

Issue 71
Christmas 2006

HATTERS

LUTON TOWN



SUPPORTERS CLUB

HATTERS CHATTER

Dear Members!

WELCOME to the Christmas edition of our newsletter.

I am delighted that our appeal for people to help with the newsletter, before the last edition of Hatters Chatter, was very successful and my thanks go to all those offered their help. In particular I must thank Rob Hadgraft who has kindly agreed to put together the newsletter for the Supporters Club. As always the biggest problem we have in producing a newsletter is finding enough material to go in it. So, if you have something to say please get in touch and your article could be featured in the next edition.

'Perspective' doesn't really feature in the football fans' dictionary. It's there all right, but rarely used in the context it's supposed to be used in. As I sat in my car after the Ipswich game under a dark cloud, wallowing in the misery of yet another defeat for our beloved team, a message came over the radio saying that Mike Newell had an announcement to make. I must admit my first thoughts were of Newell departing for a club with money and a decent stadium but it was worse than that. The news to which I refer was that Sol Davis had suffered a stroke on the team bus on Saturday and was in hospital.

The news shook me up from my self-pitying gloom. We all know there are many people in the world who suffer greater hardships and personal battles than those of us with just football to upset and annoy us.

Suddenly a 5-0 defeat did not seem so bad and my thoughts turned to whether Sol would make a full recovery and whether we would see him in a Luton shirt again, running down the wing, or stopping an opposition player in his tracks. Like all Luton fans, I sincerely hope that Sol makes a full and swift recovery and my thoughts are with him and his family and friends.

That week had started off well, with the highly anticipated trip to Everton. Everyone was looking forward to the opportunity to see how our team would match up against the Premiership high flyers. After last season's heroics against Liverpool, I thought anything was possible. However, Everton and David Moyes did not under-estimate the Town, particularly after their fright in the previous round, and put out what was

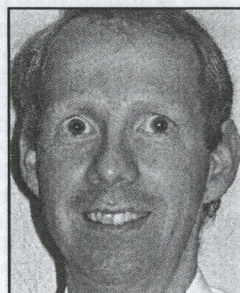
probably his first team. They were just too strong for us on the night and we didn't seem to have any answers to their slick passing and pace. The final score line was, in my opinion a fair representation of the game. However, I think the fans did Luton proud, out-singing Everton for most of the game.

While it would be nice to imagine Luton in the Premiership, with away trips to places such as Old Trafford and the Emirates Stadium, I think our visit to Goodison Park has shown that we are not yet ready to make that step up. I for one do not want to get promoted, only to become the whipping boys of the Premiership, Watford are welcome to keep that title!

Finally I can't finish this article without mentioning the recent 'Meet the Directors Evening'. I was not at the meeting so will not go into detail about the events which have been well reported elsewhere. Every supporter will have their own opinion on the new stadium issue but I feel that if we are ever to move forward, all parties involved need to listen more to the views of others. Good debate is healthy and everyone should have the chance to air views. I am not in any way lobbying for or against the Junction 12 plans but my personal view is that if this is the only way forward then we must all get behind it. The only people who will gain from the infighting among the different factions will be those who oppose a stadium being built for Luton Town, full stop.

Having said that, the main people behind the relocation, including Luton Borough Council and the Luton Town board of directors, must put their cards on the table in a full and honest fashion and let supporters know where the plans stand. Without the fans behind the exercise, any new stadium development is doomed to failure. Hopefully by the time you read this our fortunes will have recovered on the pitch, we will have returned to winning ways and Sol will be well on his way to a full recovery off the pitch.

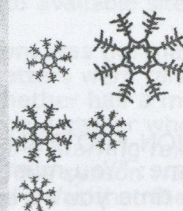
For now, keep on supporting the Hatters!



