Dixon and Preece are goal-den oldies!

Big match facts

● TOWN: Sommer; James, Peake, Johnson, Thomas; Oakes, Telfer, Waddock, Preece; Dixon, Marshall (Thorpe 72 mins). Other subs: Hartson and goalkeeper Barlow.

● PORTSMOUTH: Knight; Kristensen, Gittens, Russell, Dobson; Preki (Rees H?), McLoughlin, Powell, Pethick; Creaney, Burton (Totten 74 mins). Goalkeeper sub Fishavoy.

● GOALS: 1-0 2 mins: Kerry Dixon header from David Preece's left wing cross; 2-0, 55 mins: Preece low drive from the rebound after Julian James's shot hit a post.

● OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town six saved, seven wide and one hit a post and led to a goal; Portsmouth four saved, seven wide and one shot hit both posts. Corners: 7-5 to the Town.

● REFEREE: John Kirkby, Sheffield: enjoyed his game, with both teams easy to handle, and never a hint of a yellow card offence.

● ATTENDANCE: 8,214, third highest of the season, but including 500 Luton University students on free tickets.

● ENTERTAINMENT: The home fans enjoyed the result, with the Town deserving their second the result, with the Town deserving their second Kenilworth Road win of the season. A lot of the passing was very good up to the point of delivering the final ball, which spoiled things a little.

LAST POST FOR POMPEY . . . Julian James races in to shoot for goal from a cross by Kerry Dixon. He was denied by the woodwork, but David Preece made it a short-lived reprieve for Portsmouth by banging home the rebound.

IT'S ALL OVER NOW . . . David Preece, extreme left and also picture inset, has left Pompey goalkeeper Alan Knight grounded by the shot that made it 2-0. Julian James, foreground, and Dwight Marshall are celebrating.

WITHOUT hitting the consistent sweet form they have shown on some occasions, Luton Town lifted an unwanted pressure when they disposed of Portsmouth comfortably at Kenilworth Road.

The danger was that another home failure could have plunged team and fans into a high state of mental anxiety.

Instead, with the experienced Kerry Dixon and David Preece leading the way, Pompey went hit by an early goal and never allowed to recover.

And the second home win of the season, in ten league and cup attempts, should have buried the jitty complexity. It has put the Town within three points of third place in the table.

The Premiership might still be just a dream for this season, but at least it looks as though Town fans will have plenty to enjoy before the last day's final whistle is blown.

At times Portsmouth were more than a match for the Town in terms of passing ability, and pocket Rockets spin well after the early shock delivered expertly by Dixon.

It took the Town just two minutes to serve notice of their intensions. Barely one minute had ticked by when Preece took a short pass from Paul Telfer and whipped in a shot which whistled just beyond the far post, with Alan Knight well beaten.

And in the second attack Pompey's defence was carved wide open as Michael Thomas fed Dwight Marshall for a run down the left.

He drew two defenders, laid back the ball to Preece, and the midfielder's cross was first time, to the right spot.

Dixon got between two defenders in his his fourth goal of the season, and he fire in front of home fans.

Portsmouth rallied, without threating too much, and the Town thought they had doubled the lead in the 26th minute.

A corner by Preece was headed to Dixon, and defender Tony Dobson kicked the ball towards the net with his shoulder. But Portsmouth goalkeeper Knight made a incredible reflex save, with Town fans unsure if the ball had crossed the line first.

Juergen Sommer had to make a smart save when Portsmouth got a close question.

He blocked a drive by Gary Creaney, then came out quickly and tipped the ball over the bar when Deon Burton headed towards the top corner.

The Town were quite content turning on the style. Some of the passing was superb, but it was often if failed to deliver the right ball into the danger zone.

But Scott Oakes started look comfortable when he was wide on the right, and he was ing, with Paul Telfer looking of unsettling many a defence.

On the other flank Thomas bamboozled Nicky Gittens with speed to play for Dixon. Portsmouth took him off at the interval, giving Jason Rees a run against his old team.

It made little difference to the flow of a game in which both sides threatened but fell short of major achievement.

Early in the second half Knight made a great save from Dixon's near post header, from another corner by Preece, but the keeper was left helpless when the best move of the match brought the second goal.

Julian James started it by robbing Darryl Powell's snaff out a Pompey attack. James turned the ball forward, and passed it on to Dixon, who made rapid progress down the right wing.

The striker delivered a hard low cross to the near post, and James, who had kept running after his original pass, hit a crop-low drive.

It would have been a memorable goal, but the ball came back off the post so hard that it rebounded to the edge of the penalty area.

Preece hammered in a low shot, with a right defender making a last effort to stop it. Knight was beaten on his right hand, having gone to the left when James shot.

