Top-Hatters leave Swindon speechless

Big match facts

TOWN: Sommer; James, Peake, Johnson, Thomas; Telfer, Linton, Hawkins, Preece; Dixon (Hartson 86 mins), Oakes. Other subs Woodsford and goalkeeper Barber.

SWINDON: Digby; Robinson, Thomson, Kilcline, Bodin; MacLaren (Beauchamp 64 mins), O'Sullivan, Ekoku (Hartson 82 mins), Horlock, Mutch; Florlofi, Scott. Goalkeeper sub Hammond.

GOALS: 1-0 10 mins: Keith Scott after Trevor Peake's headed back pass fell well short of goalkeeper Juergen Sommer; 1-1, 43 mins: Scott header from a right-wing cross by Kerry Dixon header from a right-wing cross by Paul Telfer; 1-2, 60 mins: Scott Oakes, powerful low angled drive into the far corner after a through pass by Telfer.

OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town three saved and ten wide; Swindon four saved and six wide.

Corners: 5-3 to the Town.

REFEREE: Roger Wilkes, Gloucestershire.

Had a good game, although the Town think he did them out of a penalty when David Preece was upended by lumbering Andy Thomson in the 26th minute.

ATTENDANCE: 9,455, with the 1,120 from Luton making the loudest and happiest noise.

ENTERTAINMENT: Brilliant for Town supporters, with passing and pace well worth the sixth way win of the season, and even David Pleat felt that at times they played like the Liverpool of old.

MATCH WINNER: Scott Oakes, playing up front because of the absence of Dwight Marshall, shows the shooting star approach that clinched the Town's sixth away win of the season.

ON THE WAY BACK: Kerry Dixon watches the ball go into the net for the Town's equaliser just before half-time. Mitchell Thomas, on the extreme right, is the man looking quite pleased about Dixon's fifth goal of the season.

THE BEST away results in more than a decade have rekindled the promising dream for Luton Town fans who saw an astonishing performance at Swindon. Forget the narrow margin of victory. In class the teams were miles apart, with the confident and composed, outfoothnding a side desperate to do well less than a week after John Gorman was sacked as manager.

Steve McMahon, the experienced midfielder stand after talks with the local directors.

He refused to meet the Press afterwards. No wonder. He must have been speechless at seeing Swindon outplayed.

The railway Town's defence was made to look as mobile as a signal box as the Town's excellent passing expressed its way through them.

In overall performance, it was the best team display since Wolves were beaten at Molineux, and the sixth away win of the season was well deserved.

It was achieved despite the injury absence of leading scorer Dwight Marshall, and it is no reflection on him to say he was hardly missed.

Des Linton came back after two months on the injured list to play remarkably well in midfield, in his second full game of the season.

Scott Oakes was switched back to the support role backing up spearhead Kerry Dixon, and the two front men were always too hot for Brian Kilcline and Andy Thomson.

Swindon fancy as their next boss, was in a

SWINDON 1 LUTON TOWN 2

Pace as well as accuracy of passing helped to destroy Swindon, and after an early hiccup the Town defence saw of a threat of the home side's big strikers, Keith Scott and Jan Fjortoft.

They must have envied the top quality service Dixon and Oakes received. Swindon's midfield was anonymous in the Town easily controlled that area, thanks to Gary Waddock sitting in the anchor role and David Preece, Paul Telfer and Linton spreading the ball to both flanks and down the middle.

Julian James, Marvin Johnson and Mitchell Thomas were all on top of their game, and Trevor Peake oversaw a set that was by his standards unusually tight.

The skipper helped to give Swindon the early goal they had hunted desperately. With ten minutes gone he headed his towards his own goal, but Telfer ball looped too high pel Juergen Sommer and left stranded. Scott's attempted volley became a poor shot, but the ball bounced to Fjortoft, and he gave it back for Scott to tap in at a gift goal.

It failed to upset the Town's rhythm, and if there is any criticism that it came only in the more goals mode that has not taken off a team that is supposed to be demonstrating.

Oakes and Dixon overlaps

Scott Oakes, who did a good job at the front with fellow scorer Kerry Dixon

FOILED: David Preece gets into the danger area for a close-range header which goalkeeper Fraser Digby managed to save.

red to create a chance which Oakes fired out of far post, and the Town thought they should have had a penalty when Preece tripped by Thomson.

