Big match facts

● TOWN: Sommer; James, Peake, Johnson, Thomas; Feller, Linton (Hartson 38 mins), Waddock, Preece (Marshall); Kevin Dixon, Gaskewyer sub Hammond.

● SHEFFIELD UNITED: Kelly; Gage, Gayle, Beesley, Nilsen; Rogers, Starbuck (Ward 88 mins), Hartfield, Hodges; Veart, Scott (Flo 88 mins). Goalkeeper sub Hammond.

● GOALS: 0-1 12 mins: Kevin Gage angled low drive; 0-2 24 mins: repeat by Gage, but from a closer range; 0-3 52 mins: Carl Veart capitalising on a mistake by Mitchell Thomas; 1-3 67 mins: John Hartson, first shot from Julian James' low cross; 1-4, 89 mins: Glyn Hodges solo run and shot from Carl Veart's through pass; 2-4, 71 mins: Brian Gayle, thumping header into his own net from a cross by Dwight Marshall; his second own goal of the season for Town; 3-4, 74 mins: Marvin Johnson's first goal of the season, penalty after Gage fouled Thomas; 3-5 82 mins: penalty after Gage fouled Thomas; Sommer and Andy Scott, goal after. Jumping for Veart and Julian James' got tangled up following the full back's header lowered the keeper; 3-6 88 mins: back's header lowered the keeper; 3-6 88 mins: Veart again, cracking header from a cross by Paul Rogers.

● OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town five saved, three wide and header by Kerry Dixon; Ian Feller's free kick saved and six wide. Corners: 10-2 to United five saved and six wide. Corners: 10-2 to the Town.

● REFEREE: Peter Foakes, Clacton. Had a difficult day and so did his linesmen, with too many decisions to make, too many players up for an early bath. Only the referee himself escaped unhappy when the ref produced a red card.

● SENT OFF: Gary Waddock for upending Andy Scott on a run for goal. It should have been a yellow card, said David Pleat, because it was a long way from goal and the Town had defenders able to cover.

● BOOKED: Julian James for the fourth time this season, and the fourth Carl Veart and Paul Rogers will for double.

● ATTENDANCE: 8,516, including 600 who were let in free as guests of season ticket holders.

● ENTERTAINMENT: Nine goals, one midfielder injured, two more had off injured, and one spell of four goals in seven minutes. What more do you want? A better home record, that's what!

Town carved-up

INCHES AWAY . . . Luton striker Kerry Dixon watches his header beat goalkeeper Alan Kelly, with the ball just the wrong side of the bar. It was that close to being 4-4.

THE RESULT in the record books will not reflect the amazing switchback afternoon Luton Town and fans went through at Kenilworth Road in an astonishing match on Saturday.

Despair for an hour, mixed with a little anger, turned to high optimism, then sent us gloomy humiliation as we saw a vositing side hit six goals for the first time in nearly 30 years.

The temptation is to blame all sorts of factors, but the bottom line was that Sheffield United deserved to win, and deserved the dub device between the best side Luton Town can muster, and the one robbed of a veral element or two.

In a disinterested first half, David Preece limped out of the game with an ankle injury after only 17 minutes, and the loss of the consistent playmaker was compounded when another man Gary Waddock was sent off in the 33rd minute.

And to complete the tale of woe Des Linton became the third midfielder to have to leave, when a groin injury saw him subbed as well.

Strikers John Hartson and Dwight Marshall were on the bench, with the result that the Town had to make wholesale changes in their formation, and use men out of their normal positions.

And with the odds stacked against them,

LUTON TOWN 3
SHEFFIELD UNITED 6
(Half time 0-2)

the miracle was that in the second half, Town produced an amazing purple patch which might well have produced an outright victory.

They came as close as a finger-tip pulling back a 4-1 deficit to 4-4 and Alan Kelly had made a critical save in the Kerry Dixon the battling ten men were to have gone on to beat a team that was showing signs of panic.

It was not to be, and two late goals against a three-man defence completed a switchback of emotions for the Town.

It is tempting to say the Town were let go by circumstances. But they were also one down when Preece went off, and down when Waddock completed his ten months loan spell a little earlier than planned.

And for all the tudder to fight a ten-man team put in the defence was found wanting when it mattered.

United's big central defender and skipper Brian Gayle was clear early on to get a header from a free kick which Ian Feller sent to Sommer to make an excellent save at his near post.

And in the 12th minute no one got in the penalty area once when Carl Veart and I short pass into the penalty

MARVIN JOHNSON Scored from the penalty spot for Luton.

Dig-lodges upset the Town by taking a bit of the off Julian James's challenge.

He took off for a split second, the ball on loose and right back Kevin Gage raced up to shoot low past Sommer.

