

DAVE FLETT watches upset fans vent their frustration as Wigan thump a Kelvin Davis-less Luton

Kelvin hands it to us as Town get hit for four!

Lawrence abused after keeper's early bath

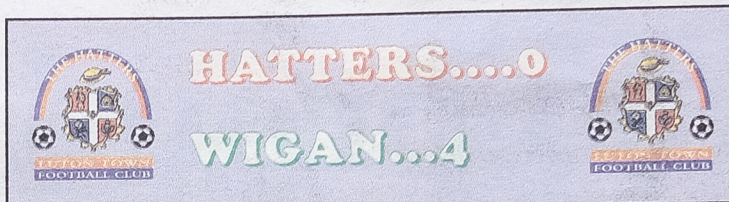
RUMBLINGS of 'Lawrence Out' echoed around Kenilworth Road as a Kelvin Davis-less Luton Town slumped to a miserable home defeat against Wigan.

The Hatters lost their goalkeeper after 23 minutes of Saturday's mid-table meeting for handling outside his area. Wigan had already taken the lead by that time and Davis' replacement Gerry Harrison went on to concede another three.

It was a painful afternoon for the home crowd and a small section levelled their frustration at the Hatters manager on the final whistle. The return of last season's familiar refrain clearly upset an exasperated Lawrence, who fumed afterwards: "People can scream and shout abuse as much as they like."

"We carry a lot of young players for development purposes. If half our experienced players are out through injury or suspension we are vulnerable. If you've got six players missing and your best player is sold, life gets hard from time to time."

"We've done alright so far but today with 10 men for 60 minutes and the goalkeeper sent off we got bashed. They brought a sub on who cost £600,000. We've got two bought players in the entire team."



"One of those was Landry Zahana-Oni for £25,000 and he was playing in the Ryman League four weeks ago. The other was Alan White at left back. Except for Sean Dyche, Gerry Harrison and Marvin Johnson, all the players are playing their first full season."

"If you look at the teams before the game and forget goalkeepers and sendings off, it's a hard one. They looked a good side when we had 11 on the pitch. The third goal killed us and it doesn't matter who was in goal for it because it was a great cross and a great header. In fact, Gerry did exceptionally well."

"We're very sorry. We tried our hardest but now and again we're going to get bashed I'm afraid. Until some of those people are out of the treatment room, it's going to be difficult."

After this defeat, the prospect of a play-off challenge does not seem difficult but near impossible. A season that started so promisingly is now in danger of becoming a mid-table scrap - at best!

Speaking at the end of October, with his side fourth in the league, Lawrence set a promotion target of 46 points by Christmas ('98 not '99). Since then, the Hatters have taken seven points from a possible 30 during a dramatic free-fall down the table and are still 12 points short of Lawrence's Yuletide tally.

Luton's problem remains the availability of senior players. There are still enough on the Kenilworth Road books but too many have question marks over their general fitness. If Lawrence had a full squad to choose from, he could field a side with three 30 somethings, five players aged between 26 and 28 and three aged 22.

But of those 11 players, six were sidelined on Saturday, including all three 30 somethings, and the question must be will the likes of Paul Showler, Mitchell Thomas and Julian James ever be fit. Ray McKinnon has also missed too many games this season with niggling hamstring and back problems.

Error

On Saturday, Davis' dismissal turned a likely defeat into a certain one with the Hatters' 10 men crumbling against an experienced and well-organised Wigan side.

An early bath for the Hatters' keeper was inevitable after a poor error in judgment. Davis raced out of his area and handled as Wigan striker Graeme Jones looked to knock the ball around him.

Wolverhampton referee Gurnam Singh had little hesitation in brandishing the red card and Harrison, already filling in at right back for Graham Alexander, was given an even sterner test of his versatility by donning Davis' number one shirt.

The reshuffle saw Gavin McGowan drop back from right midfield to right-back and Zahana-Oni move inside to join Sean Evers and Matthew Spring in a narrow three-man midfield that was easily overrun with the visitors' Andy Liddell and Michael O'Neill particularly impressive.

Wigan had gone ahead on 15 minutes when ex-Manchester United defender Pat McGibbon headed in from two yards after Alan White generously flicked on O'Neill's corner at the near post.

Harrison's first job between the sticks was to pick the ball out of the net when a suspiciously offside-looking Liddell raced on to Kevin Sharp's long ball and slipped the ball comfortably past the Sunderland loan man. At the other end, Sean Dyche went closest for the shell-shocked Hatters, his looping header forcing a fine fingertip save from Wigan keeper Roy Carroll on 38 minutes.

Andrew Fotiadis' quick feet were one of the highlights in a dismal first half for the home team but a groin strain meant he did not reappear alongside the struggling Stuart Douglas in the second period.

