

Big match facts

TOWN: Feuer; Alexander, Johnson, Patterson, Thomas; Oldfield (Taylor 88 mins), Waddock, Oakes, Thorpe (Tomlinson 76 mins); Guentchev, Grant. Unused sub goalkeeper Davis.

STOKE CITY: Prudhoe; Clarkson, Sandford, Sigurdsson, Whittle, Dreyer (Pater 54 mins); Beston (Carruthers 84 mins), Wallace, Gleghorn; Sheron (Keen 89 mins), Sturridge.

THE GOALS: 1-0 44 mins: Kim Grant shot through a crowd after Bontcho Guentchev battled through Stoke's right flank to deliver a low cross; 1-1 86 mins: Simon Sturridge, bursting through the middle and shooting home across Ian Feike into the far corner; 1-2 90 mins: Mike Sheron, unmarked for a header from a diagonal free kick by Nigel Gleghorn.

OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town seven saved and seven wide; Stoke six saved and three wide. Corners: 6-4 to Stoke.

REFEREE: Uriah Rennie, Sheffield. Made a lot of decisions which were very hard to understand.

BOOKED: John Dreyer for encroaching at a free kick; Darren Patterson for a foul on Nigel Gleghorn.

ATTENDANCE: 7,689 - a reminder that fans would prefer an Easter Monday game?

ENTERTAINMENT: Heartbreaking for Town fans, whose team allowed itself to be mugged: six wins out of 20 home games is a relegation formula.

DOUBLE SHADOW: Kim Grant outbursts by Richard Rufus and Steve Brown at The Valley, where he drew a blank against his old team Shammas, but it was not enough to prevent Stoke City winning



AGE COMPANY

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE DIVISION ONE

		AUGUST	
13 Norwich	H	1-3 (Guentchev pen)	7,848 -
19 Southend	A	1-1 (Hughes)	4,480 -
26 Leicester	H	1-0	7,612 - 17
29 Grimsby	A	0-2	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 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 - 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
15 Birmingham	H	0-0	9,220 - 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, 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
		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)	7,581 - 20
		MARCH	
17 Millwall	H	1-0 (Thorpe pen)	7,309 - 19
21 Derby	A	1-1 (Marshall)	14,825 - 17
24 Sunderland	A	0-1	16,693 - 19
29 Reading	H	1-2 (Guentchev pen)	6,683 - 20
		APRIL	
2 C Palace	H	0-0	8,478 - 20
9 Huddersfield	A	0-1	11,950 - 20
16 C Palace	A	0-2	13,609 - 23
23 Sheff Utd	H	0-1	14,925 - 23
30 Ipswich	H	1-2 (Grant)	9,151 - 23
		MAY	
2 West Brom	A	2-0 (Guentchev, Grant)	15,131 - 23
5 Charlton	A	1-3 (Grant)	14,633 - 23
9 Stoke	H	1-2 (Grant)	9,151 - 23
13 Birmingham	A		
20 Watford	A		
23 P. Vale	A		
27 Barnsley	A		
30 P. Vale	A		
4 Oldham	A		

Town's season at a glance...

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

Latest placings

WHILE THE TOWN took only one point from their two Easter games, all the teams just above them did better. The result is that the gap between the Town and safety is wider today than it was a week ago. The crucial results were Reading winning 2-1 at Ipswich, Oldham winning 3-1 at Port Vale and West Brom just about ending their worries with a 2-1 win at Leicester on Tuesday.

