Reading's winner is Taylor-made by Town!

Big match facts

● TOWN: Davis; James (Linton 79 mins), Peake, Johnson, Hackett, Telfer, Waddock, Matthews 61 mins), Preece, Oakes; Marshall, Taylor. Goalkeeper sub Sommer.

● READING: Hislop; Bernal, Wdowczyk, McPherson, Williams, Taylor; Gooding, Gibson, McPherson, Williams, Taylor; Gooding, Gibson, Kerr; Nogan, Lovell (Oakes 83 mins). Unused Sole; Quinn and goalkeeper Shepherd.

● THE GOAL: John Taylor header into his own net, 43 minutes, from a free kick by Simon Osborne, with Reading skipper Ade Williams competing for the ball and claiming the goal as his.

● OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town three saved and five wide; Reading three saved and five wide.

Corners: 14-4 to the Town (10-2 half-time).

● REFEREE: John Kirkby, Sheffield: has looked good every time he has been to Scunthorpe United this season, and had another good no-fuss game.

● BOOKED: Reading's Scott Taylor and Andy Bernal, both for fouls on Rob Matthews.

● ATTENDANCE: 8,717, second highest League gate this year, and including 2,000 Reading supporters.

● ENTERTAINMENT: Pretty good until Reading scored, but then the Town went to pieces.

BLANKET DEFENCE . . . No way through for the Town strike force as Reading get men back in numbers to protect their goal

SO CLOSE . . . Reading goalkeeper Shaka Hislop is caught off his line as a cross by Dwight Marshall, also pictured inset, flashes across the goalmouth, with John Taylor unable to make contact for the equaliser.

BLOCKED . . . Reading skipper Ade Williams puts in a vital tackle to stop John Taylor's shot reaching the target in a penalty area festooned with balloons by visiting fans.

A KICK in the teeth was David Pleat's description of the self-inflicted damage the Town did to end their run of ten home games without defeat.

It was wrecked by an own goal at one end and a series of near-misses at the other. Reading's tenth away win of the season was carved out through application and determination as they battled to regain a place in the play-off zone.

The winning goal, just before the interval, was a fluke, but it gave Reading the encouragement to control the rest of the game.

Not for the first time in recent weeks, the Town faded badly in the second half and while they might have been three or four ahead before Reading scored, just as certainly Reading could have had a couple more goals when the Town were chasing the game.

Reading used three centre-backs to bottle up the middle of defence, rode their first-half luck, then never looked in serious trouble again.

"If you don't take your chances you get kicked in the teeth," said the Town boss.

"We had four good chances in the first half when we should have done better.

"But give Reading credit for staying in the game, and then we did not have enough guile in the second half to break him down."

He added that the team lost composure in the scratch for a second-half equaliser, but admitted he might have been partly responsible, by making a change for the last hour. He took off defensive midfielder Gary Waddock, and went on forward-running Rob Matthews.

It unsettled Reading briefly, and two substitutes were booked for illegal assaults to halt former Notts County man.

"Matthews added something to our game," said the boss.

"But perhaps I didn't help by taking Waddock off because he gives us composure which we lacked in the later stages.

"We never have been good at chasing games, and in most weeks our finishing has not been up to standard.

"If we had taken just 20 per cent of our chances we would have won more points."

After the five-man midfield formation had set Scunthorpe United's Dwight Marshall was sealed in place of Matthews, to partner John Taylor in attack, and the front combination looked potent for the first 43 minutes.

But Reading got men back quickly whenever danger threatened, cheerfully giving away free-kick corners, and Shaka Hislop, voted the best goalkeeper in the fixtures by the PFA, was rarely troubled despite the Town's incontinence.

Quick passing was smart enough to get into the danger areas, but the finishing was pitiful. Scott Oakes wasted two good openings, shooting wide of the far post in a one-to-one with the goalkeeper, and then going one again from Marshall's probing pass, but losing control. The first touch invariably tied up the shot, but instead it passed the ball forward to Hislop.

Taylor hooked a shot over the bar from about 12 yards, and Marshall, Paul Telfer and Julian James all went close, but not close enough.

Reading hardly had a look-in at the other end, which made the winning goal all the more of a shock.

Brian Gibson played a good free kick into the box, and Taylor, back-tracking to mark big defender Ade Williams, beat Kelvin Davis comprehensively with a header.

"Taylor and I were in each other's pocket all through the game," said the Reading skipper. "We both went up for the ball and there was a clash of heads. I honestly can't say if I touched the ball, but I have claimed for it before."

His claim is as cheeky as Reading's bid to have Taylor sent off for misconduct in connective sessions, but they looked capable of winning more handbooks in the second half.

As the Town pushed upfield with more optimism than pattern – even David Preece, the excellent at Sunderland, started to have an off day – Reading looked more punchy on attack.

