



HATTERS

ISSUE 54 • AUTUMN 2002

LUTON TOWN



SUPPORTERS CLUB

HATTERS CHATTER

Dear Members

What a start to the season!

After all the eager anticipation, built up from the superb season we all enjoyed last year, what a disappointment the start to the season was, with the team looking as though they were up against premiership opposition each week as opposed to the likes of Peterborough.

However, on a more positive note I thought the form was starting to turn at Plymouth where we unfortunately went down to a late goal. This was followed up by an excellent effort at Cardiff, many a pundit's favourites for the title, and our first victory against Chesterfield. In addition, the club still maintained a healthy scoring record which was our downfall the last time we were in this division. Steve Howard has picked up from where he left off last year, already scoring 3 so far. If we can continue the improved defensive displays I am sure we can climb the table and I hope we can enjoy at least a play off spot by the time the season concludes.

These notes were written prior to the Watford game, which has been eagerly anticipated and gave the players the opportunity to test themselves against the opposition from a higher league. Our ticket allocation of 4,500 sold out before tickets even went on general sale!

I would like to take this opportunity of welcoming Tony Thorpe, Steve Robinson, Sol Davis, Alan Kimble and currently Ben Roberts to the club and I wish them all the best for the forthcoming season. Hopefully they will enjoy their time here at Luton and help move the Club up into Division One which is where we all want to be!

Whilst on the theme of congratulations these should be passed onto Steve Robinson for his call up to the Northern Ireland squad, and rather belatedly in my opinion to Matt Taylor, now at Portsmouth, for England Under 21 recognition. (This could also be good news for the club who will receive an additional £50,000 if he plays). Harry Redknapp has done nothing but say what a bargain Taylor has been and what an exceptional young player he is. People in the football business have said how he will play for England one day, and lets just hope it happens for Matthew, as we all know what a talented young man he is.

We will welcome Tony Thorpe and Chris Coyne to our first guest speaker evening of the season on Thursday 26th September. 7.30 kick off in the Eric Morecombe lounge. Admission to members is a bargain £2, non member's £5.

You will also find a questionnaire enclosed which asks for Supporters' opinions on the potential new ground. This is to enable the supporters club and Yvonne Fletcher the supporter's board representative to ascertain supporters' views and to enable constructive comments to be made. I would request as many people as possible to complete these and return them directly to the club, or hand them in to the supporters kiosk, for the attention of Yvonne.

We will then publish the findings in the next newsletter as well as passing the detail on to the stadium designers.

We, like everyone else, look forward to the day when the planning application is submitted so the full detail can be seen.

Enjoy the rest of the season, and please encourage as many people as possible to join the Supporters Club.

Mark Chapman

LTSC Chairman



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They Love Coming Home

WHEN Tony Thorpe and Ben Roberts signed in at Kenilworth Road at the start of this season, they were extending a tradition which probably makes Luton Town unique. I doubt any other club in the land has such a pull over players, managers and coaches to such an extent that so many of them come back time after time.

For Thorpe, it was the fourth time he had signed on: ex-Leicester as an 18-year-old in 1992, then twice on loan, in March 1999 and the following November, and then finally on a Bosman free transfer from Bristol City after he turned down Danny Wilson's offer of a new deal at Ashton Gate.

It was just like coming home, said the striker whose goals gave us so much pleasure the first time round. To be frank, the two loan spells were not as impressive, but now he looks much more like the old Tony Thorpe, with that lovely quickness of foot, sharp eye for goal, and an instinctive ability to be on the way to collect a pass the split second before it is made.

I am writing this soon after Ben Roberts pitched up for his second loan to the Town, the first having been when Lennie Lawrence brought him in from Middlesbrough. He did a job for us, and was delighted in late August to accept the chance to return to Luton to help out Joe Kinnear.

And that cheerful willingness to return to Kenilworth Road is something that has been part of life throughout the time I have been reporting on the club. There must be something about Kenilworth Road to make so many want to come back for a second or third time.

Thorpe, of course, was first brought here by David Pleat, who himself had returned for a second spell as manager a year earlier. Thorpe had been in the Filbert Street youth squad, at one time run by John Moore, and the coach, former player and manager for one season, also returned to the Town to become the best long-time servant we have ever had.

And thinking about the many others who have returned after spells away, it is noticeable that they all felt a special sort of loyalty to the club.

Typical of them is Trevor Hartley, who was appointed chief scout in August. It was the third time in his career that he had been recruited: once as a youth coach for David Pleat, before leaving with him to go to Spurs; and then as a coach under Lennie Lawrence in 1998 for two years. You start talking football with Trevor at your peril, and never if you have pressing engagements: listen to him talk about the game, tactics, developments and players, and the time flies by. He can make an hour vanish like a minute!