Kevin
Barrett

LTSC

Chairman



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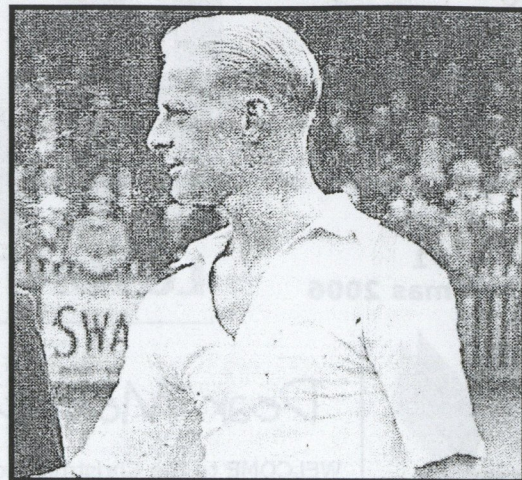
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Photography supplied by
Gareth Owen

Changing times at Kenilworth Road



HORACE GAGER embarrassed.

A NON-FOOTBALL acquaintance of mine recently said to me: "You must have seen a lot of changes during the time you've been going down to Kenilworth Road." I have to admit that change is a theme many long-standing supporters and I frequently turn to in the clubs and bars after a game, particularly when things have not gone quite as well as we had expected.

First impressions linger long in the memory and my own initiation into the exciting and colourful world of football began when my father came home from the Second World War in 1946. The huge vociferous crowds, wide expanse of perfect, emerald turf and the dazzling shirts of teams who came from places as far away as Tyneside, Yorkshire and the West Country, were a far cry from the drab parochial camouflage of war. Luton were then in the same

certainly fewer attractions to take their attention elsewhere. But there is no doubt that children of that era did not patronise teams at the other end of the country simply because they were the current champions; they supported Luton Town. They turned up with woolly scarves in black and white, sat on the perimeter walls or fencing and shook their rattles with the gusto of fans who had never seen anything better than the Hatters or at least not very often. It was also comparatively cheap, only sixpence to stand on the crowded Bobbers terrace I seem to remember, and at half-time a scalding porcelain mug of something resembling tea only cost twopence.

It is often said that the players were also more loyal to the club in those distant days and generally speaking we did not seem to have the rapid turnover in personnel that we see today. However, this was largely due to the very restricted wage structure. The top pay packet was somewhere in the region of £7 or £8 per week, with a £2 win bonus. Officially it was the same at other clubs and there was, therefore, no financial incentive for the players to move.

Nevertheless, the records show that there were usually two or three new players brought in each season and Luton's star performers were occasionally enticed to wealthier clubs via the transfer system. Horace Gager, the Luton Town centre-half and captain, went to Forest, and Hughie Billington, one of our finest centre-forwards, left for Chelsea, as part of the trade in players that has continued at an accelerating pace ever since, and which, as Mike Newell bravely pointed out recently, has become even more of a heinous and pointless waste of money as the years have gone by.

Both of these players were a terrible loss to the Town and seemed to me, as a very young supporter, to be quite irreplaceable. They were excellent performers who had originally featured in the Town side before the war and goodness knows how successful their careers would have been if they had not been denied what was probably the best seven years of their life. Even so, it is some measure of their abilities to consider that Billington scored 70 goals in 94 appearances before he went to Chelsea and Gager was immediately made Forest captain as soon as he arrived, continuing to play until 1955 at the age of 37. But what was most significant about the transfers of these two excellent professionals, was that we were losing two of our very own local heroes. I remember, for instance, waiting for a bus at Round Green with Horace Gager and embarrassing both he and my mother with my fulsome praise of his abilities. And, on many another occasions I played football regularly with Hughie Billington's nephews who proudly gave us all the latest news about our hero. But the reason their departure hit us all so hard was that they cared about Luton and the surrounding area, and we, in turn, cared about them, and it certainly seemed to hurt us far more then than it does now.

At the time there were four divisions of 22 clubs, with the two lower leagues regionalised as Third Division North and South. Luton were then a middle-sized outfit, far superior to teams like Crystal Palace, Watford, Ipswich and especially Norwich, who languished one but bottom of the Third Division South. Sadly, over the years, all these clubs appear to have superseded the Town in terms of facilities, attendances and long term planning.

During the course of that 1946 season the Town played established large clubs like Tottenham, West Ham, Newcastle and Sheffield Wednesday and beat them all, and interestingly won both home and away against Bradford Park Avenue and Newport County who are currently no longer in the present league set-up. At the end of the season Luton finished in 13th position with an average gate of about 20,000, an indication of how loyal Lutonians were to their hometown club.

