

Sport 3

Big match facts

TOWN: Feuer, James, Steve Davis, Marvin Johnson, Thomas, Alexander, Oakes (Harvey 90 mins), Waddock, Thorpe, Guentchev, Taylor (Oldfield 78 mins). Unused subs: Rashid.

SOUTHEATH: Royce, Dublin (Hone 7 mins), McNally, Bodley, Powell, Byrnes, Griedel (Tison 65 mins), Marshall, Hails, Ragie, Thomson (Charley 85 mins).

GOALS: 1-0 45 mins: Bontcho Guentchev hooking in a cross by Tony Thorpe; 2-0, 54 mins: Scott Oakes, thundering 25-yarder from pass by Graham Alexander; 3-0, 77 mins: Oakes again, from lay-back by Guentchev, with shot deflected by Southend's Tison; 3-1, 80 mins: Paul Byrne, with an inadvertent deflection by Marvin Johnson wrong-footing Ian Feuer.

OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town saved, five wide and 23rd-minute

headed by Steve Davis hit the top of the bar; Southend four saved and seven wide, including a 25th-minute shot over an empty net by Griedel. Corners: 6-4 to Southend.

REFEREE: Alan Wiley, Staffordshire.

Had a good game, although Guentchev hooking in the result and performance at Grimsby a week earlier.

BOOKED: Julian James, for a foul on Hails, and Southend's Bodley, McNally and Marshall, all for fouls.

ATTENDANCE: 6,586. Disappointing but understandable after the result and performance at Grimsby a week earlier.

ENTERTAINMENT: Provided by the effort, spirit and determination shown by the Town - the kick in the teeth at Blundell Park could yet be pain worth suffering if it provokes more performances like this one.

Faulkner is back to spy

THE Norwich City scout who came to weigh up the Town against Southend had no problems finding his way around Kenilworth Road. John Faulkner, a Town player for six years, was given the job.

Now 47, he is coach at Carrow Road, having moved to Norwich after he had been sacked out of Kenilworth Road for the second time in his career nearly four years ago.

His first spell with the Town was as a commanding centre-half. He had played for Sutton United against Leeds in an FA Cup tie and been bought by Don Revie as a result, and the Town

paid £6,000 for him in 1972.

Faulkner played in Harry Haslam's 1974 side that won promotion and survived just one season in the old First Division, before leaving in 1978 to play in the USA.

He returned to Luton as youth and reserves coach ten years ago, recruited by David Platt, and when Jim Ryan became manager in 1990 Faulkner was promoted to first team coach. But Ryan was cruelly sacked 18 months later, and when David Platt came back Faulkner also got the bullet, and moved to Norwich.

Endsleigh League

Fans rise to a

REPORT BY BRIAN SWAIN PICTURES BY GARETH OWEN

LUTON TOWN 3 SOUTHEATH 1 (Half time 1-0)

VILLIFIED by their travelling fans a week earlier, Luton Town were cheered to the echo at Kenilworth Road when players and supporters alike realised that the First Division's bottom club could yet be capable of a revival.

Manager Lennie Lawrence, who has done it in similar circumstances at Charlton, was careful to tell us not to be carried away by one result. But the season's first double, and his first win as Town manager, was an uplifting and promising as the Grimsby debacle had been depressing.

Southend came on the back of a run of nine league games without defeat, shooting for second place in the table if they could win.

The Town, after working hard in training that they have done for a long time, knew that defeat would be disaster, and condemn them to a dreadful battle for confidence and survival.

Lawrence made four changes, one of them forced by a training injury, to leading scorer Dwight Marshall. He has shifted Scott Oakes back into

midfield, which is not the player's favourite role, but was rewarded with two important goals, the first a real gem.

Ironically, Oakes was one of those singled out at Blundell Park for jeers by Town fans. Bontcho Guentchev was another - yet he scored one and made one, and for the first time showed why he was a World Cup player a couple of years ago.

The defence was 100 per cent better than at Grimsby, with skipper Steve Davis returning after suspension in place of Darren Patterson. John Taylor, recovered from illness, replaced Marshall, with Guentchev used on the attacking flanks. Graham Alexander and Tony Thorpe displaced Paul McLaren and David Oldfield.

A team that has been humiliated like Luton returning after suspension almost always raises itself for the next game, and after a week's hard work and the claret call to restore pride, all 11 fitted into a much more

balanced outfit.

Southend boss Ronnie Welch warned his men what to expect, and could hardly believe how poor they were made to look.