Mind you, the rest of the coaching staff have something of that about them, and aren't we lucky that Brian Stein and Mick Harford are both among that body of men who came, left, and came back again. Mick, a real Luton legend, first joined the Town in December 1984. After six years he went to Derby before being bought back, only to be sold off again in August 1992 to Chelsea. Mick went on to play for Sunderland, Coventry and Wimbledon, where he moved into coaching as injuries ended his playing career. What a bit of luck that was, even though we didn't know it at the time. The Dons manager, of course, was Joe Kinnear, which led to big Mick joining the Kenilworth Road staff a third time to be Joe's right hand man.

Brian Stein was another who grabbed the opportunity to come back. I always felt he had a bit of a rough deal when he was given the boot in the summer of 1988. His final appearance had been at Wembley, when he hit two goals, including the winner, against Arsenal.

I remember his testimonial function when David Evans stood up and said what a good player Brian had been for the Town, and what wonderful service he had given. The praise was fulsome, but Brian neatly put it all into perspective when his speech of thanks included the admission that he was a little bewildered – along the lines of *"If I am that good, Mr Evans, why are you letting me go?"*

After playing in France, Brian signed for Luton a second time, a one-year deal in 1991, and his third appointment at Kenilworth Road was when he came back as a coach two years ago.

His brother, Mark Stein, was another player who signed twice: as an apprentice 20 years ago and then for Ricky Hill in the summer of 2000. At 34, he was past his best, but has had a stupendous career to look back on, at QPR, Oxford, Stoke, and in particular at Chelsea.

I could probably fill double my space allocation going on about other players I have admired twice or thrice over. Steve White, for instance, who helped us to the 1982 Second Division championship, and was then unceremoniously forced out to make way for Paul Walsh. He could have been forgiven for holding a grudge against Luton because of that, but he happily came back to play for us on loan, and the club is still dear to his heart. When the team of 1982 was being rounded up for a reunion, Chalky was one of the first to book his ticket!

David Oldfield was another who gave us good service twice over and he and I have an extra bond of friendship with him. Let me tell you about a coincidence that brought us together one summer's evening 300 miles away from Luton.

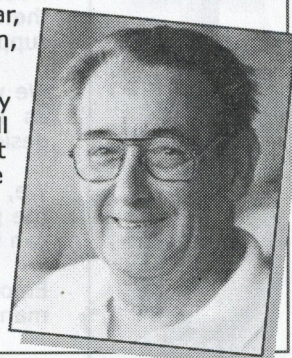
In the days when the Echo and Post were in business, they had a sports reporter called John Marquis, and he and I became good friends. The evening paper folded, and John moved on, eventually getting a job in America, and I never expected to see him again. One evening nearly 20 years ago, in Falmouth, my regular summer watering hole, the wife and I were walking across a quay-side towards a Chinese restaurant for our evening meal. Suddenly, young David Oldfield appeared. *"Good lord, David, what are you doing down here?"*

"I come down every summer. My step-father lives here. You might even know him, because he's the editor of the Falmouth Packet, and he used to work in Luton. His name's John Marquis..."

The editor was presiding over a big family party. I walked into the restaurant, and he and I looked at each other in amazement, never expecting to meet again. John and I met up for a session or two in Falmouth several times a year after that, thanks to the introduction effected by David Oldfield. I hope David Oldfield continues to enjoy his life in football, having moved from Peterborough to Oxford in the summer.

There isn't the space to go rambling on about others, like Andy Dibble, Mal Donaghy, John Faulkner, Phil Gray, Clive Goodyear, David Geddis, Andy King, Jim Ryan, Aaron Skelton and Wayne Turner.

In my experience the club's lovely family atmosphere has been well rewarded by the sort of players it has attracted over the years: there have been so many great blokes, almost every one of them a real pleasure to know, and very good company.



Brian Swain

35 Go Wild in the West!



Some of the Supporters who travelled with us

We took a coach of 35 passengers from Luton on Sunday 21 August, up through the traffic jams and through the tortuous Liverpool one-way system to *just* miss the ferry.

After a small tour around the docks and environs in search of toilets, food, beer and sight seeing (four enterprising people got a taxi to take them to the Liverpool and Everton grounds and then to the Cavern); we departed for the Isle of Man on the next boat.

The week that followed saw us stick to regular patterns. We lost our first game to Wrexham and then beat Burnley the following day (both of which we could have predicted from previous form).

This left our little Group A with all 3 teams having won 1 game (Burnley and Wrexham actually drew on the Saturday, before our arrival - but the Manx insisted that it had to be played to a win - which Burnley did on penalties). Wrexham claimed the top of the table due to goal difference, with us second and Burnley third.

The Group B games had Darlington come out on top, Rochdale second and the Isle of Man International squad come in third. (Incidentally Wrexham's goalkeeper got injured on the weekend of their arrival - and they played with the Manx second goalie between the sticks.)

