

# HATTERS

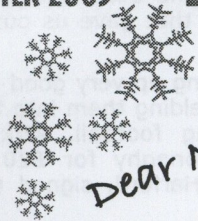
ISSUE 59 • WINTER 2003

LUTON TOWN



SUPPORTERS CLUB

HATTERS CHATTER



Dear Members!

At last - Gurney is no more!!

As I was about to write this article, news came through that John Gurney and Melodious Corporation had been defeated in their attempts to overturn the appointment of Barry Ward - even after saying they would offer 10% more than the highest bid.

This is great news for the Club and to Luton fans, it has been a while coming, but we have finally got rid of John Gurney - an early Christmas present to all. Although we are certainly not out of financial trouble just yet, it is certainly a big relief to know things will now be moving forward.

This news meant that the receiver was able to get on with his job and sell the club to his preferred choice of bidder, which, at the time of writing, appeared to be a consortium led by Bill Tomlins, the club's former general manager.

This is a move which should be much welcomed by Town fans and means that the club should be in a position to come out of receivership, probably in the early part of December.

However, this should not mean the instantaneous spending spree as seen previously under the former regime. It hopefully means that the club will no longer be in the control of one person, which has led us to sever problems not only under the regime of Mike Watson Challis, but previously under former owners as well.

The major priority should now be a new stadium, without the potentially increased revenues that this could provide, this will give the foundation for the club to move forward. We have heard so much about stadiums in the past, but with new owners in place and with the continued backing of the local council and the announced widening of the M1 motorway, the club has never been better placed to secure the move. This combined with diligent stewardship could lead to a period of sustained success.

The involvement on the trust is to be welcomed. Hopefully this will be a genuinely re-electable position rather than the unsatisfactory position Yvonne Fletcher found herself in, where she was left in the dark as to the major decisions affecting the board.

Developments off the pitch have overshadowed the playing side where the club has confounded its critics with several promising showings which give rise to optimism for the period after we leave receivership.

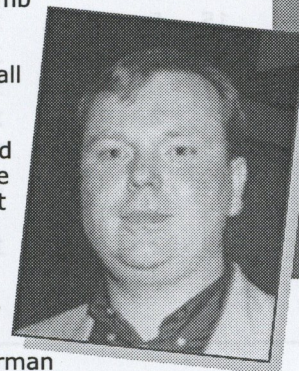
With the injuries, some long-term, and the problems we have with suspensions, the make shift teams that go out on the pitch are doing a good job - lets hope they keep up the hard work and get us the results that we want. As usual it is going to be a very busy Christmas period in the football season and I look forward to seeing the club climb up the Division Two table like I'm sure you all do.

There are now good times to look forward too - so lets all get behind the team and give them our support.

Until my next column, I hope you all have a good Christmas and New Year, and I hope you find the calendar enclosed with this newsletter useful. P.S Don't forget to look out for up coming Supporters Club events.

Mark Chapman

LTSC Chairman



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## Managers & "Early Doors"

As I sat down to think about what ramblings I should inflict on readers for this issue, I was feeling a touch gloomy at seeing the Town in the bottom half of the table. But then I reminded myself that in the summer I was hoping that we would be anywhere in the Nationwide League.

Once the threat of extinction had been seen off, I wondered what chance Mike Newell would have in his second taste of football management.

By November, he had more than proved himself, despite increasing problems with injuries and suspensions, and that set me thinking about how his early record compared with other managers.

The research was intriguing. As Mike Newell's reign approached the third of the season mark, he stands second in the list of managers since 1978 in terms of results over the first 15 matches. Only John Moore, the legend who went on to lead the Town to their best-ever league finish, can better Newell's 15-game opening sequence.

Statistics, of course, do not tell the whole story, but they threw up some interesting thoughts. Who would have guessed that bottom of the list would be David Pleat, a man I regard as the best manager the Town have had in recent years? His second spell as manager was perhaps a painful reminder that it is not always a brilliant idea to go back. He was unlucky when he returned in the summer 12 years ago – David Kohler and Peter Nelkin had fired Jim Ryan, to the disgust of supporters, because they wanted a high-profile man in charge. Pleat could hardly have known what he was letting himself in for, particularly after Nelkin walked away and left Kohler to run the show. As the Town endured a wretched period, player sales were ordered by the board, with the manager powerless to stop them. Pleat's first year back ended in relegation from the old First Division, which cost us a place in the inaugural season of the Premiership. For the board, it was a reflection of the facts of football life, with financial prudence outweighing fans' aspirations. That relegation season, incidentally, included the removal from office of the club secretary in April 1992. His name was Bill Tomlins.

Terry Westley and Ricky Hill were both super guys, but unsuccessful managers, and their early days were inauspicious, Westley getting 12 points from his first 15 games and Hill 11, one better than Pleat's second coming. Both were inexperienced former youth coaches given their chance perhaps too early in their careers. Westley had far greater problems than Hill – he had to deal with the Kohler era while Hill was given all the money he wanted to build a team.

