

Big match facts

BIRMINGHAM CITY 4 LUTON TOWN 0
TOWN: Feuer; Alexander, Johnson, Patterson, Thomas; Oldfield (Tomlinson 64 mins), Waddock (Harvey 35 mins), Oakes, Thorpe; Guentchev (Taylor 54 mins), Grant.
BIRMINGHAM: Griemink; Poole, Breen, Edwards, Grainger; Tait (Legg 54 mins), Cornforth (Francis 70 mins), Devin, Hunt (Johnson 59 mins); Barnes, Peschillo, Oldfield.
THE GOALS: 1-0 18.45 seconds: Paul Devlin from Martin Grainger's long ball down the middle; 2-0 76 mins: Kevin Francis far post header from right wing cross by Gary Poole; 3-0 77 mins: Paul Barnes from pass by Paul Peschillo; 4-0 in stoppage time: Barnes from the rebound after Ian Feuer parried a drive by Peschillo.
OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town five saved and eight wide; Birmingham ten saved and six wide. Corners: 3-3.
REFEREE: Roger Gifford, Llanbadoc - was let down at times by his linesmen over dodgy offside decisions, with the Town falling into the trap too often.
BOOKED: Paul Tait and Martin Grainger, both for fouls, with Grainger's putting Kim Grant out of the game and reducing the Town to ten men for the last 20 minutes.
ATTENDANCE: 15,426, including 630 from Luton, who did their best to raise the team that didn't seem to have the will to battle for survival.
ENTERTAINMENT: Gruesome for Town fans, with the team looking Second Division after gifting Birmingham the early goal.



BLOTTED OUT: Tony Thorpe discovers odds of two to one are too much for him

Hatters have to

Oh for another ten-goal Payne!

ON THE 60th anniversary of Joe Payne's record-breaking ten-goal debut for Luton Town, the goals rained in again at St. Andrew's... but in the wrong net.

Payne's ten in one game contrasts bleakly with today's Luton Town - ten goals between them in 21 away games all season.

We knew the attack was shotless, but as relegation pressure builds the defence has also caught the collywobblers.

Managers Barry Fry and Lennie Lawrence both thought defeat on a ground where the Town had lost only once in five previous visits was down to the psychological damage done when Stoke were allowed to score twice in the last four minutes at Kenilworth Road a few days before.

Birmingham were allowed to take the lead in 18.45 seconds, straight from the kick-off and without a Town player touching the ball, and the result was never in doubt after that.

Payne's heroics in April 1936 were not quite good enough for the Town to gain promotion from Division Three South that year. But he hit 55 the following season to help win the price.

Those figures are never likely to be equalled in today's league football, but it is time for the Town to plan for a relegation in now a near certainty.

The losses of Dwight Marshall and Paul Wilkinson have been big blows, tied off with 20 minutes to go, leaving the Town down to ten men after two subs had been committed.

Significantly, the best Town attack at goal came from midfielder Robert Harvey, with a free kick which was brilliantly saved, but Birmingham came back with three late goals for a result which flattered them a little, and left the Town 'staring into the abyss' as Lawrence's words.

The January revival he masterminded looks like a false dawn. In his first seven league games in charge the Town were unbeaten and took 17 points, and rose from bottom to 17th place in the table. In 12 games since then they have been only one win, at West Brom, and the yield has been six points out of 36.

Oh for another Joe Payne!

put last nail in Hornets

REPORTS BY BRIAN SWAIN
PICTURES BY GARETH OWEN

(Continued from back page)
"We have to win to have any chance of staying up. A draw is no good to either team - that would probably be the final nail in both coffins."

Lawrence is working on the assumption that Grant will miss the game - he will not be risked at anything much less than 100 per cent fitness - and is looking at four players for two attacking spots: John Taylor, Scott Oakes, Borich Guentchev and Graeme Tomlinson.

He was planning to pair Taylor and Tomlinson together for half a game in the reserves against Chelsea last night, so that could be his favoured solution, leaving Oakes and Guentchev to provide the ammunition from midfield.