The little midfielder seems to be enjoying to see one wide on the left since Cox Hughes was ruled out, and is now a regular cause the opposition's penalty area.

Jane Digby made an instinctive close-range save Preece looked like scoring with a header after a classy build-up which saw most of the Town's play. Peake tucked a perfectly-weighted pass out of defence to Telfer on the right wing. He had good down the flank, crossed to the Hughes, and Dixon headed the ball back to up Preece.

The Swindon could do nothing about the easier. Preece shot for goal and a tender half-cleared. Telfer sized up the volley because a poor shot, but the ball rolled out to the right, the cross was perfection this was the header by Dixon for his fifth eight goal of the season, and his fourth in two games since he came back at the expense of Jules Harrison.

The wood chisel, throughout the 90 minutes, despite an embarrassing miss just the far post.

A hard low cross by Oakes, after he had fooled and outpaced Kilcline, left defender a Mark Robinson and goalkeeper Digby thinking each other instead of the ball in

they both were for it and missed. Ball Dixon, not realizing how much time and space he had, snatched at the chance, and put it wide of an empty net.

It mattered little, and ten minutes later Dixon began the move that brought the winner. He laid off a short pass to Telfer, whose poke inside the full back gave Oakes a chance to run clear and expertly power in a low shot into the far corner of the net.

The Town then had the confidence to play a sustaining game, keeping possession with simple passing and movement, to the growing frustration of the home crowd.

Swindon tried to blitz their way back in the closing stages, but Sommer made a brilliant save to keep out a header by Scott, and he isn't capable with drives by Kevin Horlock and Scott again.

It rounded off a very satisfying day out for Town fans, made all the more pleasant able by the day's new league table. Fifth place, in the play-off zone, is the highest they have been since the Town were relegated.

If the Town continue to play like they did at Swindon promotion is not quite as impossible as it might sound.

REPORTS BY BRIAN SWAIN
PICTURES BY GARETH OWEN

How they stand

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE FIRST DIVISION

	HOME					AWAY					
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Middlesbro	18	7	1	1	16	6	4	2	3	10	10	36
Wolves	19	7	1	2	22	11	3	3	3	14	11	34
Tranmere	18	7	2	0	24	10	2	5	3	11	12	32
Bolton	19	6	2	1	17	5	2	3	5	14	19	29
Luton Town	**19**	**5**	**2**	**2**	**8**	**11**	**2**	**4**	**3**	**11**	**17**	**25**
Barnsley	18	5	3	1	12	5	3	2	4	7	13	29
Grimsby	19	4	3	1	18	9	3	1	4	9	14	28
Reading	18	4	3	2	9	5	4	1	4	12	13	28
Watford	19	5	4	1	14	9	2	1	6	8	15	28
Sheff Utd	19	6	2	2	17	8	1	3	5	8	12	26
Derby Co	19	4	3	2	13	8	3	2	4	9	13	26
Southend	19	6	1	2	12	7	1	3	6	7	24	25
Sunderland	18	4	1	4	9	9	4	3	2	14	8	24
Stoke	18	5	2	2	18	9	1	4	4	4	15	24
Burnley	19	2	5	2	9	11	3	4	3	9	15	24
Charlton	19	3	3	3	14	14	2	5	2	15	16	23
Oldham	19	5	3	2	15	9	1	2	6	9	16	23
Port Vale	19	5	1	3	15	10	1	4	4	7	13	23
Swindon	19	5	4	2	16	12	1	0	7	10	19	22
Millwall	19	5	1	4	2	16	1	3	5	8	16	19
Portsmouth	18	2	3	4	10	15	2	4	3	10	12	19
Bristol City	18	3	1	5	8	12	2	1	6	7	13	19
West Brom	19	4	2	3	9	7	0	4	7	2	20	18
Notts Co	18	2	4	3	12	14	1	1	7	8	16	14

