

# THE DAY OF SHAME AT LUTON TOWN

## THE NLP'S STUART HAMMONDS' EXPERIENCE

THEY are scenes we all have seen this week, whether on *Sky Sports News* or the back page of *The Daily Mail*.

After my first visit to Luton this season, when they hammered Mansfield 4-1, I wrote about how the fans went happily into the night to the tune of Morecambe and Wise's 'Bring Me Sunshine'. Not of Luton – a dark day for football, let alone Luton Town.

It was all so predictable. Ninety-nine per cent of Hatters fans are there to get behind their team. The atmosphere at kick-off was awesome. The noise ear-piercing.

Sadly, it all turns on a minority hell-bent on trouble. I've left three Luton games – Cambridge away, Stevenage at home and now York – saying 'I've never seen that at a Conference game before'.

Police helicopters, season tickets hurled at the directors' box and now fears for the safety of opposition players.

As I watched the York lads turn on their heels and head to the sanctuary of their own fans, I caught a glance of Hatters' managing director Gary Sweet, a Town supporter through and through. He looked crestfallen.

I have never felt intimidated walking to a game as I did on Monday. Having parked near the ground on Dallow Road, a group of teenagers sprinted past my car. Hoods were up, bottles of Budweiser hanging from their back pockets.

I turned into a side street and saw them again. "Are you York?" they were asking passers by. Coming from Nottingham, they might have mistaken my accent for a true northerner.

As it was, a police van pulled into the road and the louts legged it.

Later, the police and stewards did a great job protecting the York players and fans, but seeing footballers shielded by coats as they covered at the back of a stand, fearing for their eyesight as coins rained down, was like something out of South America.

There were probably 500 on the pitch – some dads with little children on their shoulders clearly not intent on trouble.

The 150 or so who were, pushing the police cordon towards the Oak Road stand housing the visitors, need to be identified and banned for life. Same goes for those who fought the police with brooms, mops and pot plants stolen from a hardware store outside the ground.

Then Luton can get back to bringing sunshine into their genuine fans' lives, rather than taking them back to football's dark ages.

## Boss Money: 'We need to learn'

LUTON manager Richard Money does not believe the Hatters need major summer surgery, but admits a lot depends on whether his star players sign new deals.

Centre-half George Pilkington and midfielder Keith Keane, their most consistent performers this term, are out of contract and Money said after Monday's play-off semi-final defeat that they are free to leave.

But with or without the crowd favourites, the ex-Walsall boss has seen enough in six months to assert that if remaining players learn from the sides that

have beaten them, next season may not end in heartache.

Money said: "I don't think we need major surgery. We need to do something to give us an extra push, but we've finished second and won 26 games out of 44, so there's not too much wrong.

"We need a squad of players who have learned their lessons from this year, who have seen for themselves what it takes to move forward.

"If you look at both York and Stevenage, they have big strong back fours, big strong workman-like players in the middle and

two big ones up front who run all day. That's something that we now have to think about."

On Pilkington and Keane, Money said: "My feeling is that if they want to go and play somewhere else, let them.

"We'll do everything we can to try and keep them. But if the offer we make is not good enough, it won't be for the fact that it's not good enough. If they turn offers down – anybody – because they want to play somewhere else, I'd rather they go."

Money reckons another season in Non-League won't

affect Town too drastically financially, adding: "If you're talking about a setback in terms of budgets and where we are going to go next year, it's not too much of one.

"It is a setback in that it means we have to go through another 46 games to get out of this league. A lot of clubs have tried and failed at the first attempt. We've come up just a little bit short."

His rebuilding work started on Friday with the release of Asa Hall, Rossi Jarvis, Shane Gore and Steve Basham.



DAY OF SHAME: York players shelter at the back of the stand under a hail of missiles

PICTURE: Action Images

# WE'RE SORRY SAY HATTERS

By Stuart Hammonds

LUTON managing director Gary Sweet has apologised to York for the crowd trouble that marred the end of Monday's play-off semi-final.

Bedfordshire police made seven arrests – including a Norwegian who had never attended a Town game before – after a group of yobs attacked City's players and fans with missiles, including coins.

Striker Richard Brodie was hit on the head by a coin and had to be smuggled out of the away supporters' stand by police and stewards, along with his team-mates, after a mob of around 150 surged towards them from the Kenilworth Road pitch.

The scenes were captured on national TV, heaping shame on the club who were

consigned to a second season in the Blue Square Premier by a 2-0 aggregate defeat.

Trouble continued outside the ground, where a group armed themselves with mops and brooms from a local hardware store to battle police.

It is thought members of the far-right organisation English Defence League were among ringleaders, with 37-year-old Anders Johansen – who admitted violent disorder and awaits sentencing – understood to have been in this country for an EDL rally in Aylesbury last Saturday.

The club have identified several faces who will be dealt with in different ways, and Sweet says he was happy with the level of stewarding. His talks with Bedfordshire police continue as the FA and Conference carry out their own probes.

"Everyone at Luton has worked tirelessly to encourage young supporters, create a safer environment and rebuild a more respectable reputation, which is, and will be, a continuous objective," he said.

"We were shocked and sickened to see a minute percentage of the crowd partake in moronic behaviour which compromises the club and image of genuine fans.

"We will not tolerate such behaviour and have been working non-stop with the police and witnesses to gather evidence that will allow us to take action.

"We are very proud of the majority of our fans, who have been fantastic all season. However, fewer than one per cent disgraced the good name of our club and we are now seeking their assistance in naming and shaming any guilty party."