Portsmouth had as many goal chances as the Town, but most fell to Creaney, and his shooting was wild and ineffective.

And the Town had an amazing stroke of luck in an incident which would be a cert for "What happened next?" spots on sports quiz programmes.

Sommer made a dash to the edge of his area to cut out a bouncing through-ball. He was worried about the danger of handball outside the box, tried to fly-kick clear, and missed the ball completely.

What happened next was almost a slow-motion heart-stopper for the Town. Robert Pethick shot from an angle, and the ball hit the inside of the near post and rolled along the line to hit the far post.

Powell could have followed up to hit an unguarded target but was not quick enough. Marvin Johnson was, and cleared the Portsmouth's man's follow-up shot.

And that was the end of Portsmouth's hopes, with the last close scoring attempt at the other end, when Telfer's low drive was pushed round the post by Knight.

REPORTS BY BRIAN SWAIN
PICTURES BY GARETH OWEN

NUMBER ONE . . . Kerry Dixon is the top hatter as he rises to head the Town into the lead in the first two minutes against Portsmouth on Saturday.

LUTON TOWN 2 PORTSMOUTH 0

How they stand

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE FIRST DIVISION

	HOME					AWAY					Pts
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	
Middlesbro	17	7	1	1	16	6	3	2	3	8	10	35
Wolves	17	6	1	1	19	8	3	3	3	14	11	31
Bolton	17	6	2	1	17	5	2	3	3	13	13	29
Tranmere	17	7	2	0	24	10	1	3	4	10	19	29
Reading	17	6	3	0	17	3	1	4	3	7	11	28
Watford	18	6	2	1	16	7	1	4	4	9	14	27
Luton Town	**18**	**5**	**3**	**1**	**14**	**9**	**1**	**4**	**4**	**7**	**11**	**25**
Barnsley	**18**	**2**	**2**	**5**	**11**	**12**	**5**	**2**	**3**	**15**	**10**	**26**
Southend	17	4	3	1	9	4	2	3	4	7	11	24
Charlton	17	5	0	3	12	7	1	3	5	7	22	23
Sheff Utd	18	5	3	1	14	12	1	2	5	12	16	23
Stoke	17	4	2	2	13	9	1	3	4	5	8	22
Derby Co	16	4	3	0	15	7	1	2	5	7	17	21
Burnley	17	2	5	2	12	11	3	2	3	6	9	21
Swindon	17	4	2	2	13	8	1	2	5	10	19	21
Sunderland	17	1	6	2	8	9	3	3	2	10	7	21
Oldham	18	4	3	2	11	9	1	2	6	9	16	20
Port Vale	17	4	1	3	13	9	1	4	3	5	7	20
Millwall	18	3	4	2	10	7	1	3	5	7	14	19
Portsmouth	17	2	3	3	9	11	2	4	3	10	12	19
Bristol City	18	3	2	3	9	9	1	2	6	5	17	11
West Brom	17	4	2	2	9	7	0	4	5	7	18	18
Notts Co	17	1	4	3	10	14	1	1	7	8	16	11

Pompey lack a cutting edge

THE TWO managers, who are old friends, stood side by side after the game, and agreed entirely on why Luton Town had won.

"We edged it," said David Pleat. And Pompey's Jim Smith said: "That's the right word: Luton edged it because they had better teeth than us."

Just over 20 years ago Smith was an unknown manager of Boston United, and tried to sign winger David Pleat from Exeter City. "I decided to stay in league football as long as possible," recalled Mr Pleat. "But our paths have crossed many times since."

The Town camp was delighted to achieve the second home win of the season. "We weren't getting a phobia about our home record, but we are pleased to get this win," said the manager.

"We thought that if we could get an early goal and hold on, we would have a chance of winning.

"Portsmouth came into it after the goal, and perhaps passed the ball better for a time."

Smith, football's "Bald Eagle," developed the theme about finishing power being the main difference between the sides. "Gerry Creaney had plenty of shots, but he didn't hit the target. David Preece did, when he had his chance.

"He made no reference to the appalling bad luck Portsmouth had suffered recently.

"They came to Luton with eight senior players missing, including the 11-goal skipper Kit Symons, who was injured in a hamstring strain collected playing for Wales while they were being thumped 5-0 in Georgia.

And the luck went against Pompey on the pitch at Kenilworth Road.

Smith had great sympathy for Robert Pethick, who hit his shot for both posts and roll along the line before Marvin Johnson hacked clear from David Powell's follow-up attempt.

"Pethick was unlucky," said Smith. "But Powell should never have given the defender time to block his shot. He should have followed the ball in much quicker."