Town limped away five minutes later, and Marshall arrived at his post in time to see Dale Gates waste a golden opportunity to make Marshall do well to chase the ball to be by-line and hook in a looping cross. Instead Andy Kelly, and the ball bounced invitingly for Oakes to fling himself full length for a header at the empty net for put it wide.

Kelly made a good save to hold a deflective by James, but a minute later United were up again. Veart was half-stopped off-edge behind himself to his second goal.

The red and flashpoint came after Ian Feller had failed to make anything of a corner.

Waddock lashed out at the edge of the United box and the defence was scattered by a quick counter-attack. Waddock raced left, flattened Andy Scott, and was sent off.

Another reorganisation followed as Town were on a place of injured Linton, so the Town were down to nine men in the centre.

Without further trouble, because Gage did not know he should have had the first shot of his career. He wriggled past Steve Thomas and Trevor Peake, then struck the target by a yard.

It signalled the return to United when a short pass punished a mistake by Mitchell Thomas minutes after the break to make it 3-0.

Still unlikely the team and the crowd feared so, and in seven action-packed minutes it was 4-0 and then 5-0. In 54 it was Marshall sent James down the right for a low cross which Beesley, forced in at the far post in the 67th minute. The two injury blows left Town with only a midfield of Kevin Dixon and Dixon, powered a magnetic header past Kelly for his second own goal to let Town this time.

It prompted the Town, and with the crowd sensing the chance of a historic comeback, pandemonium broke out when Carl Veart met a cross and Gage shoved the ball to ground as both went for it.

Referee Peter Foakes had a pretty good afternoon, but got that one right, and Johnson ran responsibility for the penalty after the usual Dixon penalty into the net for his first goal since February last year at Tranmere.

by so sharp Blades

START OF THE REVIVAL . . . Julian James, wearing No 2, crosses to the far post and John Hartson, also pictured inset, squeezes his shot into the net.

For a few minutes it seemed as though the emotional rude would engulf United as the Town's ten men looked take 20.

But Dixon headed over the bar from a cross by Feller, and then, from Hartson's incisive through ball, the striker raced clear and saw his shot narrowly scrawled away by with Roger Nilsen getting to the rebound inches ahead of Dixon and recording a corner instead of a goal.

But the fury of the storm of attacking could not be maintained, and with the Town looking for brake, and only three at the back United survived then put on unreal last line on the result.

James and Sommer misread each other's intentions in the 82nd minute, leaving Scott with a gift to make it 5-3, and two minutes from time the impressive Veart expertly headed in a near post cross by Paul Rogers.

United's revenge for a defeat at the hands of the Town in October was a bitter pill for home supporters. But they certainly appreciated the battling team spirit that got so close to beating the odds.

REPORTS BY BRIAN SWAN
PICTURES BY GARETH OWEN

GARY WADDOCK . . . Was sent off on Saturday to end his three month loan spell at Kenilworth Road early.

Fight back had us worried admits Gage

SHEFFIELD United's two-goal full back Kevin Gage admitted how worried they were when the Town battled back to make it 4-3 within five minutes of going 4-1 down.

"I thoroughly enjoyed the game until then," he said. "Alan Kelly made a great save from Kerry Dixon and that was very important. If it had got to 4-4 I think Luton would have gone on to beat us."

The Town were incensed at the way the game was handled by referee Peter Foakes and his linesmen.

"A terrific spectacle spoiled by the referee," was David Pleat's total comment. He thought all the officials made mistakes, including a couple of times when the Town benefited.

The Luton boss admitted that his team had started off poorly, but thought the referee missed an attempt by Waddock to pass him in the build-up to the first goal.

"He dived, and people stopped. Everything a penalty or a free kick against Hodges," said Mr. Pleat.

DAVID PLEAT

He agreed that the loss of David Preece, his midfield playmaker, had been a blow, and he disputed the referee's judgement over the sending off.

"It was very debatable," he said. "Waddock was unfortunate, and I don't think he would get the red card.

"The incident was some distance away from goal, and we had two defenders back, who were covering."

In the event, Mr Foakes circumvented the manager's complaints by not awarding a penalty on Saturday was that Waddock had been dismissed for the so-called professional foul, preventing a near-certain scoring opportunity.

By Monday it was known Mr Foakes had sent off Waddock after consultation with Ray Wilkins, which only incensed the Town more.

United manager Dave Bassett, whose team replaced the Town in the play-off zone, asked us to remember that Gage was right about the excitement of the Town's second-half revival "We thoroughly deserved to win."

He added: "Luton had nothing to lose with ten men. They got back into the game for a period with 45 to go."

"After we had got to 4-1 our suicide mob took over. But Alan Kelly's save from Dixon took the pressure off."

