Pass masters add to United's troubles

THE SEASON SO FAR

Chart shows Luton score first, then tonnes, attendance and position.

ENGLEFIELD LEAGUE DIV 1

		August		
13	West Brom	(H) 1-1 (Oakes)	8,640	
17	Derby Co	(A) 2-2 (Hughes, Hughes)	10,090	
27	Southend	(H) 3-2 (Hughes, Hughes)	5,480	20
30	Tranmere	(A) 2-2 (Hughes, Hatton)		
		September		
3	Port Vale	(A) 1-0 Marshall)	8,541	13
10	Burnley	(H) 0-1	5,134	20
13	Bolton	(H) 0-2	5,347	20
17	Watford	(A) 0-2 (Fuller 2, Dixon)	8,860	16
		October		
24	Millwall	(A) 0-0	7,150	16
		November		
1	Bristol City	(H) 2-1 (Marshall, Preece)	5,033	20
9	Stoke City	(H) 3-1 (Marshall 2, Preece)	11,712	18
22	Middlesbro	(H) 3-1 (Marshall 2, Preece) Hatton, OG)	8,412	11
22	Sheffield Utd	(A) 3-1 (James, Dixon, OG)	13,317	7

GOALS: Marshall, 4; Hatton 3; Hughes, Oakes, Teller, Dixon and Preece two each; James one. ASSISTS: Teller and Marshall, 4; Preece 3; Marshall and Hatton 2; Hughes, Thomas and Johnson 1. APPEARANCES: Peake (in brackets): Ever-present, 13 each: Johnson, Thomas, Peake, Johnson, Teller and Preece, Marshall 12; Dixon 9 (3); Dixon 8 (1), Waddock 8, Thomas 7(2), Hatton 6, Hughes 6 (1), Greene 6, Stratton 3, Linton 1 (2), Woodstead 1. Before transfer: Houghton 1; Number of players used: 18. Last season: 26.

COCA COLA CUP (First round)

		August	
16	Fulham	(H) 1-1 (Oakes)	3,267
23	Fulham	(A) 1-0 (Marshall)	5,134
27	Fulham	(H) 2-1 (Hughes, Hughes)	

APPEARANCES: Two each by Sommer, James, Greene, Peake, Johnson, Teller, Preece, Hughes and Dixon, Houghton 1; Oakes 1 (1), Linton 1 (1) Marshall 1 (1), Stratton (1).

THE CLINCHER . . . Luton striker Kerry Dixon gets a yard clear of two would-be markers to head the Town's third goal at United on Saturday.

FURIOUS home fans got it right at Bramall Lane when they staged a protest demo against the Sheffield United chairman and board after Saturday's game.

Luton Town had shown how football should be played to cruise to their third successive victory, and the 300 Tykes who stayed behind in the car park to vent their spleen at Reg Brealey actually cheered Luton players on their way in the team bus.

"You can't say they didn't try, we can't! was the sentiment behind the protest from the seventh place in the First Division with the fourth away win of the season.

Their description of United's performance was loud, crude and unprintable.

The Town's win was a triumph for patient passing from one end of the pitch to the other, and was far too good for the hosts to and hold. Dave Bassett's team produced in what is already looking a forlorn bid to return to the Premiership in the first attempt.

There were admirable performances in every Town department, including at attack which saw Kerry Dixon return in place of John Barnes, who had suffered a groin injury in training.

In the first half, when Dixon was unable to exert much influence, visiting fans were muttering about bringing on sub Steve Oakes in his place.

In the second Dixon settled his critics, playing a major part in the build-up to two goals, and expertly scoring the hat.

And all three were the result of the Brian Phelan philosophy of pace, pace and again. After a stuttering start, the style was unleashed in a home side that seemed to be afraid was a mistake to be scored.

David Preece revelled in the space he was given to command on a very good pitch of once he was in the groove so were the Town.

But there was a little luck as well pace and determination, when the way Luton survived an early onslaught from Tony Agana for its pitch after firing blanks in the three previous matches.

United need to hitlist the Town at the Dis 20 minutes, and almost succeed, the first half centre-half Colin Morris and John Reed's cross shot dipping and swerving towards the far corner. Luton goalkeeper Kevin Poole was on hand to clear, via the underside of the bar.

United had to change the attack after interval when Luton goalkeeper Jostein Flo went off injured. Substitute Paul Stoddart, the striker Adrian Littlejohn and the beach ball-headed Scottish bigger Doug Houghton, a reserve centre-half, to play as a striker.

Yorkshire Post reported, but it almost paid a immediate dividend. Within the first minute of his arrival Houghton had headed a goal, a rather fortunate one, the ball ricocheting off his shoulder. But that put the Town's defence was well organised and Luton James, called off the line.

The Town had kicked off with five in midfield and three centre-backs. Some thought this a departure from the 4-4-2, with James playing a right back and the former was embarrassed when he was limited to a 20-minute level.