"We never performed," he said. "The second half we never created any threat, never passed the ball. We looked pretty good at times going forward, but we did not penetrate. I knew Luton would be up for it after the result at Grimsby, but it seems our players didn't listen to what I said. They were lucky Luton weren't 1-4 up at half-time, because Luton created a lot more than we did."

It might have been a different story if Phil Griedel had been on the ball, a slick passing move ended with Andy Thomson putting the midfielders clear of every opponent, including Ian Feuer, but Griedel shot over the empty net from six yards.

Had he scored, as he should have done, it would have been a stern test of the Town's character.

But even at that stage, after 25 minutes, the Town had been a goal or two, and it was highly encouraging to see a team capable of cutting through the opposition's defence with quick and accurate passing.

Thorpe and Taylor played a

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Reports and gossip from Town

smooth one-two which ended with Thorpe's shot being blocked by the keeper, and Guentchev's follow-up effort deflected for a corner.

Another flag kick, after Thorpe was again denied, led to Steve Davis powering in a header which flicked the top of the bar.

Then came Griedel's amazing pass, followed by a scramble when James seemed to hand away a cross by Julian Hails. The ref refused Southend's half-hearted penalty claims.

In midfield Gary Waddock looked upstadium, tackling and closing down like a demon. Taylor and Guentchev did the same when Southend attacked, and sheet deflection alone through the whole Town side.

Thorpe dallied too long when Oakes and Taylor made a chance for him, and Taylor's sharp shot on the run was saved after Guentchev had put him through.

Oakes, the great enigma of recent months, is a bit of a luxury when he is in the mood, but against Southend he had taken on board the manager's stern warnings as much as anyone, and even backed back so enthusiastically he got a finger-wagging from the ref for one determined challenge.

The fear at half-time approached was that Southend's defence would be injured, but all that changed in injury time. Thorpe tormented Southend's right flank yet again - Mark Hone had been sent on as an early sub when Keith Dublin was injured - and from his cross Guentchev took the ball on his chest, then hooked in his fifth goal of the season as he tumbled. The other four had all been expert penalties, but none was as valuable as this.

Southend were beaten from then on, and knew it when Oakes produced a blinding 54th-minute 25-yard drive from a pass by Alexander - Simon Royce was still preparing to save as the ball hit the net.

The midfielder did it again in the 71st minute, from Guentchev's lay-back, although this time a deflection off Andy Tison contributed to Royce's downfall.

This lucky break was balanced ten minutes from time when Paul Byrne's short beat Feuer because of a deflection off Marvin Johnson.

Joy unbounded was the feeling in the stands as the victors were given an ovation for a performance which lifted everyone's spirits, and suggested that relegation can still be avoided.

But the manager was quick to calm it all down, and remind us that Luton Town are still bottom of the table, with an awful amount of work still to be done. He had told his men that this was a game they had to win, and was delighted that they deserved it.

"We looked better all round, and more organised at the back," he said.

Freshmen were full of the stunning strike by Oakes, and Lawrence said: "It was a terrific goal. Oakes had been given more responsibility in central midfield, and told to apply himself, and did. But don't single out individuals, because the whole team did well. And if we play like that, we have a chance."

Old favourite pays a flying visit

KEITH Allen, a member of the Town squad that laid the foundations for the club's revival in the late 60s, will pay a rare visit to Bedfordshire next week, to prove he is still a batsman.

He was a quicksilver forward for three years at Kenilworth Road, second in the Town rise from the Fourth Division to the Second, Born on the Rise of Wight, he had played for Grimsby and Alderley before the Town got him in a swap deal for Steve Keane, a former England international.

Allen made a huge favourite at Kenilworth Road for his heavy and dismissive, and for occasional spectacular goals. He moved to Plymouth in 1969 and retired because of a knee injury three years later.

He lives at Plymouth, having carved out a career as a sales rep after his football days were over. Now 52, he is selling used cars for Plymouth's biggest motor dealers.

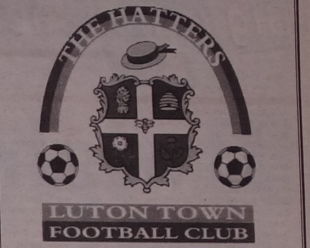
"They were great days at Luton, and he is still a great result! I look each Saturday. It was a good bunch of players we had some great times pulling the club out of the bottom division."

He is still active in sport, with "military medium" bowling in the local cricket team, Plymouth.