The majority of fixtures were played at the Isle of Man International Sports Centre. A new construction with a superb swimming pool and sports complex. The racetrack had a large patch of grass in the middle - obviously intended for field events - upon which was marked out the

football pitch. The spectators had the opportunity to sit in the lovely 500 seater "stadium" for want of a better word! 2 games were played in the town of Ramsey (up the East coast from Douglas) - neither of them Luton fixtures.

The final placings were determined by the first teams of each group playing each other, the seconds playing seconds and fifth and sixth place to be determined in a similar fashion (It was considered to be the most complex system ever seen).

To which end Darlington and Wrexham slogged it out on the Friday afternoon, we played Rochdale on the Saturday afternoon and Burnley took on the Isle of Man International squad on the Friday evening.

With Rochdale being the only team to do the double against us last season - we had something to prove to the supporters and acquitted ourselves in an admirable fashion, to finish in 3rd place.

The team were each presented with an engraved shot glass and the chairman accepted a bottle of the local whisky on the team's behalf. As shown in the photo below.

Football was not the only option available for the week's entertainment. We had groups go off to the Calf of Man - seal watching, stock car racing, sightseeing in the various towns and villages, there's a wildlife park, nature reserve, steam railway, electric tramway, horse drawn tram, going to the casino, a retired horse's home, a Chinese meal in the company of Cherry Newbery and the Chairman Mr Mike Watson Challis . . . I could go on! BBC 3 Counties Radio presenter Ian Pearce went with us and had a whale of a time - being a bus, coach, tram and train enthusiast!

We parted company with the Isle of Man that Saturday evening and got in to Luton at approximately 02:30 the next morning.

Christine J Bray - Town-on-Tour Coordinator



Luton Town FC • Important Dates!

September

Home Games

Tuesday 17	Mansfield Town
Saturday 28	Swindon Town

Away Games

Saturday 21	Huddersfield Town
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LTSC Evenings

Thursday 26	Guest Speaker Evening with Tony Thorpe & Chris Coyne
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October

Home Games

Saturday 12	Cheltenham Town
Saturday 26	Wigan

Away Games

Saturday 5	Stockport County
Saturday 19	Oldham Athletic
Tuesday 29	Crewe Alexandra

Cup Games

Tuesday 22	LDV Trophy - Round 1
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November

Home Games

Saturday 9	Port Vale
Saturday 23	QPR

Away Games

Saturday 2	Northampton Town
Saturday 30	Tranmere Rovers

Cup Games

Saturday 16	FA Cup - Round 1
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Luton Town Belles

For those of you who buy the Official Matchday Magazine you may have read the regular articles on the ladies and girls football teams Luton Town Belles. We first started in 1997 under the name of AFC Luton Belles with an Under 11 team and most of that original team now make up the ladies squad. With each passing year the club has continued to grow, winning many honours at youth level, the highlight being winning the very competitive Hertfordshire Girls League Under 15 Championship in 2000/01.

It was following the 2000/01 season that big changes were made to the clubs constitution. Firstly it was decided that the Under 15 squad were to move into ladies football (girls can move into ladies football provided they are 14 or over before the start of the season). This would be our first venture into ladies football. Secondly, and most importantly we entered into discussions with Luton Town about forming a link with them. The outcome was very positive. Through both John Mitchell and Cherry Newbery we have formed a very good relationship with the club. We continue to run independently, but from the start of the 2001/02 season the newly formed ladies team played under the name of Luton Town Belles, and as a part of Luton Town's sponsorship deal with SKF the ladies team were kitted out with the orange Luton Town away kit. As from the start of the coming 2002/03 season all of our youth teams will also be playing under the Luton Town Belles banner which will help us build up our profile further.

The 2001/02 season was on the whole a very successful one. The new ladies team were elected into The Southern Region Ladies League, playing in Division 1(North) and despite the fact that all except one of that squad were still under the age of 16 at the start of the season they acquitted themselves extremely well. First day nerves caused what turned out to be our heaviest league defeat of the season when they lost 3-1 at eventual champions Stocklake. That result was reversed a few weeks later when The Belles gained revenge against them in The FA Cup with a 5-2 victory. Our FA Cup adventure ended with a 4-0 defeat against Greater London Premier League side Redbridge. The harsh realities of moving into ladies football came home to roost in early October when The Belles were drawn against Premier League leaders Gosport Borough in the first round of the Southern Region Cup. Five times The Belles led, and each time some rather naive defending allowed Gosport back into the game. The match was eventually lost on a penalty shoot out. The good thing was that the lessons from that were learnt very quickly as five of the next seven league matches were won.

