Big match facts

● TOWN: Sommer; James, Peake, Johnson; Thomas, Telfer, Waddock, Oakes, Preece (Williams 75 min); Hartley, Dixon. Unused subs Biggins 74 min); Marshall, Dixon. Unused subs Biggins and goalkeeper Davis.

● BRISTOL CITY: Welch; Hansen, Dryden, Bryant, Munro; Berti, Owers, Kuhl; Tinnion; Allison, Fleck. Unused subs Baird, Edwards and goalkeeper Kite.

● THE GOALS: 0-1, 28 mins: Scott Oakes, thundering 30-yarder over the goalkeeper; 0-2, 53 mins: Oakes again, also from 30 yards, low drive which squirmed through the keeper's hands; 1-2, 65 mins: right wing cross by Robert Fleck, 2-2, 85 mins: Junior Berti, shooting into an empty net after Juergen Sommer dashed out but failed to collect the ball in a challenge with Fleck.

● OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town two wayed and five wide; City seven saved, including a penalty by Brian Tinnion, and five wide. Corners: 8-7 to the Town.

● REFEREE: Alan Flood, Stockport; had a good game, but was badly let down by linesman Griffiths from nearby Chippenham when City's first goal was allowed to stand. Owers was yards offside.

● ATTENDANCE: 7,929, including 427 from Luton.

● ENTERTAINMENT: Not very good, with an awful tacky pitch no help to either team: hump it, and hope is the style City have learned to use on it, and the Town had to go down a similar road.

Linesman hands lucky City a point

RUBBED OUT . . . This was the moment when the Town nearly went 3-1 up: Scott Oakes leaves Keith Welch helpless from close range, but the offside flag had already waved to deny the Luton star a hat-trick.

FOR AN hour at Ashton Gate on Saturday Luton Town looked like the best away team in football, two up and cruising against a team fighting a tough battle to avoid relegation.

But then, for the second time in a four days, a crucial decision went against them, and the cool goal conceded totalled their defensive confidence, and everything they had begun on for a draw.

Bristol City were lifted by their lucky break, and after being on the ropes so long finished the livelier side, even if their game was energy and enthusiasm rather than class.

The pitch helped to ruin the contest as an entertainment spectacle. Half of mud, and sprouting divots as the match went on, it gave no one the chance to play passing football.

Ashton Gate regulars are used to seeing the bumpy it and hope strategy, with precious little attempt to play through the midfield.

Yet in this torrent and cross was the obvious tactic, and the Town adapted their game to that to good advantage. Well, passing football — have come from them, but generally it was in short supply.

Hard was needed was classy finishing, and the Town produced that in the shape of Scott Oakes, who had his two stunning goals from about 30 yards.

They were the only Town shots on target in the first 65 minutes, because of bright ability on an afternoon of much mediocrity.

Neither side had threatened before Oakes smashed in his first goal of 1993 after 28 minutes.

He took a short square pass in midfield from Gary Waddock, the strong man of the Town midfield, and cracked in a shot that beat Keith Welch slightly off his line. The poor and placing of the drive, just under the bar, stunned the home crowd.

Junior Berti, on the City right, looked like a midget tackling a giant every time he had Mitchell Thomas, but the little man should have brought an equalizer much before the break.

He was swinging and turning on the edge of the penalty area, perhaps thinking back to last Saturday, when he had scored twice against Millwall, and finishing his own cross, and by Robert Fleck, who had shot wide of the goal, giving the left winger a chance to hit the President in the top corner, which would have made a big difference.

Mark Harrison Williams went on in place of Dixon. The Town managed one more, with Kerry Dixon offside a split second before he rolled the ball into the net from a close-range finishing with Telfer's incisive short pass.

The decision was right — pity the one for City's goal was not.

But the linesman was not responsible for the 85th-minute defensive shambles that gave City a point that had seemed well beyond them.

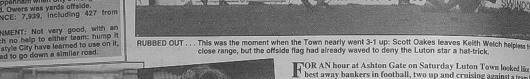
They had raised defiant pride, instead of the need to scrap to the bitter end, and when Wayne Allison sent on-loan Fleck chasing a pass on the edge of the box Sommer chose to charge out to challenge.

He failed to collect, the ball ran loose, and Berti was left with an empty net. The size of the easiest goals he is ever likely to score. In the last minute Sommer had had chances to match the winner: Kuhl was left to go down low to save Dyer's header from a corner, and Dixon, preferred to Williams, collected well over the bar from a corner by Oakes.

If we had been told before kick-off that the Town would conceed the result in the 72nd minute we would probably have settled.

But to see a very good all-round team performance denied till three points made it a major disappointment. City got out of goal — Town fans came home feeling the limelight should be turned up.