Allen rarely gets to this part of the country, but has a date at Bedford at the end of the month, when he goes on an industrial tribunal to claim unfair dismissal against a Northampton company who sacked him last October.



CLOSE CALL: Bontcho Guentchev is denied an early goal as Chris Powell's deflection knocks the ball over the bar, with goalkeeper Simon Royce well out of position after blocking Tony Thorpe's effort



So far, so good

GRATEFUL praise was followed by a realistic warning from manager Lennie Lawrence to the Luton Town players this week.

"It's a case of so far, so good," he said, after the gloom that has hung over Kenilworth Road for too long showed signs of being dispelled by the win over Southend.

"Just because we won that one, it doesn't mean that everything is OK," he said. "We are still bottom of the league, and we still need another two wins, minimum, to stay up, so there is a lot more work to be done."

"But you proved something against Southend, after letting ourselves down at Grimsby. If we continue to get the right results, that FA Cup setback could be a blessing in disguise. But only if we learn from it, and there were a few savage lessons from Grimsby."

"We now need to win at Norwich, to set ourselves up for the next important game, Crystal Palace or Port Vale."

Lawrence hopes it will be the third time lucky for him at Carrow Road: earlier this season, as boss of Bradford City, his Second Division outfit drew 0-0 at Norwich in the Coca Cola Cup, then lost the replay 5-3 after extra time.

The Canaries also have a new manager, with Gary Megson in charge for the second time following the December departure of Martin O'Neill. Megson had to endure six games without a win, including a home FA Cup

defeat at the hands of Brentford, before Norwich won 1-0 at Sunderland on Sunday.

"They have some useful players, and are a capable side," said Lawrence of the team that won 3-1 at Kenilworth Road on the opening day of the season. "What it will be important not to lose on Saturday. I will go for a win. In our position we need every point we can muster."

"But the players responded well after the Grimsby game. They worked very hard in training, and they deserve credit for the result over Southend."

Managers and coaches can only do so much, but once they step out onto the white line on Saturday afternoon it's down to the players. We asked them to restore professional pride, and they did. All we have to do now is keep it going."

Two loan players decided to play away for another month

DEFENDER Gavin Johnson has taken Lennie Lawrence's advice, and accepted a one-month extension of his loan to Third Division Wigan, keeping him there until mid-February.

David Greene, the Irish under-21 international, cent-re-half, is also likely to make a similar arrangement at Colchester, where he is coming to the end of his first month on loan.

SATURDAY'S match at Carrow Road is all-ticket for Luton Town fans, and they have to be bought in advance of £10 each.

There are no concessions to young or old age, and are on sale at Kenilworth Road until 4 pm on Friday. Norwich say they will not sell tickets to away supporters on the day.

THE six-pickler First Division match between the Town and Sheffield United, postponed on new year's day and then rearranged for

Luton Town's season at a glance....

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

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE DIVISION ONE

AUGUST									
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	17	-	-	-
29	Grimsby	A	0-0	-	4,289	10	-	-	-

SEPTEMBER									
2	Derby	H	1-2	(Marshall)	6,427	17	-	-	-
9	Reading	A	1-3	(Marshall)	6,550	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, Guentchev pen)	7,795	25	-	-	-

OCTOBER									
7	Tranmere	A	0-1	-	6,680	24	-	-	-
14	West Brom	H	1-2	(Harvey)	8,042	24	-	-	-
22	Ipswich	A	1-0	(Oldfield)	9,123	21	-	-	-
29	Charlton	H	0-1	-	6,270	22	-	-	-

NOVEMBER									
4	Stoke	A	0-5	-	9,382	23	-	-	-
11	Oldham	H	1-1	(Douglas)	6,047	23	-	-	-
18	Birmingham	H	0-0	-	7,920	23	-	-	-
21	Watford	H	0-1	(Davis)	10,042	23	-	-	-
25	Barnsley	A	0-1	-	6,437	22	-	-	-

DECEMBER									
2	Tranmere	H	3-2	(Marshall 2, McLaren)	6,025	23	-	-	-
9	Wolves	H	2-3	(Oakes, Marshall)	6,997	24	-	-	-
16	Portsmouth	A	0-4	-	7,012	24	-	-	-
23	Huddersfield	H	2-2	(Marshall, Oldfield)	7,076	24	-	-	-
26	C. Palace	A	Postponed - frost	-	-	-	-	-	-
30	Port Vale	A	Postponed - frost	-	-	-	-	-	-

