

Tyler merits his FA Cup day of days

The FA Cup retains its inherent gift to spawn wonderful football stories.

In an era where the Premier League's primogeniture and its financial power dwarfs everything else, Luton Town's Norfolk-bred, Norwich proud keeper Mark Tyler is poised to fulfil a dream he harboured as a youngster watching Bryan Gunn on the Carrow Road terraces.

The 35-year-old's wish was to play for his hometown club after starting out in the club's youth ranks. Like many raw recruits it was never to be. A mutual parting of the ways in his teens set Tyler on a different trajectory. He went onto make more than 400 Football League appearances for Peterborough before a series of loan spells led him to a permanent home at Kenilworth Road. The nearest he got to the same hallowed turf where both his brothers have played was a watching brief during a short term spell at Hull City.

Tyler will get his cherished wish this weekend for the Hatters. No doubt watched by an army of family and friends to witness history unfolding - if his search for tickets has borne fruit. Tyler deserves a rapturous reception from the home fans for one of their own; someone who may have been watching the action right beside them in the stands if his football career had never got beyond those weekly training sessions under the guidance of Kit Carson and those mini tours.

Tyler's loyalty to his current employers will come first on an afternoon in the footballing calendar fraught with pitfalls for the Canaries.

Beyond despatching a club who operate considerably lower than them in the current pecking order, Norwich have very little to gain from this exercise. And plenty to lose if they suffer the ignominy of becoming the first top flight club since former

holders Coventry City to embarrassingly exit to non-league opposition. The Sky Blues slumped to defeat at Sutton's Gander Green Lane in 1989 before Norwich put them firmly back in their place in the following round of that year's renewal.

The rarity of such a feat by its very nature demonstrates how prohibitive the odds are on a repeat at Norwich's expense. But rational logic is not what built the FA Cup legend. The Hatters have already sampled that special brand of alchemy synonymous with the world-famous competition when they despatched Championship club Wolves at Kenilworth Road to earn this shot at the Canaries.

Luton's fall from grace in recent times is a salutary lesson to many of their past contemporaries, but Tyler and the rest of Paul Buckle's full-time squad are genuine candidates for promotion back to the Football League after play-off near misses in the past three years.

They deserve plenty of respect, but it should be the end of the fairytale. Norwich's management and players showed admirable application to turn a potentially hazardous trip to Peterborough in the third round into arguably their easiest assignment of the campaign.

Whoever Chris Hughton opts to deploy this time from his Premier League squad will be superior to their opponents. The day already belongs to Tyler, his team mates and those 4,000 Hatters fans making the trip, but the spoils and a place in the last 16 will surely go to Norwich.

Speaking to him last week, it was obvious Luton expect to be deprived of the ball for long spells. The City supporter in their midst is likely to be busy; a personal dream 25 years in the making deserves a fitting ending. You wish Tyler well, but football is a hard business. He knows that better than most.



MEMORIES ARE MADE OF THESE: Luton goalscorer Alex Lawless is mobbed after despatching Wolves to earn an FA Cup trip to Norwich.