



Issue 73
Summer 2007

HATTERS

LUTON TOWN



SUPPORTERS CLUB

HATTERS

Dear Members!

SO, we're heading for League 1 football at Kenilworth Road next season even with one Coca Cola Championship game remaining as I write.

Much has changed at the club over the last couple of months and the pessimists are already fretting about the implications of an FA inquiry and any penalty that might result from it.

I am confident that the outcome is not going to be too serious but even a fine is the last thing the club really needs.

On March 15 Mike Newell was sacked from the manager's post. The team's poor performances had left the Hatters languishing at the bottom of the division and would have been sufficient to see most managers ousted. Eventually it was Newell's outspoken views on non-football matters which were his downfall. We all had different views on his style of management. Although I was never Newell's greatest fan, I do think he brought a great new era to the club, one of flowing, passing football and promotion, something that some younger fans may not have previously witnessed.

Unfortunately the latter period of his tenure resulted in poor performances, player sales (even if these were not his decision?), and increased media attention on his off-the-field comments. I do believe the time had come for a change and Kevin Blackwell's appointment has brought a fresh approach to the club. It was too late to save us from the drop but hopefully will provide us with a quick return.

Rumours had long been circulating that Bill Tomlins was looking to move on but events in mid April took many by surprise. We were only just recovering from the change in manager when news broke that

The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of
Luton Town Supporters Club

Tomlins had resigned.

Again, there is a lot that can and is being said against Tomlins but his legacy will include helping to save the club from obliteration following the John Gurney saga.

This is overshadowed by Tomlins' poor management of both the club and public relations, resulting in much disquiet over player sales, among others issues. I do not believe we will ever know the full extent of what went on in the Boardroom and hope that we can move on and not get hung up on the past.

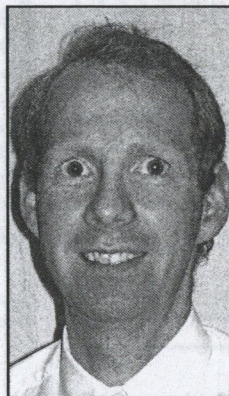
Immediately following Tomlins' resignation came the news that an FA Inquiry had begun into financial matters at the club and in particular some irregular payments. Again we still do not know the full details but we can only hope that any punishment will not affect the team and supporters.

Within days it was announced that a new owner of the football club had come forward in the shape of David Pinkney, a local businessman and racing driver. I met with Pinkney shortly after his purchase and discussed many issues which are of concern to the club's fans. He seems to me to be an honest guy with the best interests of the club in mind.

What is more, he is open to hearing fans' comments so please either let him know directly what you think or alternatively speak to me and I will pass your views on.

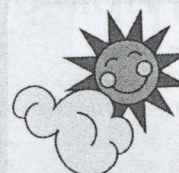
Finally back to events on the pitch and it was great to see so many fans getting behind the team at Southend United. With continued support like that, we can achieve a quick return to the Championship.

Enjoy the summer break!



Kevin Barrett

LTSC
Chairman



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Photography supplied by
Gareth Owen

Thanks to LTSC members

AS you will have seen in previous issues of the newsletter, this season LTSC has been able to make a number of generous donations on your behalf. These have included sponsorship for the club's youth team, a backpack drink dispenser and funds for the Bruce Hobbs Trust. Bruce (Sewell) Hobbs, the club's former Physio suffers from Motor Neurone Disease and you will see from the letters below how much the donations have been appreciated.