Luton Town's season at a glance

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

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE DIV 1

		August			
13	West Brom	(H)	1-1 (Oakes)	8,540	
20	Derby Co	(A)	0-0	13,060	
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)	0-0	5,911	18
13	Bolton	(H)	0-0	5,784	20
17	Watford	(A)	4-2 (Telfer 2; Dixon; Oakes)	9,860	16
24	Millwall	(A)	0-0	7,150	16
			October		
1	Bristol City	(H)	0-1	6,633	20
8	Stoke City	(A)	2-1 (Marshall; Preece)	11,712	18
15	Middlesboro	(H)	5-1 (Marshall 2; Preece; Hartson; og)	8,412	11
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, Marshal) (Dixon)	26,749	8
12	Oldham Ath	(A)	0-0	7,907	8
19	Portsmouth	(H)	2-0 (Dixon, Preece)	8,218	9
26	Swindon	(A)	2-1 (Dixon, Oakes)	9,455	5
			December		
3	Sheffield Utd	(H)			
11	Derby	(A)			
18	West Brom	(A)			
26	Reading	(A)			
27	Sunderland	(H)			
31	Notts County	(A)			
			January		
2	Charlton Ath	(H)			
14	Barnsley	(A)			
21	Wolves	(H)			
			February		
4	Oldham Ath	(H)			
11	Grimsby	(A)			
18	Swindon	(H)			
22	Portsmouth	(A)			
25	Bristol City	(A)			
			March		
4	Millwall	(H)			
7	Port Vale	(H)			
11	Southend	(A)			
21	Tranmere	(H)			
21	Burnley	(A)			
25	Watford	(H)			
			April		
1	Bolton	(A)			
8	Notts County	(H)			
15	Sunderland	(A)			
17	Reading	(H)			
22	Charlton Ath	(A)			
29	Middlesboro	(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 (as sub in brackets)			
Marshall	5	Sommer	19
Dixon	5	Johnson	19
Preece	4	James	19
Oakes	4	Peake	19
Hartson	3	Thomas	19
Hughes	2	Telfer	19
Telfer	2	Hartson	18
James	1	Hughes	17
Own goals	2	Waddock	14
		Oakes	13 (5)
Assists		Thomas	13 (2)
Telfer	7	Dixon	12 (2)
Hartson	4	Hartson	8 (5)
Preece	4	Preece	8 (1)
Marshall	3	Greene	6
Oakes	3	Skelton	3
Thomas	2	Linton	2 (2)
Hughes	1	Houghton	1
Johnson	1	Woodsford	(1)
Linton	1	Hammond	(1)

CUP GOALS... APPEARANCES

Coca-Cola goals		Telfer	2
Oakes	3	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)
Peake	2	Houghton	1 (1)
Johnson	2	Skelton	(1)

We played like Liverpool: We deserved to win...

DAVID Pleat is never a man to go over the top when he talks about football. He often quotes Rudyard Kipling's warning that wins and losses are life's twin imposters, and he rarely crows about victories nor voices deep despair about defeats.

So it was clear he felt very pleased indeed by Swindon when he told the Press: "Once we settled down we played like Liverpool."

He said: "Our goal just before half-time defeated Swindon's efforts to contain us.

"I am pleased with what we have done today because we showed a bit of quality and deserved to win. We felt we played some good stuff. We had the confidence to move the ball around, and there was a bit of finality about the way we played.

"And we are beginning to see chances and pick the right passes."

He was delighted with the way the Town held possession and backed it with power and pace.

Kerry Dixon, whose goal set the Town on their way, said: "It was a lovely team performance. I know I should have scored a second goal, when two of their players missed the ball, but I didn't know how much time I had, and the ball was a little bouncy when it reached me.

"We went to Swindon expecting a tough game. We expected their players to raise themselves after the week they have had, and with a new manager running it.

"But the way the game went we could have won by more. At half-time, when it was 1-1, we knew that we just had to do the same as we had done in the latter part of the first half and we would be all right.

Like the rest of Kenilworth Road the former England striker is wary about speaking of promotion, with two-thirds of the season still to be played.

"Ask me again when we see how we are going around Easter time," he said. "I would like to see us well placed then. We won't get carried away too early. But I do know that the blend of this team is very good, and the players all complement each other."

DAVID PLEAT

WELCOME BACK: Des Linton, after two months on the injured list, returned to league action with some style, and helped to give the Town domination of midfield.