Sent-off Halle is an innocent man

LONG RANGE FIREPOWER . . . Gary Waddock, his loan spell just extended into a third month, cracks in a 30-yarder which flew narrowly wide.

ON ITS WAY . . . Paul Telfer (also pictured inset), whose pace and power threatened to cause major damage to Oldham's left flank, fires in a cross beyond the reach of Neil Pointon.

NEVER the easiest place to visit, Boundary Park was a real hatfield on Saturday as Luton Town held on for survival against the odds.

Oldham were shell-shocked before the kick-off, having just lost manager Joe Royle to Everton, but played with a spirit and determination that eventually earned them the big point.

In a desperate last-minute pitched battle almost on the Town goalline, Gunnar Halle was sent off for aiming a crude kick at Julian James, who was curled up on the ground, trying to protect his body, after a foul.

The Norwegian international protested that it was mistaken identity, and the video evidence is that he was right.

Richard Graham was the culprit, and you wonder about the standards of a man who can kick a fellow pro when he is down, and then watch someone else carry the can.

Injuries left Oldham's strike force depleted, with leading scorer Sean McCarthy and Graeme Sharp, the caretaker manager, out of the side.

And for all the blitz attempts to break through, Oldham never looked like having the invasiveness needed to unsettle a Town defence that played superbly, and got goalkeeper Jurgen Sommer off the hook.

But on a wet pitch, with the ball not rolling freely, the Town's passing game on the break was well below par, and they

OLDHAM 0
LUTON TOWN 0

rarely threatened to hit the goal standard.

Dwight Marshall and Scott Oakes had very quiet games, and even Iain Pence found himself bogged down in midfield.

Kerry Dixon, often a lonely front name, gave Richard Johnson a problem or two and looked the most likely man to either kick or pick a goal.

If both attacks were poor, the defending was first-rate. Oldham made better use of the flanks, and in Richard Holder, on the left, they had a player whose pace and pro-ficiency could have caused problems.

But Paul Telfer did his share of defending, and James came through his hardest examination with great credit.

So did the rest of the back four, by Marvin Johnson deserves special mention. After all his injury problems, he at last looks like being the player we looked forward to when he first broke into the team.

Mitchell Thomas was another worker, and Trevor Peake was an inspiration, and a real frustration for Oldham.

His only worry came on a way through the second half, when the home side had appeared to get the upper hand after consecutive 0-0 bore draws.

The Town defender had booked a few minutes before for a foul on Andy Ritchie, and he was close to a second yellow card, and a sending off, when Neil Pointon ran at him.

The Oldham man pulled the ball past Peake, who dropped to ground. Pointon then charged straight into him, and raised Kevin Lynch into the air in obstruction, then seemed to be reaching for the card in his pocket.

Town on TV

LUTON'S home match against Derby County, scheduled for December 10, will now be played that afternoon, kick-off 2.55pm, after being chosen by ITV for live television coverage.

It looked as though he realised that the sinking he contemplated would become a red card, and changed his mind.

The home fans booked with rage, but caretaker boss Sharp had no complaints afterwards.

Much of the game was sterile, with two sides trying hard to beat the conditions, but not capable of achieving their ambition.

The Town were not as sharp as they had been in Molineux a week earlier, but a lot of work went into the necessary job of avoiding defeat.

Two one of those days when a mistake right turn the game, and Sommer lived hopefully three times in the first half.

After only three minutes James headed a ball back, wide of the goal. The keeper kicked against letting it run for the corner, tried to gather the ball, and was still grasping in the mud as it squirmed out of his grasp.

Fortunately Holden, who was presented with what should have been a gift, shot hurriedly over the bar, from a narrow angle, but the big goal surprised.

The next embarrassment for the big keeper was shrugged off by Halle, who for one had a similar slip-up and got down his leg-lines, on the edge of the penalty area. Sommer had time to make contact with the ball, and was a spectator as Halle tossed hard and long, and Pence managed to clear before Nicky Banger could initiate.

Sommer made a rare mistake to set up another Chance, Oakes, under no pressure, kicks failed to hold on to the ball, and Peake was cleared as Oldham were tried to clear.

Sommer recovered to play well after that among 20-minute spell, with his punching and fisting the job on a day that was not fun for trying to catch crosses.

The Town had Pence in the first half with Dixon twice close to the target. Oakes, for the second time, was given time to shoot, and was cleared by Neil McDonald, for a Corner.

Oldham had a Corner, and Holden was free in the second half, but the second attempt, but conditions and incidents were few and far between.

