

A lovely weekend

Come along with Luton striker **Sam Parkin** as he describes the sights, sounds and tastes of a mini-break to Barnsley...



Friday, 5pm CHECKING IN

"It's up the M1 after training to a hotel near Barnsley. You have to be careful with your room key, or your room will be trashed! I've been sharing with Adam Boyd but on this occasion I'm in with Sol Davis. His missus has just had a baby so I'm sure he's looking forward to some kip!"



7pm BUFFET BONANZA

"The buffet usually consists of chicken, pasta and salmon but this time we've got three starters and four main dishes. There's a mad scramble and the people serving are given a hard time by the lads. We're segregated from the rest of the diners in a small room – probably for our own good!"

8pm CHILL OUT

"Free time sees the camp fall into different groups. Rowan Vine, Kevin Foley and Sol are in the card school, while the younger lads – Steven O'Leary, Keith Keane, Dean Morgan – are in the creche playing their PSPs. My old club Ipswich are playing Colchester tonight, so I watch the game with Barnsley's Brian Howard, who has popped by to say hello – we were at Swindon together. Rowan joins us as they were at college and Southampton Schoolboys together."

10pm IN BED WITH CHARLOTTE!

"It's Jonathan Ross and Charlotte Church – the footballer's Friday TV diet! Lights are out at midnight but there's a wedding reception downstairs – blaring music, people in the corridors, someone

doing doughnuts in the car park... it's too hot not to have the window open, but it's too noisy not to close it. So much for Sol's night of peace!"

Saturday 9am MORNING, MARLON

"I usually don't surface until 10am. That's not possible with Marlon Beresford next door; despite being the oldest in the squad, he's like a little kid, shouting and banging on the wall. I'm in the process of moving house, so I'm downstairs by 9.30am making a few phone calls. The older lads, the ones who have children and are used to getting up early, are reading the papers; normally we'll



"There's a wedding party in the hotel, music blaring, doughnuts in the car park"

have *Soccer AM* on in the room, but this hotel hasn't got Sky – scandalous!"

11.30am WALKABOUT

"Time for a pre-match walk around the grounds of the hotel. Some clubs train on the morning of a game, but Mike Newell just likes us to get our heads clear with a gentle stroll. There's no pre-match meeting as we do tactics and team shape in training towards the end of the week, so most of us already have an inkling who will be playing."

12noon BRUNCH

"I decide to really go for it this week: cereals, chicken, pasta, beans, toast – I pile it away. It's hard to get it all down at this time of the day but I've often been feeling a bit tired towards the end of recent games, so want to give my energy levels a boost. Then it's back to the room where I'll always have a shave and a shower before we set off."

1.15pm OAKWELL BOUND

"I sit with Carlos Edwards and Markus Heikkinen on the way to the ground and, as I did on the journey up, I bury my head in Rio Ferdinand's autobiography. I read Frank Lampard's book recently and it's interesting to read how all these international players came through the system."

1.45pm TEAM TALK

"I read the programme, we have a look at the pitch, then Mike

Newell puts the team on the wall – I'm in! The gaffer goes through what he wants and we get changed. I'm quite superstitious: I've already gone through 10 pairs of boots this season, I'll drink a can of Red Bull and will have the same Tubigrip over my pads if I've scored the previous week. I'll also put my left sock on first. The iPod goes on and Leon Barnett gets hammered for playing Lily Allen but I think she's alright so I defend his corner."



2.15pm WARM-UP

"Our warm-up is quite intense: skipper Steve Robinson leads the way and Brian Stein puts us through our paces with plenty of possession and ball work. We do more than I did at Swindon and Ipswich but it gets us really loosened up. I'll have a few shots at goal but that's usually the job of goalkeeper coach Dmitri Kharine. The gaffer goes though any last-minute pointers and wishes us well."

4.45pm RESULT! Barnsley 1 Luton 2

"After a poor first-half, we're the better side after the break. Carlos scores in the 47th minute, only for Brian of all people to equalise from the kick-off. The game's heading for a draw until injury time, when their keeper Vito Mannone drops the ball, letting Ahmet Brkovic grab the winner. We've had no luck at all this season, but you have to feel a bit sorry for the keeper, who is inconsolable."

5.30pm WE'RE ON OUR WAY

"After a warm-down and shower, it's back on the team coach. We watch the results come in and I'm pleased that my team QPR have won again! Then as we drive south we tuck into pasta served up in the kitchen at the back of the coach. It always goes quicker when you've won and I'm dropped off at Newport Pagnell services. I haven't notched but I've been pleased with my contribution."



IN THE OTHER CAMP

Tykes scorer and Parkin's pal **Brian Howard**

"Having been team-mates with Sam for two years and spent plenty of hours on the M4 together, it was good to catch up with him and Rowan. It was odd going into the opposition hotel but although they tried to pump me for info, I was having none of it!"

"We should have won the game. At half-time we said 'Let's not switch off' – but within two minutes we conceded! We replied immediately when Paul Hayes flicked on a delightful ball for me to finish off."

We hit the bar and had a shot kicked off the line – but then, in the 93rd minute, Vito dropped the ball and they scored. Vito's world class in training but he's 18 – these things happen.

"We were so devastated we could barely warm down, but I managed a quick chat with Sam. I'll stick my neck out and say we'll definitely stay up. Our football is suited to this level and if we can be more solid and take our chances, we should have no problems."