But before we ponder on men who might have been promoted beyond their capabilities, don't forget that the policy had worked gloriously previously. David Pleat was youth coach a few weeks before he took over as an unknown manager from Harry Haslam in January 1978, and even if his introduction to the hot seat was not tremendously successful, he learned fast. I still think the team he built to win the old Second Division championship in 1982 was the best Town side I have seen since the 1955 squad that gave us our first-ever taste of football's top flight.

Pleat had the knack of picking up very good players for modest transfer fees and welding them into teams that played top quality passing football. Kirk "Basher" Stephens for free, Mal Donaghy for £20,000, Bob Hatton for £50,000, Mick Harford, signed twice, and many, many more.

John Moore built on a solid foundation after Pleat left to go to Spurs in the summer of 1986, and it was mainly Pleat's team which took the Town to seventh place in the 86/87 campaign. The squad was not too much different when Ray Harford followed Moore and his record shows that he was destined to be a good manager – in the 15-game table, he is third behind Moore and Newell.

Lennie Lawrence also had a decent start, just slightly better than Joe Kinnear's, although both came into a club in difficulty, and were to suffer relegation in their first seasons, having been brought in to try to save sinking ships.

You may wonder about one manager I have not included: Lil Fuccillo. I hope he gets another crack at management, but have left him out of the 15-game competition because his reign, between Hill and Kinnear, lasted for only 10 games. He won three and lost seven, giving him nine points out of 30. If he had stayed and that average had been maintained he would have been eighth in the 15-game table.

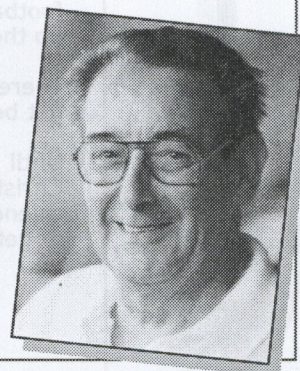
And some may recall another manager I have left out. Ray Harford's New Year present in January 1990 was the sack as the Town languished in 19th place, after a run of ten games without a win in the First Division.

Coach Terry Mancini was installed as his caretaker replacement. His job application failed rotten: his only game in charge was an FA Cup third round tie at the Goldstone Ground. We were up against Brighton, a division below us, and were thumped 4-1, with Danny Wilson getting our goal. Chairman Brian Cole promptly resigned, Roger Smith came in and sacked Mancini, to appoint Jimmy Ryan as the Town's third manager in nine days. Mancini was a great bloke, one of the most cheerful players I have ever met. He hardly deserves to be in my trivia memory as the only manager I have known who never won a single game!

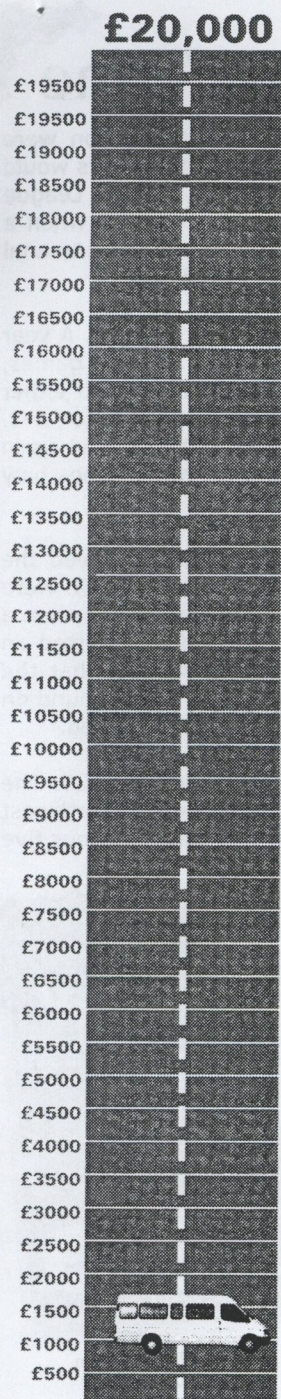
### How the managers' early days compare:

Manager	Home						Away					
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
John Moore, 1986	15	5	3	0	12	4	2	2	3	6	7	26
Mike Newell, 2003	15	5	1	1	16	8	1	2	5	11	21	21
Ray Harford, 1987	15	4	2	2	10	6	2	0	5	8	12	20
Lennie Lawrence, 1995	15	4	2	2	13	9	1	2	4	3	7	19
Joe Kinnear, 2001	15	2	4	2	10	9	2	1	4	10	13	17
Jim Ryan, 1990	15	3	4	0	12	8	1	1	6	5	17	17
Dave Pleat, 1978	15	4	1	3	14	12	0	2	5	2	11	15
Terry Westley, 1995	15	1	1	5	7	12	2	2	4	3	5	12
Ricky Hill, 2000	15	2	1	5	10	10	0	4	3	7	13	11
David Pleat, 1991	15	2	3	2	7	7	0	1	7	1	24	10

Brian Swain







# Appeal for a Minibus...

We as a Supporters Club have undertaken the task of raising around £20,000 for a new minibus, which will mainly be used by the youth team. As you will have seen from articles in the matchday program, the current minibus has seen better days and costs to keep it running are quite substantial.