As far as the league was concerned The Belles were always playing catch up to the top two, Stocklake and Wycombe Wanderers, but from early December they remained unbeaten until mid March which largely accounted for the eventual third place finish. The final month of the season saw some real excitement. Champions elect Stocklake dropped their only away points of the season when a last minute Vicky Moody equaliser evened things up at 1-1. Runners up Wycombe Wanderers were then thrashed 6-2 on their own ground in what must go down as the best performance of the season. The final two matches yielded twenty goals, a third of the seasons total. Firstly Holmer Green were beaten 12-0 before the season ended with a match at Kenilworth Road when Thame United were beaten 8-0 in front of a crowd of about 250 which was really encouraging.

We now look forward to the new season with a lot of optimism. Promotion to The Southern League Premier is what we are looking for, and we feel that The Belles are capable of achieving that. We have a long, long way to go to reach National League level, but we have the belief that anything is possible. If you would like to come and support The Belles we play our home matches at Stockwood Park Athletics Stadium on Sunday afternoons kick off at 2pm. Spectators are always welcome and admission is free. If you have never watched ladies football before come and have a look, you will be pleasantly surprised just how good it is. Of course it is different to men's football, but once you get to understand that, you will then appreciate the game for what it is.

If you want to find out more on Luton Town Belles then log on to our website, www.lutontownbelles.com or see the regular features in the Luton Town matchday magazine.

Mick McConkey - LTSC Member

Luton Town Supporters Club

As always, we welcome any new members to the Luton Town Supporters Club. If you have any friends or family who would like to join, no problem! Tell them to pop by at our kiosk in Kenilworth Road before or after home matches. We will be happy to give them details of how to join.

Being a member, you get priority for tickets to events we hold including the annual end of season presentation evening, the Xmas fun quiz and many guest speaker evenings, and of course, at a discounted price! We give you the chance to ask players and managing staff the questions you want to ask - an opportunity we are proud to give you.

Our events usually prove very popular to Luton Town fans including non-members, and being held in the Eric Morecombe Suite at Kenilworth Road we have use of the Bar facility and stewarded car park in Maple Road.

Upcoming events...

Tony Thorpe and Chris Coyne Guest Speaker Evening
Thursday 26th September - Eric Morecombe Suite

Dates for your diaries...

Xmas Fun Quiz - Thursday 12th December
Xmas carol Service - Monday 16th December

LUTON TOWN SUPPORTERS CLUB COMMITTEE • 2002/03

LTSC President • Nick Owen
LTSC Vice President • Brian Swain
Chairperson • Mark Chapman
Vice Chairman • John Pypier
General Secretary • Trish Johnson
Membership Secretary • Vic Fussell
Treasurer • Ian Kelly
Press Officer • Maureen Ingram
LTFC Representative • Cherry Newbery
T.O.T Co-ordinator • Christine Bray
Newsletter Editor • Helen Gatward

Additional Committee Members:

Yvonne Fletcher, Merilyn Fussell, Adrian Shotbolt, Audrey Bray, Caz Meers, Dave Baker, John Heley, Ray Lelliott, Peter Hosier, Maureen Barrett.

We are always on the lookout for new committee members, especially to assist us with our 'Town on Tour' away travel service. If you have been a LTSC member for more than a year and are interested in helping out, visit our kiosk on first team games during the season and speak to one of our committee members. Or alternatively, leave a message on Town on Tour's mobile on 07960 567465.

FOR SUPPORTERS BY SUPPORTERS!

Hatters Fun!... Hatters Fun!

PROMOTION SEASON 2001-2002 QUIZ

To celebrate promotion to Division Two, we thought it would be nice to throw a few questions to you on that fantastic season. It's just for fun!!!

1. What record did Club Captain Marvin Johnson achieve during the first match away to Carlisle United?
2. How many Luton Town players made their league debuts in the Carlisle United game?
3. What was the name of the French club that Jean Louis Valois played for during the previous season?
4. How many clubs were in Division Three last season, who were also in the old Division Four the last time we were there?
5. Who did Kevin Street make his one and only league appearance against?
6. What was the name of the former Luton Town apprentice who scored an 'Own Goal' in the match at Shrewsbury Town?
7. When Steve Howard scored his hat-trick against Hull City in which half of the game did he score his second goal?
8. Of the 96 league goals Luton Town scored last season, how many were scored during the first half?
9. How many times did Andrew Fotiadis come on as substitute last season?
10. Who played in the most number of league matches; and how many did he play?
11. How many clean sheets did Luton Town keep?
12. From which club was defender Alan Neilson signed?
13. How many times did Luton Town score five goals in a match?
14. What was significant about Luton's first two league games of the season?
15. How many hat-tricks were scored and by whom?
16. Who was the only Nationwide team to better our league goals tally for the season?
17. What was Luton's average attendance?
18. Who was the only Luton player to be included in the PFA's divisional team of the season?
19. The land at Junction 10 was purchased by our Chairman for our new stadium, but how much did this cost?
20. Who were the winners of the LTSC Player of the Season and Goal of the season?

