

Trevor still holds that record

LAST week's report about Trevor Peake being the oldest man to play league football for Luton provoked a stream of calls questioning its accuracy. Daily Duncan and Bob Hawkes were the other names suggested, but Town statistician Roger Wash confirms we were right.

Peake was 39 years and 17 days old when he turned out for the Town against Reading.

Youth team dreams fade

DREAMS of winning the championship of the South East Counties League have ended for the Town's youth side after they were beaten 3-0 at home by Brighton, leaving Crystal Palace ten points clear at the top of the table.

But coach John Moore is looking much further ahead than 90 minutes each match as the last lap of the season approaches. For some of the boys it is the last chance to prove they are worth signing, either to step up from the schoolboy ranks, or from trainee to junior pro.

With those judgements to be made, Moore's team is peppered

ago, and the mistake was not spotted.

Peake in fact became the oldest league player for the Town a year ago in a match at Bristol City. Sadly, those of us who should have noticed his place in history at the time failed to do so.

Bob Hawkes, who played for England as an amateur, still holds the record as the oldest man every to play for Luton, but his illustrious career was spent in the old Southern League. A one-club man, he was a left half born at Breachwood Green in 1880, he was 39 years and 191 days old when he made his final and 349th league appearance for the Town.

with schoolboys, and games are more about how they perform than about results.

A lot of young players will be waiting anxiously for the verdict on their careers. Nine lads are reaching the end of their two-year training periods, and only four or five will be offered contracts. And boys leaving school this summer are sweating on the chance of working at Kenilworth Road as YTS lads.

The youth team is away to Barnet in the SE Counties League on Saturday.

The reserves are away to Norwich next Wednesday evening.

It should have



PAINFUL: Bontcho Guentchev looks less than happy with life as he and Dean Gordon get into a tangle.

LUTON TOWN 0 CRYSTAL PALACE 0

LIGHTWEIGHT in attacking power after the loss of Dwight Marshall, the Town were grateful for small mercies on Saturday. Manager Lennie Lawrence agreed with Palace's Dave Bassett that the game could have been all over at the interval. Never had he seen the Town so comprehensively outplayed as they were in the first half, he said.

Fortunately the defence, with Steve Davis back after suspension, was in no mood to be beaten, although the woodwork and the Feuer were called on to preserve the clean sheet.

Lawrence tried Vidar Riseth as leader of the attack in the first half, when the Town never had a sniff of goal, but replaced him with John Taylor after the break, with little noticeable difference.

Small wonder that the manager confided new striker before the transfer deadline was less than a month away. The Town's only threat came from midfielder Tony Thorpe, although in the last minute there were a few hearted appeals for a penalty when Taylor and Andersen tangled and fell.

Feuer was man of the match, enjoying a particular first-half save at the feet of Tony Houghton, his favourite player since leaving him in the World Cup in the USA.

been over by the break



FIRING BLANKS: Defender Marvin Johnson tries to boost the Luton attack against Palace, with a header that looped over the bar

DUE A GOAL OR TWO: John Taylor, second half sub for Vidar Riseth against Crystal Palace.

REPORTS BY BRIAN SWAIN
PICTURES BY GARETH OWEN

Big match facts

TOWN: Feuer, James, Johnson, Davis, Thomas, Alexander, Oakes, Waddock, Thorpe (Harvey 84 mins); Riseth (Taylor HT), Guentchev (Oldfield 54 mins).

CRYSTAL PALACE: Martyn, Gordon, Davies, Roberts, Edworthy, Hopkin, Houghton, Vincent (Andersen 57 mins); Freedman, Ndah, Dyer (Taylor 80 mins). Unused sub: Rodger.

GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town four saved and two wide; Palace six saved, five wide and harder by George Ndah hit the bar. Corners: 6-6.

REFEREE: John Kirkby, Sheffield, for the first 24 minutes, but then suffered gastric and headache problems, and was replaced by senior linesman Tim Howes, who seemed a little shy of making important decisions.

BOOKED: Town's Julian James and Marvin Johnson and Palace's Bruce Dyer, Dougie Freedman and David Hopkin.

ATTENDANCE: 8,478, Kenilworth Road's highest of the season so far, and only the second over 8,000.

ENTERTAINMENT: Very poor, with the Town outplayed for the first half, stirring in the last 15 minutes, and lucky and grateful to take a point which looked even better 24 hours later when Oldham lost at home to Tranmere.