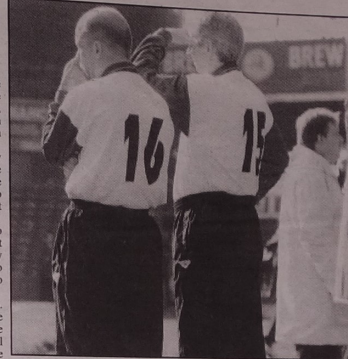
Tomlinson has been disappointed at not starting a game since joining the Town on loan from Manchester United, but might now be set for his chance.

He was recruited before Lawrence completed the transfer of Grant, otherwise we would have seen Tomlinson in 90-minute action before now.

The major demand on Saturday will be to score goals. Lawrence figures that for the Town to have any chance of beating the drop to the Second Division they must win four of their last five games.

He said: "We have got to go for it. We have a ten per cent chance. If we win on Saturday and Portsmouth lose at home to Barnsley it might go up to a 15 to 20 per cent chance."

"Certainly we will not give up. Players are well aware of the importance of Saturday's game and I know how important local derbies are to supporters. We are not dead yet and we must go out and give ourselves and the fans reason to hope that we can still get out of trouble, despite the odds."



GLOOMY OUTLOOK: Wayne Turner and Lennie Lawrence are helpless spectators as the Town cave in at St. Andrew's

Luton RFC win the battle to sign the former Bedford skipper

LUTON Rugby Club scored a major coup this week when they beat their neighbours Stockwood Park and several other clubs to sign up the former Bedford captain, the highly rated Paul Alston.

Alston joined his new team-mates at a sporting dinner at Newlands Road on Tuesday night.

He is 31 and has had an impressive career starting with Bedford at the age of 13.

One of the strongest back row players in the region he is now 31 and played for England Schools under-18s and England Colts.

He played for Northampton and Barbarians before returning to Bedford where he has skipped the club's first team for the past three seasons.

He said: "I am looking forward to new challenges at Luton and think I have three more years ahead of me at this level. Stockwood asked me to join them but Luton got the foot in the door first."

"Luton Rugby Club has some of the best facilities I have seen in the country and I am hoping to bring some success back to the club."

"I want them to get back into the habit of winning and to promote Luton as the centre of rugby excellence that it deserves to be."



Return of Davis could be a good omen for Town

IF YOU believe in omens, the return of Steve Davis should improve the Town's chances of beating Watford. He has completed his third suspension of the season, which forced him to miss five matches.

Every one was lost, with the goals figures three scored and 16 conceded. But after the two previous suspensions Davis came back and the Town halted the rot: after missing the FA Cup humiliation at Grimsby he led the Town to a 3-1 home win over Southend.

His next suspension kept him out of defeats at Sunderland and at home to Reading, and he then returned for the 0-0 draw against promotion-chasing Crystal Palace. Davis has played in nine of the ten league games the Town have won this season - Trannmere at home was the odd one out - in ten of the 11 draws and in 14 of the 20 defeats.



OMEN: Lawrence needs the luck

Youth topple the league leaders

CHASING runners-up honours in the South East Counties Second Division, the Town's youth team enjoyed toppling league leaders Crystal Palace at Monday, are away to Millwall next Monday.

Palace rested some of their brighter young talents before Monday's FA Youth Cup semi-final against Liverpool, but the Town lads were good value for a 2-0 away win against a side that beat them 5-2 in the league on the opening day of the season, and then put them out of the SEC League Cup after a replay.

Stuart Douglas and Andre Scarlett scored the goals which kept the Town up with the chasing pack, which Palace have already buttoned up the championship. John Moore's boys have no game on Saturday, but on Wednesday they will be away to Wivenhoe in the semi-final of the Eastern Junior Cup.

The reserves, beaten 1-0 at Bristol City on Monday, are away to Millwall next Monday.

WHATEVER happens on the field, manager Lennie Lawrence has promised that his players will still meet the fans next week when Luton Town Supporters' Club hosts its annual player of the year presentation night.

It will be at the Kent Social Club, Luton, on Saturday week, and tickets cost £4 to members, £5 to others, and they will be on sale at Saturday's match from the LTSC kiosk in Kenilworth Road.

Last chance to get seats for the derby

SEAT sales for Saturday's all-ticket match with Watford end at 4pm tomorrow, and the Town remind supporters that no tickets will be sold on the day, nor will there be any cash admission to the ground.

Sales have been brisk, with the enclosure selling particularly well, but yesterday there still some spare seats in the Kenilworth and stand ends.

