

Luton praying for salvation 07/08

HEART OF FOOTBALL

Victory over Tranmere provides Kevin Blackwell with some respite from his woes, writes **David McVay**

THE Salvation Army turned up at Kenilworth Road on Saturday. The Samaritans would have been more fitting. That is if Luton Town could have stretched to the phone call.

Docked 10 points by the Football League for entering into administration, anchored at the foot of the table last week, there was some respite for Kevin Blackwell's side with a 1-0 victory over Tranmere Rovers that lifted them a couple of places in League One.

Another Merseyside visit to Liverpool, in the third round of the FA Cup on Jan 5, offers further hope, but it is a fleeting reprieve. Luton are a club perilously close to a permanent mooring at rock bottom.

Blackwell must raise £1.3 million by April to satisfy creditors, but that figure includes players accepting a 50 per cent reduction in their wages. He has already forfeited his monthly salary to pay the YTS staff over the festive period.

Pivotal central defender Jaroslav Fojut is among three loan players who must return to their clubs next month. Luton have been advised to recall their on-loan players, but two of those, Ahmet Brkovic and Marlon Beresford, earn double the combined monthly salary of the departing trio, and would compound Luton's financial woes should they return.

Such fiscal folly is just one of the concerns of chairman David Pinkney, who is remaining stoically at the helm, trying to entice new owners. Even so, the vultures are hovering over the Eric Morecambe Suite.

Football agents survive on percentages and they can sniff a large wedge among



Plenty to shout about: Luton's Dave Edwards leads the celebrations after scoring

what Blackwell describes as "bankrupt stock". Nottingham Forest have already offered a huge markdown value of £150,000 for Dave Edwards, who swept the decisive goal over the line after Tranmere goalkeeper Danny Coyne obligingly dropped Matthew Spring's centre at his feet in the 70th minute.

Can it get worse? Probably, though there is one incentive for potential investors. The old ground stands on the site of a redevelopment scheme which would be funded by a £300 million grant from European coffers. A hitherto indifferent local council are suddenly more focused on relocating the club to pastures new to expedite matters.

These, though, are peripheral issues to

Blackwell, for whom a takeover scarcely promises job security despite recouping £6 million in transfer revenue since he was appointed in March. A sense of *deja vu* prevails after his travails with Leeds United.

Raising a smile is almost as big an achievement as raising a winning team. Blackwell deserves some Christmas cheer and the goodwill of Luton fans for combining both so seamlessly.

Luton (4-5-1): Brill; Perry, Coyne, Fojut, Goodall; Bell, Edwards, Robinson, Spring, Currie (Talbot 67); Furlong (Andrew 17).

Subs: Keane, McVeigh, Grant. **Goal:** Edwards 70. **Booked:** Robinson, Fojut, Coyne, Perry.

Tranmere (4-5-1): Coyne; Stockdale, Goodison, Sherriff, A Taylor; Greenacre (Curran 76), Ahmed (Myrie-Williams 76), Henry, Jennings, Suker; G Taylor. **Subs:** Tremarco, Zola, Achterberg (g). **Booked:** Greenacre, G Taylor, Goodison, A Taylor.

Referee: T Kettle (Rutland).