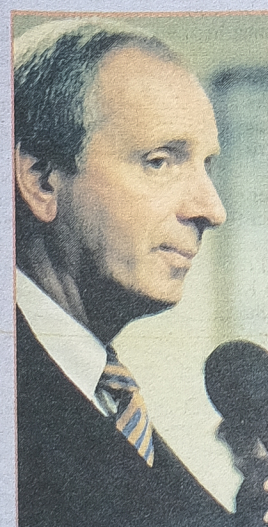
Fotiadis' replacement Gary Doherty briefly shone after the restart, dancing through the visitors' defence before seeing his blocked shot cleared off the line with Zahana-Oni slow to attack the loose ball.

That was about as good as it got for the home team. On 64 minutes,



● BALL GAMES: Hatters striker Johnson drives forward in the Wigan penalty box but forgets one thing - the ball!

LENNIE'S VERDICT



"We're very sorry. We tried our hardest but now and again we're going to get bashed I'm afraid."

People can scream and shout abuse as much as they like.

If you've got six players missing and your best player is sold, life gets hard from time to time.

We've done alright so far but with 10 men for 60 minutes and the goalkeeper sent off, we got bashed.

Until some of the people are out of the treatment room, it's going to be difficult. We're vulnerable and that's going to happen now and again."

PICTURES by Jane Sherlock

LUTON TOWN FC 1998-99

August	Opponents	Score	Scorers	Att	Pos
Sat 8	Wycombe	1-0	Davis (S) 36	5,252	10
Tues 11	OXFORD UTD (WC1)	2-3	Alexander 59 (pen), 63 (pen)	3,165	-
Sat 15	PRESTON	1-1	Marshall 54	5,392	7
Tues 18	Oxford Utd (WC1)	3-1	Gray 37, Evers 48, McLaren 70	5,099	-
Sat 22	Reading	0-3		18,108	12
Sat 29	COLCHESTER	2-0	Douglas 62, Davis (S) 82	5,005	9
Mon 31	Wigan Athletic	3-1	Davis (S) 41, Evers 78, Gray 81	3,778	5
September					
Sat 5	BURNLEY	1-0	Douglas 47	5,554	2
Tues 8	Wrexham	1-1	McKinnon 36	2,951	3
Sat 12	BRISTOL ROVERS	2-0	Davis (S) 7, Alexander 9	5,558	3
Tues 15	Ipswich (WC 2)	1-2	Douglas, 60	9,032	-
Sat 19	Blackpool	0-1		5,695	5
Tues 22	IPSWICH (WC 2)	4-2	Fotiadis 52, Douglas 83, Davis (S) 99	5,655	-
			Johnson 120	5,530	7
Sat 26	WALSALL	0-1			
October					
Sat 3	Fulham	3-1	Gray 3, Douglas 48, Davis (S) 65	11,856	7
Sat 10	York City	3-3	Douglas 22, Evers 43, Gray 55	3,780	4
Sat 17	OLDHAM	2-0	Gray 82, Scarlett 90	5,447	4
Tues 20	NORTHAMPTON	1-0	Alexander 19	6,087	3
Sat 24	Gillingham	0-1		5,602	4
Tues 27	COVENTRY (WC 3)	2-0	Gray 50, Davis (S) 78	9,051	-
November					
Sat 7	Stoke City	1-3	Douglas 81	12,964	6
Tues 10	BARNLEY (WC4)	1-0	Gray 82	8,435	-
Sun 15	Boreham Wood (FA1)	3-2	Gray 33, 53, Davis (S) 76	1,772	-
Sat 21	Lincoln City	2-2	Gray 43, Doherty 76	4,893	6
Sat 28	MANCHESTER CITY	1-1	Doherty 76	9,070	7
December					
Tue 1	Sunderland (WC5)	0-3		35,742	-
Sat 5	HULL CITY (FA2)	1-2	Davis (S) 36	5,021	-
Sat 12	Macclesfield	2-2	Douglas 3, Gray 90	2,905	8
Sat 19	MILLWALL	1-2	Davis (S) 69	5,939	11
Mon 28	Bournemouth	0-1		8,863	14
January					
Sat 2	Colchester	2-2	Alexander (pen) 7, White 72	4,694	14
Tues 5	WALSALL (AWS 2)	0-3		1,870	-
Sat 9	WYCOMBE	3-1	Spring 16, Evers 69, Douglas 75	5,063	13
Sat 16	Preston	1-2	Fotiadis 15	11,034	12
Sat 23	WIGAN ATHLETIC	0-4		4,934	13
Sat 30	BOURNEMOUTH	H	3		
February					
Sat 6	Burnley	A	3		
Sat 13	WREXHAM	H	3		
Sat 20	Bristol Rovers	A	3		
Tues 23	NOTTS. COUNTY	H	7.45		
Sat 27	BLACKPOOL	H	3		
March					
Sat 6	Walsall	A	3		
Tues 9	FULHAM	H	7.45		
Sat 13	STOKE CITY	H	3		
Sat 20	Chesterfield	A	3		
Tues 23	READING	H	7.45		
Sat 27	GILLINGHAM	H	11.30		
April					
Sat 3	Oldham Athletic	A	3		
Tues 6	YORK CITY	H	7.45		
Sat 10	Northampton	A	3		
Wed 14	Manchester City	A	7.45		
Sat 17	LINCOLN CITY	H	3		
Sat 24	Notts County	A	3		
May					
Sat 1	MACCLESFIELD	H	3		
Sat 8	Millwall	A	3		