Luton has always had rather poor support compared with other towns of a similar size. What support we have had has always been good but it was certainly far stronger just after the war than it is today. One of the reasons could have been that fans in those days were supporting a team comprised of far more local lads and there were

'Meet the Directors' event dominated by new stadium saga UP THE JUNCTION: 10, 12, OR NEITHER?

LIKE many Luton Town fans, I went along to the Riverside Suite in early October to hear the club's Chairman and Directors answer questions from supporters.

I think we all knew what the main theme of the evening was likely to be! The last time Bill Tomlins faced the fans was at the same venue in March 2005, and we were assured that the club would be in the new stadium at Junction 10 by the start of the season 2007-8. I recall it being said that the M1 widening would help, as this meant that the club would not have to pay for the electricity pylons on the site to be moved.

Fast forward 19 months and the M1 is being widened, but what of the stadium at Junction 10?

Those supporters who were not there will probably have either read an account of the evening in the local press, or listened to the highlights on BBC Three Counties Radio. The Watson-Challis family entered the hall shortly after the meeting got under way and things got livelier from thereon in. No surprise there, then.

Mike and Sheila clearly had an axe to grind over the fact that the proposed deal at Junction 10 had come to a halt but also the fact that they had bailed out the club in a time of



CLIFF BASSETT

Report by BERNARD ELWEN (LTSC member)

need and were still owed a large sum of money.

There were strong views expressed all round the room, with some fans happy to entertain the idea of a new stadium at Junction 12, while a vociferous section at the back were totally opposed to the idea of the club relocating to anywhere outside the town boundaries. Luton Town Football Club should remain exactly that, as far as they were concerned. There was also concern from the Loyal Luton supporters about the lack of consultation with the fans, other than Trust in Luton members, about their views.

There was a growing sense of frustration that, not only are we still in a ground that becomes more embarrassing each year as yet another club in our league boasts a sparkling new stadium, but that the current and former Chairmen are giving us conflicting accounts as to whether Junction 10 is an option. No matter who is telling the truth and who isn't, it seems to me very disappointing that supporters find themselves in the middle of this sort of slanging match.

The plans for Junction 12 were outlined. The offer on the table is for a 20,000 seater stadium on a 30 acre freehold site that the club would own and which would be paid for by a £25m enabling development. The plans had yet to be submitted but would be some time in the new year. There was some concern raised about the personal involvement of Cliff Bassett, whose land it was, and what he stood to gain from the deal on the table.

There were several questions raised about alternative sites in Luton. Supporters were only too well aware of the potential opportunities in Luton that appeared to have been lost while the 'Junction 10-or-not' saga has rumbled on. We were told that there were no alternative sites that would be suitable, but this was

greeted with some scepticism. One fan even volunteered to fund a professional survey into available sites.

Although the stadium was the main topic, two other matters were raised. One fan queried whether half a million pounds spent on a striker who had not exactly had a starring role on the pitch so far this season was best value. The reply was that the striker was fit when he was signed, and the club hoped to see him more prominently on the pitch in future.

The question of falling attendances this season was also raised. The Chairman replied that the club was pursuing the idea of discounted prices for children who accompanied adults. Since the meeting, this has been implemented, with some success.

The main message of the evening was that, regardless of where the new stadium is to be built, our current one is clearly no longer fit for purpose and we need a new one somewhere as soon as possible. We supporters all have our views about where it should, and should not be, located.

Regardless of where we would like to see it, we are watching developments with interest and we will not let the matter rest until it is resolved one way or another. We expect to be properly and consistently informed about what is going on, even if at times we don't like what we are told.



BILL TOMLINS

First giant-killing

A YEAR after the opening of the Kenilworth Road stadium, the directors and supporters of Luton Town looked forward to a good 1906-7 season.

The previous season had ended in a 4th place finish in Southern League Division One, the best showing since 1896/97. Reasonable placings had been achieved in the South Eastern and United Leagues, attendances were up on the 1904/05 season and the club's finances were healthy. However, by the end of the season gates had fallen and the wage bill was growing due to the directors' decision to participate in three leagues all of which had increases in membership. For a keen fan there would be forty games to watch with some teams visiting three times. 1906/07 was best remembered for Luton's first giant killing in the FA Cup.