Goalkeeper Alan Knight said Preece's killer goal through a deflection off Pethick in its way into the net, although he was not claiming he would have saved the shot.

Said Preece: "I couldn't believe it when the ball came out to me off the post. I just hit it."

The midfielder was named man of the match by the commentator, but said: "This time I didn't think I deserved it. I thought Kerry Dixon was our best player.

"He was there in just the right place to create the opportunity for my goal, and that was a good start for us.

"We have the players in midfield who can supply good crosses, and strikers who can score. We deserved to win, but we thought we might have scored more goals.

"When Portsmouth hit both posts I think it killed them off."

Preece added that it was a relief to win at home, and he was looking forward to setting the away results maintained on Saturday's visit to Swindon.

DAVID PLEAT

Luton Town's season at a glance

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

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE DIV I

13 West Brom	(H)	1-1	(Oakes)	8,640
20 Derby Co	(A)	3-0		14,065
27 Southend	(H)	2-2	(Hartson, Hughes)	5,918
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		6,811 18
13 Bolton	(H)	0-3		5,764 20
17 Watford	(A)	4-2	(Telfer 2, Dixon, (Oakes)	6,860 16
24 Millwall	(A)	0-0		7,150 16
			October	
1 Bristol City	(H)	0-0		6,633 20
9 Stoke City	(A)	2-1	(Marshall, Preece)	11,712 18
15 Middlesbro	(H)	5-1	Marshall 2; Preece) (Hartson, og)	8,412 17
22 Sheffield Utd	(A)	3-1	(James, Dixon, og)	13,317 7
29 Barnsley	(H)	0-1		7,212 10
			November	
1 Grimsby Tn	(H)	1-2	(Oakes)	5,839 12
5 Wolves	(A)	3-2	(Preece, Marshall) (Dixon)	26,749 8
12 Oldham Ath	(A)	0-0		7,907 8
19 Portsmouth	(H)	2-0	(Dixon, Preece)	8,218 8
26 Swindon	(A)			
			December	
3 Sheffield Utd	(H)			
17 Derby	(H)			
19 West Brom	(A)			
26 Reading	(A)			
27 Sunderland	(H)			
31 Notts County	(A)			
			January	
2 Charlton Ath	(H)			
14 Barnsley	(A)			
21 Wolves	(A)			
			February	
4 Oldham Ath	(H)			
11 Swindon	(A)			
18 Grimsby	(A)			
22 Portsmouth	(A)			
25 Bristol City	(A)			
			March	
4 Millwall	(H)			
7 Port Vale	(H)			
11 Southend	(A)			
18 Tranmere	(A)			
21 Burnley	(H)			
25 Watford	(H)			
			April	
1 Bolton	(A)			
8 Notts County	(H)			
15 Sunderland	(A)			
17 Reading	(H)			
22 Charlton Ath	(A)			
29 Middlesbro	(A)			
			May	
6 Stoke City	(H)			

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	Barlow	1
Dixon	4	Sommer	18
Preece	4	James	18
Hartson	3	Peake	18
Oakes	3	Johnson	18
Hughes	2	Telfer	18
Telfer	2	Preece	18
James	1	Marshall	15 (3)
Own goals	1	Waddock	13
		Oakes	12 (3)
Assists		Thomas	11 (2)
Telfer	5	Dixon	11 (2)
Hartson	4	Hartson	8 (4)
Preece	4	Hughes	8 (1)
Marshall	3	Greene	3
Oakes	3	Skelton	3
Thomas	2	Linton	1 (2)
Hughes	1	Houghton	1
Johnson	1	Woodstead	(1)
James	1	Thorpe	(1)

CUP GOALS... APPEARANCES

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

KERRY DIXON . . . The giant's star in teamwork David Preece's eye.

Marshall's all right!

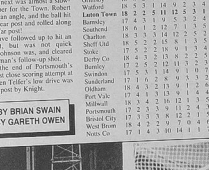
AFTER three days of troublesome, stiffer Dwight Marshall hopes to resume full training tomorrow.

And if he shakes off a calf muscle injury sustained against Portsmouth, he will be in a hurry to leave Luton. But manager David Pleat, "But we are hoping it will not be too serious.

"Dwight should be back to work on Thursday and hopefully fully fit before Saturday."

The boss was pleased with the way all 11 players performed against Pompey, including Tony Thorpe, who made his first league appearance of the season as sub for Marshall.

Contenders for places in Saturday's team also include John Hartson and Deon Greene, after missing under-21 caps last week for, respectively, Wales and the Irish Republic.



LUCKY ESCAPE . . . Confusion in the Pompey goal as the ball is scrambled clear after Tony Dobson almost presented the Town with their third own goal of the season.