Talk of the Town *with Dave Flett*

HEAD START: Luton midfielder Ray McKinnon jumps the highest but Walsall's Bjarni Larusson gets the better of the Scotsman in this aerial contest during Saturday's 1-0 defeat at the Bescot Stadium.

Sean sent back to Bristol

SEAN DYCHE has returned to Bristol City after the Hatters board vetoed a third month on loan.

Lennie Lawrence must now hope Dyche is not snapped up by another club before the off-field situation at Kenilworth Road has been resolved.

Outgoing chairman David Kohler and directors Cliff Bassett, Chris Green and Nigel Terry blocked an extension to Dyche's loan this week.

City want £250,000 for him but Lawrence believes that price could fall if Dyche does not leave before the March 25 transfer deadline.

Dyche is currently injured with bruised ribs anyway – unfortunate for him but a factor that might just give the Hatters the time they need to let the boardroom dust settle.

Speaking this week, Lawrence said: "He's returning to Bristol because of financial reasons. He's somebody we'd definitely like in the building.

"We're unable to extend to a third month but haven't given up on a permanent deal in the course of time.

"I don't think he'll go anywhere on loan now. He won't be fit for first team football for at least two weeks.

"If somebody came to buy him before the deadline Bristol would take the plunge. He may or may not.

"Bristol were interested in a permanent deal. We can't do that. We can't do anything at the moment."

GONE BACK: Sean Dyche.

Sad Hatters fail to unseat high riding Saddlers!

WALSALL completed a hat-trick of victories over the Hatters this season thanks to Darren Wrack's second-half goal at a wet and windy Bescot Stadium.

Ray Graydon's promotion-chasing side, assembled on a shoestring budget, are starting to be taken seriously and were the better footballing side in difficult conditions.

In January, the second of this trilogy of clashes had seen a shot-shy Luton crash out of the Auto Windscreen Shield 3-0. A similarly toothless attacking display cost them again on Saturday.

Home keeper James Walker cannot have enjoyed an easier clean sheet all season. A feeble Phil Gray effort in the first-half was the Hatters only shot on target all afternoon.

Calls of Mick Harford for manager were heard from the increasingly despondent Hatters fans and, on Saturday's evidence, his presence on the pitch, let alone in the dug-out, would be of value!

Gray has only netted once in his last 11 games and Stuart Douglas once in eight.

Lennie Lawrence was also left cursing the Irish FA for depriving him of Gary Doherty's services on a weekend he was sorely needed.

Douglas endured a dreadful 90 minutes in the Walsall mud but with Doherty training with Eire under 18s and Andrew Fotiadis out, Lawrence had no attacking alternative on the bench.

Pushing Liam George into a central role may have been an option but ceased to be when Lawrence replaced him with Gavin McGowan.

Gray and Douglas were not helped by an unimaginative midfield performance in which the inconsistent Ray McKinnon disappointed.

Graydon has bought wisely since taking over the managerial reins at the Saddlers in the summer.

Bargain buys Dean Keates, Andy Rammel, Colin Cramb, Darren Wrack and Neil Pointon would all walk into the current Luton Town side. And it was Keates and Cramb who combined for Wrack's 69th-minute winner.

The impressive Keates rode two challenges in midfield before Cramb delivered a delightful pass inside Mitchell Thomas for Wrack to run on to.

Thomas recovered to make a last diteh tackle on the ex-Derby winger but the ball ricocheted off Wrack past Kelvin Davis.

Aside from Gray's effort, Matthew Spring wasted the visitors best two chances, one five minutes into the game, the other five minutes from the end.

With the goal gaping, Spring fired the first wide after George's cross and then blazed over when set up by McGowan during a brief, late flourish from the visitors.

Afterwards, Lawrence said none of his players had disgraced themselves. But equally not one had produced his best form and, collectively, the Hatters players could have had few arguments about being beaten by a superior side.

match*facts*

WALSALL 1 LUTON TOWN 0

● WALSALL: James Walker, Chris Marsh, Neil Pointon (Wayne Evans, 74), Dean Keates, Adrian Viveash, Ian Roper, Darren Wrack, Colin Cramb, Andy Rammell, Bjarni Larusson (Wayne Thomas, 46), Darko Mavrak (Jason Brissett, 69).