TBA CHESTERFIELD (H)

DIVISION TWO

Up to January 23 1999

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Preston	26	15	7	4	45	24	52
Fulham	25	16	4	5	37	20	52
Walsall	27	15	6	6	38	30	51
Stoke City	26	15	3	8	37	23	48
Gillingham	26	11	11	4	39	22	44
Bournemouth	24	12	6	6	38	24	42
Chesterfield	27	12	6	9	30	23	42
Man City	27	10	11	6	32	23	41
Millwall	27	10	9	8	29	29	39
Reading	26	10	8	8	32	36	38
Wigan Athletic	26	10	7	9	36	26	37
York City	28	9	8	11	37	46	35
LUTON TOWN	25	9	7	9	33	33	34
Blackpool	27	8	10	9	29	32	34
Burnley	28	8	12	8	33	46	32
Bristol Rovers	25	7	10	8	36	29	31
Colchester Utd	27	6	10	11	28	41	28
Wrexham	26	7	7	12	25	38	28
Oldham	26	7	6	13	27	38	27
Northampton	26	5	10	11	24	31	25
Notts County	25	6	6	13	26	37	24
Lincoln City	26	6	5	15	26	44	23
Wycombe Wdrs	27	5	8	14	25	35	23
Macclesfield	25	4	9	12	19	31	21

GAMES AND GOALS

Player	Apps	Goals
Nathan Abbey	0(0)	1(0)
Graham Alexander	19(0)	9(0)
Hervé Bacqué	2(5)	2(2)
Emmerson Boyce	0(0)	1(0)
Jimmy Cox	2(2)	1(1)
Kelvin Davis	25(0)	9(0)
Steve Davis	20(0)	9(0)
Simon Davies	0(0)	0(0)
Gary Doherty	0(8)	2(2)
Stuart Douglas	22(0)	7(1)
Sean Evers	3(0)	1(0)
Andrew Fotiadis	24(0)	10(0)
Stuart Fraser	4(8)	2(2)
Liam George	2(3)	0(2)
Phil Gray	22(1)	9(0)
Gerry Harrison	5(0)	1(0)
Marvin Johnson	23(0)	8(0)
Tresor Kandol	0(0)	1(0)
Dwight Marshall	3(1)	3(0)
Gavin McGowan	18(1)	9(0)
Michael McIndoe	8(3)	3(3)
Ray McKinnon	15(1)	6(1)
Paul McLaren	8(4)	4(3)
Kofi Nyamah	0(0)	1(1)
Andre Scarlett	1(3)	0(2)
Paul Showler	2(1)	0(0)
Matthew Spring	11(5)	3(0)
Mitchell Thomas	11(5)	3(0)
Alan White	8(9)	2(3)
Landry Zahana-Oni	2(0)	0(0)

HATTERS BAD BOYS

PLAYER	Y	R	Ray McKinnon	Matthew Spring
Gavin McGowan	11	1	1	0
Graham Alexander	7	1	1	0
Marvin Johnson	4	1		
Mitchell Thomas	4	1		
Steve Davis	6	0		
Paul McLaren	5	0		
Phil Gray	2	1		
Stuart Douglas	4	0		
Michael McIndoe	4	0		
Kelvin Davis	1	1		
Liam George	2	0		
Alan White	2	0		
Jimmy Cox	1	0		
Sean Dyche	1	0		
Gary Doherty	1	0		
Sean Evers	1	0		
Gerry Harrison	1	0		

● KELVIN DAVIS

LUTON NEWS PLAYER OF THE YEAR STANDINGS

(Top Hatter awards won)	Player	Points
5	Graham Alexander	5
5	Steve Davis	5
5	Matthew Spring	5
3	Phil Gray	3
3	Marvin Johnson	3
3	Sean Evers	3
2	Gavin McGowan	2
2	Ray McKinnon	2
1	Kelvin Davis	1
1	Stuart Douglas	1
1	Sean Dyche	1
1	Gerry Harrison	1
1	Paul McLaren	1
1	Andre Scarlett	1
1	Paul Showler	1
1	Mitchell Thomas	1

● MCGOWAN: Top Hatter v Wigan Athletic.