Big match facts

TOWN: Feuer, Linton, James, Peake, Thomas, Alexander, Waddock (Vilstrup 83 mins), Oldfield, Thorpe (Oakes HT), Guentchev, Taylor (Riseth 65 mins).

READING: Mihailov; Wodowczyk (Gilkes 52 mins), Williams, Hopkins; Bernal, Meaker, Parkinson, Holsgrove, Booty; Nogan (Quinn, 67 mins), Lovell. Unused sub: Jones.

GOALS: 1-0 5 mins: Bontcho Guentchev penalty; 1-1 45 mins: Martin Booty header; 1-2, 78 mins: Stuart Lovell shot.

OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town five saved, five wide and shots by Thorpe and Taylor hit posts; Reading five saved, six wide. Corners: 7-4 to the Town.

REFEREE: Paul Rejer, Tipton, had a better 90 minutes than the Town.

BOOKED: Guentchev for dissent and Nogan and Parkinson of Reading for fouls.

ATTENDANCE: 6,683.

ENTERTAINMENT: Good for the first half-hour, but dropped off after that.



Oldfield back against play-off chasers?

STRIKER turned midfielder David Oldfield is set for a recall to Luton Town's starting line-up at Huddersfield on Saturday. Unlucky to be on the subs' bench against Crystal Palace, he will be needed at the McAlpine Stadium because Graham Alexander is starting a two-match suspension, while Ceri Hughes is completing his.

But manager Lennie Lawrence is worrying far more about the attack, which has been shot by Dwight Marshall broke his leg at Sunderland.

"I am asking around who is available, but I don't think we will have anyone in by the weekend," he said.

Against a team searching for a play-off place after promotion from Division Two last season, Lawrence is looking for a sharpshooter to assist himself.

John Taylor, so unlucky with a blistering volley which hit a post in the Reading match, is due a goal or two - in 17 full appearances he has scored only once, in the 5-0 stroll against Ancona in the Anglo-Italian Cup.

Vidar Riseth, with much less experience, is still waiting for his first league goal, which leaves a lot of responsibility on Bontcho Guentchev.

The Bulgarian's eight goals make him the Town's second leading scorer, but six of those have come from the penalty spot and another was direct from a free kick.

The good news from Saturday's home draw with Crystal Palace, who have the best away record in the First Division, was that the Town collected no further injuries.

And Darren Patterson has got over a groin strain. He was ready to play against Palace, his former club, but was left out because Steve Davis was available again after suspension and Marvin Johnson had overcome his hamstring strain.

Patterson was pencilled in for a run-out with the reserves against Wimbledon last night, but Lawrence hinted he may not be in the side at Huddersfield. He said: "Marvin Johnson and Steve Davis did very well against Palace."

"The problem is at the front, where we have lost the only man with pace, and I feel Dwight Marshall has to be replaced."

Huddersfield, under the management of former Town favourites Brian Horton and David Moss, looked a very good side at Kenilworth Road in December, in a 2-2 draw in the first match after Lawrence's appointment. In 17-goal Andy Booth they have one of the best strikers in the First Division - he was on target at Luton and has scored in each of the last four games.

Ten wins, four draws and three defeats is Huddersfield's home record, but Lawrence said: "They're beatable, and we know we have got to get results right again after a blip against Reading. We have seen a radical change in fortunes since I came, with 19 points from 11 games. In recent times, these first-choice centre-backs were missing against Reading."

"But we got a good draw at Derby, and were not that far off when we lost by one goal at Sunderland - and they have beaten Southend and Grimsby, both away, since then."

"The spirit here is good, and we know March will be an important month, with so many away games. We must see the month through being no worse off compared to other teams at the bottom, which means we want a couple of away wins and a few goals."

Luton Town's season at a glance...