● HATTERS: Kelvin Davis, Graham Alexander Mitchell Thomas, Matthew Spring, Alan White, Marvin Johnson, Gerry Harrison (Paul McLaren, 76), Ray McKinnon, Stuart Douglas, Phil Gray, Liam George (Gavin McGowan, 67) Sub not used: Chris Willmott.

● Shots on target: Walsall 7, Luton 1.

● Free-kicks: Walsall 12, Luton 17.

● Corners: Walsall 2, Luton 2.

● Attendance: 4,508.

● Referee: M Cowburn.

● Top Hatter: Johnson – another resilient display.

❑ TRESOR KANDOL got the Hatters juniors back to winning ways with the only goal in a 1-0 win at Southend. Luton's youth team now entertain Swindon on Saturday. Goals from James Ayres and Michael McIndoe gave the reserves a 2-1 Beds Premier Cup win against Biggleswade Town. The reserves are back in action this afternoon at QPR.

❑ DANIEL ALEXANDER, of Corncastle Road, Luton, was the lucky winner of last week's News-Gazette tickets competition. Daniel's prize is two tickets to Satuday's Hatters v Stoke City Division Two clash. He identified Aussie David Oldfield as the former Hatters striker who moved to the Britannia Stadium last summer.

Lennie Lawrence's verdict

"We had three or four good chances in the first-half. We needed to score one. We didn't and paid the penalty. It was a disappointing goal. We played him onside and another player was allowed to ride two challenges. We didn't do enough to claw a goal back."

White's time has come

ALAN WHITE has been told to grab his chance after Sean Dyche returned to Bristol City this week.

The 22-year-old defender has filled in for the Hatters sporadically at centre-back this season.

And boss Lennie Lawrence has now set White the challenge to prove himself week in, week out in a first team shirt.

"It's his time," Lawrence said about White.

"He played adequately on Saturday. Now he'll have to do it every week."

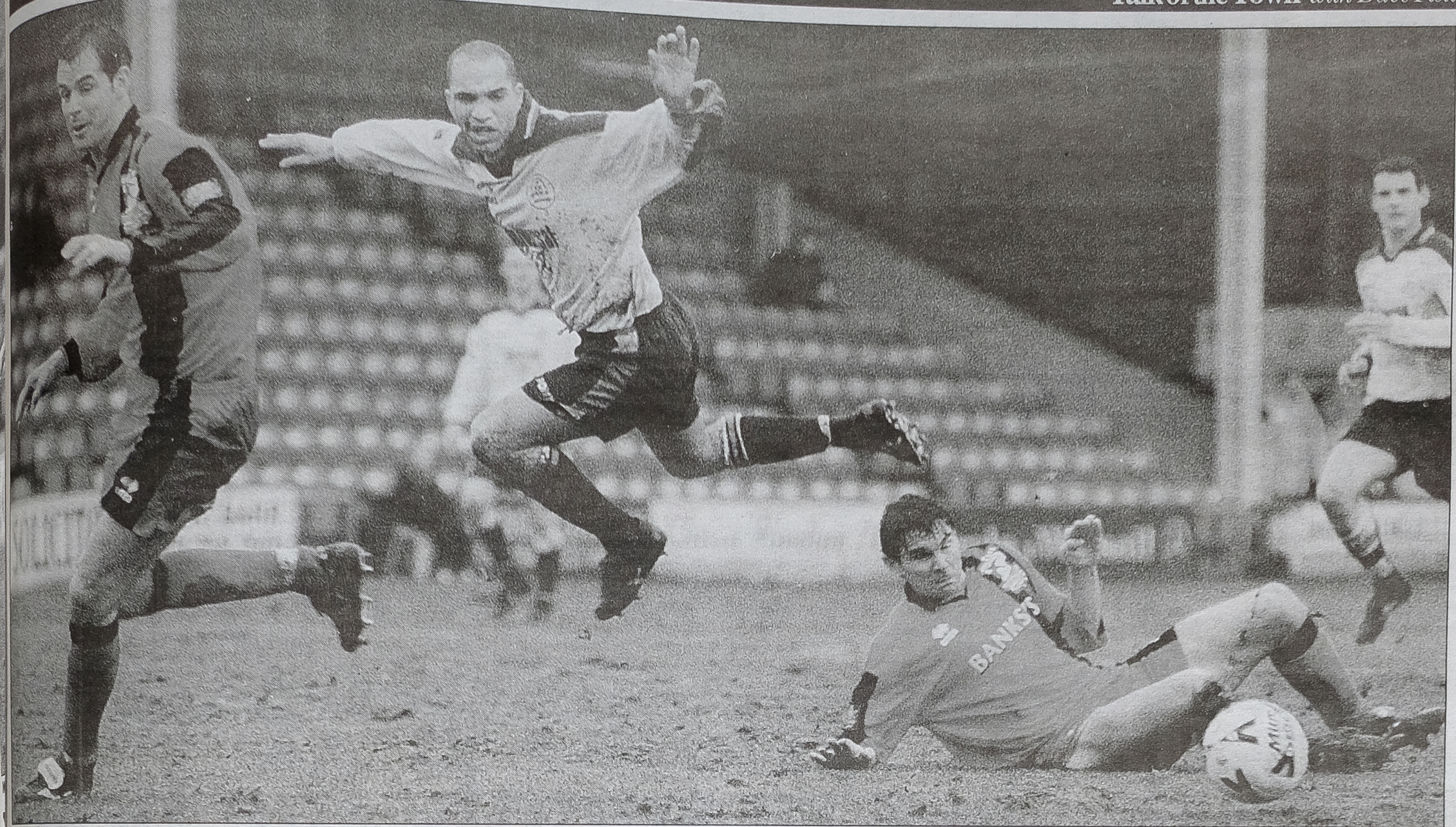
But White will still not enjoy an uninterrupted run in the first team after Saturday's booking against Walsall.