Answers can be found on page 6.

Brian Ellis & John Pyper - LTSC Members

Tony Thorpe



Player Interview

Born • Leicester 10/04/1974

Height • 5ft 9 in

Signed for Luton • 19/06/02

Squad Number • 9

Position • Attacker

EARLY YEARS: Tony started playing football when he was at school and it was at his last school in Leicester, King Richard III, where his P.E. teacher pushed him in the right direction. 'My parents were very good and didn't push me at all, they supported me with what I wanted to do, where as most parents push too much, I'm glad I went my own way.' Tony was signed as an apprentice by Leicester but didn't quite make it as a Pro.

LUTON TOWN: Tony was 17 when he came to Luton and signed as a Pro. 'I came to Luton and played for 2 years in the Reserves where I learnt my trade under some good players.' Tony's debut for Luton was as a sub at the age of 18 against Stoke and from then on he worked his way into the team. His position was left wing when he started at Luton, it was Lennie Lawrence who played him as a striker, which is where he has played ever since!

OTHER CLUBS: Luton were struggling financially when Fulham came in for Tony, and they had no choice but to let him go. 'I have mixed feelings of my time at Fulham, I was only there for six months and never really had chance to do as well as I should have done.' Tony was then quickly moved onto Bristol City where he stayed for four years, had five managers, and loan spells at Reading and here at Luton.

FUTURE: 'I'd like to see my two years out here then maybe go into coaching. I haven't thought that far ahead though as I am still enjoying my football.'

HOBBIES: 'I have a little boy who is two years old now, and he takes up lots of my spare time, but he's good fun to be with.' Tony also likes to play golf when he has the time.

We'd like to thank Tony for giving his time to chat with us.

Maureen Ingram
& Helen Gatward

Hatters Away Guide

Welcome to the first Hatters Away Guide of the new 2002/2003 Division 2 season. We have 6 away games coming up, so we have tried to cover some useful information such as parking, places to get a drink before the game and any recommended food if you wish to travel to these games either by car, coach or rail.

As always, the Town on Tour coach service will be running their luxury coach service to all matches and places can be booked in the LTSC kiosk or at the Club Shop. Coaches depart from Maple Road Car park and you can leave your car in safe hands there for only £4. Membership cards must be shown. Boarding commences 15 minutes before departure time. Service stops will be included on longer journeys and eats and drinks are available on board.

(*denotes a pick up at Milton Keynes Coachway approximately 20 minutes after departure).

If you do wish to travel by car directions can usually be found in the most recent Luton Town programme prior to the away game. Your support is greatly appreciated at away games, and we hope you have an enjoyable time if you go.

September

Huddersfield Town • 21/09/02 • The Alfred McAlpine Stadium

Town on Tour leaves at 09.30am*, Adult £15, Con £13, Non member £17

Away fans • South Stand: 4037.

Parking • Season Ticket Holders reserve most of the parking at the ground and the side streets are very busy after the final whistle, so it may be wise to park on one of the other roads off the A62 and walk the 10-15 minute walk to the ground.

Rail • Huddersfield (01484 533481) Allow plenty of time to get from the station to the ground as it is quite a walk.

Food & Drink • There are pubs in the town which are about a 20 minute walk from the ground. Alternatively, you can get a pint inside the ground along with a very potatoey meat pie!

October

Stockport County • 05/10/02 • Edgeley Park

Town on Tour leaves at 10.00am*, Adult £15, Con £13, Non member £17

Away fans • Vernon Stand: 964, Railway Terrace (uncovered): 2651.

Parking • The roads around the ground are either full of double yellow lines or police bollards, so it is either take a chance to find a space or use the pay and display car park opposite the ground but it's not very big!

Rail • It is not advisable to travel by rail due to severe disruptions on route.

Food & Drink • The Royal Oak is a good pub to go to in the town centre and it has a great chippie right by it! The food inside the ground isn't too impressive though.

Oldham Athletic • 19/10/02 • Boundary Park

Town on Tour leaves at 10.00am*, Adult £15, Con £13, Non member £17

Away fans • Ellen Group Stand 4643.

Parking • There are 1000 spaces in a car park behind The Lookers Stand and there is also some off-street parking. Or for a charge, there are 125 spaces in a car park 100 yards behind the Rochdale Road End.

Rail • It is not advisable to travel by rail due to severe disruptions on route.

Food & Drink • Visiting fans can go to the White Hart or the Old Grey Mare for a pre-match pint.

Crewe Alexandra • 29/10/02 • Gresty Road

Town on Tour leaves at 15.00am*, Adult £13, Con £11, Non member £15

Away fans • The BMW Stand 1736.

