



Luton unable to cash in against Money's men

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HEART OF FOOTBALL

Troubled visitors fail to make Walsall pay as game ends in stalemate, writes **David McVay**

SOME call them parasites, others, like Sam Allardyce and Sir Alex Ferguson, call them son. Whatever the disparate opinion, there is no doubt that you can't keep a good, bad or distinctly ugly agent down these days.

Luton Town are the latest club to be accused by the Football Association of wrong-doing involving payments to agents, one of whom is called Sky Andrew, innocent of all charges perhaps but definitely guilty of retaining a name that suggests he may have been fostered by Bob Geldof and Madonna in a previous life.

Throw in a troubled board and an anxious former chairman and the Mad Hatters' Tea Party should benefit from an Eric Morecambe entrance, a surreal appearance in one of those famous festive plays 'wot' was written by his hairy-legged associate Ernie Wise.

Asked what he thought of it as the club drew 0-0 with Richard

Money's Walsall at the Banks's Stadium, Luton's most celebrated supporter is certain to have shrieked "Rubbish" from the comic hall of fame beyond the grave.

In fact, if any of the charges brought against the League One club, some of their directors, former chairman Bill Tomlins, and a variety of agents should stick, the FA might consider a sentence of 100 uninterrupted hours viewing repeats of this guileless epic in solitary.

In between gruel and water rations, the guilty parties may be inspired by Tommy Mooney's snap second-half shot, smothered by Luton goalkeeper Dean Brill, while a glaring miss by Michael Ricketts, who once commanded a £3.5 million transfer fee from Bolton to Middlesbrough, can comfort confined agents, a cheery reminder of how so much can be earned from so little in their industry.

At the moment, there is nothing to cheer Luton manager Kevin Blackwell. A local lad who once plied his trade as a builder while shoring up a dodgy Boston United back four as goalkeeper, returning to his hometown club should have been a fitting reward for a honest and respected professional who has survived working shifts with Neil Warnock and Ken Bates.

Instead, Luton are in turmoil. Former manager Mike Newell,

Close encounter: this header from Walsall captain Tommy Mooney failed to break the deadlock against Luton Town

the self-styled crusader against illegal bungs, says the FA's stance has "vindicated" his criticism of Luton and the bungs culture.

Less justifiable, though, is a series of extended contracts he granted to several players past their pensionable age (35 in football years) as the club slid towards relegation last season. It left Blackwell with a clutch of players paid about £200,000-a-year, a staggering amount for a club in the old Third Division and in particular goalkeeper Marlon Beresford, who will be 41 when his contract expires.

Not content with that fiscal curiosity, Newell, who was eventually sacked, is taking the club to court for a reported £3 million, an amount that would bankrupt Luton and force them into administration.

The fear is that the FA, since the Stevens Report failed to finger any culprits at Premier League level, will make an example of the minnows. In which case Luton may care to paraphrase Eric Morecambe's classic rebuke in their defence.

"We were paying all the right notes," he almost said. "But not necessarily in the right order, sunshine."

Walsall (4-4-2): Ince; Weston, Gerrard, Dann, Fox; Hall (McDermott 63); Sonko, Wrack, Demontagnac (Taundry 83); Ricketts, Mooney. **Subs:** Roper, Bossu (g), Deeney. **Booked:** Gerrard.

Luton Town (4-5-1): Brill; Perry, Coyne, Fojut, Jackson; Bell, Spring, Hutchison, McVeigh (Talbot 70), Wilson; Andrew. **Subs:** Goodall, Currie, Keane, Grant. **Booked:** Perry, Hutchison.

Referee: A Taylor (Greater Manchester).

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