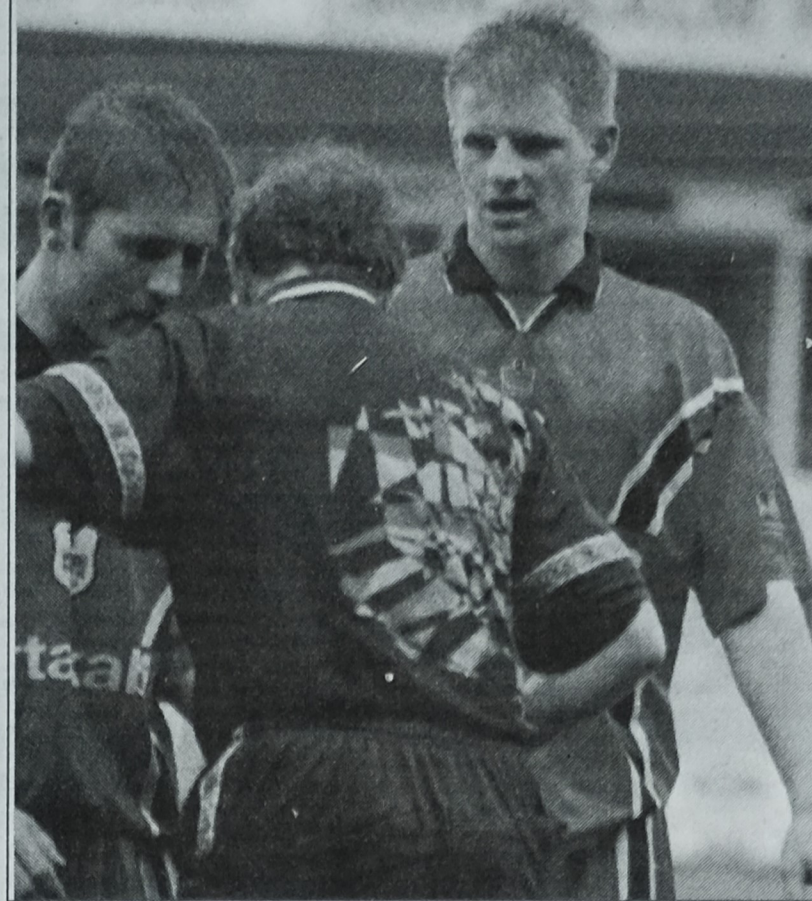




● When you've got to go...York players (left) argue with referee David Crick as he awards a penalty and prepares to send off Graeme Rennison; ● ...You've got to go: (Middle) Rennison gets his marching orders; ● Paul McLaren and David Oldfield celebrate Luton's second (right).

■ Vital win: Luton topple nine-man York to revive hopes of staying in second division

A crock of gold over the rainbow

Luton Town 3 York 0

By PETE KENYON

SUBSTITUTE Phil Gray nodded home a late goal to give Hatters another priceless win.

As a perfect rainbow arched over the rain-soaked goal at the Kenilworth Road end, how appropriate that Hatters should finally find the elusive pot of gold that has been lacking at home all season.

And how appropriate that with just six minutes left, Irishman Gray should cast himself in the role of Lucky Leprechaun to rise unmarked at the far post and finally kill off plucky City, who ended up with just nine players on the pitch.

Reduced to 10 men for the best part of an hour after 18-year-old debutant Graeme Rennison received his marching orders for stopping Rory Allen's goalbound effort on the line, York did their best to plunder a point. Graham Alexander sent Andy Warrington the wrong way with Hatters' first spot-kick of the season, and the result looked to be a formality.

Even more so when David Oldfield curled Alexander's pull-back into the top right-hand corner from 18 yards a minute before the break, as a second-half avalanche looked on the cards.

Hatters totally dominated the first half –

and could even afford the luxury of wasting two glorious opportunities.

On 20 minutes Allen slipped at the far post as he was about to head Dwight Marshall's inch-perfect cross into a half-empty net, and seconds later Alexander blazed an 18-yard effort over the bar with just the keeper to beat.

Sean Evers' viciously-dipping 25-yard shot looked to be going into the top corner, but Warrington flung himself across his goal to tip to safety.

But ten-man York weren't in any mood to surrender without a fight – and turned the heat on beleaguered Luton for half an hour.

Steve Davis – playing despite a groin injury and almost certain to miss Tuesday's trip to Grimsby – made an error of judgement which left Rodney Rowe free down the inside right.

But his cross failed to pick out an unmarked Richard Cresswell just six yards out.

Hatters didn't heed the warning and three minutes later Kelvin Davis had to make a fine diving save at full stretch to deny substitute Neil Tolson – who should have tucked the ball away from eight yards.

Marshall and Steve Davis were hauled off after picking up knocks – and suddenly Luton rallied for the last 15 minutes.

Gray should have picked out an unmarked Allen after getting to the by-line, but allowed his centre to be intercepted, and seconds later the Irishman

BOTTOM OF DIVISION TWO:

	P	Pts
17 Walsall	39	49
18 Wigan	39	48
19 LUTON	40	47
20 Brentford	41	46
21 Plymouth	41	45
22 Burnley	39	42
23 Carlisle	41	41
24 Southend	41	41

wasn't quite sharp enough to capitalise on Allen's headed flick from Thomas' cross.

13 minutes from time, Allen again wasted a glorious opportunity – sending a diving header wide of the post after good work from Alexander down the right flank.

Two minutes later a sweeping move ended with Warrington pulling off a remarkable save to deny Oldfield from point-blank range at the far post, but six minutes from time York finally buckled under the pressure – Gray heading home from 10 yards after Alexander had lofted a

deep cross to the back post. Hatters fans celebrated only a third back-to-back win all season, even mustering up the optimism to launch into a rendition of "We're staying up!"

In injury time Mark Tinkler received his marching orders after a bust-up with Allen – who was booked, to end off a miserable day for the York number eight who had been booked in the first half, the free-kick from which Luton won their penalty.

A delighted Lennie Lawrence said after the game: "To be fair, it wasn't York's day and it was ours.

"To have two men sent off must have made them sick. I thought the defender who stopped the ball on the line might have got away with a booking, but the law is the law and I suppose the referee had no choice."

But Lawrence admitted Tinkler's sending off in injury time was harsh, and said it was a travesty that York finished with only nine men following what had never been a dirty game.

Lawrence said: "We deserved to win and what is especially pleasing is to get

three goals last week and three goals this week. Phil Gray needed a goal badly so that was pleasing and Oldfield has now scored two in two games.

"We started too slowly in the second half and there was a nervousness about us even though we were winning.

"We took a gamble with playing Steve Davis, who has a groin strain, and he will struggle to play on Tuesday. Julian James also did well because he has been ill since Tuesday and has hardly trained."

And the Luton boss said Rory Allen was unlikely to feature against Grimsby in midweek – Lawrence doesn't feel the on-loan striker can manage two games in a week given his current fitness level.

Luton now move out of the relegation zone for the first time in a month and two more wins in the next six games should see them to safety.

Team: K. Davis, James, Thomas, Evers, S. Davis (White 74), Patterson, Marshall (Gray 71), McLaren, Oldfield, Allen, Alexander. Sub not used: Waddock.

Attendance: 5,541. Man of the match: Patterson.