Davis had to make the best save of the game to deny Mick Gooding, and the only second-half excitement at the other end was a wonderful curling cross-shot from Oakes which was deflected wide of the goal.

All the earlier promise had vanished after more than an Easter egg at a chocolate convention.

REPORTS BY BRIAN SWAIN
PICTURES BY GARETH OWEN

How they stand

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE FIRST DIVISION

	HOME						AWAY						A Pts
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A		
Middlesbro	43	14	6	4	39	18	8	7	6	24	19	77	
Bolton	42	16	2	1	49	12	5	7	9	18	27	76	
Charlton	43	15	3	3	49	19	5	6	11	15	30	74	
Wolves	43	10	7	4	38	17	8	5	8	34	29	74	
Reading	43	10	7	4	30	19	10	3	9	22	22	70	
Barnsley	42	14	4	2	38	14	6	4	7	17	20	67	
Derby Co	43	9	7	5	43	21	6	5	10	21	26	65	
Sheff Utd	43	12	3	6	34	22	4	7	10	23	34	61	
Walsall	43	12	6	3	28	16	3	7	11	20	36	61	
Luton Town	**43**	**8**	**6**	**8**	**33**	**27**	**7**	**7**	**7**	**25**	**31**	**58**	
Millwall	43	11	4	7	31	21	4	6	11	20	34	57	
Oldham	42	11	7	3	31	19	4	4	13	24	37	56	
Swindon	43	9	5	6	26	24	5	5	11	16	30	56	
Charlton	41	10	5	6	31	24	5	5	10	23	35	55	
Port Vale	43	11	6	4	32	21	3	5	13	16	31	53	
West Brom	43	12	2	7	28	23	3	6	13	16	31	53	
Portsmouth	43	9	4	9	30	27	3	7	12	18	34	51	
Southend	42	11	3	5	28	23	3	6	12	17	47	50	
Sunderland	43	4	11	6	19	20	2	5	14	18	22	44	
Swindon	42	8	6	7	25	25	3	5	13	25	44	44	
Burnley	43	8	5	8	25	26	3	5	13	12	40	44	
Bristol City	43	8	8	5	25	26	2	3	15	13	33	44	
Notts Co	41	6	6	7	22	26	2	3	15	18	34	35	

* Not including last night's match.

Luton Town's season at a glance

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

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE DIV 1

August 1994

13 West Brom (H) 1-1 (Oakes) 8,640
20 Swindon (A) 1-0 (Vigo) 7,363
27 Southend (H) 2-2 (Harper, Hughes) 5,818 17
31 Tranmere (A) 2-4 (Harper, Hartson) 8,465 24

September

3 Port Vale (A) 1-1 (Hartson) 8,541 15
10 Burnley (H) 0-1 6,911 18
17 Sunderland (A) 0-3 (Hartson) 20
17 Watford (A) 4-2 (Telfer 2, Dixon) 8,880 16

24 Millwall (A) 0-0 October 7,130 16

1 Bristol City (H) 2-1 (Oakes, Dixon) 6,633 20
8 Stoke City (A) 2-1 (Marshall, Preece) 11,712 13
15 Portsmouth (H) 1-1 (Preece) 8,412 11
(Hartson 0g)
22 Sheffield Utd (A) 3-1 (James, Dixon, 0g) 20
29 Barnsley (H) 0-1 7,212 10

1 Grimsby Tn (H) 1-2 (Oakes) 5,839 12
5 Charlton (A) 3-2 (Dixon, Marshall, Dixon) 8,455 8
12 Oldham Ath (A) 0-0 7,907
19 Portsmouth (A) 2-0 (Dixon, Preece) 8,318 8
26 Swindon (A) 2-1 (Dixon, Oakes) 8,455 6

December

3 Sheffield Utd (H) 3-6 (Hartson, Johnson, og) 5,516 8
11 Derby (H) 0-0 8,400 10
17 West Brom (A) 1-1 (Oakes) 12,892 12
26 Reading (A) 0-0 11,623 12
27 Sunderland (H) 3-0 (Oakes 2, Hartson) 8,953 11
31 Notts County (A) 1-0 (Telfer) 6,249 8

January 1995

2 Charlton Ath (H) 0-1 7,642 8
14 Barnsley (A) 1-3 (Dixon) 4,808 11

February

4 Oldham Ath (H) 2-1 (Marshall 2) 6,903 10
11 Grimsby (A) 0-5 4,615 10
18 Swindon (H) 3-0 (Marshall 2, og) 6,595 9
21 Portsmouth (A) 2-4 (Telfer, James) 7,363 10
25 Bristol City (A) 2-2 (Oakes 2) 7,938 10