The caution means White is suspended for the trip to Chesterfield on March 20 when 21-year-old Chris Willmott is likely to stand in.

● Crystal Palce winger Andy Turner has returned to Selhurst Park after a two-game trial with the Hatters.

● French goalkeeper Maxine Agueh is still at Kenilworth Road.

Talk of the Town *with Dave Flett*



MUD LARK: Hatters midfielder Gerry Harrison avoids a sliding challenge from Walsall captain Neil Pointon during Saturday's game at boggy Bescot Stadium. PICTURES: Gareth Owen.

Win! Match of the Day tickets

A FAMILY ticket to Britain's biggest ever football show is the latest great prize up for grabs in your sports-loving News-Gazette.

We've got four tickets to give away for the BBC Match of the Day Live Event, supplied by sponsors Nationwide Building Society, and one lucky reader will walk away with the lot!

The event, held at the Birmingham NEC, will see the official launch of the new England kit, modelled by Michael Owen, Alan Shearer and David Seaman.

All you have to do to be in with a chance of winning is answer this question:

Which former Liverpool and Scotland defender is a regular on BBC's Match of the Day?

All entries must be sent to Match of the Day competition, Sports Desk, News-Gazette, 60 Church Street, Luton, LU1 3JQ, including the date between Thursday April 8 and Sunday April 11 you would like to attend.

If you are not lucky enough to win our competition, then tickets can be booked on 0121 7674144.

Prices are £11 for adults and £7 for children and OAPs.

Division 2 *table*

Up to March 8 1999

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fulham	33	22	6	5	51	24	72
Preston	34	19	9	6	64	34	66
Walsall	34	19	7	8	46	36	64
Gillingham	33	15	14	4	54	28	59
Bournemouth	32	16	9	7	54	32	57
Man City	33	13	14	6	39	24	53
Stoke	31	16	3	12	39	33	51
Chesterfield	33	14	9	10	37	29	51
Wigan	31	14	7	10	45	30	49
Millwall	35	13	10	12	40	43	49
Reading	33	12	11	10	39	44	47
Wrexham	33	11	9	13	35	46	42
LUTON TOWN	**32**	**11**	**8**	**13**	**39**	**41**	**41**
Blackpool	33	10	11	12	32	36	41
Bristol Rovers	31	9	12	10	42	34	39
Colchester	33	8	14	11	37	48	38
York City	34	9	9	16	40	57	36
Burnley	33	8	10	15	36	57	34
Notts County	32	9	7	16	34	46	34
Oldham	33	9	6	18	33	46	33
Lincoln City	33	9	6	18	31	53	33
Northampton	34	6	12	16	26	39	30
Wycombe Wdrs	33	6	10	17	31	44	28
Macclesfield	32	5	9	18	21	41	24

98-99 Story so far...