New signings

Before the season began, an event off the field saw Captain Joe Blackett sold for £150 by his former club Middlesbrough to Leicester Fosse. This occurred as Middlesbrough as a Football League club held his registration. In return Middlesbrough encouraged John Hogg who was a left-sided full back and their veteran former England reserves centre half Abe Jones to join Luton. Joining them were Neil Murphy from QPR a versatile forward who had been capped by Ireland; Alf Gittins and Bartram Jackson a forward and wing half (midfielder) from non league football in Lancashire. Much was expected from

LTSC member BRIAN ELLIS looks back 100 years (Part One)

Joe Schofield, Stockport County's captain the previous season, for whom a fee had been paid.

The season started with a 1-1 draw at home to QPR in front of a gate of four thousand. Alf Warner opened the scoring with Ted Anderson equalising for QPR but the game proved costly with injuries to Hogg and Jones. Three changes were made for the subsequent visit to champions Fulham. Every player played their part to come away with a point in a 0-0 draw.

The first win of the season came against Southampton but the unbeaten run could not last as WHU won 5-1 and further defeats followed at home against Tottenham Hotspur and Norwich City with an away defeat at Swindon Town. For the next game the return of Hogg and Jones was supplemented with the introduction of Harold Fitzpatrick, whom Luton had to buy out of the Army. His presence helped bring victory over Bristol Rovers and he quickly set up a partnership with fellow Scot Sandy Brown. Fitzpatrick scored the winning goals against Crystal Palace and Brentford

but the three game unbeaten run came to an end at Millwall who inflicted a second 5-1 defeat.

League new comers Leyton (not Orient) were seen off 5-3 with double strikes from Fitzpatrick and Brown with an influential Gittins returning at inside right and laying on the goals.

Strangely the goals dried up during the next three games with the Town losing to Portsmouth and New Brompton. The defence managed a clean sheet and a point in a 0-0 draw at Plymouth Argyle. The goal drought came to an end when another returning player, the unpredictable Alex McDonald, scored twice against Brighton & Hove Albion. Fitzpatrick scored his fifth goal in nine games. Luton lost Abe Jones for their game at Reading and his replacement, the experienced Fred White, took to the field in a strong team that still crashed to their worst defeat in six years, losing 7-2.

Christmas derby

Next up on Christmas Day were local rivals Watford. Fitzpatrick was replaced by Pickering who had not had a good season up to then but he laid on a goal for Alf Warner who had not scored since the opening day of the season. That goal and another he was to score himself gained two valuable points. The year ended with a 2-0 defeat at QPR.

January began against league leaders Fulham who were to win their second successive championship. Centre forward Sandy Brown returned after two games and along with Harold Fitzpatrick they surprised the champions elect, beating them 2-0 with a brace of Brown goals.

Luton's success in the league the previous season gave them a passage into the FA Cup 1st round proper and they were drawn away against Gainsborough Trinity who were in the Second Division of the Football League. Their home record was good with only two defeats in thirteen games. Away from home Luton had conceded twenty-four goals in nine games while only scoring six. The team took to the field without two of their most influential players, Abe Jones and top scorer Sandy Brown. Drawing 0-0 and forcing a replay was a major achievement.

(To be continued in the next issue).



The men who represented Luton Town 100 years ago...

Lewis Emanuel

Born • 14/10/1983

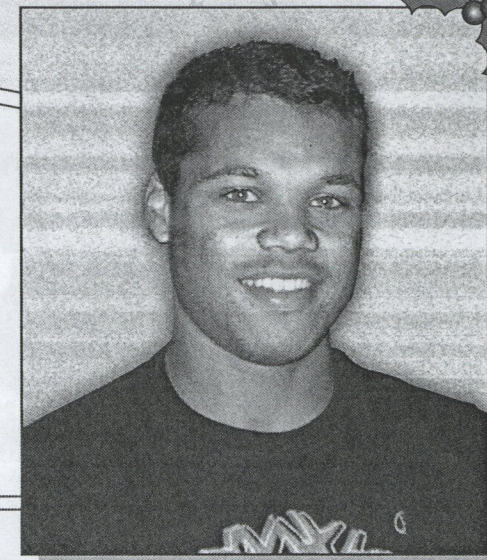
Height • 5'8"

Signed for Luton • July 2006
(from Bradford City)