4 Millwall (H) 1-1 (Marshall) 6,864 10
11 Port Vale (H) 0-0 (Telfer, Dixon) 5,947 10
18 Southend (A) 0-0 4,558 11
25 Tranmere (H) 1-0 (James, Biggins) 5,660 11
21 Burnley (A) 1-2 (Marshall) 9,551 11
28 Watford (H) 1-1 (Telfer) 9,861 11

April

4 Wolves (H) 3-0 (Telfer 2, Taylor) 9,651 12
8 Notts County (H) 2-0 (Telfer, Oakes, pen) 6,428 12
15 Bolton (H) 1-2 (Taylor) 13,819 11
15 Sunderland (A) 1-1 (Taylor) 17,292
17 Reading (A) 0-1 9,717
22 Charlton Ath (A) 0-0
30 Middlesbro (A) 1-3 (Taylor)

May

7 Stoke City (H) 1-0 (Taylor)

COCA-COLA CUP (First Round)

August 1994

16 Fulham (H) 1-1 (Oakes) 3,287
23 Fulham (A) 1-1 (Marshall) 5,134

Luton lost on penalties.

FA CUP (Third Round)

January 1995

7 Bristol Rov (H) 1-1 (Hartson) 7,571
18 Bristol Rov (A) 1-0 (Marshall) 8,218 Replay
(Fourth Round)
28 Southampton(H) 1-1 (Biggins) 9,938

February

8 Southampton (A) 0-6 15,075 Replay

Who's who

APPEARANCES... GOALS

League appearances (as sub in brackets)		Williams	(2)
Peake	43	**League goals**	
Johnson	43	Marshall	11
Telfer	41	Taylor	7
James	42	Oakes	7
Davis	42	Dixon	5
Sommer	37	Hartson	4
Waddock	36	Preece	3
Marshall	34 (1)	James	2
Taylor	34 (1)	Hughes	2
Thomas	31 (2)	Johnson	2
Dixon	23 (5)	Biggins	1
Hughes	21 (1)	Own goals	4
Hughes	8 (1)	**Assists**	
Harper	7 (1)	Telfer	9
Biggins	6 (1)	Marshall	8
Preece	6	Preece	6
Oakes	6	Taylor	5
Taylor	5	Williams	3
Matthews	4 (5)	Dixon	3
Linton	4 (5)	Harvey	3
Davis	3	Hughes	3
Barthe	2 (2)	James	2
Houghton	2	Johnson	2
Woodcord	(6)	Waddock	2
Thorpe	(3)	Matthews	2
Adcock	(1)	Thomas	2

CUP APPEARANCES... GOALS

Cup appearances		Biggins	(1)
Johnson	6	Hughes	(1)
Peake	6	Hartson	1
Linton	6	Houghton	1
Telfer	6	Harper	1
Preece	6	Thorpe	(1)
Davis	5 (1)	Williams	(1)
Marshall	5 (1)	Sutton	(1)
James	5 (1)	Own goals	1
Oakes	4	**Cup goals**	
Thomas	4	Marshall	2
Waddock	4	Oakes	1
Hughes	4	Johnson	1
Greene	3	Biggins	1

JOHN TAYLOR . . . Scored Luton's goal at Sunderland but helped an own goal against Reading

Bolton's lucky escape

BOLTON WANDERERS 0
LUTON TOWN 0

PROMOTION contenders Bolton were lucky to escape with a home draw as the Town turned on the style, but only unfortunately for the visiting coach at Burnden Park.

The Town looked the better footballing side, and goalkeeper Keith Branagan was the Bolton man of the match.

The only major scare for the Town came in injury time, when Bolton threw everybody forward to seek the goal they desperately needed.

Alan Thompson's header caught a deflection of Dwight Marshall, leaving the impressive Kelvin Davis stranded, but the ball bounced off the inside of a post and Lee-cover Trevor Peake carefully passed it away to safety off the line.

THE MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Davis; James (Linton 72 mins), Peake, Johnson, Hackett, Telfer, Waddock, Oakes, Preece, Matthews (Marshall 72 mins), Taylor (Hughes, Phil Gray, Thompson; Pedersen, Hughes). Unused goalkeeper sub Sommer.

● BOLTON: Branagan; Green, Soagraves, Stubbs, Phillips, Bergsson, Thompson; Pedersen, Holdsworth (McKinlay 81 mins), Sellars, Gilbert, Subs Dreyer.

● GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town eight saved and four wide; Bolton seven saved and four wide, and an injury time header by Alan Thompson bounced against a post and was cleared off the line by Trevor Peake.

● REFEREE: Urian Rennie, of Sheffield.

● BOOKED: Stubbs and McAteer of Bolton, for a foul on Marshall; Trevor Peake for a foul on Sneekes and John Taylor for encroaching at a free kick.

● ATTENDANCE: 13,619, including 237 from Luton.