(1) From Cherry Newbery

Dear Kevin,
I write on behalf of Luton Town F.C. to thank Luton Town Official Supporters Club for providing us with a backpack drink dispenser for use at matches. Whilst sales were slow at the first match, it did not take long for supporters to take advantage of the new sales point - so thank you everyone for your support.
Yours sincerely,
Cherry Newbery - Club Secretary, LTFC

(2) From Marvin Johnson

Dear Kevin,
I write on behalf of everyone in the Youth Department for the kind donation of £1,500 by the Official Supporters Club towards our youth tours. I would be grateful if you would convey our appreciation to all your committee members, we will of course acknowledge your support on both the official website and in the match day programme. Once our plans are confirmed I will be in contact with you and let you have full details. Finally, thank you once again, we are grateful for your support.
Yours sincerely,
Marvin Johnson - Head of Youth, LTFC

(3) From The Bruce Hobbs Trust

Dear Kevin,
Thank you so much for your donation kindly raised by the Luton Town Supporters Club. The financial advantages of such donations to Bruce and his family are obvious, however what is more beneficial at the moment is the incredible support given by people such as yourself, showing to Bruce that he is not forgotten and encouraging him in the fight against this terrible disease.
I visited the family last night and passed on the news of your support and donation. Bruce was immensely humbled by your kindness and asked me to pass on his gratitude to yourself and the supporters club.
Thank you again for your generous actions. You have no idea how much this has and will help Bruce focus on living.
Kind regards,
Ken Niven (on behalf of The Bruce Hobbs Trust)
(Website: www.road2hope.com)

An unexpected source of support

ON the BBC's 'Football Focus' programme recently, Luton manager Kevin Blackwell and former Arsenal defender Lee Dixon were discussing the cost of going to see Premiership matches.

During the discussion Dixon brought up an interesting point, that some of his friends, although Arsenal fans, go to watch Luton matches as it is cheaper than going to the Emirates Stadium!

With the average cost of a ticket at £50 at Arsenal, a supporter wanting to bring a couple of kids to a match will not have much change from £200 when you add the cost of travel and refreshments.

So when you compare this to some cheap day returns and tickets in the family stand, it's easy to see why they are making the trip to Bedfordshire.

Fair enough, Kenilworth Road wouldn't win any beauty prizes in a stadium contest and at the moment we don't possess a Thierry Henry type (yet!), but if you like your football and want to share the experience with your kids, Luton can still deliver value for money.

Maybe when the new stadium is built (yes, I believe it might happen this time), it might be a good idea to have alongside the home and away fans a FAIR Stand for - Fans Against Inflated Rates. It not only would bring in welcome funds to the club but would show the rest of the league that LTFC puts the fan first.

As long as the line is drawn at Watford fans using it, I think it could be a hit!

DES O'DONNELL
LTSC - Sussex Division

Kit sponsors evening

AS many of you will know, Luton Town Supporters Club has been sponsoring Youth Development Officer Mark Ridgeway's kit this season, while Town on Tour have been the sponsors of David Bell's away strip.

This year we offered the chance to attend the Kit Sponsors Evening to one lucky Town on Tour passenger who had travelled with us to the majority of the season's away matches.

Les Manners, with the aid of his trusty walking stick, is an almost ever-present at the Town's away matches and wouldn't think of getting there any other way than via the comforts of Town on Tour.

We hope Les and his guest had a great evening at the dinner, and enjoyed his chat with David Bell and being presented with his away shirt by the midfield maestro himself.

If you would like to be in with a chance of attending next year's Luton Town Kit Sponsors' Dinner, all you need to do is travel with Town on Tour eight times or more during the 2007/08 season. That will guarantee that your name is put into the hat at the end of the season and you may well end up being the lucky person meeting the Luton players and receiving a shirt at next season's dinner.

TOWN ON TOUR 2007

A review of our season

WITH the last away match of the season now done and dusted we can start packing away the food and drink and preparing for a close season rest - well that's the theory!

The reality, of course, is quite different. Planning for next season is already underway with the need to obtain quotes for coach prices, fix fare levels and plan any changes in the service we may offer all has to be sorted out. It also gives us an opportunity to look back at the season just gone.

It all started so well with a win at Sheffield Wednesday, a trip which historically attracts a good attendance. This was true, in spite of the midweek scheduling, and the coach was almost full as we all looked forward to another good season.