Squad Number • 16

Position • Defender

Goals scored this season: 1



Player Interview

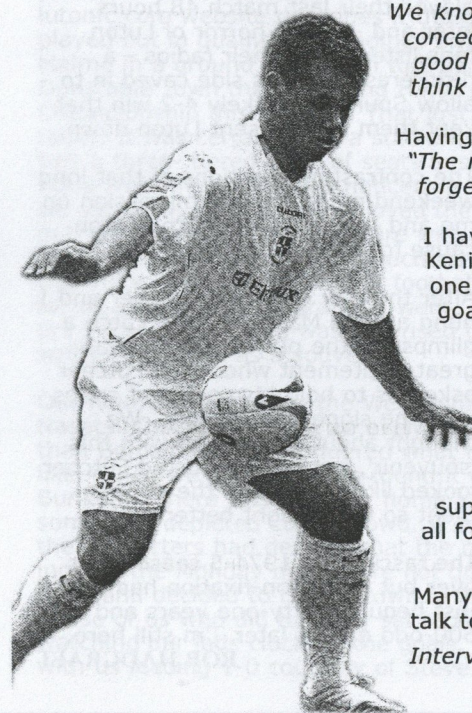
EARLY YEARS: Most little boys want to play professional football when they grow up and for Luton's Lewis Emanuel, that is exactly what he wanted to do and exactly what has happened - his dream has come true. "I always knew I wanted to play football - I was about 7 or 8 and my Mum took me to a local team in Bradford and it went on from there really. I got scouted by Bradford Boys and then by Bradford City scouts and then I went through to play for Bradford under-14's and graduated from there and I got my YTS."

Here at Luton Town, Lewis is a defender, playing on the left side of the field, but this hasn't always been the case in Lewis' footballing history. "I played for my school team, and at school I was a striker, but for Bradford I was a left back. During the years I have since been playing left-wing. I don't really mind which position I play in. To be honest, I'm just happy to be playing and to be picked for the squad."

BRADFORD CITY: Lewis started of his professional football career at Bradford City when he signed as a trainee back in 2000. "I really enjoyed my time at Bradford, I was very fortunate and got to play a lot of games at a young age, and played in the Championship for two years so that's where I got most of my experience." In the six years that were spent at Bradford, a total of four goals were scored by Lewis, which is not bad for a defender! "I'd have to say the best moment in my career so far has to be one of the goals I have scored. It was the goal I scored for Bradford against Cardiff in the 2003/2004 season - I got the ball and I hit it from about 35 yards out and it went in to the top corner."

LUTON TOWN: It was in the Summer of 2006 when we saw Lewis Emanuel sign for the Hatters and it was through his agent that this move came about. "My agent rang me and said to come down to Luton for a trial and to do pre-season with them, so I came down and took it from there. It was a big move to come here and it was a long drive down here so I was a bit nervous but I settled in ok. The lads are all good and made me feel welcome." Since signing for Luton, Lewis has moved down here now so it's much easier, but said it was quite strange moving down south when your from up north!

The state of play from Luton Town during November has been one of the worst runs in over 100 years at the Club. Speaking to Lewis about this, it has been difficult for everyone involved at the Club. "I feel we have done ok this season, I'm just glad to be playing and glad to be given a chance to show people what I can do. We started well this season, I think what is happening, the results and everything, I think this is just like a little blip."



We know we can score goals. It is frustrating, especially when some of the goals we have conceded have been quite sloppy. I think we can turn it round though, the team we have is good and we want to win. It's a close league, there is not a lot of difference in points so I think if we can get a good run together we can get back in and around the play-offs.

Having asked Lewis what he would say is his worst moment in his career to date he replied: "The run we are in now is probably one of the moments I'd like to get over and to try and forget about."

I have to say, what a way we ended that run of seven straight defeats - a nice 2-0 win at Kenilworth Road over league leaders Preston North End, well done boys! Lewis has scored one goal for the Hatters so far this season, but did admit he would like to score some more goals - so we look forward to seeing those!

INTERESTS: When Lewis is not training or playing football, he likes to spend time with his little girl. "My little girl takes up a lot of my time outside of football, so I go to the park with her and take her swimming, and I have dogs as well." There isn't a team that Lewis likes to support, but he does like to watch football. "I watch all football but I don't tend to support anyone really."