Fans are invited to help with this cause by sending donations of any size to L.T.S.C. c/o the football club, who have kindly agreed to pass them on. Any supporter who gives £200 or more will have their name on the minibus as will any corporate body who donates £1000 or more. Naturally over the next few months we will be launching further fundraising projects, and it is hoped that with your help we should be able to present the keys of a new minibus to the club at the end of the season.

At the time of writing the amount raised stood at £1528.22 which included £860.66 from the bucket collection held before the match against Wycombe Wanderers. We have also received a cheque for £416.06 from Loyal Luton which was raised from a football match they played against Hitchin Supporters Club and a donation of £200 from Mr and Mrs P Ingram. Further donations have been promised which should see the fund raise by another thousand pounds or so.

All fans are invited to hold their own fundraising events such as stalls at fetes and jumble sales, coffee mornings, sponsored events etc. - all would help the cause and results will be reported via the matchday program, official website and future editions of this newsletter.



**Remember every penny counts!**

*Maureen Barratt - LTSC Committee Member*

## Travel with Town on Tour

Christmas and New Year are a busy time when it comes to football so as usual, Town on Tour will be running their coach service to the 6 away matches we have between now and the end of February (as shown on the mini calendar below) - and look out for details if Luton get drawn away for any Cup matches as we will also be running coaches to those games too!

The Luton pick-up point is from the Maple Road Car park and you can still securely park there for £4. Boarding commences 15 minutes before departure times. Service stops will be included on longer journeys and eats and drinks are available on board along with the Predict-a-score competition and various sport related videos to watch.

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 or on the official website: [www.lutontown.co.uk](http://www.lutontown.co.uk). Your support is greatly appreciated at away games, we look forward to seeing you on board and we hope you have an enjoyable time if you come with us.

**TOWN ON TOUR BOOKINGS: 07960 567465**

## Luton Town Supporters Club

### December

#### Home Games

Saturday 20	Barnsley
Sunday 28	Notts County

#### Away Games

Friday 26	Colchester Utd
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### January

#### Home Games

Saturday 3	Brighton
Saturday 17	Stockport County

#### Away Games

Saturday 10	Rushden & Diamonds
Saturday 24	Grimsby Town
Saturday 31	Hartlepool Utd

### February

#### Home Games

Saturday 7	Colchester Utd
Saturday 21	Brentford

#### Away Games

Saturday 14	Wycombe Wanderers
Saturday 28	Peterborough Utd





# A mixed sack of results over Christmas Time



Luton Town matches over the Christmas period have often thrown up many oddities, none more so, when Luton were involved in matches over Christmas Day and Boxing Day against the same opponents. Often Luton and their opponents would travel together on an overnight train to continue a match that was started twenty-four hours earlier but the Football League outlawed the practice in 1959. The last matches Luton played on Christmas and Boxing Day were against Arsenal, when a Luton side went to Highbury on Christmas Day and recorded their biggest ever win 3-0, but twenty four hours later Arsenal gained their revenge winning 1-0 at Kenilworth Road. Here now are some of the more odd results over Christmas.

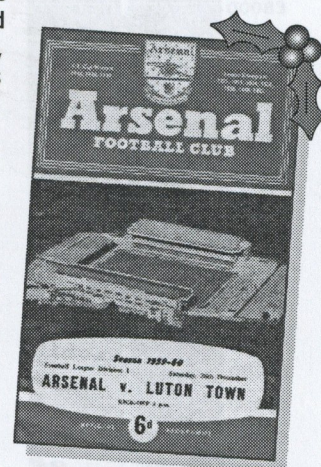
In 1924-25 after a 1-1 draw at Vicarage Road, Watford came to Luton the following day and recorded a rare 3-0 win. A year later after a 1-1 draw over Gillingham, Luton put five past them in a 5-3 win. Goals were always a feature of these games, with usually the home side scoring several while the following day, back at their own ground the home side would either match or beat the previous days score. Take 1934 when Luton put four past Brighton, but a day later they beat Luton 4-1. This was the fourth time Luton were on the receiving end of opponents unwanted presents, as Brighton put four past us in 1923, as did Northampton in 1929 and Cardiff in 1931, only against Brighton in 1923 did Luton fail to win both games only managing a 0-0 draw in the home game.