The cup trip to Everton in October provided a extra challenge. We knew the demand for tickets and travel would be high for this match and we ended up taking nearly 130 people on our coaches alone.

Unfortunately for the travelling faithful our luck seemed to change at the Ipswich game and from then on nothing seemed to be going for us, even when we outplayed the opposition.

The away season ended with a 3 -1 win at Southend on a glorious day and we managed to arrive early enough for a quick stop at the sea-front for all our passengers. The atmosphere generated by the Luton fans in the ground was electric and we were even able to poke fun at ourselves in our relegation misfortune, and at the Southend fans who were, by the end of the match, following us into League 1.

It is not easy running the Town on Tour service and everyone who helps does so on a purely voluntary basis. Our thanks go to Ryan, Maureen, Yvonne, Gill, Mark, Heather, Debbie and Helen (sorry if I have missed anyone), who have all stewarded coaches at some time during the season, and an extra special thanks to John Heley, who does a tremendous job taking bookings, co-ordinating with Motts coaches and arranging the supply of the refreshments, even standing in as an emergency steward when required.

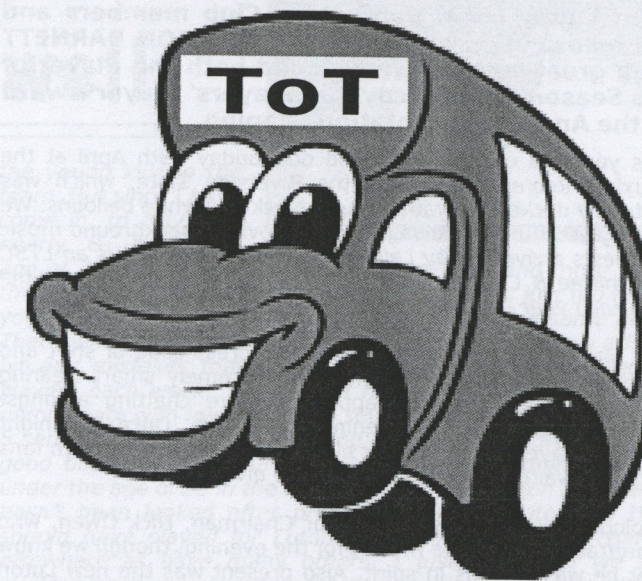
Of course the final 'thank you' goes to all of our passengers without whom the service wouldn't be viable.

We are always open to feedback as we strive to provide a good quality and cost-effective service for our passengers. So please let us know if you have any ideas on how we can improve.

There will of course be a pre-season tour to contemplate and as soon as we know the location we will look at arranging travel for supporters wherever it may be, home or abroad.

Enjoy the close season - see you all next year.

Regards
KEVIN BARRETT



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Situations Vacant

WANTED - Town on Tour Stewards

We are looking for stewards to assist on away coach trips with: Collecting fares; serving food & drink; organising DVD entertainment; and generally ensuring our passengers have a pleasant and safe journey. In return we offer free transport to the match and a small donation towards the cost of a match ticket. If you are interested please contact Kevin Barrett on 07734100010 or e-mail townontour@btinternet.com

WANTED - New committee members

Want to make a difference for the fans? We need new committee members to provide ideas, feedback and assistance to the committee and LTFC. If you want to help - even if you don't know how - please contact Kevin Barrett on 07734100010 or e-mail him at: k.j.barrett@btinternet.com

AGM in July

THE Luton Town Supporters Club AGM will be on Monday 9th July at the Eric Morecambe Suite from 7.30pm.

Don't forget to rejoin

LUTON Town Supporters Club members are reminded to rejoin for the 2007/08 season - a renewal form is included with this issue.

HATS OFF TO LEON!

Both Luton Town Supporters Club members and his fellow team members saluted LEON BARNETT on a great season. He scooped both the Player of the Season and the coveted Players' Player Award at the Annual Presentation Evening.