	HOME					AWAY						
	P	W	D	L	F A	P	W	D	L	F A	Pts	
Sunderland	41	12	6	2	29	10	9	8	4	27	21	77
Derby C	42	13	7	1	45	20	7	7	7	21	26	74
Crystal P	42	8	9	4	32	21	10	6	5	30	24	69
Charlton	40	8	8	4	27	22	8	4	4	26	20	64
Stoke	40	10	6	4	28	14	6	6	8	25	30	60
Ipswich	40	11	4	5	41	28	5	7	8	30	32	59
Huddersf	41	13	4	3	29	23	3	7	10	17	31	59
Leicester	41	6	7	7	25	28	9	6	6	32	30	38
Southend	42	10	7	4	27	20	4	6	11	22	36	55
Barnsley	41	9	8	3	32	25	4	7	10	23	37	54
Birmingham	40	10	7	4	32	21	4	5	10	23	32	54
Sheff Utd	42	9	5	7	28	24	5	7	9	23	29	54
Grimsby	40	8	9	4	26	22	6	3	10	23	34	53
Norwich	42	7	8	6	23	20	6	5	9	31	29	53
Wolves	41	8	5	14	26	5	6	10	21	30	52	
Port Vale	39	8	7	4	26	25	5	9	10	20	36	52
West Brom	41	9	5	7	28	26	4	11	23	36	51	
Tranmere	40	7	8	5	34	26	5	5	10	29	49	
Portsmouth	42	8	5	8	34	31	4	7	10	25	35	48
Millwall	41	6	7	6	19	24	6	6	9	20	32	48
Reading	40	7	6	7	25	27	3	10	7	21	28	46
Oldham	40	8	6	6	30	20	3	6	11	19	27	45
Luton T	40	6	5	7	26	29	4	6	10	10	24	41
Watford	40	4	8	7	25	25	2	9	10	20	35	40

*Not including last year's match. Millwall v Birmingham

*Not including last night's match, Millwall v Birmingham.

APPEARANCES... GOALS

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE

GOALS: Marshall 9 (4 pens); Thorpe 4 (1 pen); Grant and Oakes 3; Davis and Oldfield 2; Hughes, Harvey, Douglas, Alexander and McLaren 1.

ASSISTS: Thorpe 6; Alexander and Guentchev 4; Marshall 3; Oakes, Oldfield and Harvey 2; Grant, Hughes, Thomas, Taylor, M. Johnson, G. Johnson, S. Davis, Vilstrup, Feuer, Peake and McLaren 1.

APPEARANCES: as sub in brackets: Feuer and S Davis 33; Alexander 30

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);

REPORTS BY BRIAN SWAIN
PICTURES BY GARETH OWEN

LUTON TOWN 1

STOKE CITY 2

HEARTBROKEN fans who saw Luton Town beaten in the last four minutes at Kenilworth Road on Thursday had every sympathy with the team. "So unlucky, typical of the way it goes when you're up against it," was the general banter after the game.

OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town saved, three wide and 80th-minute header kick by Graeme Tomlinson, eight wide and 82nd-minute shot by Linger hit a post. Corners: 7-6 to the Town.

REFEREE: Bill Burns, Scarborough. Town fans thought he was harsh with the penalty award, but he failed to give an obvious one against Darren Patterson as he was more open, and been defied by a goalkeeper who had an inspired night.

ATTENDANCE: 14,633, highest of the season, and their just reward for dropping admission prices by five per cent for a game being televised live on London.

ENTERTAINMENT: A good cause adding to the feeling that there is no much difference between teams at the top of the First Division and those at the bottom.

The world saw Newcastle fans weeping when it happened to them at Blackburn. The same agony went through Town fans.

But anger was the dominant feeling of the Town manager after a defeat that leaves First Division survival hopes all but dead.

"We didn't seem to want to do it, we let it happen. One team knew we were to win, and one has forgotten to win."

"That was the first game since I've been here where we have had many good chances to finish the game off, never mind the good ones the goalkeeper made."

It made Macari change his formation. Left back John Dreyer was

taken off, midfielder Graham Potter went on, and Stoke were a conventional 4-4-2 team.

The need for an equaliser at last gave the Town space in the Stoke half, and a spirited team performance had the home fans cheering.

But Prudhoe had one of those days when he could do no wrong. When skill and bravery were not enough, he had luck with him.

In one amazing sequence Guentchev, Tony Thorpe and David Oldfield all saw shots bounced off the keeper, who then made good saves on purpose from Scott Oakes and Thorpe.

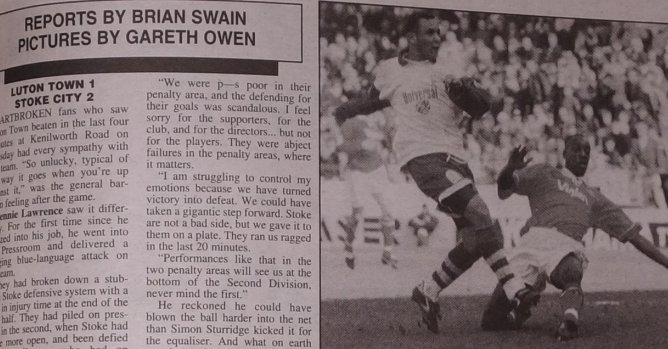
But the breakthrough would not come, and with no Paul Wilkinson the option of high crosses was denied the Town.

