They're back on the attack at last!

REPORTS BY BRIAN SWAIN
PICTURES BY GARETH OWEN

AFTER A couple of false dawns earlier in the season, Luton Town finally shook off the gloom of recent weeks, with the first home win since Terry Westley became manager.

And there was no fluke about it, despite the fact that Portsmouth were down to ten men for the last 29 minutes. The Kenilworth Road celebrations, the first since last April, and after nine unsuccessful attempts, were justified on a day when the team suggested that better things are in store.

The ability to defend had been shown at Wolver-hampton, and at long last there are now signs that the attack can also score goals.

They know they have got to keep proving it, because the early season failures meant that the three points lifted the Town only one place off the bottom of the First Division.

But it was a day to be grateful: at the tenth attempt this season the Town at last managed more than one goal in a game. And only twice before in 1995 had they managed three.

Portsmouth, themselves in trouble at the wrong end of the table, looked good for the first five minutes, in which they forced four corners. Marvin Johnson had to produce a vital tackle to prevent Paul Walsh snatching an early lead, and the Town were on the back foot until Dwight Marshall lifted the pressure with the vital opening goal.

It was hardly a classic in build-up quality, but its value to a team that had become frightened of playing at home was incalculable. Ian Feuer, who has been a splendid loan acquisition, punted a long clearance downfield, and Pompey defender Jon Gittens, under pressure from John Taylor, inadvertently flicked the ball on with his head. Marshall needed no help from then on, with his pace taking him clear to beat Alan Knight in a one-to-one contest.

Lee Bradbury, a 20-year-old making his debut for Portsmouth, missed two good chances to equalise, closed down by Feuer, and then shooting wide, before the Town notched the crucial second goal.

It started with Johnny Vilstrup. A free kick 30 yards from goal was touched off to him, and not for many years have we seen a left foot strike produce such an explosive effect. Knight must have felt that he had been shelled as the ball hit him and bounced away. Graham Alexander, on the right, won it, crossed low, and Steve Davis tucked away his first Luton Town goal to a great roar that voiced relief as well as appreciation.

Portsmouth then had to open up, and Fitzroy Simpson was denied by Feuer after he had somehow wriggled through the Town defence.

But there was a closer call at the other end when Bontho Guentchev's corner was met by Taylor's head. With Knight beaten, the ball bounced off the inside of a post and into his arms.

Guentchev was taking a bit of stick from the crowd for his inability to put a finishing shot or pass to several promising attacks, and it might have been costly when Pompey pulled back a goal just before the interval. Walsh looked well offside when he collected a through-ball by Robbie Pethick and netted.

Linesman Armstrong must have been one of the few people in the stadium who thought it was a legitimate goal.

In the second half, after Vilstrup had limped off, the Town looked the most confident we have seen them at home.

Ceri Hughes, in a good run of form recently, set up Guentchev for a shot which Knight did well to save, but the Bulgarian's moment of glory was not long delayed.

Home fans howled in vain for a penalty when Walsh seemed to body- check Gary Waddock, and Portsmouth will always believe referee Paul Rejer compensated for that by giving a penalty a minute later when Gittens and Marshall tangled.

The defender was booked, as was Guy Butters for dissent, before Guentchev maintained his 100 per cent record from the spot with his third penalty of the season.

Portsmouth's anger was redoubled two minutes later, when Gittens flattened Taylor in midfield, to earn a second yellow card, and instant dismissal.

The last time it happened to the Town, the ten men produced victory at Southend. But the depleted Portsmouth side was never allowed a glimmer of hope that they could do the same.

The Town defended as a unit, and restored self-belief by the ease with which they held on to their first home win bonuses of the season.

LUTON TOWN 3
PORTSMOUTH 1
(Half-time: 2-1)

EARLY STRIKE: Dwight Marshall is grounded after beating Pompey goal-keeper Alan Knight and fullback Robbie Pethick to put the Town ahead with his fourth goal of the season.

SPOT ON: Bontcho Guentchev sends Alan Knight the wrong way to convert his third penalty of the season.