This year the evening was held on Sunday 29th April at the Vauxhall Recreation Club in the Riverside Suite, which was tastefully decked out with orange, black and white balloons. We were greeted by 'Bandwagon' who provided background music as guests arrived. (Ray Lelliot who leads the group is an LTSC Committee & Century Club member and he gives us his time free each year - so thank you Ray.)

The players all arrived smartly with a dress code of shirt and trousers, the youth players looking extremely smart wearing full suits. They seemed happy and were chatting amongst themselves before the evening kicked off. Once the night started, players went to their allocated tables and sat with fans eagerly awaiting for the awards to be given out.

Apologies were received from our Chairman, Nick Owen, who regrettably couldn't be with us for the evening, though we know that he was with us in spirit. Also present was the new Luton Town Football Club Chairman, David Pinkney, and he kicked off proceedings with some warm words of welcome & thanks. He was happy to be with us for the night and mixed freely with fans. Our new manager Kevin Blackwell was also present and gave a positive address even though we had been relegated.

It was great to see former player Kingsley Black and star of the Littlewoods Cup Final winning side once again. Kingsley, who still lives locally kindly agreed to be our Guest Speaker for the evening and he entertained supporters with memories of his time at Luton and tales of life under Brian Clough when he moved to Forest.

We were also lucky enough to have Linda O'Brien, from Anglia TV with us. Linda, who has seen many of the Town's games during the season, was kind enough to accept our invitation and present Keith Keane with the Goal of the Season Award. Grateful thanks are extended to Simon Oxley of Three Counties Radio for ably and effortlessly hosting the award ceremonies.

Mid-way through, a delicious hot and cold buffet was served, which seemed to go down very well with the supporters and the players! It wasn't long before the players went up to the tables and the queue's grew!

The evening was finally brought to a close, in rousing fashion by 'Backtrack', a group of singers who live and work in the region. They are all friends from musical backgrounds and have made numerous appearances in local shows. It was a chance for supporters to let their hair down and have a dance!



2006/2007 Award Winners
Keith Keane, Leon Barnett, David Bell and Dean Brill

As always, the evening was very enjoyable and everyone had a good time so thanks go to all those who put in lots of hard work and effort to make it the success it is every year. Let's hope it's another promotion party next season!

The Winners for 2006/2007

Goal of the Season
Keith Keane against West Brom (Away)

Young LTFC Player of the Season
Dean Brill

Players' Player of the Season
Leon Barnett

Internet Player of the Season
David Bell

Young Supporters Player of the Season
David Bell

LTSC Player of the Season
Leon Barnett

GRAND PRESENTATION DRAW WINNERS... GRAND PRESENTATION DRAW WINNERS...

1 Electrolux Fridge/Freezer	01687 R.V. Kempson	11 CDs	04292 Terry Toone
2 LTFC Stand Season Ticket	01420 Keith Woodruff	12 Town on Tour Trip for 2	02480 Alan Ayres
3 TV and DVD Player	03143 D Lawson	13 LTFC Polo Shirt	03505 Fred Mayne
4 Framed Shirt	01096 R.W. Taylor	14 N.T. Gift Set	09212 Del
5 £10 M&S Gift Voucher	05537 Marilyn Fussell	15 Boxed Game	06704 Mr Gregory
6 Book Bag	01576 K Rayner	16 A Hatters Surprise	05011 Laishley
7 Town on Tour Trip for 2	03014 Alice Hall	17 Coca-Cola Fridge Pack	05710 Cliff Savage
8 Toiletries	01595 J Reyland	18 LTFC Club Shop Voucher	00867 Julie Parry
9 Thorntons Delights	05748 Hensley	19 CDs	05544 J Parrish
10 Signed LTFC Football	05969 Jakeman	20 Luggage Set	09295 Helen Gatward

Thank you to all of you who bought prize draw tickets and congratulations to all those who were lucky winners. If you have won a prize and have not yet claimed it, please contact Vic or Marilyn Fussell on 01908 569339.