JANUARY									
1	Sheff Wed	H	3-1	(Guentchev, Oakes 2)	6,566	24	-	-	-
13	Southend	H	3-1	(Guentchev, Oakes 2)	6,566	24	-	-	-

FA CUP									
Jan 6 Round 3:	Grimsby (a)	1-7	(Marshall)	5,387	-	-	-	-	-
Goal:	Marshall	Assists:	Marshall	-	-	-	-	-	-

COCA COLA CUP									
Aug 15	Bournemouth H	1-1	(Marshall)	2,728	-	-	-	-	-
22	Bournemouth A	1-2	(M. Johnson)	4,844	-	-	-	-	-

ANGLO-ITALIAN CUP									
Sep 5	Perugia (h)	1-4	(Guentchev pen)	2,352	-	-	-	-	-
Sep 12	Parma (a)	3-3	-	3,499	-	-	-	-	-
Nov 8	Cesena (a)	1-2	(Marshall)	400	-	-	-	-	-
Dec 13	Ancona (h)	5-0	(Oakes, Marshall, Taylor, Thorpe, Guentchev pen)	-	-	-	-	-	-

Hatters close the gap

		HOME					AWAY							
		P	W	D	L	F	A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Derby C	26	9	4	1	28	11	3	4	16	18	49	-	-	-
Huddersf	25	5	2	1	16	4	6	3	18	43	-	-	-	-
Charlton	27	8	2	3	25	15	3	6	5	12	42	41	-	-
Stoke	26	5	6	3	16	10	5	4	4	22	39	-	-	-
Leicester	25	4	3	4	18	6	5	3	22	38	-	-	-	-
Norwich	27	5	5	2	16	13	5	3	6	20	38	-	-	-
Barnsley	25	6	5	2	22	16	4	3	5	15	38	-	-	-
Sunderland	23	6	3	2	19	8	4	5	3	11	32	38	-	-
Southend	26	7	4	2	17	12	3	4	6	12	39	-	-	-
Grimsby	25	5	7	1	16	11	4	3	5	15	39	37	-	-
Oldham	26	5	5	2	17	12	2	4	6	17	29	-	-	-
Millwall	26	4	4	6	13	16	5	2	14	36	-	-	-	-
Ipswich	25	6	4	3	28	20	2	6	4	17	37	34	-	-
Tranmere	22	6	4	3	24	14	3	3	3	11	33	34	-	-
Crystal P	24	6	3	3	13	16	3	4	3	18	37	33	-	-
Portsmouth	27	6	4	4	26	19	2	4	7	17	25	32	-	-
Sheff Wed	25	5	5	2	21	12	5	5	13	31	-	-	-	-
Port Vale	26	3	3	6	15	19	4	5	17	29	-	-	-	-
Reading	25	5	3	4	18	17	1	7	5	13	39	28	-	-
Wolves	25	3	6	4	16	17	2	4	6	14	19	25	-	-
West Brom	25	5	2	6	16	16	2	8	13	25	-	-	-	-
Sheff Wed	24	3	5	4	15	13	2	4	16	18	24	-	-	-
Sheff Utd	25	3	3	6	15	19	2	2	7	17	25	22	-	-
Luton Tn	24	3	4	6	18	21	2	3	6	4	22	-	-	-

APPEARANCES... GOALS

APPEARANCES (Subs in brackets)		Douglas McLaren	1 1	Steve Davis Oldfield
Harvey	(2)	22		1
M Johnson	22		ASSISTS	Alexander
Marshall	21	20	4	Marshall
S Davis	20	Alexander	3	Taylor
Alexander	(1)	20	Oakes	2
Feuer	17	Marshall	2	Guentchev
Hughes	16	Guentchev	2	Harvey
Peake	(3)	14	Taylor	2
Oakes	13	M Johnson	1	Thorpe (2)
Oldfield	(4)	G Johnson	1	Thomas (1)
Waddock	(4)	12	Vilstrup	1
James	(3)	11	S Davis	1
Guentchev	(7)	9	Waddock	
McLaren	(4)	8	Matthews (1)	
Taylor	(4)	8		
Vilstrup	6			
Thorpe	(7)	5		
Riseth	(1)	5		
Uinton	(1)	5		
M Johnson	(1)	5		
Kevin Davis	5			
Patterson	3			
Thomas	2			
Sommer	2			
Douglas	(3)	1		
Woodford	(2)	1		
GOALS				
Marshall	2			
Oakes	3			
Guentchev (2 pens)	3			
Davis	2			
Oldfield	2			
Thorpe	1			
Hughes	1			
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