Watford expect to bring a good following, with well over 1,000 of their tickets for the Oak Road end already snapped up.

For Tuesday's Town match at Port Vale no advance tickets are on offer - it is pay on the night, £10 each, with no concessionary rates.



TRYING: John Taylor fires off a shot that went just too high

Town's season at a glance...

DATE...	OPPONENTS...	RESULT...	SCORE...	APPEARANCES...	GOALS...
ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE DIVISION ONE					
AUGUST					
13 Norwich	H	1-3 (Guentchev pen)	7,948		
19 Southend	A	1-0 (Thorpe)	4,630		
28 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	1-1	7,076	22	
16 Sunday	H	0-2	6,555	23	
23 Wolves	A	0-0	23,659	24	
30 Portsmouth	A	0-1 (Marshall, Davis, Guentchev pen)	7,795	23	
OCTOBER					
7 Trannmere	A	0-1	6,680	24	
14 W Brom	H	1-2 (Harvey)	8,042	24	
22 Ipswich	A	1-0 (Oldfield)	8,123	21	
29 Charlton	H	0-1	6,270	22	
NOVEMBER					
4 Stoke	A	0-1	9,382	23	
11 Oldham	H	1-1 (Douglas)	6,047	23	
18 Birmingham	H	0-0	7,920	23	
21 Watford	A	1-1 (Davis)	10,042	23	
28 Portsmouth	A	0-1	6,437	23	
DECEMBER					
2 Trannmere	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 Hudders'd	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	24	
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	
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	
MARCH					
2 C Palace	H	0-0	8,478	20	
9 Hudders'd	A	0-1	11,950	20	
16 Palace	A	0-2	13,609	23	
23 Sheff Utd	A	1-1	14,936	23	
30 Ipswich	H	1-2 (Grant)	9,151	23	
APRIL					
2 West Brom	A	2-0 (Guentchev, Grant)	15,131	23	
5 Charlton	A	1-1 (Thorpe)	14,533	23	
9 Stoke	H	1-2 (Grant)	9,151	23	
16 Birmingham	H	0-4	15,426	23	
20 Watford	A				
23 P. Vale	A				
27 Barnsley	H				
30 P. Vale	H				
MAY					
5 Oldham	A				

*Not including last night's matches, Leicester v Oldham.

Latest placings

HOME	AWAY	Pts
Sunderland	43 16 2 32	109
Derby C	43 13 7 1	45
Crystal P	43 9 4 21	30
Stoke	41 8 9 4	27
Ipswich	41 11 6 4	35
Hudders'd	42 14 4 4	22
Leicester	42 6 7 25	28
Birmingham	43 11 7 4	36
Port Vale	41 9 4 7	27
Sheff Utd	43 9 6 7	38
Southend	43 10 7 4	27
Barnsley	42 9 8 4	32
West Brom	42 10 5 7	31
Grimsby	42 8 9 4	26
Wolves	42 8 8 5	34
Norwich	43 7 8 6	23
Millwall	43 7 6 8	21
Trannmere	41 7 9 5	31
Reading	42 7 6 7	25
Portsmouth	43 5 8 3	34
Oldham	41 8 7 6	30
Watford	42 6 8 7	34
Luton T	41 6 5 9	26

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 and Waddock 1; Thorpe (2); Matthews (1).

ANGLO-ITALIAN CUP
Sep 5 Perugia H 1-4 (Guentchev pen) 2,352
Oct 11 Genoa A 0-4 3,759
Nov 8 Cesena A 1-2 (Marshall) 461
Dec 13 Ancona H 5-0 (Oakes, Marshall, Taylor, Thorpe, Guentchev pen) 2,001
GOALS: Marshall 2; Guentchev 2; pens: Oakes, Taylor and Thorpe 1.
ASSISTS: Taylor 2; Hughes, Laine, Marshall and Harvey 1.
APPEARANCES: K. Davis, S. Davis and Harvey 4; Oakes and McLaren 3; Marshall 2 (1); Guentchev, James, Marshall, Oldfield, Patterson, Laine and Vilstrup 2; Thorpe (2); Alexander and Waddock (1); Skelton, Evans, Hughes, Riseth, Taylor, Thomas and Upson 1; Woodford (2); Simpson (1).