Roker Park details

● TOWN: Davis; Linton (Greene 73 mins), Peake, Johnson, Harvey; Telfer, Waddock, Oakes, Preece, Matthews (Marshall 72 mins), Taylor. Goalkeeper sub Sommer.

● SUNDERLAND: Norman; Kubicki, Ord, Bennett, Scott; Rogan, Gray, Scott; Atkinson, Martin Gray, Michael Gray (Russell 70 mins), Phil Gray. Subs: Bell, Smith; Angell, Russell.

Goalkeeper sub David Preece (honesty).

● ATTENDANCE: 21,503 – 9 mins: John Taylor header, after Martin Gray's free kick was cleared to Marshall.

● OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town four saved and five wide; Sunderland four saved, six wide, and shot by Martin Gray hit a post. Corners: 9-0 to Sunderland.

● REFEREE: Peter Richards, Preston. Had a good game, and refused to allow the Roker roar to upset him.

● BOOKED: Trevor Peake, for handbag.

● ATTENDANCE: 17,232, the day's highest in the First Division, if only the people of Luton gave such unflagging support!

● ENTERTAINMENT: Very fair, with the Town's passing winning the first half and Sunderland's passion and commitment giving them the edge in the second.

Moore happy with a point

SUNDERLAND 1 LUTON TOWN 1

JOHN MOORE, in charge of the Town at Roker park because David Pleat was away on a scouting trip, was pleased with a point from a tough game.

"I could understand how the game changed," he said, when the Press discussed how well the Town had played in the first half, but been second-best after the break.

"If I was Sunderland I wouldn't want to let Luton carry on passing the ball the way we did in the first half. The way Sunderland were desperate for points to take away from the relegation zone, they came through passion and commitment in the second half.

"I do feel the Town's better passing and controlled possession took the sting out of Sunderland, and dampened the intensity. But they were let off the hook before John Taylor helped himself to a gift opening.

"In Sunderland's first attack, balls after Taylor lost possession in midfield, Martin Angell serve Martin Smith clear of a Town defence that had pushed upfield.

Kelvin Davis looked panic-stricken – he started in adrenaline, then changed his mind, and was stranded as Smith rolled the ball back to the left-footed Angell.

Phil Gray, opposite his old club, dived into the goal and drove the ball into the empty net. Phil Gray ground and dive-ball-length to mark the 10th goal of his career.

The 18-year-old goalkeeper settled down after that scare to dominate the Town's rows of the match, and for most of the first half had little to do as Sunderland were baffled by the Town's ball, formation, and, most of all, passing.

His second goal since his transfer from Bradford came in the tenth minute. Rob Matthews, wide on the left, lofted in a drag-back cross; Gary Bennett should have cleared, but misjudged it, and left the Kubicki defender, running in behind, looked almost apologetic as he headed into his own net.

The Town's passing continued to look good, but it lost control in the first half, and Sunderland, despite a lot of hard work, failed to create a real chance, stifled in perfectly as the back four organised and marshalled.

The Town should have gone two up in the 18th minute, which would probably have ended Sunderland's hopes. Marshall snarked an attack in which Taylor's shot was palmed away by Tony Norman, but Marshall, deemed to be in the rebound, but although his shot beat the keeper, Bennett cleared off the line.

The lack crossed when Michael Gray pulled the Town defence with a neat chipped pass. Martin Gray was unmarked, but his shot was blocked by Davis, and he had unchallenged rebounds in areas of David.

In the second half Sunderland raised the pace and endeavour, and with the crowd roaring them on began to enjoy more possession.

The Town escaped when Atkinson appeals when the ball hit Johnson's hand, but he cleared it cross from the path of Gray, but the referee Peter Richards, who had been a good, no-fuss performance, ruled that the ball had hit the Sunderland player.

A corner was the equaliser, with the Town defence unable to make a decisive clearance. Martin Gray got on a header, which bounced off Johnson's and Phil Gray headed his first goal of 1995.

Sunderland forced the second half without threatening too much, but the Town were forced back to so much that they had to survive a period of 15 minutes of effort, both struck by Scott Oakes in the Sunderland area, and Phil Gray's shot on target, but saved by Davis, and Michael Gray's header.

For the last 20 minutes the Town changed to a 4-4-2 formation, with Marshall replacing Matthews, that by Sunderland's standards, was a comfortable one, and Taylor put the ball between the Sunderland and his lonely front role.

The defence reorganised to allow David Greene to go on as a sub in place of Linton, and looked all the better for a formation including three centre-backs.

Just Sunderland came closest to snatching victory, when Michael Gray delivered the best cross of the game at noon and Richard Ord met it with a powerful header, which looked good enough to win the match, but Davis produced a top-class save.

Said Moore: "He started very nervously but I was pleased with the way he settled down. He showed again that he is a tremendous prospect."