

precious points in five-goal nail-biter at Fratton Park last night

PRICELESS WIN

MATCH facts

POMPEY: Knight 7, Pethick 7, Daniel 6, McLoughlin 7, Symons 6, Butters 8, McGrath 6, Preki 8, Hall 6, Creaney 6, Rees 5 (Doling 75). Subs (not used): Durnin, Glass.

LUTON: Sommer 7, James 6, Johnson 6, Waddock 7, (Woodsford 85), Thomas 6, Peake 8, Telfer 6, Oakes 6 (Harvey 52, 6), Dixon 7, Preece 8, Marshall 6. Sub (not used) Davis.

REFEREE: Ken Leach (Wolverhampton). 8, Excellent control and commonsense.

ATTENDANCE: 7,363.

GOALS: Pompey – McLoughlin 49, Preki 76, Creaney (pen) 79. Luton – Telfer 11, James 72.

BOOKINGS: Pompey: McGrath (foul), Butters (foul).

POMPEY MAN OF THE MATCH: Preki. Constant problems for Luton.

Creaney.

His presence suggested that the talk of his interest has some foundation. Whether Pompey's skipper or their match winner did enough to persuade him to sound out Fenwick about the possibility of doing business is another matter.

Symons has certainly played with greater authority and Creaney, after a quiet first half, did himself rather greater justice when Pompey began to find the room and time to move with a freedom which had earlier eluded them.

Luton, whose seven-win away record is bettered only by Reading in the division, needed only 11 minutes to ease in front.

Then the left flank of Pompey's defence was fatally exposed by David Preece's crafty little pass and full-back James steamed into the gap it had created to fire in a low cross which required only a simple side-foot conversion by Paul Telfer.

As Preece and former Republic of Ireland man Gary Waddock ruled midfield and 38-year-old Trevor Peake dominated at the back, Pompey struggled to impose any real control although only Juergen Sommer's outstretched leg denied Creaney a sharply-taken goal in the 26th minute.

That finally seemed to bring Fenwick's side to life and suddenly a storm of pressure was exerted on a shaky-looking defence which climaxed in Guy Butters meeting an Alan McLoughlin cross with a fierce volley which Sommer saved spectacularly in the top corner.

Yet on the stroke of half-time, Pompey might have been facing a two-goal recovery challenge, Kerry Dixon's cross falling for Preece at the far post only for Lloyd McGrath to smother a half-hit shot off the line.

Luton's defensive insecurity undid them four minutes into the second half.



GET IN THERE! ● Alan McLoughlin pounces to put Pompey back on level terms last night

A long ball threw them, Sommer was 20 yards from goal when he missed an attempted tackle on Creaney and the Scot's instant shot came back off the post to be squeezed behind for a corner. Preki took it, McLoughlin's late run carried him clear of a challenge and a firm header started the celebrations.

Gradually Pompey seized the initiative as Preki was deployed to inhibit Waddock, yet the next save was by Alan Knight to deflect Dwight Marshall's angled shot away for a corner.

And then in the 72nd minute Pompey were behind again. A corner by Preece was only partially cleared, crossed back into the area where Symons headed it away and James thundered it straight back past a helpless Knight.

So had Pompey the bottle to save it again? Within four min-

utes they had provided the answer.

Marvin Johnson dallied on the ball 30 yards out, Creaney forced it away from him and Preki was clear to score from the edge of the area.

Four minutes later and Preki went down in a whirl of bodies and Pompey had a penalty – Creaney roofed it arrogantly and clinically.

Yet it still might not have been enough. From the restart Dixon broke clear, Ray Daniel's challenge forced the ball away from him to substitute Richard Harvey, whose fierce shot lifted a foot too high.

After that Pompey always looked capable of increasing their lead, Paul Hall twice whisking shots narrowly wide and Preki swirling an impudent long range effort just over the bar. But they had done just enough to win it and that was what mattered.

Pictures ● MIKE SCADDAN



Coventry City's new manager Ron Atkinson (left) was in the Fratton crowd last night after being reported to be interested in Pompey striker Gerry Creaney, who hit the winner from the penalty spot against Luton, and Welsh international defender Kit Symons.

But he didn't talk business with Terry Fenwick afterwards.

The Pompey boss has been told he is under no pressure to sell his stars, and he admitted after last night's fighting performance: "I don't think I'm that interested to hear anything Ron Atkinson's got to say."