build for his age, but work and training, and a determination to build up fitness, will be needed if he is to continue to make progress.

"It's hard to say how a 16-year-old will progress in football. While a boy can be head and shoulders over everyone else at 16, particularly in physique, other lads usually catch up physically in the next three or four years.

"We have often seen young boys who have looked world-beaters at 15 or 16, but then faded away by the time they were 22 or 23. A good education as well as football ability is no bad thing for a boy."