Meet the Manager

Kevin Blackwell



EARLY YEARS: Football was always going to be a way of life for new Luton manager, Kevin Blackwell. "I played locally as a boy for St. Josephs Junior School, then at secondary school, Cardinal Newman. I got picked to play for the County, had trials for Luton Town, then ended up going with Cambridge United, with Ron Atkinson and Paddy Sowden, who was Chief Scout at Luton, and that is how the career started."

PLAYING CAREER: During his years of playing football, Kevin has a long list of teams that he played for. "As I said, I started at St. Josephs, went on to play for Cambridge United, then I moved on to Bedford Town, Barton Rovers in the FA Vase at the age of 18, then went to Barnet in the Conference, then Scarborough in the Football League, Notts County, Torquay, Huddersfield and Plymouth." Kevin recalls the best players he played with, was when he was at Notts County. "We got to the Premier League that year with the likes of Craig Shaw and people like that who went on to have very good careers, and it was a great achievement for a club like Notts County."

When you speak to some players, they are unsure of what they want to do once their playing career is over although most say they would like to stay in football, and Kevin was the same. "I loved coaching, and being a goalkeeper, I was a very good talker, a good organiser of my back four and many people said to me that I could make a good coach. It was something I hadn't really thought about and I got badly injured and smashed my leg at Scunthorpe while playing for Scarborough. I was out for a year and a half and I was based at Lilleshall for about 6 months. While I was there I watched some of the coaching and it really interested me, and it is there that I saw what a good coach was so I started embarking on the coaching. At Notts County after I was transferred, I did coaching for the under 9's at the Centre of Excellence. I progressed from there, did all the badges, and finished playing. I did the youth at Huddersfield then the youth and reserves at Plymouth, then the first team at Sheffield United and the rest is history!"

LUTON TOWN: Dreadful results and matters off the playing field at Luton in March ended up with Mike Newell's contract being terminated and this allowed the door to open for Kevin Blackwell to come and join the Club. "I'd been out for 5 months and I'd had a couple of offers from decent clubs, but I got a call from Luton asking to speak to me, and I spoke to certain people here at the Club, who painted a picture, which I know has been painted for nearly 30 years, I'm a Luton lad, so I'm well aware, but I was given certain assurances that made me think that it was the right time to come to Luton. On the basis of that, I looked at the fact that I know the area, my family lives here, it's not as if I didn't know what I was coming into, I felt that the time was right. The things that I have seen, the new Chairman coming onboard, and I have to say that David Pinkney is one of the reasons why I did come here. I had a chance to meet him before I'm came here and he sold a vision to me. I knew how successful he is as a businessman and I thought that if he can bring that to the football club then I thought why shouldn't I give it a go!"

When Kevin joined Luton Town Football Club, we were stuck down at the bottom of the Championship table although we still had a mathematical chance to stay up, so it was a massive task for our new manager. "I knew the situation the club was in. I was disappointed to see that the loan market hadn't been used to it's full potential as it may have helped

the young kids in the team. But since I have come in, to play with nearly 8 under the age of 23 is very rare at a professional level, and more so at the level Luton are at in the Championship. It's just too many youngsters trying to learn their trade, all at the same time. That means their learning curves are starting to clash a little bit and mistakes that might be made come from different players each week. You need a happy blend, the club were unfortunate with injuries to the senior pro's but there are only 5 seniors here so it is something we have to address. It is a good basis for the future though to have so many players under the age of 23 in the first team. For me, Luton as an area hasn't been looked after properly. I was a Luton lad that should have played for Luton but I had to get my chance elsewhere as have many others, I just wonder if we are working hard enough as a club to bring in local talent. When you look at the million plus people in the local area, I'm sure we can get 3 or 4 players through every year, and with a good transfer policy and trying to bring in other players to build a strong youth, the future is bright.