Corners and free fans got more and more frequent and more dangerous as time ticked away, and the pressure grew steadily, the quality of Oldham's attacking improved, the use basic to throw the Town defence into serious confusion, of John Gayle, by Marshall for the final 11 minutes, made little difference to the Town's attacking.

The crowd screamed for a penalty when James produced a superb tackle on Pointon, and when the corner was given their angst redoubled because it ended with a header by Holden being bundled off the line by Oakes.

The major excitement and controversy came in the 89th minute. Another corner led to a massive scramble in the mod in the Town goal area.

Redmond's scoring attempt came back off a post, and it was not clear if the whistle had already gone for a foul on James.

But at least one Oldham man kept dig-ging in after the whistle, and Mr Lynch had to blow for the inevitable foul.

The offence well deserved the red card that followed, and for the sake of Richard Graham should own up for his flash of temper.

Town fans rightly gave their team an impressive send-off at the end. The away record is still far and away the best in the Third Division, and it was maintained by determination and resolve not to be beaten.

REPORTS BY BRIAN SWAIN
PICTURES BY GARETH OWEN

SPEARHEAD . . . Scott Oakes, working as a support midfielder, races clear of Oldham defenders to get in a drive which was saved at the second attempt by Paul Gerrard.

How they stand

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE FIRST DIVISION

	HOME					AWAY					
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A
Wolves	16	6	1	1	15	9	3	3	2	14	10
Middlesbro	16	6	1	1	15	6	3	2	3	8	10
Tranmere	16	7	1	0	23	9	1	3	4	10	20
Reading	16	4	3	1	8	2	4	1	3	11	9
Grimsby	16	5	1	2	16	7	1	3	4	5	12
Bolton	16	5	2	1	15	5	2	1	3	13	13
Walford	17	5	1	2	14	9	1	3	3	9	12
Luton Town	**17**	**5**	**1**	**2**	**5**	**9**	**12**	**5**	**3**	**1**	**15**
Sheff Utd	17	5	2	2	15	5	1	3	4	6	8
Barnsley	16	4	1	3	9	5	2	3	3	9	13
Charlton	17	3	3	3	14	12	2	4	2	14	15
Southend	16	3	3	2	9	7	2	3	3	8	10
Swindon	16	5	3	1	14	9	1	0	6	8	16
Sunderland	16	4	1	3	9	7	1	2	5	10	7
Oldham	17	4	3	2	13	9	1	2	5	8	13
Port Vale	16	4	3	1	13	9	1	2	5	7	15
Stoke	16	4	2	2	15	9	1	3	4	4	15
Derby Co	17	3	2	2	11	8	2	2	5	11	20
Millwall	17	3	4	1	16	11	1	3	5	7	14
Portsmouth	16	3	2	3	9	11	1	4	2	10	10
Barnsley	16	2	5	2	8	9	3	2	3	6	9
Bristol City	16	2	3	3	5	10	2	2	4	7	11
West Brom	16	3	3	2	6	6	0	4	4	6	7
Notts Co	16	1	4	3	10	14	1	1	6	8	14

Luton Town's season at a glance

DATE... OPPONENTS... RESULT... TOWN SCORERS... ATTENDANCE... LEAGUE POSITION

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE DIVISI

August
13 West Brom (H) 1-1 (Oakes) 8,640
20 Derby Co (A) 0-0 10,060
27 Southend (H) 2-2 (Hartson, Hughes) 5,918 17
30 Tranmere (A) 2-4 (Hughes, Hartson) 5,480 20

September
3 Port Vale (A) 1-0 (Marshall) 8,541 15
10 Burnley (H) 0-1 6,911 18
17 Bolton (H) 0-3 5,764 20
17 Watford (A) 4-2 (Telfer 2, Dixon) (Oakes) 8,880 16

24 Millwall (A) 0-0 7,150 16

October
1 Bristol City (H) 3-1 6,633 20
8 Stoke City (A) 2-1 (Marshall, Preece) 11,712 11
15 Middlesboro (H) 5-1 (Marshall 2, Preece) (Hartson, o) 8,412 11
22 Sheffield Utd (A) 3-1 (James, Dixon, og) 13,317 11
29 Barnsley (H) 0-1 7,212 10

November
1 Grimsby Tn (H) 1-2 (Oakes) 5,839 12
5 Wolves (A) 0-2 (Hughes, Marshall) (Dixon) 26,749 8

12 Oldham Ath (A) 0-0 7,907 8
19 Portsmouth (H) 1-0
26 Swindon (A) 1-1

December
3 Sheffield Utd (H) 1-1
11 Derby (H) 1-0
16 West Brom (A) 1-1
26 Reading (A) 2-1
27 Sunderland (H) 1-1
31 Notts County (A) 1-1