Nobody ever achieved a double over Luton, and generously Christmas was always a successful time. Luton achieved the double over Notts County in 1935, with a 3-0 win at Meadow Lane and a 1-0 win at Kenilworth Road. Swansea Town were beaten twice in 1950 2-0 at the Vetch Field and 3-1 at Luton. Luton's biggest ever win occurred on Boxing Day 1951, when a Gordon Turner hat trick helped Luton beat West Ham 6-1. But the most unusual match Luton ever took part in occurred on 26th December 1999 against Chesterfield. No one realised at the time, least of all the Club's Official Historian, that the corresponding match against the same opponents was played exactly one hundred years to the day, on Luton's old ground on Dunstable Road. This has never occurred before to any two clubs in the 115 years since the Football League was formed.

In 1899, Luton Town were in their third and final season of the Football League; until they were elected back in 1920. The first two seasons had been reasonably successful; but poor attendances and rising travel costs to the Midlands and Northwest were proving very costly and this was reflected in their results. Up to the Boxing Day game Luton had lost their previous five matches, whilst Chesterfield Town in their first Football League season had won their previous match and were in seventh place. The Luton Town team that lined-up that day in red, black and white striped shirts and white shorts were: Daw, Dow, McCurdy, Morrison, J. Brown, W. Ralley, Eckford, Marshall, McInness, R.W. Fairgrieve and J. Inglis. Luton were no match for Chesterfield as the visitors won 3-0. The return match at Chesterfield, played on the 26th March 1900, saw them run out 2-0 winners. Luton played six more matches that season, and couldn't win any of them, and finished second from bottom and the following season re-joined the Southern League.

Moving forward one hundred years, it was Luton who were in a safer position in the league while Chesterfield were in twenty-fourth place. The 1999-2000 season started, after all the off the field problems had ended brightly enough for Luton but by Christmas wins had become a rare commodity with only one win in six games a 2-1 win over Burnley at home; a win well over due. The Luton team that lined-up v Chesterfield at home in the last match of the twenty century was: Abbey, Boyce, Taylor, Johnson, Doherty, Watts, Locke, George, Douglas, Thorpe (P. Gray) and Spring (McLaren). In a very dull match which finished 1-1, Adam Locke scored for Luton just before half time. Interestingly the return game played one hundred years and a day after the corresponding game in 1900 finally saw Luton gain revenge on Boxing Day 1999 when goals from Watts, George and Doherty gave Luton a 3-1 win.

Brian Ellis - LTSC Member



The programme from Boxing Day in 1959 against Arsenal

## 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 many 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...

#### Annual Player of the Season Presentation Evening

Sunday 2nd May - Riverside Suite - Vauxhall Recreation Centre.  
We will advise when tickets go on sale, please note, members will have first priority and it will be 1 ticket per member.

## LUTON TOWN SUPPORTERS CLUB COMMITTEE • 2003/04

**LTSC President** • Nick Owen  
**LTSC Vice President** • Brian Swain  
**Chairperson** • Mark Chapman  
**Vice Chairman** • John Pyper  
**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, Marilyn Fussell, Adrian Shotbolt, Audrey Bray, Caz Meers, Dave Baker, John Heley, Ray Lelliott, Peter Hosier, Maureen Barrett, Kevin 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!

## Match of the Day!

Christmas is going to kick-off soon and the festive period always means a busy football diary. Listed below are 21 things you associate with a football match - but one is missing. You can find the words reading forwards, backwards, to the left, right and even diagonally. So have a go and see if you can work out which one is missing!

CAPTAIN	LINESMAN	SHIRT
CENTRECIRCLE	NINETYMINUTES	SHORTS
FLAG	OFFSIDE	SOCKS
FOOTBALL	PENALTY	STRIKER
FOUL	PITCH	SUBSTITUTE
FREEKICK	REFEREE	WHISTLE
GOAL	SHINPADS	YELLOWCARD

O	R	W	T	F	I	G	C	D	R	S	S	R	J	I	K	N	N	O	O
N	F	O	O	T	B	A	L	L	E	J	V	W	A	I	V	A	H	E	O
S	I	F	K	B	G	V	R	R	F	M	E	M	Q	L	W	M	Z	N	R
W	F	N	S	M	Y	B	T	O	E	L	T	S	I	H	W	S	R	T	G
N	P	X	E	I	G	A	L	F	R	Z	K	F	R	G	U	E	X	R	V
N	I	J	Y	T	D	U	H	C	E	J	C	C	O	B	T	N	I	E	Q
G	I	Y	U	I	Y	E	O	L	E	I	U	A	S	F	P	I	O	C	U
G	M	A	O	Q	K	M	F	J	T	T	L	T	A	E	S	L	V	I	R
A	L	S	T	V	N	C	I	R	Y	P	I	I	N	B	L	M	S	R	E
T	V	D	H	P	P	Q	I	N	C	T	P	A	P	F	X	T	Z	C	K
E	L	P	Z	E	A	U	Q	K	U	V	L	D	W	C	R	U	S	L	I
N	D	G	O	N	D	C	J	T	E	T	B	W	U	O	P	D	F	E	R
F	A	U	K	H	L	U	E	Z	Y	E	E	I	H	J	A	C	O	Z	T
D	R	A	C	W	O	L	L	E	Y	V	R	S	R	P	G	Q	U	R	S
X	N	Z	J	W	T	S	H	I	R	T	I	F	N	N	B	K	L	B	N
R	X	R	M	T	H	A	J	N	W	V	P	I	S	B	M	K	T	F	S
V	G	Q	P	Z	Z	J	E	F	I	F	H	Y	C	O	G	X	X	L	X
B	F	M	D	Q	B	M	S	O	T	S	L	D	P	X	C	F	O	Q	E
O	A	U	C	X	Y	I	Z	A	Q	K	K	Y	N	G	U	K	I	B	O
C	Z	N	C	B	Q	J	Q	K	U	K	D	M	G	Y	X	D	S	M	F