Overall, Kevin has been pleased with the performances of the team since he has been in charge. "I was worried knowing the inexperience of the squad, other than maybe Bell and Foley, some of the others have only got 8 or 9 games under their belt so they are not only young but also inexperienced. To be fair, they have got better over the weeks, that is my opinion. Looking back over results, like Southend, I felt we should have had more. I felt we should have beaten Derby, and QPR. Apart from the first half against Plymouth, I do feel they have played well. Anyone at Burnley knows we should have beaten them. Against Southampton, it was one minute of madness before half time. We had 2 goals disallowed. You need things to go for you. Looking at the last 6 or 7 games the team have been competitive, but unfortunate not to gain anything.

FUTURE: Looking ahead to next season already, Kevin wants the players to do things his way, pre-season is planned and ready to go. "The players will have to do what I want them to do and as long as they take it on board, it's a different regime but hopefully we will see results for it. I will be looking to add to the squad, I will need to wheel and deal and get one or two out. I'd like to bounce straight back. It is a challenge as not many teams bounce straight back. This season is an exception, with Sunderland, Birmingham and possibly West Brom, bouncing straight back up but they spent heavily on players. So if we can spend a decent amount of money and influence some good signings we would have a decent chance next season - I want to bounce straight back. Sometimes for whatever that has gone on at Luton, maybe we need to take a step back for whatever reason, but what we must do is learn from the past.

We need to work together, the club, the fans, and all move and push up in the right direction. We have to believe in someone at sometime and if we can all do that together, we have a bright future, the sky is the limit for Luton Town.

Kevin Blackwell

Many thanks go to Kevin for taking the time to talk to me. We wish you every success as Manager of Luton Town FC. Interview by Helen Gatward, LTSC Committee

SELF-INFLICTED MAYHEM AGAIN!

LTSC member FRANK BATT gives a fan's view of Luton's traumatic 2006-07 season

I HAVE been asked to write a review of the season just finished, and in a nutshell it is a very simple task.

The Town started well and finished atrociously. But there is a bit more to it than just a simple statement because, apart from being a bitterly disappointing campaign, it has also been a very complex period and unfortunately, in the history of Luton Town, this self-inflicted style of mayhem seems to happen with an irksome regularity.

Before we kicked off against Leicester in early August I imagined, or perhaps wistfully dreamed, that the Hatters would do just as well as the previous season or maybe even better. That judgement, however, was based on last year's team and did not factor in the transfer of Nicholls, our dynamic captain, or our one consistent goal-scorer in Steve Howard.

A bright start

Neither did it take into consideration the loss of two senior professionals in Coyne and Underwood before a ball had been kicked.

In the light of these deficiencies, the Town started very brightly and after 15 league and cup games the Hatters had a fine tally of seven wins and only three defeats.

After some fine performances against Brentford, West Brom, Barnsley, Birmingham and Hull, Saturday 21st October erupted with a six-goal thriller against Leeds. It was even enough to prompt famous local poet, John Hegley, to write an appropriate ode in celebration.

The Town stood fifth in the table at that point and even the ducks in Wardown Park were singing.

That, however, was as good as it got and within a week the season turned turtle and the whole club was shattered. Two games, in which

the Town conceded nine goals without reply, changed the whole course of the season.

Losing by four goals on the premiership turf of Goodison Park was understandable but a painful televised defeat at lowly Ipswich, by five goals to nil, seemed almost incomprehensible.

When news later filtered through of the illness suffered by Sol Davis shortly before kick-off, it put the result in some sort of perspective. It obviously had a devastating effect on the club and, to my mind, they never really recovered from it. The whole team appeared to lose concentration as things went from bad to worse.

An avoidable demise at home to Burnley was followed by a comprehensive loss to an inferior Preston side. But after the next match, at home to QPR, Mike Newell criticised one of the officials for costing Luton the game and all hell broke loose.