January
2 Charlton Ath (H) 2-1
14 Barnsley (A) 1-1
21 Wolves (A) 1-1

February
4 Oldham Ath (H) 0-0
11 Grimsby (A) 1-1
18 Swindon (H) 2-0
25 Portsmouth (A) 2-1
25 Bristol City (A) 1-1

March
4 Millwall (H) 1-1
11 Port Vale (H) 1-1
11 Southend (A) 1-1
18 Tranmere (H) 2-1
21 Burnley (A) 1-1
25 Watford (H) 1-1

April
1 Bolton (A) 1-1
8 Notts County (H) 1-1
15 Sunderland (A) 1-1
17 Reading (H) 2-1
22 Charlton Ath (A) 2-1
29 Middlesboro (A) 1-1

May
5 Stoke City (H) 1-1

COCA-COLA CUP (First round)

August
16 Fulham (H) 1-1 (Oakes) 3,287
23 Fulham (A) 1-1 (Marshall) 5,134
Luton lost on penalties.

Who's who

GOALS... APPEARANCES

League goals		League appearances (as sub in brackets)
Marshall	5	Sommer 17
Oakes	3	James 17
Preece	3	Hartson 17
Hartson	2	Johnson 17
Oakes	3	Hughes 17
Hughes	2	Telfer 17
Telfer	2	Preece 17
James	1	Marshall 16 (3)
Own goals	2	Waddock 12
Assists		Oakes 11 (5)
Telfer	7	Thomas 11 (2)
Hartson	4	Dixon 10
Preece	4	Hartson 8 (4)
Marshall	3	Hughes 8
Oakes	3	Greene 8
Thomas	2	Holden 7
Hughes	1	Linton 3 (2)
Johnson	1	Houghton 1
		Woodstord (1)

CUP GOALS... APPEARANCES

Coca-Cola goals		Telfer 2
Oakes	2	Preece 2
Marshall	1	Hughes 2
Cup appearances		Dixon 2
Sommer	2	Oakes 1 (1)
James	2	Linton 1 (1)
Greene	2	Marshall 1 (1)
Hughes	2	Houghton 1
Johnson	2	Skelton (1)

JUMP TO IT . . . Kerry Dixon was the Town's livelliest attacker at Boundary Park, but this header drifted wide of the angle of bar and post.

Graeme's in at the sharp end!

BOTH managers looked for positive aspects from a match which the Pressbox neutrals did not enjoy on a miserable wet afternoon at Oldham.

Graeme Sharp was experiencing his first taste in the hot seat. He was made caretaker manager for one game as Oldham think about how they replace Joe Royle.

Sharp, the 34-year-old former Scottish international has applied for the job, and was impressive in the way he handled his Press conference. It might not be a big gamble if Oldham stick with him: 12 years ago Royle was also an ex-international striker with no management experience.

David Pleat was also an unknown when he succeeded Harry Haslam at Luton nearly 17 years ago, and the Press were queuer up to hear him speak.

"I thought we threatened at times," he said. "We tend to pass the ball out of defence, but lacked clinical work in the last third of the field.

"But we were resilient and although Oldham put pressure in the last 20 minutes I felt comfortable. Yeah I sick the match away, and we played with a lot of spirit."

He praised the referee for his sensible handling of the situation when Trevor Peake looked to be in danger of a second yellow card. Said the manager: "Peake is lively to watch because he hasn't just clatter the ball away."

The Town have had sympathy with the official over the last-minute fracas that left Gunnar Halle red carded when video replay showed he had not kicked Julian Pearce.

"I couldn't see who kicked Julian James, but I know what lads were saying to the ref," he said.

"Our whole back four played well; and James in particular deserve credit for stop Halle coming in too many good crosses."

Sharp thought Oldham played well enough to have nicked a win, but said he had enjoyed his first time in a manager.

"Our players gave 100 per cent," he said. "My views have not changed on the game from outside, but we can pass the ball as well. In the end we scored and each team deserved a point."

DAVID PLEAT

Free ticket offer by friendly club

AFTER the success of offers to Junior Hatters, and with Luton University students being offered free tickets for Saturday's game, the Town are to give their season ticket holders an early Christmas present next month.

"Bring a friend" is the constant plea of David Pleat to all Town fans, and the club is now ready to make that even easier.

For the visit of Sheffield United on December 5 season ticket holders are offered a free seat for anyone they care to bring with them. The only restriction is that the freebies must be claimed by the afternoon of the day before.