Parking • There's a car park adjacent to the ground behind the Main Stand and also a couple of car parks by the ground.

Rail • It is not advisable to travel by rail due to severe disruptions on route.

Food & Drink • Plenty of pubs can be found on Nantwich Road along with many restaurants. There is a chip shop right by the ground and the food available inside the ground is also quite good - so you have plenty of choice!

November

Northampton Town • 02/11/02 • Sixfields Stadium

Town on Tour leaves at 12.30am*, Adult £10, Con £9, Non member £12

Away fans • Stand 7653.

Parking • There is a car park by the ground with free parking.

Rail • Castle Station (01908 370883). The station is a good 2 miles from the ground so a taxi would be required.

Food & Drink • There are pubs close to the ground and the food is pretty decent inside the ground too.

Tranmere Rovers • 30/11/02 • Prenton Park

Town on Tour leaves at 09.30am*, Adult £15, Con £13, Non member £17

Away fans • Stand 2100 (can be increased depending on level of support).

Parking • There is limited parking at the ground and street parking isn't easy what with yellow lines and residential bays.

Otherwise drive past the ground onto Preston End Road and take the third left onto Church Road where there is a car park.

Rail • Birkenhead Central or Rock Ferry (from Liverpool Lime Street 0151 709 9696).

Food & Drink • There are a couple of pubs by the ground but if you wander down Prenton Park away from the ground you will come across the Sportsman which is a better one to go to and the Chopsticks on Borough Road is a good tip for food.

ANSWERS: 1. Marvin played at every level in professional football. 2. Five: Emberson, Perrett, Nichols, Griffiths & Hughes. 3. OCS Lille 4. Nine, Darlington, Exeter City, Halifax Town, Hartlepool United, Lincoln City, Rochdale, Southend United, Swansea City and York City. 5. Macclesfield Town. 6. Neil Riech 7. Second half 8. 40 9. Eight 10. Matthew Taylor with 43 apps. 11. 17 12. Grimsby Town 13. Four times 14. Both goals were scored by the same players: Hughes & Griffiths 15. Three (Howard x 2 & Griffiths) 16. Manchester City with 108 league goals 17. 6,852 18. Matthew Taylor 19. 5.5 Million 20. Howard and Valois

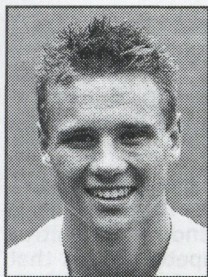
Brian Swain reports....

MAY AND JUNE

There didn't seem to be much time to celebrate a tremendous promotion campaign before we were fretting about whether the team was good enough to cope with the Second Division. The same question, we soon discovered, was also exercising the mind of Joe Kinnear.

Our major worry as summer approached was about Matt Taylor: he was out of contract, and able to go wherever he chose, and Joe did his best to persuade the 20-year-old wing-back to stay with Luton to achieve his ambition to play at a higher level.

Matt Spring, Emmerson Boyce, Ahmet Brkovic and Paul Hughes decided to throw in their lot with the Town, but the chance to earn higher wages was too good to turn down for Taylor.



Taylor - now at Portsmouth

He went to First Division Portsmouth, where he is rumoured to pocket eight times his old Luton salary. Thankfully, the Bosman ruling does not kick in until players are 24, so Joe was able to haggle with Harry Redknapp over the fee. Pompey offered £250,000 and Joe replied that Taylor was worth £2.5million. It looked like going to a Football League tribunal, until it was announced that agreement had been reached, with the Town accepting a deal to yield £750,000, with more possible depending on Taylor's progress. It looks a bargain from Portsmouth's point of view although whether it was a good career move for "Super Matt" remains to be seen.

The other major departure is a surprise to everyone at Kenilworth Road. Jean-Louis Valois, having intimated that he would accept a new deal, came in with a demand for a huge increase in wages. Rumour has it that several other players advised him to get real, but presumably they didn't know the French for that!

The Frenchman went to Rotherham briefly, then pitched up at Hearts, and began a new chapter in his career in the Scottish Premier League. "He'll be out by Christmas," was Joe's comment.

We also said goodbye to Dean Brennan, Stuart Fraser, Adam Locke, Stuart Douglas and Richard Dryden.

JULY

Players report back for training, with new faces given a warm welcome. A couple are old friends returning - former coach Trevor Hartley, who is Chief Scout on joining the club for the third time in his career, and striker Tony Thorpe, who has signed on with Luton for the fourth time.

Joe Kinnear is busy with other signings. Steve Robinson, best remembered as an attacking midfielder with Bournemouth, comes in from Preston, for a £50,00 fee. We also see bus loads of trialists pass through, most of them foreign, as agents scramble to earn a few bob by unloading players of decidedly mixed abilities.