## Spot the Ball

Here are Luton players McSheffrey, Boyce and Perrett in the thick of the action but the ball has been taken out of these photos - can you work out where it should be?

All answers on page 6.



## Paul Hughes



### Player Interview

**Born** • London 19/04/1976

**Height** • 183 cm

**Signed for Luton** • Aug 2001

**Squad Number** • 21

**Position** • Midfield

**Goals so far this season** • 1

**EARLY YEARS:** Paul always knew he wanted to be a footballer. 'I started off with local teams, Sunday teams, and obviously at school, then you represent the Borough or County and it was then I got spotted by a Chelsea scout and got invited to go to their school of excellence'.

**PREVIOUS CLUBS:** From the age of 17 to 24, Paul was at Chelsea, whilst there he also went on loan to Stockport and Norwich. He then moved to Southampton for a year before he joined Luton Town.

**CHELSEA:** 'I really enjoyed my time at Chelsea, I learnt alot and it was a great place to get the foundations as your learning your career. It was very hard to get a place there but I was really happy there'. One of Paul's best moments in his career is the taking part in the European games whilst he was at Chelsea and scoring on his debut.

**LUTON TOWN:** For Paul, his move to Luton was very positive. 'I had quite a serious injury at Southampton and was out for the whole season. My contract was only a year long so when Luton came along it was a chance to play first team football at a good club and to get my career back on track so I jumped at the chance - the injuries have been the low points to my playing career.'

**INTERESTS:** 'I play a little bit of golf outside of football, I like listening to music, spending time with friends and having a good time. I do like watching football and still go and watch Chelsea quite a bit and I like to watch the games on the TV'.

Interview by Helen Gatward



# WONDERFUL WINGERS

In the history of Luton Town Football Club there have been a number of exceptionally good wingers. One of the first was probably Louis Bookman who was capped by Ireland in 1921. A year or two later, it was a local lad from Leagrave, called Syd Hoar, who was so successful at Kenilworth Road that Arsenal came and pinched him. Another powerful winger, who is probably just within the memory span of our eldest supporters, was George Stephenson, who lived up to his name and travelled up and down the touchline like a steam train when Luton at last gained promotion in 1937. Just after the war, Dally Duncan and Billy Waugh mesmerised visiting full backs on Luton's perpetual mud patch and they were soon followed by the South African, Roy Davies, and Mike Cullen - our one and only Scottish international player.

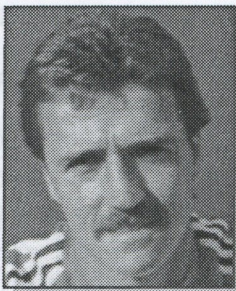
In more recent times, wingers tend to have become a bit of a rarity, ever since Sir Alf Ramsay introduced the 'wingless wonders' of 1966. But strangely enough, whilst everyone else seemed to be shedding their flank players, Luton seemed to be finding some excellent wingers just when they needed them most. Freddie Jardine, later converted to full back, Ray Whittaker and Graham French were exactly what the Hatters needed for the all-out attacking policies of Allan Brown in the dark days of the old Fourth Division, and even if nobody else cared for wingers, we did and we were the champions.

During the upward movement of the Town in the early 1970's, Givens and Jim Ryan were both fast and direct and another ex Man Utd winger, John Aston gave us several wonderful displays when Luton Town were promoted to the top division in 1974. Then in 1982 we had the excellent David Moss with 94 goals in 245 games. He was an outstanding left winger who remains among favourites of all at Kenilworth Road. But another local lad, Kingsley Black did very well for the Town when they won the League Cup in 1988, and Paul Telfer and Scott Oakes turned in some equally memorable performances when the Hatters got to the Semi Final of the F.A. Cup in 1994. In recalling these famous outside lefts and outside rights, it seems Luton Town always appear to prosper when they have a good winger, even down to a couple of years ago when Matthew Taylor and Jean Louis Valois both rampaged down the left wing of Kenilworth Road in another promotion side.