BRISTOL CITY 2
LUTON TOWN 2
(Half-time 0-1)



HANDY TACKLE . . . Bristol City defender Richard Dryden gets to grips with Dwight Marshall.

TWO GOAL HERO . . . Scott Oakes

PLOUGHING THROUGH . . . The awful state of the pitch at Ashton Gate is illustrated by the flying mud as Kerry Dixon, also pictured inset, tries to battle through it.

The way with 53 minutes gone, and while we were not determining to expend the lead the Town looked well capable of holding on to it.

But linesman J. H. Griffiths, from Chippenham, wrecked that judgement in the 72nd minute.

Gary Owers was yards offside when Robert Fleck crossed from the right. It looked central as about everybody stopped to await the flag and he whistled. Owers did the right thing, taking powerfully into the net.

The chaos that followed his first goal for the 4th time he move from Sunderland was one of surprise and gratitude for the lucky break.

Town protests came to nothing, and perhaps the angry and impatient protest a part in the way the defensive lost concentration later on.

But the first response was to get two more strong attempts on target, with Welch scrambling it clear by Preece and in the right shot to catch a header by Thomas, following corner by Telfer.

I suppose two goals from four on-target efforts in 90 minutes is a good percentage of success. But a few more at Welch, who looked strong throughout, would have made a big difference.

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REPORTS BY BRIAN SWAIN
PICTURES BY GARETH OWEN

How they stand

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE FIRST DIVISION

	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
		HOME					AWAY					
Tranmere	31	14	2	1	42	17	9	6	1	12	19	59
Middlesbro	31	10	2	3	25	11	6	6	4	19	15	56
Bolton	32	17	1	1	47	9	5	3	7	14	24	56
Sheff Utd	33	9	5	2	27	12	5	6	6	29	26	53
Wolves	31	11	3	1	31	16	5	3	7	25	28	45
Reading	33	7	6	3	18	11	6	2	7	19	18	53
Grimsby	33	9	2	3	30	14	4	3	7	20	28	48
Watford	31	8	6	2	21	12	4	5	6	14	17	47
Barnsley	31	10	4	2	29	12	3	3	9	11	24	46
Luton Town	**32**	**5**	**3**	**7**	**22**	**20**	**7**	**5**	**5**	**23**	**23**	**44**
Oldham	31	10	4	2	29	17	4	3	9	12	27	43
Derby Co	31	7	5	3	22	13	4	4	8	15	29	42
Millwall	30	7	4	5	24	14	3	5	7	13	22	41
Portsmouth	32	6	5	5	21	20	4	5	7	16	26	40
Stoke	30	6	4	5	19	16	4	6	5	11	22	40
Swindon	31	6	4	6	24	21	4	5	6	19	26	39
Sunderland	33	3	10	4	16	17	4	5	7	14	19	38
Port Vale	30	8	3	5	23	18	2	5	7	14	22	35
West Brom	33	9	2	5	24	15	1	7	9	11	27	37
Southend	31	6	5	4	17	18	0	2	4	10	14	41
Bristol City	33	6	6	5	21	21	1	3	9	15	28	33
Swansea	31	6	4	5	21	21	2	2	9	16	28	33
Notts Co	33	5	6	6	20	20	2	3	9	12	27	33
Burnley	30	3	5	6	10	21	3	4	9	10	27	27