Still worried about his left flank, Joe recruits Alan Kimble, once part of the Kinnear Crazy Gang at Wimbledon. The left back is signed, a week or so before his 36th birthday, having been released by MK Franchise FC.

The Town's first competitive games are in the Isle of Man Tournament, where we finished third of the six participants. Our home pre-season friendlies are against Gillingham and Southampton, but are to prove costly to the club.

The Gillingham game wasn't half a night to remember...

Matt Spring whacked in a super 25-yarder to give us an interval lead we well deserved against the First Division visitors. Then there was a torrential downpour, and the rain

got into a substation in Beech Hill Path, and caused a power failure for a large part of Bury Park. Emergency generators kept the floodlights on, but the rest of the ground was in darkness.

Southampton hardly looked a Premiership team when they came to Kenilworth Road and are beaten 3-2 after goals from Thorpe, Fotiadis and Holmes.

The down side was that Adrian Forbes went down injured with ten minutes to go. It turned out to be a cruciate ligament problem and he is unlikely to play this season.



Adrian Forbes - out injured

Another long-term injury worried Joe. Mark Ovendale had to undergo an operation to cure a hip problem, and will be out for the first two or three months of the season, leaving no cover or competition for Emberson.

The boss thinks he has solved the problem when Alan Combe has an excellent game on trial against Southampton. The Town and Dundee United agree a £50,000 fee, and the 26-year-old says he is willing to sign.

But on the eve of the season, when he flies in to complete the paper-work he chucks a £25,000 spanner into the works.

The Scottish club owe him that as a loyalty bonus, says his agent. Dundee are unwilling to pay it, so the Town will have to give the player the £25,000 before he signs but Joe does not accept this and refuses the deal, leaving the search for a new keeper still on.

NEW STADIUM NEW STADIUM

Detailed information about the new Luton Town stadium was still not available as we went to press, but there was a sign that the plan is moving along with an item in the matchday magazine for the game against Barnsley.

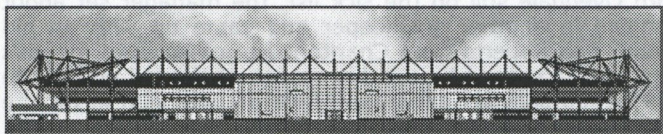
The arena is planned for a site near the M1 junction 10, with 55 acres of land already bought by Town chairman Mike Watson-Challis. The programme article added:

"Guiding the scheme from blueprint to completion is a complex job, and at this stage, with much more detail to be sorted out, there is no firm date for the submission of a planning application to Luton Borough Council."

We have good reason to hope that the Council will be helpful - the Town Hall line has been that it believes a new facility on the outskirts of Luton will be an asset to the community, not just to the football club. The council also wants to see the scheme move on for another reason: it owns the Kenilworth Road stadium, and once the Town move out, the site will be released for redevelopment and regeneration."

Eric Hood, the Town's deputy chairman, issued the press release, in which he said: "I have had positive meetings with the planners at Luton Borough Council, and I have also met the Leader of the Council, Bill McKenzie. Over the next few weeks, we will be releasing further details of the proposed new stadium design."

Supporters have been very patient regarding the new stadium, but I feel sure that once they have seen the plans, they will be proud to be associated with Luton Town."



An artist's impression of how Luton Town's new stadium will look

AUGUST

At last, the real thing kicks off at home to Peterborough. Hopes are high – Barry Fry has already gone on record saying that things are not too happy at London Road – no money, no new players, no training kit, no assistant manager, no shirt sponsors, no reserve team manager and five first-teamers out through injuries. He still had Paul Showler as physio, though!

Oh boy, were we kidded. Peterborough win more convincingly than the 3-2 result suggests. We made them look world class because we were just awful. Nerves? Over-confidence? Who knows? The players themselves can't believe how bad they were. Goals by Dean Crowe and Ahmet Brkovic are scant consolation. We were two down and looking awful by the interval, at which time we said goodbye to a player who staked his claim for the shortest-ever Luton Town career. Left winger Robbie Winters, released by Aberdeen, had signed a one-week contract, but was allowed to leave after half an appearance for the Town.

We now start to worry a bit about the next two games, both away: Blackpool on the following Tuesday and then Plymouth, where we have a score to settle.

The home side's football at Bloomfield Road turned out to be a lot smarter than ours. Alan Neilson and Alan Kimble kept their places at Blackpool, and some of us fell about in



Tony Thorpe gets up to head home

happy laughter when Steve Howard headed us into a sixth-minute lead after some poor defending from a corner. We soon find ourselves 2-1 down after some of our own dodgy defending gifted centre-half Peter Clarke with goals. It was downhill from there, Blackpool going 3-1 up before Tony Thorpe headed in a beauty from a far post cross by Ahmet Brkovic. We needed one goal in the last ten minutes to salvage a point, but instead Blackpool helped themselves to two more. As in the Peterborough game, they were sharper and quicker in midfield, and eventually well ahead in defending and attacking too.