For all the exploits of these wonderful wingers, however, none caused the furore and anticipation than was unleashed on Luton in 1985 when Billy Bingham signed



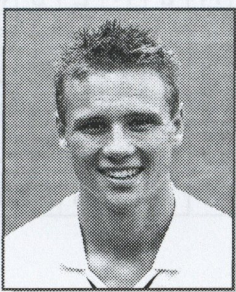
Billy Bingham



David Moss



Graham French



Matthew Taylor

for the Town immediately after starring in the World Cup Quarter Finals for Northern Ireland. At that stage of his career, he had accumulated about thirty international caps and was regarded as one of the best wingers in the country. He was undoubtedly the biggest star Luton had ever signed and although he was not, by his own admission, a tricky player, he worked absolutely tirelessly for the team. He was expected to succeed and he did not disappoint, for his contribution to Luton Town was quite outstanding.

Bingham was only 5 feet 8 inches tall, but what he lacked in inches he made up for in energy and enthusiasm and the crowd loved him for it. There was a hum of excitement every time he got the ball he would gather roars of approval from the crowd as he burst down the touchline and attacked his full back. First, he would attack on the outside and then just before being clobbered or hauled down, he would impudently clip the ball over with the outside of his left boot. As the ball sailed into a mass of muddy bodies under the weak old floodlights on a misty fifties afternoon, Bingham would be lying in a heap, but his job was done. Billy Bingham was that sort of man and his electrifying runs pumped fresh adrenalin into the Luton Town forward line and by the beginning of October, Luton were top of the league.

It could not last of course. For with injuries, inadequate reserves and playing surface like Uncle Ben's allotment, Luton were unable to maintain their neat one-touch style of play and they duly slumped down the table. But as suddenly as the sparkle had disappeared, it returned again with the brightness of the Christmas shopping lights. Luton scored six against Arsenal on Boxing Day and when the F.A. Cup came round two weeks later, in January 1959, Luton, Owen and Bingham in particular, were all psyched up and ready to go on what was to become the Hatters' greatest run in the F.A. Cup and it is debatable as to whether they would have achieved it without the cheerful and effervescent Billy Bingham.

Frank Batt - LTSC Member

Stuck for Christmas ideas?

Why not choose something from the club shop!

With lots to choose from including Replica Kits and leisure wear, I'm sure there is something for all the family. So why not pop in and have a look!



Spot the ball: As shown below.

**QUIZ ANSWERS:** Match of the Day! Missing word is PITCH.



After a nightmare summer, the Town are in administration with a Football League transfer embargo in place. Our only goalkeepers are in the youth teams and Russell Perrett and Steve Robinson are on the injured list, recovering from operations. That leaves just 15 senior players available. But against all the odds the Town enjoy August, with home wins in the league against Rushden and Hartlepool, a 3-2 success at Stockport a defeat at home to Grimsby and a poor display at Brighton in a 2-0 reverse.

The month's major blow was the decision of Tony Thorpe to take advantage of receivership by leaving to join QPR, who get him for a derisory £50,000 fee. Mike Newell is unhappy with QPR for shafting us, and with Thorpe, who a couple of weeks earlier had gone on radio and TV to say how much he loved Luton Town and how important it was for everyone to stick together to see the financial crisis through. *"Talk is cheap,"* says Newell. *"It's easy to kiss the badge, but actions speak louder than words."*

## SEPTEMBER

With Thorpe departed, the Football League kindly agrees to a relaxation on the transfer embargo, and Newell pulls off a smart move. Unknown Gary McSheffrey is signed on loan from Coventry, and proves to be an inspired acquisition.

But it's not all good news. Skipper Kevin Nicholls is struggling with a knee injury, and after playing through the pain for several weeks is forced to give in. He undergoes an operation and will be out for three months. Referees and opponents might be pleased, but we're not. The league allows Courtney Pitt to be signed on loan from Portsmouth as a replacement.

McSheffrey's first Luton goal came in a 3-2 home win over Hartlepool. Steve Howard struck twice and is a target for Sheffield Wednesday, who offer £150,000. Glory be, the receiver declines to sell. Wednesday later buy Adam Proudlock from Wolves, once one of the several hundred players a former Town manager said he was chasing.

Howard won't have long to show his skills: he has a two-match ban for being sent off in the dire 0-2 defeat at Brighton, where he let rip at a linesman. Newell was also "sent off" to the stands at the Withdean for trying to hurry up a throw-in and leaving the technical area.

Red cards are to become a touch too common. Paul Hughes collects two yellows in a drab 1-1 draw at Notts County, where we appreciate that one day's result is not the most important fact of life. County, like us, are trying to come out of administration, and are under notice from the League that if they don't get there before the end of the year they will be chucked out. Town fans contribute generously to the fighting fund bucket collection.

Chris Coyne is emerging as a natural captain in the absence of Nicholls. He gets our goal at Meadow Lane, and with Howard suspended for the next two games Enoch Showunmi a 21 year old trialist straight off parks football in London, is added to the squad. He makes an energetic debut at Plymouth, where McSheffrey nets twice to put us ahead. Showunmi has loads of enthusiasm but is very raw. A series of fouls earns him a booking and he is subbed just before the break to stop the red card that looks inevitable.