"When it got to 4-3 I was a little concerned, because nothing is impossible in football and Luton were roaring them. But we could relax after we got our fifth goal.

"And our forwards were in form – Carl Veart and Andy Scott were a constant problem to Luton, and we should have had more goals."

Luton Town's season at a glance

DATE	OPPONENTS	RESULT	TOWN SCORERS	ATTENDANCE	LEAGUE POSITION
		ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE DIV I			
		August			
13	West Brom	(A) 0-0		8,640	
20	Derby Co	(A) 0-0		13,060	
27	Southend	(A) 2-2	(Hatton; 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) 2-1		6,911	9
13	Bolton	(H) 2-3		5,764	20
17	Watford	(A) 4-2	(Telfer 2, Dixon)	8,880	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	(A) 2-1	(Marshall 2, Preece)	8,412	17
			(Hartson, og)		
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)	20,749	8
			(Dixon)		
12	Oldham Ath	(A) 0-0		7,907	8
19	Portsmouth	(H) 2-0	(Dixon, Preece)	8,218	6
26	Swindon	(A) 2-1	(Dixon, Oakes)	9,455	5
		December			
3	Sheffield Utd	(H) 3-6	(Hartson; og,Johnson)	8,516	8
10	West Brom	(A)			
17	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)			
18	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)	League appearances (as sub in brackets)
Marshall 5	Sommer 20
Dixon 5	Sommer 20
Preece 4	Peake 20
Hartson 4	Johnson 20
Oakes 3	Telfer 20
Hughes 2	Feller 20
Telfer 2	Marshall 15 (4)
James 1	Hartson 14 (4)
Johnson 1 (pen)	Waddock 14 (5)
Own goals 3	Oakes 14 (2)
Assists	Hughes 13 (1)
Telfer 4	Thomas 12 (2)
Hartson 4	Hartson 8 (6)
Preece 4	Hughes (1)
Marshall 4	Hughes 6
Gates 3	Gates 6
Thomas 3	Linton 3 (2)
James 1	Houghton 1
Hughes 1	Woodstord (1)
Johnson 1	Peake 1

CUP GOALS... APPEARANCES

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

How they stand

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE FIRST DIVISION

	P	W	D	L	HOME F	A	W	D	L	AWAY F	A	Pts
Middlesboro	19	8	1	1	20	6	4	2	3	10	10	39
Tranmere	19	8	2	0	26	11	2	3	4	7	11	35
Wolves	20	7	1	2	22	11	3	3	4	14	12	34
Grimsby	20	6	3	1	17	9	2	4	4	11	15	31
Reading	19	4	3	2	9	9	5	1	4	13	13	31
Sheff Utd	20	6	2	2	17	8	2	3	5	14	15	29
Millwall	19	6	2	1	17	5	2	3	5	14	19	29
Luton Town	19	5	2	2	16	8	3	1	5	17	21	29
Bristol C	19	5	3	1	12	5	3	2	5	8	15	29
Watford	20	5	1	4	19	12	2	3	5	8	15	25
Southend	20	7	1	2	14	7	1	3	6	7	24	28
Stoke City	20	5	2	3	18	10	2	4	4	15	17	25
Derby Co	20	4	2	3	15	8	3	2	5	9	11	27
Oldham	20	5	3	2	15	9	2	2	6	10	16	26
Sunderland	20	3	1	5	8	10	4	4	2	14	8	25
Port Vale	19	3	5	2	13	15	10	1	4	4	9	24
Burnley	19	3	2	2	10	11	4	1	4	9	12	24
Charlton	19	3	3	3	14	12	5	2	2	15	16	23
Swindon	20	3	4	3	17	15	2	1	8	10	21	22
Millwall	20	4	4	2	17	12	1	3	6	8	16	22
West Brom	20	3	3	3	11	8	0	4	7	7	20	20
Portsmouth	20	2	3	5	10	16	2	4	4	10	16	19
Bristol City	19	1	3	5	4	9	1	4	5	6	7	13
Notts Co	19	2	4	3	12	14	1	2	7	5	8	16

Six of the worst at Kenilworth

IT IS 29 years since Luton Town fans last saw their defence knocked for six at Kenilworth Road.

In recent times Manchester United and Derby County visited to come to Luton and scored five, but it was even worse in March 1965.

The Town were in the old Third Division, on their way to promotion to the Fourth, when Shrewsbury won 7-2 in front of a dispirited Kenilworth Road crowd.

Earlier that season the Town were thrashed 7-1 by QPR at Loftus Road. The consolation goal was scored by a young winger, David Pleat.

The heaviest defeat in his time as manager was 6-0 at Liverpool 11 years ago in what is now the Premiership.

Ian Rush scored five and Kenny Dalglish hit the other.