Many thanks go to Lewis for taking the time to talk to me. Good luck for the rest of the season.

Interview by Helen Gatward, LTSC Committee



Cash raised for children's hospice

AS those of you who attended the 'Meet the Directors Evening' in October will be aware, a small charge was levied for your ticket. All proceeds from this event were to be donated to Keech Cottage Children's Hospice in Luton and we are pleased to announce that a total sum of £518 was raised.

On the morning of the Leeds game, two members of the LTSC Committee (John Heley and Ryan Canney) presented a cheque to Mark Relf from the Pasque Charity (pictured left). The Pasque Charity would like to pass on their thanks to all the Luton Town supporters who contributed to this donation.

Ryan's lob not enough

ACCORDING to my parents, I first attended football at Kenilworth Road as a tiny lad in short trousers - during the 1958-61 period. Crowds were often massive back then, all flat caps and Bovril, and I got in free by being passed over the turnstiles.

However, the first game I attended as a FULLY-COMMITTED Luton supporter did not come until the mid-1970s, by which time I was a young adult, complete with driving licence and admission money.

Yes, by the 1974-5 season, Bovril and flat caps were out of fashion, and Luton's famous lily-white shirts had been replaced by staggering orange monstrosities with a thick stripe down the left of the chest. They were so bad, they were good! Rumour has it the Luton director and comedian Eric Morecambe designed them.

Incidentally, a few years back, I took ownership of one of those orange shirts - and it had actually been worn in matches by our No.10, Bob Hatton. My brother gave it to me after liberating it from the dressing room area after a match! I'm hoping Cherry Newbery will turn a blind eye to this criminal confession - after all it was 30 years ago and all the vidence is now destroyed.

Getting back to my 'first' match... it was actually the final Saturday of 1974-5 and the opposition was glamorous Manchester City. Under the leadership of 'Happy Harry' Haslam,

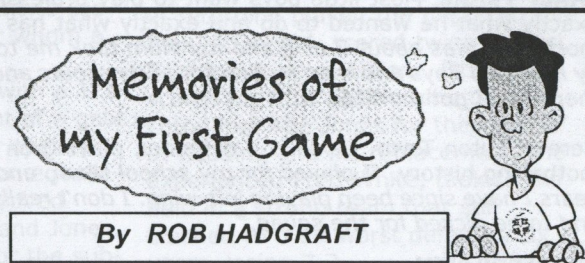
Luton had been back in the top flight for just one season and it was essential we beat City this sunny April day to have a chance of staying there. Chelsea and Carlisle were below us in the table, and the last relegation spot would go to either us or Spurs.

The atmosphere was electric. Inspired by the buccaneer forward play of Aussie Adrian Alston, Luton had recently chalked up some fine results and looked capable of pulling off a shock by avoiding the drop. City, however, were near the top and had stars like Rodney Marsh and Colin Bell in their ranks.

Things got off to a bad start when Hatters winger Jimmy Ryan made a mistake that led to Dennis Tueart opening the scoring. Roared on by



JIMMY RYAN recovers after the April 1975 Manchester City game.



By ROB HADGRAFT

the anxious crowd of 20,000-plus, Luton tried desperately to get back on terms. The equaliser finally came on 72 minutes and the roar nearly brought the Main Stand down. Big Joe Corrigan was caught off his line by eagle-eyed Ryan, who made up for his earlier blunder with a glorious lob from 30 yards out.

Young sub Andy King came on for his debut and Haslam pushed men up in a bid to snatch a winner. But City somehow held firm and we were all left frustrated. Our season was over and we found ourselves one point ahead of Spurs. The Londoners played their last match 48 hours later and - to the horror of Luton fans listening on their radios - a disinterested Leeds side caved in to allow Spurs an unlikely 4-2 win that kept them up and sent Luton down.

The contrasting emotions of that long weekend made a huge impression on me and I was hooked to the Luton cause for life.

After the City game my brother and I hung around Maple Road to catch a glimpse of the players. There was great excitement when Paul Fletcher asked us to hold his packet of crisps while he signed autographs. We thought about running off with this 'souvenir', but the exhausted Fletcher looked like he needed the nourishment so we thought better of it.