It looks as though we are going to enjoy a rare victory over Plymouth, two up with eight minutes to play. Sadly, our defence is about to go through a bad patch in terms of conceding late goals. Plymouth get a couple, and teenage goalkeeper Robert Beckwith is under pressure. But the nerves are steadied when Brian Horton returns to Kenilworth Road. He is given a lovely welcome, but Port Vale are seen off comfortably 2-0. McSheffrey scores again, and 17-year-old Kevin Foley gets the other. He is a real find, slotting in at right back with huge maturity to enable Emmerson Boyce to go into central defence. Adrian Forbes, a midfielder out of favour until now, is tried as an emergency striker, and looks good.

With the squad stretched, Michael Leary, 20, makes an impressive league debut in place of suspended Hughes in a home game with QPR. Howard gives us the lead and we look winners until an equaliser is conceded two minutes into stoppage time.

Similar problems hit us at Charlton in the Carling Cup, but it is a night to remember, with the Town desperately unlucky not to dump out their full-strength Premiership opposition. We are 3-2 up at 90 minutes, through Foley, David Bayliss and McSheffrey, only to concede a goal in the third minute of stoppage time. Charlton go ahead in extra time, but Coyne knocks in a well-deserved leveller. It goes to the agony of penalties, and we are beaten 8-7. Luckless Coyne is the one who missed after 15 perfect spot kicks.

Dean Crowe, unable to win a regular place in the side, wants to return to the north, and is sent on loan to York. But we have more troubles defensively. Russ Perrett has been out all season following a groin operation and at Charlton Bayliss ruptured his Achilles. He has surgery and will be out for up to six months.

Spring and Foley are also out for the visit to Boundary Park, where the performance is as awful as it was brilliant at Charlton. Ian Dowie's suffering with financial problems as well and feels sorry for the under-strength Town side beaten 3-0. Beckwith was sent off after 70 mins for handball outside the area and Dean Brill, 17, kept a clean sheet as sub for his league debut. The only other good news was that Perrett made a return as a sub. The bad news: Howard limped out of the game, and has a hernia, which adds him to the ops list. Surgery means that he will be lucky to return by Christmas.

## OCTOBER

The red card problem is still present: at Swindon a 2-2 draw is marred by a bad joke refereeing performance. Our goals are from McSheffrey (penalty) and Forbes, but Paul Danson is the name on most lips - he finds nine yellow card offences which leave both managers baffled, sends off Sol Davis and Swindon's Stefani Miglioranza, and has Newell banished to the stand and facing an FA rap. Ludicrous!

Fortunately Forbes, the midfielder who was out in the cold at the start of the season, is on fire as a stand-in striker. He nets again in a 3-1 home win over Tranmere, with Perrett and McSheffrey also on target.

Dean Brill makes his first senior start in place of suspended Beckwith against struggling Wycombe at Kenilworth Road, and a 3-1 win pushes us up to eighth place in the table. McSheffrey (2) and Perrett get the goals against poor opposition.

A mainly youth team is put out at Stevenage in the LDV first round and for once a late goal is welcome: sub Matthew Judge hits his first senior goal in the 90th minute.

But the rest doesn't seem to do our seniors much good: we are stuffed 4-2 at Brentford, with Forbes getting both our goals. Beckwith was brought back for the midweek visit to Bournemouth and we are hammered 6-3. Forbes gets another brace, while our opener was an own goal.

Newell has given the youngsters their chance: time now, for experience. Marlon Beresford, 34, released by Bradford, is signed on a one-month contract. The vacancy is created by allowing Pitt to return to Portsmouth. The keeper's debut is in a battling 1-1 home draw with Peterborough. Forbes gets the goal, making it six in six games, and for that he wins the Umbro Division Two marksman of the month award. More bad news though: Hughes has a stress fracture of the shin, and will be out for some weeks.

But we hear there might be much-needed good news in November. The receiver has at least one credible group willing to take the club out of administration.

cont...





## NOVEMBER

There is one result above all others we want to hear this month, and, praise be, our wishes are granted when a high court hearing in Birmingham approves Barry Ward's scheme to sell the club to new owners, a consortium fronted by Bill Tomlins, and including former directors John Mitchell and Rob Stringer, plus former owner Cliff Bassett.

John Gurney's objections are thrown out by Mr Justice Norris, and Gurney is also rebuffed when he offers to buy the club for the best rival bid plus 10 per cent. We have a long way to go yet, but at least we can look forward to coming out of receivership shortly, probably in early December. That will mean the end of the Football League embargo on transfers, which will be much welcomed by Mike Newell.

We go into November with a squad down to the bare bones because of injuries and the inability to bring in reinforcements. Bristol City away looks a tricky proposition for the first game in the month, and after only 90 seconds at Ashton Gate we are up against it – a half-hearted clearance leads to a shot from the edge of the box flying into the Town's net. City attack in numbers, but without a lot of invention, and after 18 minutes the Town spring out of defence. Emmerson Boyce and Matt Spring shift the ball rapidly, and Spring's pass down the middle sets Gary McSheffrey free to slide in his ninth goal of the season.