Questions were asked about whether Steve Thomas had gone when Marshall racing down the left wing. He crossed hard and low, and although Teller, the first man running in, failed by inches to make contact, James did not. He had moved well forward on the blind side, and was unmarked as he lashed in his first goal of the season.

Preece went off with a calf strain with 15 minutes to go, and substitute Oakes went on to pile on the agony for United.

Within three minutes he faced down the left wing, got behind the United defence, and fired in a cross which Dixon met with a careful header for his second league goal of the season.

"A lot of the home fans went home then; after the obligatory chants of What a Joke," said Bassett.

Another 500 or so stayed behind long after the final whistle to gather outside the United boardroom doors and demand the resignation of the chairman.

Having seen Sheffield United's performance, I came through the ground wondering why only the chairman?

SHEFFIELD UNITED 1
LUTON TOWN 3
(Half-Time 1-1)

THE EQUALISER . . . Brian Gayle has that down and out feeling as he looks up from the turf to see his header bulge the Sheffield United net. The outstretched arms just visible beyond Dixon's head belong to Mitchell Thomas, who had headed the ball into the danger area.

Pleat's setting high standards

MANAGER David Pleat disclosed that in half-time the Town's dressing room was full of confidence. The score was 1-1, United had lost one of their man strikers, and the Town's football was flourishing after a slow start.

"In the early stages we didn't seem to quicken our stride," he said. "We started off with three centre-backs but when Jostein Flo went off injured I knew that the man who went on as sub was a reserve centre-half.

"We changed the system, and Italian James went to right back in an orthodox back four.

"And after the first 26 minutes—I made a note of it—we started to play with good imagination.

"We were confident at half-time that we had more passing ability, and that sharp passing could get around their big men.

"We are setting standards, but I know when you do that just how hard it can be to maintain them.

"But everyone in the team did themselves credit after the first lathargic 20 minutes."

He has a bet of a go at his defence for opening goal. United left a big good play on their part, with everything pushed to Kevin Gage going down the flank and delivering a good centre for Nathan Blake to lead in. But Pleat was concerned that Blake was free for the header, so close to goal, and at the way Gage failed to make tackles before hitting the cross.

But he added: "After that we got off the game and go what we deserved."

Julian James, who had an earlier shot off the line, then scored to give the Town the lead, his first goal since one against Millwall in Bermondsey Road in October. "We were all looking forward to playing here. It's a lovely pitch, and I'm glad we came in the early stages I was going to be a bit of a battle. But we all worked hard and got our reward."

The win pushed the Town up to seventh place in the table, and the players scented a chance of getting into the top six for a play-off place.

Said James: "If we can get maximum points from the two home games next week we should be in the thick.

And he believes that the win owes Middlesbrough's Bernie Slaven a debt. He said that his early season home matches. "We are confident about our ability," he added.

The same was not true of United manager Dave Bassett. He looked pale, middle-aged, and spoke to a background roar as a crowd in the Kop Stand Bar, Bass tanged a demo demanding the removal of Blades chairman Reg Brealey.

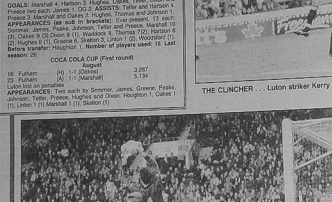
The fans are furious that after relegation from the Premiership in May United are in the bottom half of the First Division, and very much second best to Luton on Saturday.

Bassett had no complaints about the result, only about the poor performance by his team. "I must get rid of some of these players before they get into the sack," he said. "Their response when we went behind was unacceptable.

How they stand

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE FIRST DIVISION

	HOME					AWAY					
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A
Wolves	15	6	1	1	17	5	3	2	2	7	6
Reading	15	4	2	1	8	3	3	2	2	9	8
Middlesbro	15	4	1	1	10	1	3	2	2	8	7
Tranmere	15	4	1	2	16	11	2	4	4	10	23
Swindon	15	5	0	0	15	7	1	2	2	7	7
Charlton	15	4	2	2	12	9	1	2	2	11	12
Luton Town	**15**	**3**	**2**	**3**	**8**	**9**	**4**	**2**	**1**	**12**	**8**
Sunderland	15	4	1	2	9	7	2	1	4	6	19
Stoke	15	4	0	2	13	7	1	3	3	4	15
Southend	15	3	2	2	7	6	1	3	3	7	16
Grimsby	15	3	4	2	7	13	0	3	3	7	10
Bolton	15	3	2	2	11	9	1	3	3	7	12
Oldham	15	3	4	1	12	9	1	1	4	7	17
Portsmouth	15	3	3	1	9	10	1	2	3	7	11
Watford	15	3	3	1	12	9	1	2	3	5	8
Barnsley	15	3	3	1	7	7	1	2	3	5	8
Sheff Utd	15	3	2	2	10	7	1	2	3	4	5
Derby Co	15	3	2	2	8	6	1	2	3	4	10
Port Vale	15	3	2	3	8	6	1	2	3	6	10
Bristol City	15	2	2	3	5	8	1	2	3	5	12
Burnley	15	3	2	2	12	6	0	2	4	5	9
Millwall	15	2	3	2	8	7	0	3	3	6	10
West Brom	15	2	2	3	7	12	0	1	5	6	16
Notts Co	15	0	4	3	7	12	1	1	4	7	11



NOT THIS TIME . . . Julian James, very much an attacking defender, is outnumbered and outgunned by United goalkeeper Alan Kelly.