TWO UP: Steve Davis, wearing the Luton No. 4, watches his shot beat Alan Knight for his first goal for the Town.

Marshall celebrates!

Big match facts

TOWN: Feuer; Peake, Davis, Marvin Johnson; Alexander (James 78 mins), Hughes, Vilstrup (Waddock 48 mins), Harvey; Marshall, Guentchev, Taylor Unused sub Oldfield.
PORTSMOUTH: Knight; Pethick (Wood HT), Butters, Gittens, Russell; Hall, McLoughlin (Igoe 72 mins), Simpson, Rees (Durnin 65 mins); Walsh, Bradbury.
GOALS: 1-0 7 mins: Dwight Marshall, run and shot after long clearance by Ian Feuer was unwittingly headed on by Jon Gittens; 2-0 23 mins: Steve Davis, close range shot from Graham Alexander's cross after goalkeeper Alan Knight could not hold a Johnny Vilstrup piledriver; 2-1 43 mins: Paul Walsh, looking yards offside from Robbie Pethick's through ball; 3-1 59 mins: Bontcho Guentchev penalty after Gittens tripped Marshall.
OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town four saved, seven wide, and header by John Taylor hit a post; Pompey seven saved and four wide; Corners: 5-5.
REFEREE: Paul Rejer, Tipton: not on top of his game, but let down by a linesman when Portsmouth scored.
BOOKED: Gittens for the foul that led to the penalty, and Guy Butters for dissent.
SENT OFF: Gittens, in the 61st minute, two minutes after the penalty, for his second yellow card offence, a foul on John Taylor.
ATTENDANCE: 7,795, Kenilworth Road's best since the first day of the season.
ENTERTAINMENT: A better spectacle than we have seen for a long time in a home game, thanks mainly to the result. The overall quality of the football was better as well.

Luton Town's season at a glance

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

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE DIV I

August 1995

13	Norwich	(H)	1-3 (Guentchev, pen)	7,848	–
19	Southend	(A)	1-0 (Thorpe)	4,630	–
26	Leicester	(H)	1-1 (Hughes)	7,612	16
29	Grimsby	(A)	0-0	4,289	10

September

2	Derby	(H)	1-2 (Marshall)	8,427	17
9	Reading	(A)	1-3 (Marshall)	3,550	20
13	Millwall	(A)	0-1	7,076	22
16	Sunderland	(H)	0-2	6,955	23
23	Wolves	(A)	0-0	23,659	24
30	Portsmouth	(H)	3-1 (Marshall, Davis, Geuntchev pen)	7,795	23

October

7	Tranmere	(A)			
14	West Brom	(H)			
21	Ipswich	(A)			
28	Charlton	(H)			

November

4	Stoke	(A)			
11	Oldham	(H)			
18	Birmingham	(H)			
21	Watford	(A)			
25	Barnsley	(A)			

December

2	Tranmere	(H)			
9	Wolves	(H)			
16	Portsmouth	(A)			
23	Huddersfield	(H)			
26	C Palace	(A)			
30	Port Vale	(A)			

January 1996

1	Sheffield U	(H)			
13	Southend	(H)			
20	Norwich	(A)			

February

3	Leicester	(A)			
10	Grimsby	(H)			
17	Millwall	(H)			
21	Derby	(A)			
24	Sunderland	(A)			
27	Reading	(H)			

March

3	C Palace	(H)			
9	Huddersfield	(A)			
16	Port Vale	(H)			
23	Sheffield U	(A)			
30	Ipswich	(H)			

April

2	West Brom	(A)			
6	Charlton	(A)			
9	Stoke	(H)			
13	Birmingham	(A)			
20	Watford	(H)			
27	Barnsley	(H)			

May

4	Oldham	(A)			

COCA-COLA CUP (First Round)

August 1995

15	Bournem'th	(H)	1-1 (Marshall)	2,728
22	Bournemouth	(A)	1-2 (aet) (M Johnson)	4,844

(Bournemouth win 3-2 on aggregate).

