

Kedwell on spot to seal Wimbledon fairytale



WHEN Danny Kedwell suppressed his nerves and blasted little AFC Wimbledon into the Football League, the ear-splitting roar emerged from their die-hard supporters, a strange sound born of long suffering which had suddenly turned into ecstasy.

'Nine Years! It only took nine years!' they sang when they could stop laughing and crying. It was even longer ago when Dave Beasant saved a Wembley penalty and set the old Wimbledon on the path to 1988 FA Cup glory.

Yesterday a 21-year-old called Seb Brown, who was still working for a car rental company 12 months ago, saved two penalties in the shoot-out.

That was too much for Luton, whose own trials and tribulations have ended in more disappointment. The likeable Brown did sympathise but understandably could not hide his own joy.

'Dave Beasant was before my time but I have seen the video,' he said. 'To do that under such pressure was phenomenal. I suppose I'm following a bit of a tradition but I was in a no-lose situation today. No one blames the keeper if you don't win a shoot-out but they make you the hero if you do.'

How proud Seb's father Keith would have been last night. 'My dad was a season-ticket holder when Neil Sullivan used to be in goal for Wimbledon. Neil was my hero and I had my photo

WIMBLEDON 0

LUTON 0

Wimbledon win 4-3 on penalties

By **Mark Ryan**

CITY OF MANCHESTER STADIUM

taken with him when I was aged eight or nine.'

Fan-driven AFC Wimbledon should have completed their remarkable resurgence before the end of extra-time. In the end, we probably would not have had it any other way.

'We've practised penalties for six long weeks,' said manager Terry Brown. 'Danny isn't the shyest of boys and he always said he would take the fifth penalty.'

Kedwell said: 'I just thought I've got to smash it.' And what a sweet strike

it was. If you love the romance of football and have a healthy disrespect for the cynics who run it, this was one savour. The little guys — good guys — can win after all, if they refuse to be swept aside by power-crazy authorities or masters of identity theft.

'This club recognises the smaller people,' said manager Brown proudly. We have 35 volunteers who do so much around the club and we'll have the smallest wage bill in League Two.'

AFC Wimbledon, the reincarnation of that famous FA Cup-winning club, callously consigned to the scrapheap during the creation of Milton Keynes Dons, proved at Eastlands that happy stories can be as gripping as tragedy.

Not that defeated Luton were in any sense victims of the piece. They, too, have suffered their share of troubles. A Draconian 30-point penalty three years ago for financial irregularities caused such hopelessness that it was

cruel in the eyes of many. 'Two clubs with a good tradition,' said Luton manager Gary Brabin nobly. 'It is unfortunate that one club couldn't achieve its goal. We practised penalties, too, but you can't practise the tension and pressure. We don't seem to have any luck.'

Much of yesterday's contest, in front of more than 18,000 in Manchester City's spacious home, was more about huff and puff than fine art but that was to be expected.

Wimbledon captain Kedwell had the ball in the net in the ninth minute but it was disallowed for offside. But he had the last laugh.

Perhaps the most skilful moment of normal time came in the 21st minute, when the skilful Claude Gnagna turned elegantly and whipped a dangerous, angled shot at young Brown. Wimbledon's keeper was suitably agile to keep the dream alive.

Luton's Jason Walker saw a header bounce back off a post into the grateful Brown's arms. At the other end Kaid Mohamed scraped an upright.

And so to spot-kicks, Brown saving Luton's first from Alex Lawless, then stretching up a defiant left hand to deny Walker, setting up Kedwell's moment of glory.

'It was a dream come true,' the Wimbledon skipper said. A dream nine long years in the making.



PEN PALS:

Wimbledon players celebrate their win after a penalty shoot-out