The fascinating 1974-5 season was over but my Luton-fixation had only just begun. Thirty-one years and 600-odd games later, I'm still here.

ROB HADGRAFT

Town supporters link up with the team in Sweden

TOURISTS ENJOY A NINE-GOAL FEAST

LTSC member BERNARD ELWEN on summer leave with the Hatters

EARLIER this year, while attending the Supporters Club Player of the Year presentation evening, I asked Steve Howard where the team was taking us on holiday this year.

I went to Bulgaria in 2005 to watch the Hatters play in a tournament in Sofia and thoroughly enjoyed it. Steve told us that Sweden had been mentioned but the plans were not definite at that time. So I waited patiently for the details to appear on the club website which they did - eventually. It was rumoured that the club were trying to organise further fixtures but these failed to materialise so off we went to Malmo to see our boys play Bunkeflo IF and Nasets SK.

The Supporters Club tried to organise a group package trip and Mark Chapman put much effort into researching flights and hotels at a reasonable price. In the end though the most practical thing to do was for everyone to make their own flight arrangements, using an assortment of websites and cut-price airlines to get the best deal possible. Most of us were booked in to the Comfort Hotel in Malmo city centre. This certainly worked for me. The hotel was comfortable, cheap, not too noisy and the breakfast was quite reasonable. It was also within easy suitcase trundling distance of the main railway station. I flew to Copenhagen and then caught the train to Malmo over the spectacular Oresund bridge which links Denmark with Sweden.

And so to the Monday evening and our match against Bunkeflo, a suburb on the outskirts of Malmo in a very pleasant residential area. As for the ground, the lutonfc.com website describes it thus, "the game was played out in quaint surroundings on the outskirts of Malmo in a ground more akin to Barton Rovers or Dunstable Town than anything Hatters will face in the Championship this season". That just about sums it up, really. It was certainly not a stadium as we think of it, just a three-tiered bank of seats beside the pitch. Any noise from the crowd was noticeable by its absence. So we sat back, relaxed and enjoyed the sight of our players in their smart new orange attire with the sound of our players bellowing tactical instructions to one another in the fruity language beloved of footballers everywhere. As far as a matchday programme went, one of our supporters asked for one and was surprised to be given a handwritten team list as a souvenir!

Our next match was on the Wednesday evening, against Nasets. This team are in an even lower Swedish division than Bunkeflo so we wondered what the ground would be like. When we got there, we found it was much like Bunkeflo. There was a bigger home attendance but a somewhat depleted Luton crowd. It seemed that some of the supporters had decided that the match and surroundings on the Monday night were not quite up to expectations and decided to hit the town in Malmo instead. Those of us who did turn up, sat together and enjoyed watching our lads clock up the goals. The first half ended with us leading 1-0 courtesy of Steve Robinson but things

livened up in the second half as Emanuel, Feeney (twice), Morgan (three times) Holmes and Andrew all managed to hit the back of the net. We were wondering (a) when Luton were going to repeat this feat at Kenilworth Road and (b) whether the scoreboard would go into double figures.

The main topic of conversation amongst the Luton contingent was the sudden departure of Kevin Nicholls and Steve Howard and who might be replacing them. The news had just been released on various websites while we were in Sweden and there was much speculation about how the money from their sale might be used to fund replacements. The other topic of conversation was the new away strip, generally thought to be a vast improvement on the black of last season, even if the bright orange and black lettering put some of us in mind of Toffee Crisp wrappers!

We were also pleased with the way that Mike Newell and the team went out of their way to welcome us to the matches and generally show that they appreciated the supporters having travelled to Malmo to watch them play.

Last but not least, Malmo itself was a delight. The old part of the town in particular has a historic charm and there is also a good selection of shops, bars and restaurants. Several of us went to Copenhagen by train from Malmo on the Tuesday. The sun was shining, and the city was a very relaxing place to be.

Here's hoping we have a good time abroad again next year!



AHMET BRKOVIC shows some nifty footwork against the Swedish side Nasets.

AUTUMN PROBLEMS ILLUSTRATED WHERE SQUAD WAS SHORT

A review of the 2006-7 season so far
by JOHN PYPER, LTSC committee member

LIKE many Luton Town supporters, I approached our second season in the Coca-Cola Championship, knowing that after a great first term back in that division, we had a lot to prove to show that our good placing wasn't a one-off.