The fact that an assistant referee from a minority group had been specifically fast-tracked to publicise and promote the FA as a progressive body had been a disaster. By my reckoning the assistant referee that day was very poor indeed and did much by her lack of attention to cost Luton the game. But it was the repercussions from that day that, in my opinion, unsettled the whole club even further.

Newell had already criticised his own board of directors and had also caused a national furore with his statements about football agents.

Outspoken Mike

Some might argue that he was merely exercising his democratic rights but it achieved very little in promoting a positive image of the Town in the national press however right he may have been.

When Derby, the league leaders, ably led by the astute professionalism of Steve Howard, beat the Hatters with probably the best display



'I have never seen the club implode with such devastating consequences'

(Left) A rare moment of delight! Rowan Vine, David Bell and Dean Morgan celebrate a goal in the win over Birmingham City.

we had seen by a visiting team, rumblings of discontent rang around the ramshackle old ground.

To his credit, Newell managed to rally his side and, after a couple of narrow away defeats, the Town took nine points from the next eight games and also managed to edge past QPR in the cup.

It was during this period that fans and players alike began to realise that Lady Luck just wasn't on their side with heart-breaking defeats at Sunderland, Birmingham and West Brom yielding only one point after fine performances that certainly seemed to warrant far more.

Kamikaze transfers

The straw that broke the Hatters' back was the January sales when Rowan Vine and Carlos Edwards were transferred to Birmingham and Sunderland, respectively. To fans and media alike it seemed the ultimate kamikaze act of self-destruction to sell both your leading goal-scorers.

At this point Newell's distrust of agents probably backfired on him. For a man who had the insight to bring in Underwood, Beresford, Vine, Edwards, Heikkinen and Bell, and had also chased after McSheffrey for two years, it must have been particularly disappointing not to be able to capture or buy the players he wanted, and he blew his top again.

Newell's swan song of "Where's the money gone?" was enthusiastically taken up by the crowd as the team lost heart

and ploughed an efficient furrow towards League Division One.

A new chief executive had been brought in to cover up the sins of the board over such as claims of asset stripping, lack of progress on a new ground and finally, the ignominy of illegal payments. All this put an end to the reigns of both manager and chairman and the ramifications of improper accounting practices will surely return to haunt us next year.

During the season there have been some good performers. Certainly Vine and Edwards early in the season but Barnett, Bell, Coyne, Keane and, occasionally, Heikkinen and Foley have, to my mind, acquitted themselves well in what has been the worst run I have ever witnessed, with only two wins in 22 games.

Devastating consequences

Supporters and players may well cast envious eyes at the top four sides in the division because each of them has one of our best four players from the last two years. In all the time I have been an ardent fan of the Town, I have never seen the club implode with such devastating consequences as it has this season.

Fittingly it was left to the final day of the season to demonstrate in the most perfect of dramatic climaxes exactly why the Hatters had been such worthy winners of relegation with the most inept and humiliating display of the entire season against the champions elect, Sunderland.

Colourful career of winger Graham French - Part 2

GUN-TOTING LUTON STAR WHO CHANGED HIS NAME!

PART TWO, by LTSC member ROB HADGRAFT

IN his autobiography, 'A Little Thing Called Pride', ex-Luton manager Alec Stock wrote: "I still think about Graham French a lot and dream about what a great player he could have become without all the distractions."

His Luton team-mates never knew what to expect next, with French's chaotic personal life causing him to miss training, turn up late for games and on one occasion even hid greyhounds in the club's gym, where they proceeded to chew up the equipment. He smoked menthol ciggies, allegedly for medicinal purposes, and had the appearance of a hung-over rock singer - but with a ball at his feet was a true genius.

French's finest season was 1969-70, when he laid on goals galore for a young Malcolm MacDonald, who had just been converted from full-back to striker and smashed in 28 goals as the hatters roared to promotion.