Luton Town's season at a glance

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

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE DIV I

		August 1992		
13 West Brom	(H)	1-1 (Oakes)	8,540	4
17 Grimsby Co	(A)	0-0	4,615	10
27 Southend	(H)	2-2 (Harbison, Hughes)	5,918	17
30 Tranmere	(A)	2-4 (Hughes, Harrison)	5,480	20
		September		
3 Port Vale	(A)	1-0 (Marshall)	8,541	11
10 Barnsley	(H)	0-1	6,911	18
13 Bolton	(H)	0-3	5,764	19
17 Watford	(A)	4-2 (Telfer 2, Dixon, Harrison)	8,880	16
24 Millwall	(A)	0-0	7,159	16
		October		
1 Bristol City	(H)	0-1	6,633	20
4 Sheff Utd	(A)	2-1 (Marshall, Preece)	15,111	15
15 Middlesbro	(H)	5-1 (Marshall 2, Preece, Dixon, Harrison)	9,412	11
22 Sheffield Utd	(A)	3-1 (James, Dixon, Oq)	13,317	7
29 Barnsley	(A)	1-1 (Dixon)	7,218	7
		November		
2 Grimsby Tn	(H)	3-2 (Oakes 2, Harrison)	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)	3-2 (Dixon, Preece)	8,218	8
26 Swindon	(A)	2-1 (Dixon, Oakes)	9,455	5
		December		
3 Sheffield Utd	(H)	3-0 (Harbison, Johnson, og)	8,518	5
11 Derby	(A)	0-0	6,400	10
19 West Brom	(A)	0-2	14,992	12
26 Reading	(A)	0-0	9,275	9
27 Barnsley	(H)	5-0 (Oakes 2, Harrison)	8,953	9
31 Notts County	(A)	1-0 (Marshall)	6,249	9
		January 1995		
2 Charlton Ath	(H)	0-0	7,642	8
14 Barnsley	(A)	1-3 (Dixon)	4,808	11
		February		
4 Oldham Ath	(H)	2-1 (Marshall, Dixon)	8,903	9
11 Grimsby	(A)	0-3	4,615	10
18 Swindon	(H)	3-0 (Marshall 2, og)	8,540	9
24 Telfer, James			7,363	10
28 Bristol City	(A)	2-2 (Oakes 2)	7,929	10
		March		
4 Millwall	(H)	1-0 (Telfer)	8,541	8
7 Port Vale	(H)	1-0 (Dixon)	6,911	8
11 Sheffield Utd	(H)	1-0 (Dixon)	5,764	8
18 Tranmere	(H)	1-0 (Harrison)	8,880	6
21 Burnley	(A)	1-0 (Dixon)		
25 Watford	(H)	1-1 (Dixon)	7,159	6
		April		
1 Bolton	(A)	1-1 (Dixon)	6,633	20
4 Wolves	(H)	1-0 (Dixon)	15,111	15
8 Notts County	(H)	1-0 (Dixon)	9,412	11
15 Sunderland	(A)	1-1 (Dixon)	13,317	7
17 Reading	(H)	1-0 (Dixon)	7,218	7
20 Charlton Ath	(A)	1-1 (Marshall)	8,518	5
29 Middlesbro	(A)	1-3 (Dixon)	14,992	9
		May		
6 Stoke City	(H)	1-0 (Dixon)	9,275	9

COCA-COLA CUP (First Round)

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

FA CUP (Third Round)

		2 January 1995		
7 Bristol Rov	(H)	1-1 (Harbison)	7,571	
8 Bristol Rov	(A)	1-0 (Marshall)	8,218	Replay
		(Fourth Round)		
28 Southampton	(H)	1-1 (Biggins)	9,936	
		February		
8 Southampton	(A)	0-6	15,075	Replay

Who's who

APPEARANCES... GOALS

League appearances		League goals	
Sommer	32	Marshall	9
James	32	Oakes	8
Peake	32	Harrison	7
Johnson	32	Dixon	7
Telfer	31(1)	Telfer	2
Preece	29	Hughes	2
Thomas	26(5)	Johnson	1
Thomas	26(5)	Preece	1
Oakes	25	Thomas	1
Dixon	21(3)	Own goals	
Harrison	11 (3)	Assists	
Hughes	8 (1)	Telfer	8
Williams	4	Marshall	6
Akinola	4	Oakes	6
Linton	4	Dixon	4
Davis	3 (2)	Thomas	3
Biggins	3	Harrison	2
Hartley	1 (1)	Johnson	1
Houghton	1	Hughes	1
Woodcock	(4)	Johnson	1
Waddock	(2)	Waddock	1
Thorpe	(2)	Hartley	1

CUP APPEARANCES... GOALS

Cup appearances		Cup goals	
Sommer	6	Biggins	2
James	6	Linton	(1)
Johnson	6	Harrison	1
Telfer	6	Houghton	1
Peake	6	Oakes	1
Thomas	6	Thorpe	(1)
Oakes	5	Williams	(1)
Marshall	5 (1)	Davis	(1)
Dixon	5 (1)	Akinola	(1)
Harrison	4	Cup goals	
Waddock	4	Marshall	2
Williams	4	Oakes	1
Akinola	4	Harrison	1
Biggins	1	Biggins	1

JUERGEN SOMMER

Luton are in a spot of bother again!

PORTSMOUTH 3 LUTON TOWN 2

THE WEEK'S first spot of bother arrived a referee-delay late time at Fratton Park.

Kevin Leach was accosted by Town players of falling for a one-trick pony, and the match-winning penalty which rolled down the net in the last minute was the end of a very good, very hard-working performance by the Town.

Skipper Trevor Peake, who had an outstanding game against Gerry Creaney, led protests which continued as the teams left the field, and said that even the Portsmouth man had admitted he had been hit before the penalty should have been given.

But when the Wolverhampton official rightly took Leach for his mistake, one Mr Marvin Johnson four minutes later, with a very costly, using tricky little Serbian Predi Portsmouth's second equalizer.