It's anybody's game after that, with City attacking hopefully and the Town defending carefully, and the draw is about right.

We now have a game we could probably do without – Rushden away in the LDV Vans Trophy, a competition which offers little except to the two clubs who make it to the Millennium Stadium for the final.

Certainly it is not a priority in Mike Newell's diary, especially as we have an FA Cup-tie at Thurrock three days later. So we go to Rushden with a very inexperienced team. There are five youth players, and debuts for Keith Keane and Stephen O'Leary. Rushden send out a full league side, but are stunned when the Town go two up in the first 18 minutes. The opener is a corker, knocked in by 21-year-old Enoch Showunmi, who is still playing for expenses and without a contract. He is brought down for the second, with Michael Leary confidently banging in the penalty.

Our only regular first-teamer on duty at Nene Park is Sol Davis, who must have wished he too had been left out. He picks up his second yellow card from fussy referee Ian Richardson in the last minute of the first half. By then Rodney Jack, target of Davis's two mistimed yellow card tackles, had pulled one back for Rushden, but they were unable to repeat the trick against the ten men.

Next up is a chance to show off in front of the Sky television cameras, with our second game on the box this season. Presumably they have chosen Thurrock (Ryman Premier League) v Luton Town (Nationwide Second Division) in the hope of a cup upset. It seems unlikely when Emmerson Boyce scores his first goal in more than two years,. It comes on 39 minutes, but instead of deflating the part-timers it seems to lift Thurrock while our lads have completely forgotten the need to pass to each other. The performance is wretched, and there are no complaints when Thurrock equalise, just huge relief that our old mate Tresor Kando fluffs a glorious late chance to snatch victory for the Essex side. *"We're lucky we're still in the cup,"* admits Mike Newell.

The poor form continues as we return to league action against Wrexham at Kenilworth Road and some of us remember the Welshmen's last visit, three years previously. On that occasion the Town were three up ten minutes into the second half, only to be beaten 4-3. This time Wrexham start off looking a classy passing side, and deserve their two-goal lead achieved in the first 42 minutes. Boyce,

having waited nearly three years to get his name on the scoresheet, makes it two goals in three days. Pity it was at the wrong end. Fortunately Adrian Forbes bustles in to pull a goal back in the last minute of the first half, and after the break the Town are transformed. They hit form with a vengeance and Wrexham are outplayed. Steve Robinson smashes in a top quality equaliser and Lee Mansell floats in an unlikely winner from an acute angle. It's a miserable return to Kenilworth Road for Andy Dibble, but even worse for Wrexham skipper and playmaker Darren Ferguson. Sir Alex's son gets narked when his claim that he was fouled by Forbes is waved away by referee, Trevor Kettle, who is a couple of yards away from the incident. Incredibly, Ferguson responds with an uppercut to the Forbes jaw, and is sent off.

If we start the Cup replay the way we finished against Wrexham, Thurrock are due for a hiding. Ah, that little word 'if'. Once more we struggle to get a grip on Thurrock until fitness and professionalism finally settles it. Forbes has a bit of luck with the opening goal, but Thurrock refuse to buckle, and equalise through former Town youth player Cliff Akurang. Leon Barnett's slip lets him in, the defender having been called up for suspended Sol Davis. Fortunately the Town get a grip after that shock, and Forbes completes his first hat-trick, with an athletic header and a penalty after Ahmet Brkovic is upended.

The other good news from the cup-tie is that Steve Howard is back, for the first time since late September, after recovering from a hernia operation. It's a timely return, because Coventry City will not allow Gary McSheffrey to be cup-tied.

We need Howard, although not quite in the way we expected, as we head for Yorkshire, for our first visit in 11 years to Hillsborough. Team selection is not so much decide who you want, but who is available. Out through injury are Alan Neilson, Russ Perrett, Kevin Nicholls, Paul Hughes, David Bayliss and Kevin Foley. Sol Davis and Chris Coyne are suspended, and Enoch Showunmi has had to be released after the receiver accepts he has to honour the contract offer made by John Gurney to Peter Holmes.

With only two experienced defenders available – Emmerson Boyce and Ian Hillier – the Town opt for a novel solution. Stick in Steve Howard at centre-half, and play a back three. Those of us who remembered the formation in the days of Terry Westley cringed.

We needn't have worried. Sheffield Wednesday are still coming to terms with the culture shock of playing Second Division football in a Premiership stadium, and are frustrated for 90 minutes as the Town battle for survival. Marlon Beresford has to make one or two very good saves, but the unusual defensive line-up does its job magnificently. It's seven games without defeat, and the end of receivership is in sight...Perhaps it is going to be a happy Christmas for us all!

Merry Christmas



&  
Best Wishes  
for the  
New Year