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

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE DIVISION ONE

1995
Town's scores:
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) 8,550 - 20
13 Millwall A 0-1 7,076 - 22
18 Sunderland H 0-2 8,855 - 23
23 Wolves A 0-0 23,685 - 24
30 Portsmouth H 3-1 (Marshall, Davis, Guentchev pen) 7,795 - 23

OCTOBER
7 Tranmere A 0-1 6,680 - 24
14 W 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 Birm'm H 0-0 7,920 - 23
21 Watford A 1-1 (Davis) 10,042 - 23
25 Barnsley A 0-1 6,437 - 23

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 Hudd'ld H 2-2 (Marshall, Oldfield) 7,076 - 24

JANUARY
13 Southend H 3-1 (Guentchev, Oakes) 26,566 - 24
16 Norwich A 1-0 (Guentchev pen) 12,474 - 23
31 Sheff Utd H 1-0 (Guentchev) 6,995 - 21

FEBRUARY
3 Leicester A 1-1 (Thorpe) 14,821 - 21
10 Grimsby H 3-2 (Alexander, Guentchev, Marshall) 7,158 - 20

MARCH
17 Millwall H 1-0 (Thorpe pen) 7,308 - 19
21 Derby A 1-1 (Marshall) 14,825 - 17
24 Sunderland A 0-1 16,693 - 19
27 Reading H 1-2 (Guentchev pen) 6,683 - 20

2 C Palace H 0-0 8,478 - 20

APPEARANCES... GOALS

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE

GOALS: Marshall 9, Guentchev 6 (three pens), Oakes 3; Thorpe 3 (1 pen), S Davis and Oldfield 2; Hughes, Harvey, Douglas Alexander and McLaren 1.

ASSISTS: Thorpe 5; Alexander 4; Marshall 3; Oakes, Guentchev, Harvey 2; Oldfield, Hughes, Thomas, Taylor, M Johnson, G Johnson, S Davis, Vilstrup, Feuer, Peake and McLaren.

APPEARANCES, as sub in brackets: S Davis 27; Alexander 26 (1);

Johnson 26; Feuer 26; Harvey 25 (Marshall 23); Waddock 21 (4); Hughes 21 (1); James 18 (3); Guentchev 16 (8); Oakes 16 (1); Oldfield 15 (9); Peake 15 (3); Taylor 14 (8); Thomas 13 (2); Thorpe 12 (8); McLaren 9; Linton 6 (2); Riseth 6 (5); Vilstrup 6 (1); K Davis 5; Douglas 1 (3); Woodford 1 (2). Before transfer: G Johnson 5 (1), Sommer 2. Number of players used 26 (27 last season).

Town's Cup record

FA CUP THIRD ROUND
Jan 6 Grimsby A 1-7 (Marshall) 5,387

GOAL: Marshall. Assist: Guentchev.
APPEARANCES: One each by Feuer, Patterson, James, M Johnson, Thomas, Waddock, Guentchev, Oakes, Oldfield, McLaren and Marshall. One as sub by Alexander and Thorpe.

COCA COLA CUP FIRST ROUND
Aug 15 (1) Bournemouth H 1-1 (Marshall) 2,728

Aug 22 (2) Bournemouth A 1-2 aet. (M. Johnson) 4,844

GOALS: Marshall and M. Johnson 1 each.

ASSISTS: S. Davis and Alexander 1 each.

APPEARANCES: Sommer, M. Johnson, S. Davis, Oldfield, Alexander, Marshall, Taylor, Guentchev and Harvey 2; Thomas 1 (1); James, Hughes

Defence was on suicide mission

MANAGER Lennie Lawrence blamed "kamikazi defending" for a disappointing home defeat against fellow strugglers who always looked likely winners in the second half.

He had to field a makeshift back four, with Steve Davis suspended and Darren Patterson and Marvin Johnson injured. Trevor Peake, 39, in his first game for three months, looked class, and Gary Waddock and David Oldfield did well in midfield.

But the attack, without the pace of Dwight Marshall, was toothless, and Julian James did not look comfortable as a right back pressed into central defensive service.

Bontcho Guentchev maintained his 100 per cent record from the spot to give the Town an early lead, netting his sixth penalty after Jeff Hopkins pulled him back by his shirt as both chased a high ball down the middle by Peake.

LUTON TOWN 1 READING 2

The result would probably have been very different if two near things had been goals: Tony Thorpe and John Taylor both hit the woodwork, but after that first half hour the Town started to look second best.

Martin Booty stole up from midfield and was unmarked six yards from goal on the far post to head in Michael Meaker's cross in injury time at the end of the first half, and Stuart Lovell shot the winner Reading always threatened in the 11th minute, with the defensive marking again highly suspect.

"Reading were the better team in the two penalty areas, where it really matters," said Lawrence after tasting home defeat for the first time since he came to Luton.