DAVID PLEAT

ANOTHER ONE TO US . . . Julian James is elated and elevated after his goal, and Ceri Hughes signals his pleasure as the Town take the lead.

CHILTERN YOUTH LEAGUE

Saints lose their unbeaten record

ST JOSEPH'S lost their unbeaten record in Division One of the Windsorbuild Chiltern Youth League when they 15 section when they lost 2-1 at Dragons.

Carl Nugent scored a spectacular solo equalizer with a shot that flew into the top corner from 25 yards to make the half time score 1-1.

In the second half Dragons showed a lot of pressure with most of the match David Barron in goal performing particularly well. Nugent then sprinted the crucial pass for Mark Joy in bit the winner.

● A HAT TRICK by Gary Chock helped Dragons to a 6-5 victory over Celtic in a closely fought game and ensured that Dragons under-13 manager Dave Cornell had a great Sunday night.

Chock scored two in the first two minutes and another in the last. Dragons' other scorers were Andre Sampson, Chris Dunking and Sabet Hussien.

● FOR the second week running Dragons hit double figures in the under-12 Division Two when they scored a dozen without reply at Redbourn.

Andrew Whiting opened the scoring followed by two from Steve Yaxsley and one apiece from Aaron Walbolne and Danny Graeme to make it 5-0 at half time. Adam West, having come on as a substitute, scored with almost his first kick to make it six.

Ivan Aumonier scored the third of the season. Graeme got a fine individual goal and then came the goal of the match, Paul Brisland Jnr hit the cut the and evil worth the wait.

Dragons shot from outside the area flew into the net giving the keeper no chance. Yaxsley then completed his third hat-trick of the season, Paul Aylings shot was deflected for number 11 and Adam West completed the scoring.

● TWO goals from Darren Mutley and one from Ian Fraser were not enough to stop a repeat of the same scoreline as when Sandon Park and Dragons last met in Division Two of the under-11 section, Park winning 5-3 again.

● IN Division One of the under-14 section Lewsey, with a few good players missing, produced a great team effort to secure a comfortable 5-0 win over Rambridge B.

Richard Marshall scored a hat-trick and the other goals came from Darren Hongan and Lee Petryszyn.

● BUSMILED Colts A made relatively hard work of beating bottom side Barnfield Colts A 6-1 in Division Two of the under-13 section.

They took the lead with a fine strike by Mark Lynsky and a header from Ryan Jones.

Barnfield hit back and scored, but then long shots by Andrew Jennings and two by David Hongan made the game safe. Craig Martin completed the scoring.

Hashmead have built a three point gap at the top of the table but need to return to form to keep the pace on. Their man of the match was Ryan Jones.

The under-sixes side lost 7-2 to Dunstable Colts, conceding four goals near the end.

Manager Gary Stanton was disappointed how the boys fell apart at the end of the game.

The big match facts

● TOWN: Sommer; James, Peake, Johnson, Thomas; Teller, Hughes, Waddock, Preece (Oakes 75 minis); Marshall, Dixon. Other subs Thorpe and goalkeeper Barber.

● SHEFFIELD UNITED: Kelly; Gage, Gayle, Marshall, Scott; Reed, Morris, Houghton (75 minis), Gardner, Whitehouse; Blake, Flo (Hodgson 10 mins), Goalkeeper sub Mercer.

● THE GOALS: 1-0, 17 mins: Nathan Blake header from right wing cross by Kevin Gage, pushed back Kevin Gage; 1-1, 33 mins: Brian Gayle own goal, header in attempt to clear Michael Thomas's cross; 1-2, 71 mins: Julian James, drive at the far post from a left wing cross by Dwight Marshall; 1-3, 78 mins: Kerry Dixon, header from a left wing cross by Mark Oakes.

● OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town five saved and three wide; United three saved, six wide and one deflected on to the crossbar by Carl Hughes's goal-line clearance. Corners: 8-6 to the Town.

● REFEREE: Edward Parker, Preston, played well and if some of the bookings were harsh he was kind to Paul Teller when he might have shown him a second yellow card for a high tackle.

● BOOKED: The Town's Paul Teller, and United's Scott, Marshall, Brian Gayle, John Reed and Doug Hodgson, all for fouls.

● ATTENDANCE: 13,317, Bramall Lane's lowest league gate of the season except for a televised match against Barnsley. The Luton following was 660 and another 2,000 were schoolchildren on free tickets.

● ENTERTAINMENT: Very satisfying for Town fans, with plenty of passing football into reward against a team full of hustle and bustle and little else.

REPORTS BY BRIAN SWAIN
PICTURES BY GARETH OWEN