

Big match facts

TOWN: Feur; James, Davis, Patterson, Thomas, Alexander (McLaren 72 mins), Oldfield (Tomlinson 81 mins), Waddock, Oakes, Harvey (Thorpe 81 mins); Taylor.

SHEFFIELD UNITED: Tracy; Short (Starbuck 58 mins), Hodgson, Abelt, Nilset, Ward, Hutchison, Patterson, Whitehouse (Cowan 81 mins); Taylor (White 58 mins), Walker.

THE GOAL: Don Hutchison, from an indirect free kick seven yards from goal wrongly given by the referee for an alleged back pass by Mitchell Thomas.

OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town six saved and four wide; United four saved, seven wide and 20-yarder by David White hit the bar.

REFEREE: Trevor West, Hull. Had a good game except for one monumental mistake which decided it.

BOOKED: Steve Davis for a foul on Andy Walker and which will lead to another suspension, and United's Don Hutchison and on-loan Gary Ablett for fouls on Graham Alexander and John Taylor.

ATTENDANCE: 14,935, third highest at any Town game this season.

ENTERTAINMENT: Top quality in the first half, when the Town were easily the better passing side but let down by the old failure to turn chances into goals. They fell away after the interval, with the ref's blunder the final blow.

Do or die is the

Gift from the ref shocks the Town at Bramall Lane



LATE FLOURISH: Skipper and centre-half Steve Davis, wearing 5 on the left, is among those giving support to John Taylor as the Town pile on pressure in the closing minutes at Bramall Lane

SHEFFIELD UTD 1 LUTON TOWN 0

MANAGER Lennie Lawrence was one of the few connected with Luton Town who were not publicly furious with referee Trevor West of Hull for the part he played in a cruel defeat at Bramall Lane, which the manager had billed as "one we must not lose."

Wrestled amidst both sides by giving an indirect free kick seven yards from goal after the hall bounced off Mitchell Thomas into the hands of Ian Feur. The ref was the only man in the stadium who thought it was a back pass, but United accepted the gift, with Don Hutchison firing the 77th-minute decider.

Town players were incensed, and Lawrence agreed he could

never remember a similar decision being made.

But he added that by the first-half chances, and he became second best after the interval. The season-long goal still persists - the manager is conceding the Town as a good as beaten because of the lack of firepower at the other end.

John Taylor had an impressive game, except for wanting clear chances, with headgear straight at the goalkeeper.

Boncho Guentchev had been dropped, but new signing Graeme Tomlinson, on loan from Manchester United, given only nine minutes action as a sub, by which time the day was cast.

plan against Ipswich

REPORTS BY BRIAN SWAIN
PICTURES BY GARETH OWEN

LUTON Town will go for broke at Kenilworth Road on Saturday, at the start of a run of four crucial matches in ten days. As he prepares for the first, at home to Ipswich, manager Lennie Lawrence said: "There will be no question of playing it safe. It will be do or die, and we will be looking for goals in a game we have to win."

"We will have an attacking team, and there could well be three forwards on the bench."

Boncho Guentchev, who was for the England game at Wembley last night, will be back in contention for the visit of Ipswich, after being left out of Sheffield United.

"He was looking a bit shell-shocked," said the manager. "He cares very deeply about his form and his performances, and he needs a rest. But he wants to do well, and to score goals."

Saturday gives the Town their last chance to score a goal in March, after four blanks, and Lawrence hopes there will be three new strikers competing for places in the attack: Graeme Tomlinson will be on the bench or given a full debut, and two other recruits being chased yesterday could also be signed in time to play.

Said Lawrence: "The relegation battle is now between the bottom six, and it is vital we

further behind. In the good run soon after I came we played a number of teams at the right time, with no form, with three more games at home than away, and perhaps the results were a little unrealistic. We also had a bit of luck at times, but that has since evened itself out."

"By today I wanted us to have 40 points, so we are three short. In the last three or four weeks we have not done enough to climb away from danger. Fortunately, not have Watford, Oldham or Reading, and I don't think Sheffield United and West Brom are completely out of it yet."