ANGLO ITALIAN CUP

September 5 1995

Perugia (h) 1- 4 (Guentchev pen) 2,352

Who's who

APPEARANCES... GOALS

League appearances (as sub in brackets)

M Johnson 9
Hughes 6
Oldfield 8 (1)
Harvey 10
Taylor 5 (3)
Guentchev 7 (3)
Alexander 7
Sommer 2
James 6 (2)
S Davis 9
Marshall 9
Thorpe 1 (3)
Thomas 1 (1)
Waddock 4 (3)
Peake 5 (3)
K Davis 4
G Johnson 4
Linton 5
Woodsford (2)
Vilstrup 4
Feuer 4

League goals

Guentchev 2 pens
Thorpe 1
Hughes 1
Marshall 3
Davis 1

Assists

Alexander 2
Taylor 1
Guentchev 1
G Johnson 1
Marshall 1

Coca Cola Cup

Sommer 2
M Johnson 2
S Davis 2
Oldfield 2
Alexander 2
Guentchev 2
Harvey 2
Thomas 1(1)
Hughes 1
James 1
Waddock 1
Thorpe (2)
Matthews (1)

Cup goals

Marshall 1
M Johnson 1

Assists

S Davis 1
Alexander 1

Anglo Italian Cup K

Davies 1
James 1
Skelton 1
S Davies 1
Evers 1
Thorpe 1
Linton 1
Guentchev 1
Hughes 1
Harvey 1
Waddock 1
Marshall 1
Woodsford 1

Goals

Guentchv pen

Assists

Hughes (1)

FA Cup dates

Round 3 ..... Jan 6
Round 4 ..... Jan 27
Round 5 ..... Feb 17
Round 6 ..... Mar 9
Semi-Final ..... Mar 30

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Community Corner

Have fun and learn the game

by COLWYN ROWE

IT HARDLY seems possible that after the long summer holidays, we are now preparing for the autumn half-term break, and at Luton Town we have the perfect answer to parents who worry about keeping children occupied when schools are shut.

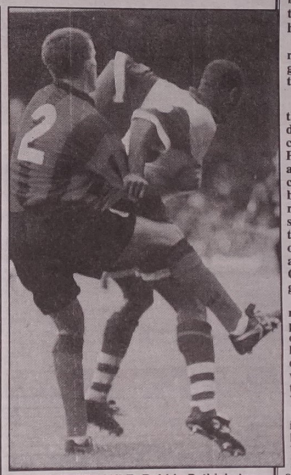
We are holding our biggest-ever programme of coaching clinics all over Bedfordshire, open to all boys and girls between five and 14, and regardless of their football-balling ability.

You don't have to be a mini Steve Davis to enjoy football, and we make sure our courses are a bit of fun as well as instructive.

They will enable youngsters to improve their football ability, and that includes encouraging the right attitude and behaviour. Stars of the first team turn up to meet the youngsters, and we give away free match tickets as part of the package.

We will be running well over a dozen courses at various places during the half-term break, starting on the weekend of Saturday October 21. We expect them to be popular, so if you are interested, get in touch quickly and we'll give you full information about prices and places – everywhere from Caddington to Leighton, and from Luton to Bedford and Biggleswade.

We also have specialised goalkeeping courses, and serious coaching courses for adults. If you're interested, give me a ring, on Luton 411622.



HANDY TACKLE: Robbie Pethick, tormented for 45 minutes by Dwight Marshall before being subbed, gets to grips with the Town striker.