"He put in tremendous effort, but the nerves and tension kept into their game in the closing stages."

Referee Uriah Rennie, whose contribution added little to the entertainment, took great care to signal his verdict on time-wasting, and the extra time added on was a nightmare for the Town.

I had 66 minutes on my watch when the defence was caught out by Simon Sturridge's pace as he pinched an equaliser on the break from a long ball by Nigel Gleghorn, and the clock showed 93 minutes when the final disaster overtook the Town. Gleghorn played in a diagonal free kick from the left, and Mike Sheron was given the freedom of the penalty area to head the winner.

And Stoke, unlike the Town, were too canny to throw it away with schoolboy defending. But it was still a very bitter experience for Town fans, who had been uplifted by much of what they saw, then stunned by the final outcome. You can argue if the performance was relegation form or not. The trouble is that the result is



OVER THE TOP: Kim Grant fires too high in an attempt to put the Town two up at Charlton



Fight to the death

MANAGER Lennie Lawrence will demand that Luton Town will scrap to the last kick of the season if necessary in the bid to avoid dropping into the Second Division.

And if it is all down to the final match, at Oldham, that will be no more than he would have accepted when he took on the Kenilworth Road job.

Lawrence came to Luton when the Town were bottom of the table, (our wins from 22 league games). They had 18 points, and were five adrift of the then safety line.

In 18 matches since then 23 points have been won, but the safety line is still five points away - effectively six because the Town's 36 goals scored this season is the worst in the division.

The manager knows that Luton have a tradition of settling their fate on the last day of the season, most famously at Maine Road, Manchester, when Raddy Antle earned immortality.

Lawrence said yesterday: "If someone had said to me when I came that we would need a point to stay up at Oldham on the last day, I would have said that was OK by me. If we have to win on the last day, so be it. 'Let them all write us off. We have got to have the bottle to keep playing our football.'

I have said for some time that I believe the last fortnight will be crucial. My hope is that we get to 50 points with two or three games to go. We have got to keep battling, but we need victories. I won't give up until it is statistically impossible.

Luton have a tradition of settling their fate on the last day of the season, most famously at Maine Road, Manchester, when Raddy Antle earned immortality.

Lawrence said yesterday: "If someone had said to me when I came that we would need a point to stay up at Oldham on the last day, I would have said that was OK by me. If we have to win on the last day, so be it. 'Let them all write us off. We have got to have the bottle to keep playing our football.'

I have said for some time that I believe the last fortnight will be crucial. My hope is that we get to 50 points with two or three games to go. We have got to keep battling, but we need victories. I won't give up until it is statistically impossible.

Luton have a tradition of settling their fate on the last day of the season, most famously at Maine Road, Manchester, when Raddy Antle earned immortality.

Lawrence said yesterday: "If someone had said to me when I came that we would need a point to stay up at Oldham on the last day, I would have said that was OK by me. If we have to win on the last day, so be it. 'Let them all write us off. We have got to have the bottle to keep playing our football.'

I have said for some time that I believe the last fortnight will be crucial. My hope is that we get to 50 points with two or three games to go. We have got to keep battling, but we need victories. I won't give up until it is statistically impossible.

Luton have a tradition of settling their fate on the last day of the season, most famously at Maine Road, Manchester, when Raddy Antle earned immortality.

Lawrence said yesterday: "If someone had said to me when I came that we would need a point to stay up at Oldham on the last day, I would have said that was OK by me. If we have to win on the last day, so be it. 'Let them all write us off. We have got to have the bottle to keep playing our football.'

I have said for some time that I believe the last fortnight will be crucial. My hope is that we get to 50 points with two or three games to go. We have got to keep battling, but we need victories. I won't give up until it is statistically impossible.

CONFRONTATION: Charlton's Richard Rufus and the Town's Paul Wilkinson seem to be ready to swap shirts at The Valley