The defence needs a shake-up before Plymouth, and by the time we get to Home Park Emerson Boyce has been re-installed at right back, and on the other flank we welcome Sol Davis, who has been signed from Swindon. At 22 he is too young to be a Bosman. The Town have offered £50,000 in two instalments. Andy King, who tried to persuade Davis to stay at Swindon, replies with a demand for two cheques of £75,000 each so a tribunal will decide the fee later.

Davis makes a good debut at Plymouth, where at last the Town raise their game to the sort of level we saw last season. But Chris Coyne hardly helps the cause when he is sent off after less than ten minutes, for a "professional foul" on Micky Evans. The Town's ten men are more than a match for Plymouth, but chances were not taken, and the Pilgrims took a 57th-minute lead with a tremendous long-range strike by defender Brian McGlinchey. Ten minutes later hard-working and often lonely front man Steve Howard produces an equally brilliant finish to level it, and with Plymouth getting ever more frustrated in the closing stages we look set for a point at least, possibly all three. But with seven minutes to go, Plymouth skipper Paul Wotton tries his luck with a 30-yarder from the touchline. The ball seems to be heading safely into the arms of Carl Emberson, until somehow he lets it sneak past him into the net.

With Ovendale still on the sick list, the manager set about bringing in another goalkeeper and came up with an old friend, Ben Roberts from Charlton. He joined on a month's loan for the second time in his career. At the tail end of the 1999/2000 season Lennie Lawrence brought him in for the last 14 games of the campaign on loan from Middlesbrough, to replace Nathan Abbey.

Roberts must have wondered if he had made the right decision after his "second debut" for the Town. We are beaten 3-2 at home again by Barnsley, who, like Peterborough and Blackpool, were allowed to look as though they came from a different league. We couldn't even beat ten men, after Andy Holt was sent off just before the interval. Worse still, we fall for one of the oldest tricks in the book after Kevin Nicholls equalises from the penalty. Barnsley roar upfield from the re-start and Mike Sheron has regained the lead while press box fingers are still dialling to report the red card and penalty.

We share with Port Vale the unwanted distinction of being the only sides in the division without a point from the first four games, and are ahead of them only on goal difference, by one goal.

After the game manager, coaches and players are in a long and serious debate about what is going on, and Joe Kinnear is scathing about the team's performance.

It was hardly the curtain-raiser we wanted to go to Cardiff two days later, to take on Lennie Lawrence's promotion favourites. Cardiff, backed by the cash of Joe's old mate Sam Hammam, have invested around £10 million in Hammam's dream of going all the way to the Premiership, just as he did with Wimbledon.

A big crowd produces a cracking atmosphere as the teams get going, but, wonder of wonders, the Town are in a completely different mood. The defending is ultra-professional, the midfield tucks in to compete hard in that department, and even Dean Crowe, preferred to Tony Thorpe, plays a lot of the game in his own half, tracking back to cover before looking for chances on the break.

Paul Hughes plays on the left of midfield, and for once the Town side looked well-drilled, highly organised, and capable of more than matching Cardiff. The locals realise that, and start to get at their team as they see the Bluebirds bash away at a rock solid rearguard. Worse, for Cardiff, is that the Town have settled into a groove that draws the home side forward, creating loads of space at the other end of the field. Robinson, going on as a sub, has the game's clearest chance, through on his own and with only the keeper blocking his view of an inviting net. Neil Alexander somehow makes the save, and in the last of five minutes of stoppage time we have a let-off when a cross-shot rebounds safely off the far post. "It would have been an injustice if Luton had lost," admitted Lennie Lawrence.

The bad news is that our first point of the season has been bettered by Brian Horton's men. Port Vale have pulled off an even more unlikely result, winning 1-0 at leaders Wigan, so we have finally hit rock bottom.

Not to worry, the Ninian Park show has demonstrated that this team can play a bit when it is in the mood, and to prove it August goes out with a very welcome first win of the season, and, we hope, the start of the climb up the table.



Man of the Match

Chesterfield, on a roll after three straight wins, come to Kenilworth Road and are well beaten. Dean Crowe has been reinstated in place of Tony Thorpe, and the press box majority view is that he is the man of the match, operating wide on the right wing against a back three that looks a bit ponderous. Set pieces, yet again, are the key, but this time they are in our favour. Russ Perett heads in from a Sol Davis far post corner to give us an interval lead, and after the break Steve Howard misses a sitter with a free header, but then plants another, from a free kick by Davis, perfectly into the top corner. And Crowe completes his good day's work with a cracking cross-shot for the third. We're on our way!