How they stand

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE FIRST DIVISION

	P	HOME W	D	L	F	A	AWAY W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Leicester	10	2	1	2	9	9	4	1	0	7	2	20
Millwall	10	2	1	2	4	4	3	2	0	6	3	18
Barnsley	10	3	1	1	8	9	2	1	2	8	10	17
Charlton	10	3	2	0	9	5	1	2	2	6	5	16
Huddersfield	10	4	0	1	11	5	1	1	3	4	9	16
Sunderland	10	2	2	1	7	5	2	2	1	5	5	16
Ipswich	10	4	0	1	13	8	0	3	2	5	8	15
Oldham	10	3	1	1	10	5	1	2	2	4	5	15
Norwich	10	2	2	1	4	3	2	1	2	9	8	15
West Brom	10	3	1	1	6	3	1	2	2	7	8	15
Southend	10	3	1	1	5	3	1	1	3	5	7	14
Birmingham	10	2	3	0	7	3	1	1	3	9	9	13
Tranmere	9	1	3	1	9	8	2	1	1	5	2	13
Grimsby	10	2	3	0	5	3	1	1	3	5	8	13
Watford	10	2	2	1	8	5	1	1	3	6	9	12
Reading	10	2	2	1	8	8	1	1	3	7	10	11
Sheff Utd	9	1	3	0	6	5	1	2	2	4	6	11
C. Palace	10	2	2	1	8	4	0	2	3	5	9	10
Wolves	10	1	3	1	4	4	1	1	3	6	11	10
Derby Co	10	1	2	2	3	4	1	2	2	6	11	10
Stoke	10	1	2	2	6	7	1	1	3	7	10	9
Portsmouth	10	**1**	**1**	**3**	**6**	**9**	**1**	**2**	**2**	**4**	**9**	
Luton Town	10	0	2	3	3	8	1	2	2	4	5	7
Port Vale												

KEEPER SWEEPER: Alan Knight rescues his defence with a clearance outside the area to prevent Bonthco Guentchev reaching a through ball.

Pompey are furious over ref's decision

A RELIEVED Terry Westley saw the overdue first home win of the season as the right reward for the belief he held through the bad days. "You have got to believe in what you are trying to do," he said. "I have never doubted our players' quality."

Portsmouth boss Terry Fenwick was furious with referee Paul Rejer over the penalty that killed off the game, and the yellow card for Jon Gittens which was to have a dramatic follow-up two minutes later.

Fenwick should know a thing or two about defending: he had a top class career with Crystal Palace, QPR and Spurs, and earned 20 England caps. He said: "I can't believe the decisions the referee made. I could't see anything wrong with the tackle Gittens made on Marshall. He came away with the ball. And Gittens had a terrific game."

He suggested that the ref had put himself under pressure, heeding the second penalty appeals barely a minute after turning down the Town's claims when Paul Walsh seemed to impede Gary Waddock.

But when he was asked if the ref had not also been wrong to allow Walsh's goal to stand, Fenwick declined to give a positive answer, saying that the new second phase offside law did seem to he a bit of a problem for linesmen.

That incident happened just before half-time, and Westley went onto the pitch to stop his players getting into trouble with the ref. The Town were incensed, and the danger was that someone might have spoken too bluntly to Mr Rejer and ended up on the disciplinary mat.

But the manager shared the view of his players and supporters that the goal should not have been given. "Walsh looked absolutely miles offside," he said. "I think the linesman realised it, but did not flag early, and was then not brave enough to stick his flag up after the event."

Westley praised all his players for delivering the goods and justifying his confidence, and had a special word for Bontcho Guentchev. He had been subject to jeers and boos, but still insisted on taking the penalty, even though Steve Davis had offered.

Westley said: "Guentchev was magnificent in being brave enough to take the penalty. The fans booed him, but he is a top player. He got in on goal three times, and just needs a goal. He was a shorn to Portsmouth all the game."

Town players were in no doubt that the penalty was rightly awarded, and also felt one should have been given just before.

Walsh, back on the ground where he started more than a decade ago, begged to differ. "Gary Waddock and I ran into each other," he said. "At the most it might have been obstruction."

He thought the crowd put pressure on the ref over that incident, then took the easy way out a minute later by penalising Gittens's tackle on Marshall.

The former England striker was 33 on Sunday, but despite the goal felt little cause to celebrate his 500th league match. "In the early stages we looked like we were going to have a stormer," he said. "But Luton scored against the run of play. We had to chase the game, but didn't. And we gave away sloppy goals."