	Opponents	Score	Scorers	Att	Pos
August					
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 Johnson 120	5,655	-
Sat 26	WALSALL	0-1		5,530	7
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	BARNSLEY (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	2-2	McKinnon 6, Doherty 53	5,426	14
February					
Sat 6	Burnley	2-1	Fotiadis 34, Doherty 87	10,285	12
Feb 13	WREXHAM	1-2	Doherty 47	4,759	13
Feb 20	Bristol Rovers	0-1		6,361	13
Feb 23	NOTTS COUNTY	0-1		4,021	13
Feb 27	BLACKPOOL	1-0	Douglas 54	4,646	12
March					
Sat 6	Walsall	0-1		4,508	13

...and matches still to come

MARCH				Sat 10	N'hampton	A	3pm
Sat 13	STOKE	H	3pm	Wed 14	Man City	A	7.45
Sat 20	Chesterfield	A	3pm	Sat 17	LINCOLN	H	3pm
Tues 23	READING	H	3pm	Sat 24	Notts Co	A	3pm
Sat 27	G'INGHAM	H	11.30	Tues 27	CHES'FIELD	H	7.45
APRIL				MAY			
Sat 3	Oldham Ath	A	3pm	Sat 1	MAC'FIELD	H	3pm
Tues 6	YORK CITY	H	7.45	Tues 8	Millwall	A	3pm

Follow the Hatters in the News-Gazette.

Games and goals

	APPEARANCES *(SUBS)* Lge	Cup	GOALS Lge	Cup
Nathan Abbey	1(0)	1(0)	0	0
Graham Alexander	24(0)	9(0)	3	2
Hervé Bacqué	2(5)	2(2)	0	0
Emmerson Boyce	0(0)	1(0)	0	0
Jimmy Cox	3(4)	1(1)	0	0
Kelvin Davis	31(0)	9(0)	0	0
Steve Davis	20(0)	9(0)	6	4
Simon Davies	2(0)	0(0)	0	0
Gary Doherty	4(9)	2(2)	5	0
Stuart Douglas	28(0)	7(1)	8	2
Sean Dyche	8(0)	1(0)	0	0
Sean Evers	27(0)	10(0)	3	1
Andrew Fotiadis	6(8)	2(2)	2	1
Stuart Fraser	1(1)	1(0)	0	0
Liam George	4(3)	0(2)	0	0
Phil Gray	24(3)	9(0)	6	5
Gerry Harrison	10(0)	1(0)	0	0
Marvin Johnson	29(0)	8(0)	0	1
Tresor Kandol	0(1)	1(0)	0	0
Dwight Marshall	3(1)	3(0)	1	0
Gavin McGowan	20(3)	9(0)	0	0
Michael McIndoe	9(3)	3(3)	0	0
Ray McKinnon	23(1)	6(1)	2	0
Paul McLaren	11(6)	4(3)	0	1
Kofi Nyamah	0(0)	1(1)	0	0
Andre Scarlett	2(4)	0(2)	1	0
Paul Showler	2(1)	0(0)	0	0
Matthew Spring	31(0)	8(1)	1	0
Mitchell Thomas	13(5)	3(0)	0	0
Chris Willmott	1(0)	0(0)	0	0
Alan White	11(13)	2(3)	1	0
L'Andry Zahana-Oni	2(2)	0(0)	0	0

Bad boys

WHERE the red and yellow cards have gone...

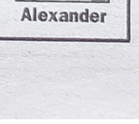
McGowan

	Y	R		Y	R
McGowan	12	1	McKinnon	3	0
Alexander	7	1	White	3	0
Johnson	4	1	Doherty	2	0
Thomas	4	1	George	2	0
Davis (S)	6	0	Cox	1	0
McLaren	6	0	Dyche	1	0
Gray	3	1	Evers	1	0
Douglas	5	0	Harrison	1	0
McIndoe	4	0	Scarlett	1	0
Davis (K)	1	1	Spring	1	0
			TOTAL	68	6

Good boys

LUTON News Player of the Year standings (the Top Hatter awards given by Town reporter Dave Flett)...

Alexander	5	McKinnon	2
Davis (S)	5	McLaren	2
Johnson	5	Thomas	2
Spring	5	Abbey	1
Gray	3	Davis (K)	1
Dyche	2	Douglas	1
Evers	2	Scarlett	1
Harrison	2	Showler	1
McGowan	2	TOTAL	42



Alexander