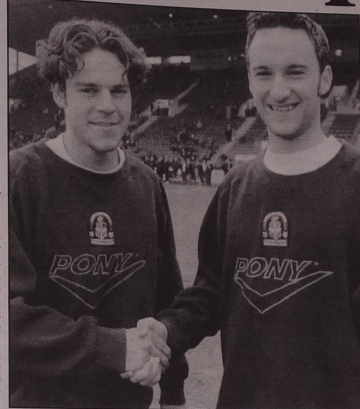
"But we must win on Saturday, and we must get to the season's last fortnight, with three home games left, still in touch. We cannot afford to fall further behind."

"It can be done, but we are one win behind schedule at the moment."

With new signings in prospect, Lawrence expects to make a change or two in the side.

Defender Marvin Johnson, out for five games with an ankle injury, might be fit for Saturday, but the defence has played so consistently he may have to wait for Steve Davis to start his suspension before being recalled.

After Ipswich the Town have a six-pointer away to West Brom on Tuesday (7.45) before going to Charlton a week tomorrow. Good Friday. Stoke City are the visitors for the other Easter game, on the Tuesday.



WELCOME TO THE CLUB: Graeme Tomlinson, left, who may make his full Luton Town debut on Saturday, gets the glad hand from Scott Oakes

Suspension means Davis will be out for two games

SKIPPER Steve Davis and mid-fielder Gary Waddock are both facing suspensions for collecting too many yellow cards.

Waddock passed 21 points with a booking for hands at Crystal Palace, and will miss next Tuesday's match at West Brom. Davis collected his tenth caution of the season at Sheffield, which

pushes him past the 33-point mark, and that brings his third suspension of the season. He misses two games, Stoke at home and Birmingham away. His previous suspensions covered three games, and all were defeats, at Grimsby in the FA Cup, and in the league away to Sunderland and at home to Reading.

Leicester, currently a point below the play-off zone, could have a major say in the relegation equation because they figure on the fixture lists of Watford, Oldham, Sheffield United and West Brom.

Remaining fixtures for the bottom six, with * denoting realistic promotion-chasing teams, in or within a point of the top six:

LUTON TOWN (5 home 5 away): Home - Ipswich*, Stoke*, Watford, Barnsley*, Port Vale. Away - West Brom, Charlton*, Birmingham, Port Vale, Oldham.

WATFORD (6 home 4 away): Home - Sunderland*, Portsmouth, Port Vale, Reading, Grimsby, Leicester*, Ayr - Wolves, Southend, Luton, Norwich.

OLDHAM (5 home 5 away): Home - Oldham, C. Palace*, Wolves, Charlton*, Sheffield Utd. Away - Huddersfield*, Ipswich, Watford, Barnsley*, Birmingham.

SHEFFIELD UTD (4 home 4 away): Home - Southend, Wolves, Sunderland*, Port Vale. Away - Leicester*, Portsmouth, Grimsby, Reading.

WEST BROM (4 home 5 away): Home - Luton, Millwall, Grimsby, Derby*, Ayr - Portsmouth, Leicester*, Norwich, Sunderland*, Barnsley*.

ADMITTING that he had not done himself justice in his six months at Luton Town, midfielder Johnny Vistrup returned to Denmark this week, but said: "I will be back next season."

He has gone on loan to AGF of Aarhus after making only half a dozen full league appearances for the Town. He will stay with them until the end of the Danish season in late May, and said: "I know I have not reached top fitness here at Luton, and it has been a disappointing time for me. But I want to play here, and I hope I can get fully fit and be back to try to get into the team next season."

Manager Lennie Lawrence said he would want to see how things panned out, but confirmed that Vistrup's move would be helpful to the Town's wages bill. He said: "If we get out of it will be considered. But Johnny has struggled to make an impact here, and at 29 he doesn't have time on his side."

Two Norwegian clubs have made enquiries about striker Vidar Riseth, one to ask for a loan, the other to try to buy.

