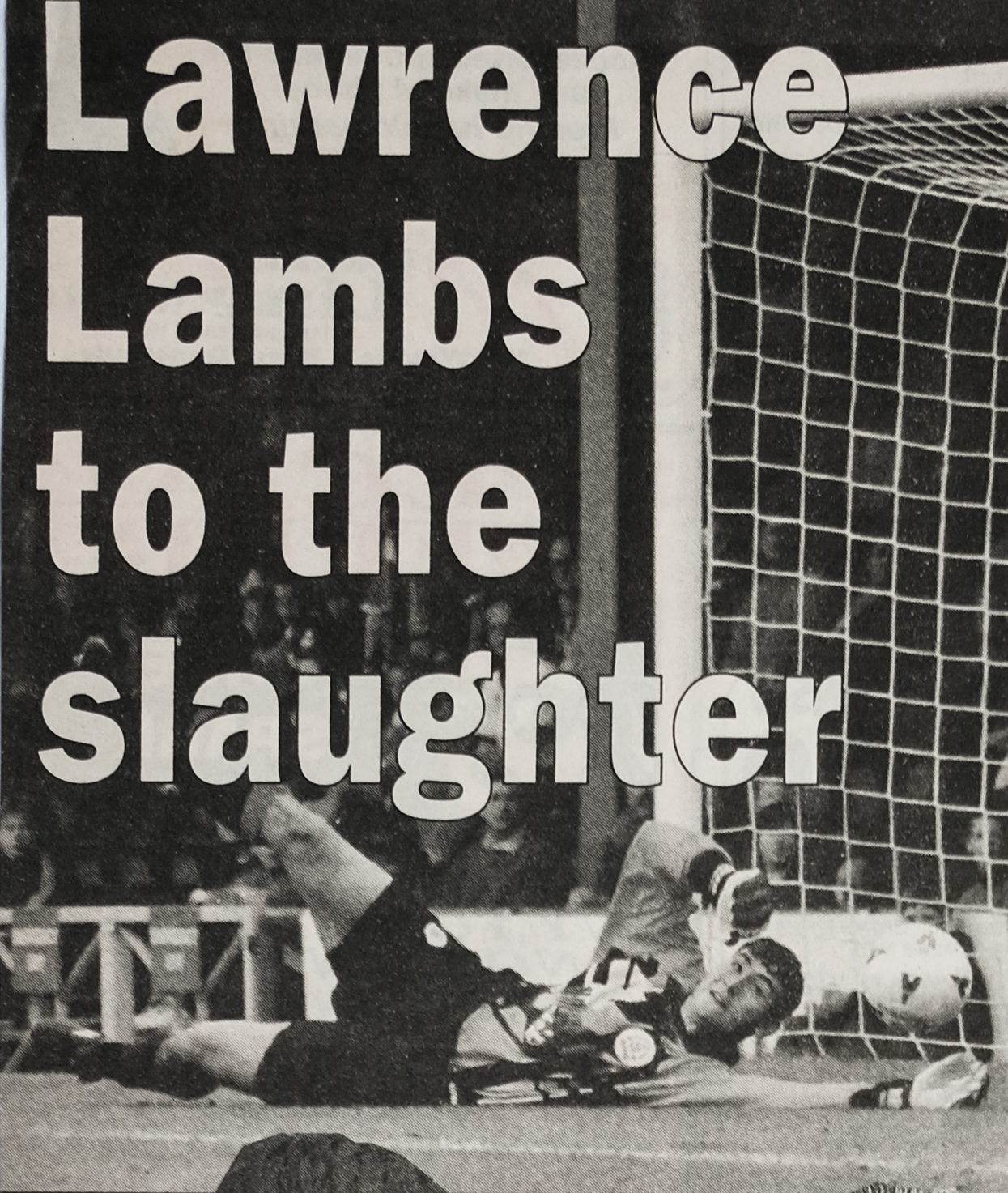


Lawrence Lamb to the slaughter



Bristol City 3 Luton Town 0
ONLY a mixture of heroics from Luton goalkeeper Kelvin Davis and the Ashton Gate woodwork stopped rampant City notching up a cricket score.

But in truth this game was pretty much over as a contest from the moment Hatters' manager Lennie Lawrence picked up a pencil to fill in his team sheet.

No Steve Davis, no Marvin Johnson, no Darren Patterson, no Julian James, no Mitchell Thomas, all injured, and no Gavin McGowan, suspended following his sending off in the 1-0 defeat at Northampton.

And so it was left to on loan Bryan Small and £40,000 new signing Alan White – playing his first ever league game – to form the heart of the defence, with teenage reserve midfielder Sean Evers in the unfamiliar territory of right-back and 26-year-old Richard Harvey acting as the unlikely veteran in a baby-faced back four that would not have looked out of place in a Johnson's Baby Powder advert.

Predictably it all ended in tears, but with four league debutants in the side, three of them teenagers plucked from the youth team ranks, little else could be expected. Liam George, barely 18, was given the responsibility of acting as Tony Thorpe's strike partner in the absence of the injured Stuart Douglas.

And to complete the youthful look of Hatters desperately depleted side trainee Robert Kean and youth-team player Matthew Spring were both thrown in the deep end of a man's world in the second half.

Within five minutes of the kick-off the home side were in front after Michael Bell slotted home a penalty after White had made the clumsiest of challenges inside his own six yard box.

Out-of-sorts Tony Thorpe was furious at not being given a penalty minutes later, then lost out

on a marvellous opportunity after failing to capitalise on Paul McLaren's wonderful volleyed crossfield pass which looked like leaving Thorpe in the clear. 97/98

But the scorer of the spectacular second Luton goal in midweek failed to control, then was left red faced as he tripped over the ball.

Just before the half-hour Steve Torpey headed home at the far post following Brian Tinnion's inch-perfect left footed cross. Torpey's header looked like it would be saved by Davis but the unfortunate White stuck out a boot to block it, then knocked it into his own net as he fell over.

A more farcical goal you will not see in a long time but when your luck is as bad as Luton's is at the moment anything can happen.

Four minutes later Torpey made it three and the floodgates threatened to open.

Davis then had to be at his very best to deny Gregory Goodridge whose fierce volley into the ground looked every inch a goal until Davis threw himself to his right and got a vital fingertip onto the ball to deflect it onto the bar.

From the corner central defender Sean Taylor rose completely unchallenged inside the six yard box but his thumping effort shuddered against an upright and away to safety.

On the hour Davis again spread himself superbly to deny Goodridge for a second time.

And it was the bar to the rescue again for Hatters just minutes later. Goodridge once more the victim of bad luck after capitalising on Harvey's slip.

And it was Davis again to the rescue. This time denying Steve Torpey his hat-trick by flinging himself full length across his goal to keep out the striker's glancing header from the corner.

But Hatters to their credit never gave up despite a barrage of pressure and the despair of being three goals down within half an hour, and in the second period there were times when the youngsters more than held their own.

Hatters: Davis, Evers, Harvey, Waddock (Kean 65), Small, White, Davies, McLaren, Oldfield, Thorpe, George (Spring 45). Attendance 8,509.



DESPERATE DIVE: (main picture) Kelvin Davis lets in a Bristol City goal as the floodgates begin to open in the first-half of yesterday's second division clash

BABES IN THE DUG-OUT: (left) The youthfulness of Luton's squad yesterday is reflected in the fresh faces without a league appearance between them in the visiting dug-out.

BOY GEORGE: (right) Young Liam, barely 18, was thrown in at the deep end, given the job of partnering Tony Thorpe at Ashton Gate.

