

11/12 (PO)


WREXHAM 2 LUTON TOWN 1
 LUTON TOWN WON 3-2 ON AGGREGATE


NOW ETCH YOUR OWN NAMES IN HISTORY!

By Stuart Hammonds

PAUL BUCKLE has told his players to picture themselves as Luton Town history men ahead of their trip to Wembley.

The former Torquay manager will take a team to a final at the national stadium for the third time in five years after beating Wrexham 3-2 on aggregate.

Now he wants them to copy the likes of Mick Harford, Brian Stein and Danny Wilson – heroes of David Pleat's team's 1988 League Cup final win over Arsenal – whose images he has forced them to embrace since taking over five weeks ago.

Buckle, who also took Torquay to last year's League Two final at Old Trafford, told *The NLP*: "I've told the players they must not be afraid of the club's heritage and history. It's got to inspire you."

"I got all the old photos out and put them back up. They are up on the walls in my office and around the place. Why should they be boxed up in a cupboard?"

"Either throw them in the

bin or get them on the wall.

"They were lying in a cupboard and that's where we were as a club, in my opinion. We were caught in between and I want these players to make some new history for Luton Town."

"That's what I've been trying to drive forward. I feel immensely proud to be manager of Luton because of the managers, the players and the league positions that have gone before, as well as the massive fanbase."

It is the weight of expectation from that support – comfortably the biggest and most vociferous outside the Football League – that has appeared too much for some players in the last three years.

Buckle saw that for himself in a 3-1 defeat at Braintree on April 7, when he watched Town's winless run stretch to eight games. Monday's second-leg reversal was the first time he had lost in the eight games since.

"When I saw the amount of Luton fans turn up at Braintree and I looked at their faces, they didn't deserve that at all," says Buckle.

"We conceded the first

goal early on, but they still backed the team. That was massive for me, and I thought 'Right, over my dead body are these performances going to carry on'.

"We had to get our house in order very quickly, and we haven't wasted a second. It was a big gamble to hit them hard with a new training regime to get fitness levels up to where I like my teams to be, but we had nothing to lose."

And Buckle praised skipper George Pilkington for leading by example, both in buying into his ideas and stepping up to net the first-half penalty that gave the Hatters what ultimately proved an insurmountable 3-0 aggregate lead at the Racecourse.

"He's a really calm leader, a great influence on the team," said Buckle of the 30-year-old centre-half.

"He's bought into this massively because that's how he wants to live his life and how he wants to play his football."



LEAP OF JOY: Paul Buckle celebrates at the final whistle. Inset: George Pilkington, second right, is mobbed by team-mates after putting Luton in front

PICTURE: Action Images



YOU'LL SEE MORR OF ME, VOWS ANDY

ANDY MORRELL will keep leading from the front as he bids to go one better with Wrexham next season.

The 37-year-old striker has told *The NLP* he will continue pulling on his boots for the Blue Square Bet Premier runners-up, rather than concentrating solely on management.

Morrell said: "Speaking to

the staff here and the board, I still feel I've got something to give. It's hard at times to do both, but on the other hand, sometimes it's good to go out and train for two hours and forget about everything that goes off in management. That's my release really."

"There are going to be some games I don't feel quite right for because of what's

happening in the office, but I'm looking forward to playing again. I've scored 14 goals this year and I think I can add some more to that next time."

Centre-half Nat Knight-Percival has now left for Championship club Peterborough, but Morrell hopes to keep the bulk of his Dragons squad together.

"We have to go again," he

said. "It's going to be harder next year, but we'll give it a go. We've made our contract offers to the lads and I think there's not a lot to be changed."

"I expect there to be interest in some of them because we've done great, but I'm happy with the squad."

"I'd like to make a couple of additions if I can, and that

may mean altering a couple who are already here.

"We've got to work the budget and freshen it up a little bit, but the core of the squad is right. Getting 98 points proves that we are doing something right."

"It's going to be harder next year though because expectations have been raised."

DEJECTED: Andy Morrell