Lawrence said: "There is no hurry to make a decision, because the season in Norway does not start until mid-April, and Vidar has a bad ankle at present."

"We will listen to offers, and while I think he will go to Norway a lot depends on him whether it is a loan or a permanent transfer."



LUTON TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB

Dogfight goes on and on.....

LENNIE Lawrence believes the First Division relegation dogfight will go on until the final two weeks of the season at least. And the fixture list has ensured that the last month has plenty of six-pointers.

The Town still have to play three of the other bottom five, Watford, West Brom and Oldham.

Other crunches are Watford v Reading and Sheffield United v Reading. But all Watford's other games are against teams much higher up the table, and like Sheffield United and West Brom they include League Reading, Oldham, who enter the Town on the last day of the season, still have to take on second-placed Derby, as do West Brom.

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ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE DIVISION ONE

AUGUST			
13 Norwich	H	1-3 (Guentchev pen)	7,848 -
14 Salford	A	1-1 (Thorpe)	4,830 -
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
16 Sunder'd	H	0-2	6,955 - 23
23 Wolves	A	0-0	23,659 - 24
30 Portsm'th	H	3-1 (Marshall, Davis, Guentchev)	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)	8,047 - 23
19 Birm'ng	A	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)	9,025 - 23
9 Wolves	H	2-3 (Oakes, Marshall)	8,997 - 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 2)	6,566 - 24
20 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
APRIL			
2 C Palace	A	0-0	8,478 - 20
9 Hudders'd	A	0-1	11,950 - 20
16 C Palace	A	2-2	13,609 - 23
23 Sheff Utd	A	0-1	14,935 - 23
MAY			
4 Oldham	A		

Town's season at a glance...

DATE... OPPONENTS... RESULT... SCORE

APPEARANCES... GOALS

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE

Latest placings

THE Town's tenth away defeat of the season cost them the chance of moving out of the bottom three, and made a last ditch showdown at Oldham a distant possibility. Oldham's defeat at Sunderland and Reading's at Tranmere were the kindest results of the weekend for the Town, but Grimsby's surprise win at Huddersfield was a blow. And the three-point gap between the Town and safety is in reality four points because of their poor scoring record.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sunderland	37	11	5	2	26	8	7	4	23	18	69	
Derby C	38	11	7	1	36	17	6	7	6	20	25	65
Crystal P	38	8	8	3	30	18	8	6	5	24	23	62
Charlton	36	8	7	3	26	20	7	7	4	25	20	59
Stoke	36	9	6	3	25	12	5	6	7	22	26	54
Ipswich	36	10	4	4	39	26	4	7	7	27	28	53
Hudders'd	37	11	4	4	33	20	3	7	8	15	26	53
Leicester	37	6	7	5	24	24	7	6	6	30	30	52
Barnsley	37	9	7	2	30	22	6	9	2	32	32	52
Southend	38	9	6	4	24	19	4	6	9	21	33	51
Norwich	38	8	5	5	21	19	6	4	9	28	26	48
Birmingham	37	8	7	4	27	20	4	5	9	22	30	48

*Not including last night's match, Portsmouth v Port Vale

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 Feur, 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); James, Hughes

ANGLO-ITALIAN CUP

Sep 5 Perugia H 1-4 (Guentchev pen)

2,352

Oct 11 Genoa A 0-4 3,759

Nov 8 Everton A 1-2 (Marshall) 481

Dec 13 Ancona H 5-0 (Oakes, Marshall, Taylor, Thorpe, Guentchev pen) 2,091

GOALS: Marshall 2; Guentchev 1; Oakes, Taylor and Thorpe 1 each.

ASSISTS: Taylor 2; Hughes, Lawton, Marshall 2(1); Guentchev, James, M. Johnson, Oldfield, Patterson, Lawton and Vistrup 2; Thorpe (1); Alexander and Waddock 1(1); Skelton, Evers, Hughes and Woodford 2; Simpson (1)



LIFE'S A BITCH: Graham Alexander down in the dumps after another Town match failure