Until that goal, in the 75th minute, the Town had looked capable of a very valuable point against a proud side of the eighth away win of the season.

Paul Telfer shot the Town ahead in the 18th minute, after the end of a sweeping and skilful move rehearsed in training.

David Preece sent Julian James away on an overlap, and Telfer came in from deep to meet the cross with a close-range shot.

Juergen Sommer made excellent saves against Creaney and Guy Butters, but was at fault in the build-up to the 40th-minute equalizer.

The goalkeeper charged out of his area to clear, but the ball ran loose for Creaney to set one Creaney hit a 25-yarder

Until that goal, in the 75th minute, the Town had looked capable of a very valuable point against a proud side of the eighth away win of the season.

The scramble that followed led to a corner, taken by former Everton player Predi and by the head of Alan McLoughlin to make it 1-1.

The Town responded with top quality football, and Richard Harvey, on as sub for the injured Scott Oakes, had a cross beaten out in the 73rd minute.

But James met the ball clearance with for the second goal of the season.

Two minutes later Johnson's wide Gerry Creaney to nick the ball from him, and the Town defence was caught napping and Predi finished to beat Sommer in a one-to-one.

The penalty row erupted in the 79th minute, when Predi ran at the Town defence in the inside left position.

James challenged just outside the box, and the Town will claim he was pushed that Predi tripped over team-mate Creaney.

The ref gave a penalty, Creaney scored, and Portsmouth held on to the lead they desperately needed for survival.

And they were let off the hook when Kerry Dixon's run at goal was stopped on the edge of the box. Harvey lost his concentration and hit a drive way over the bar.

Said Town manager David Pleat: "We are very disappointed to lose like that, by a penalty given because Predi ran into Creaney.

"But it happens, and there were good things. In the second half we looked a very good side."

DAVID PLEAT

LUTON TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB

Unhappy Pleat draws the line

BRISTOL City manager Joe Jordan was well pleased to see his side escape with a point from a match that should have gone Luton's way, but Luton boss David Pleat was away with the fairies.

And he carefully declined to tell the Press if he thought offside should have been given for the goal that led to City's unlikely revival. "Mistakes happen in football," was the nearest Jordan came to acknowledging the possibility the Town might have been robbed.

David Pleat agreed and said he and his players had little doubt that the linesman boobed. The Town manager said: "The goal was yards offside. And I had said before it happened that it was wrong for a linesman to come from Chippenham."

Mr Griffiths, who missed the offside, lives 22 miles from Bristol, and Pleat said his decision was crucial in getting City back into the game.

He added: "We are disappointed, but on the other hand we know it could have been 1-1 at half-time because of the pressure.

"Our disappointment is at going 2-0 up, being better than, but not winning.

"The pitch was poor and we had with two goalkeepers more comfortable with the ball would have helped for. We hooked the ball on best we could. There might say it was on Luton-Bristol, but we had to make of the play we should have won.

"We created half-chances — and don't forget it was our third game in eight days, while Bristol City did not have a midweek game."

Jordan said that at 2-0 to Luton he still felt his side had a chance. "We knew Luton didn't like many saves to make, and if you look at the four goals that were scored they could be critical of Luton and critical of defending for all four. Mistakes were made by both sides.

"Luton are a good side, and we supply will be very important to us — every one is precious."

Big match facts

● TOWN: Sommer; James, Peake, Johnson, Thomas, Telfer, Waddock (Woodcord 84 mins), Oakes (Harvey, 51 mins), Preece; Marshall, Dixon. Unused subs Davis and Williams.

● PORTSMOUTH: Knight; Pethick, Symons, Butters, Daniel, McLoughlin, McGrath; Rees (Doling 75 mins); Creaney, Hall. Unused subs Durrett and goalkeeper Hill.

● THE GOALS: 0-1, 1 mins: Paul Telfer shot home from close range after a move by Julian James; 1-1, 49 mins: Alan McLoughlin header from a corner; 2-1, Predi; 3-1, Johnson, 75 mins: Predi, 25-yarder; 2-2, 79 mins: Predi, solo effort after Marvin Johnson was dispossessed in midfield; 3-2, 79 mins: hotly disputed penalty by Gerry Creaney with the Town saying he had not James tripped Predi.

● OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town four saved and one wide; Portsmouth three saved, seven wide and one hit a post. Corners: 6-5 to the Town.

● REFEREE: Ken Leach, Wolverhampton. Did well except for the incident over the penalty that angered the Town and gave Pompey a very little dispute deserve.

● ATTENDANCE: 7,363, Including 323 from Luton.

● ENTERTAINMENT: A cracking game, spoiled for Town fans by the result.