We knew that if we could start this season as we had the last, we would have a great chance of getting in the play-offs. Having gained 15 points from the first 10 league games, the team's performance wasn't far off last season's. There were some great, and workman-like, performances, no more so than the 2-1 wins against Palace and Barnsley, to name but two.

Prior to this season, we learnt that we were to lose two of our most influential players in Steve Howard and Kevin Nicholls and regardless of the players that have come into the club, I personally believe that we still need to replace Nico in midfield. He was such a great leader on and off the field and was one of the main forces behind our elevation into the Championship.

Of the players that Mike Newell brought in during the summer and the early part of the season, I think we have yet to see the best of them. Adam Boyd arrived from Newell's previous club, Hartlepool, after a season plagued by injury. Full back/midfielder Lewis Emanuel has been a great buy from Bradford City. He has a cultured left foot, powerful shot and a great engine over 90 minutes, provided he avoids injury.

Sam Parkin was a new addition to the squad from Ipswich and has had one or two good matches to date. Unfortunately an ankle operation means that we will have to wait a while to see how his form progresses.

In attack, we have Vine and Edwards, who are in great form at present and could be destined for the Premiership but hopefully not just yet. One player who has gone from strength to strength since the departure of Curtis Davies, is Leon Barnett. He has a great head and agility and seems to improve in every game he plays.

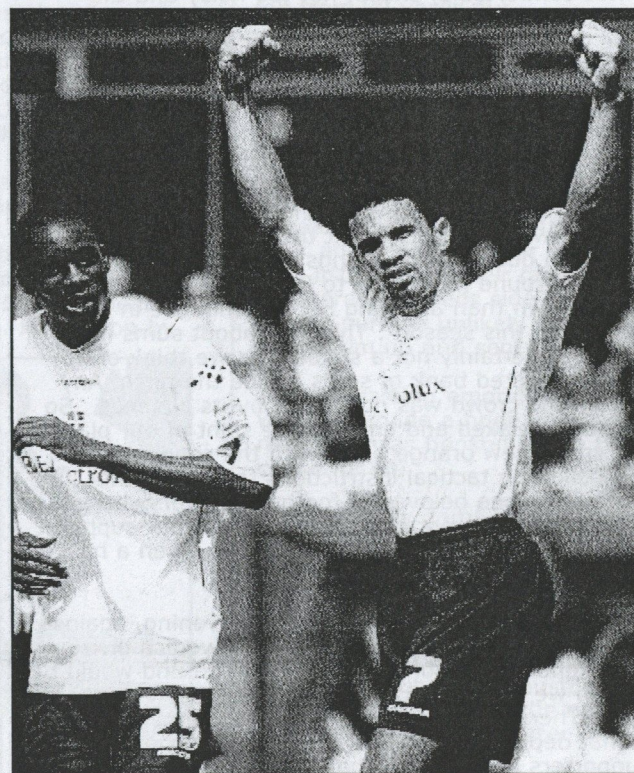
We went into October on the back of some good performances and a reasonably good league position, and started the month in great form with two wins and a draw, elevating us to the top five for the first time this season. The games started to come thick and fast with a difficult League Cup visit to Goodison Park in the middle of the league fixtures. In spite of a battling performance we were turned over 4-0.

That result against in-form Everton and the following three results showed the squad needs cover in a few

areas, namely the midfield position I highlighted earlier and a centre-half being the priority. With club captain, Chris Coyne (knee op), and Russ Perrett (flu and groin problems) just coming back, we are very short on cover in central defence, clearly illustrated by having to play Keith Keane there for two matches. Keane is a good defender/midfielder, but is not a central defender, especially when the man to be marked out of the game is Everton and England striker, Andy Johnson!

All my thoughts of lack of cover on the pitch, and off the field problems with the new stadium were put into perspective when we received the news that full back, Sol Davis, had suffered a stroke on the way to Ipswich for the Sunday televised live match. I, like all Luton Town supporters, wish Sol a full and speedy recovery.

We have had sticky patches in previous seasons in late October and early November, so hopefully with players returning from injury, we can return to winning ways and achieve the play-off place we all hope for.



CARLOS EDWARDS celebrates scoring on
2006-7's opening day against Leicester