Typically, at the height of his powers and with the club on the crest of a wave over the summer of 1970, French pushed the self-destruct button once again. First, he refused a new contract and then didn't bother to turn up to training while the dispute raged. Shortly after suspending the player, Alec Stock was then stunned to be told by Beds CID that his winger had been charged with attempted murder and would not be coming into work!

The case went before a jury at Nottingham Assizes, who heard that a petty, sneering remark about an autograph in Luton's Caesar's Palace nightclub had set off a chain of violent events. A man was shot in the chest and another beaten up with a knuckle-duster after a car chase. The person responsible for both attacks was French.

After the main charge was reduced from attempted murder to GBH, French and his private gang of heavies (including a 23-stone bouncer known as Tiny) lined up in court to deny the allegations.

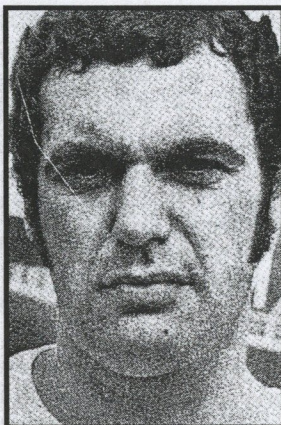
The court was told French had recruited the gang to go on a revenge mission after a pub altercation. French borrowed a white Mini from a married

woman he was on "visiting terms" with, and lay in wait late at night for one of his victims to pass. After being chased and cornered, the man had his nose and ribs broken, with French allegedly using a knuckle-duster.

French and his boys later located their other principal target at a Luton pub in the shape of a man known as the 'King Joker' of the local housing estate. By this time the winger was in possession of a .22 American revolver. French claimed the gun had only been for show, and it had gone off accidentally, but a ballistics expert made a nonsense of this claim with evidence that it had been in contact with the man's chest when the heavy trigger was pulled. The victim needed emergency surgery at a London hospital to have the bullet removed from his chest.

Then followed a "Keystone Cops" getaway from the pub as French and his five substantial cohorts squeezed into their tiny getaway car while their opposite numbers hurled random missiles at them. French brandished the gun Hollywood-style as the little car chugged off.

Although French denied the assault charges but admitted possession of the gun, he was found guilty and told by Justice Melford Stevenson that there was little doubt the whole unsavoury plot had been organised by the footballer himself. He said French's "synthetic glamour" as a local hero had influenced his hangers-on.



Graham French

French, then aged 25, was sentenced to three years' jail on a Friday morning as his Luton team-mates were at the other end of the M1 preparing for a table-topping home game with Sheffield United.

A slimmed-down French emerged from prison in 1972 and Luton's new manager Harry Haslam offered him the chance to rebuild his career. Despite his lifestyle, French had always been blessed with natural strength and stamina, and he made typically obsessive attempts to recapture fitness. But as teammate John Moore recalled, it became sadly apparent that "prison grub had taken its toll" and French's much-abused body rebelled as he punished it in training.

Nevertheless, to the fans delight, his second coming occurred in December 1972 and he fired home a cracking goal against Millwall. The goal was greeted with ecstatic scenes and French's surly face cracked into a rare and huge smile. But, after a handful of appearances and a loan spell at Reading, it was clear he was a mere shadow of his former self, and he subsequently moved to the USA to try his luck in Boston.

Less than three years later, French's former mentor Allan Brown briefly took the managerial reins at Southport, struggling at the bottom of Division Four. Hearing of French's availability, he invited him to troubled Haig Avenue for a trial. French grabbed the chance, announcing that he would get himself fit - and, he told Brown, he now had a new name: 'Graham Lafite.'

Apparently the name-change was not a bid to start afresh with a new identity, but merely a whim, with the name being 'a play on words' that had amused him. With little prior publicity, French was slipped into the Southport team for a couple of League games under his new name, and he helped inspire a mini-revival with occasional flashes of fine wing play.

Again, however, he never really looked fit enough for the rigours of full-time football and was soon released, announcing his intention to head for South Africa or Australia.