

MAD AS A HATTER!

THE LUTON TOWN FANZINE

Issue 43



Nov 97

OUT ON HIS OWN...



After what seemed to be a slow start, Tony Thorpe is back on the goalscoring trail, hopefully setting Luton Town on the way to a promotion challenge.

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THE LUTON TOWN FANZINE

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THE LUTON TOWN SHOP at ASDA, Wigmore Lane, Luton.

CONTRIBUTIONS PLEASE

We're back with you and there are another four issues to come this season. Your contributions are always welcomed, and we look forward to receiving your cuttings, articles, match reports, letters, drawings, photos, money etc, etc. Such items should be sent to the above address. The deadline for issue 44 will be December 5th, and it will be on sale December 20th.

EDITORIAL

It's been a funny couple of months, hasn't it? Well, no, not really. It's actually been anything but funny until the last couple of weeks. The team we all expected to walk this division, the bookies favourites, were looking like relegation candidates. Not, actually, the same team but the shadow version. Now, I'm not going to claim that the abysmal results of the early part of the season were purely due to the injury crisis, but surely no-one can doubt that they heavily influenced results around the end of September and beginning of October. You'll need no reminding of when things reached their nadir, and at that time the under-fire Lennie Lawrence was saying that things would improve when we started getting some players back. For those who were knocking Lennie, can you now start to believe? Presumably, when Lennie said, at the Supporters Club do at the end of last season, "Live at risk, it's the only way" he wasn't referring to his own job prospects, but for a while there it looked that way.

Thankfully it's been improvement all the way since early October. The injury crisis forced the signing of Alan White, who looks to be improving with every game, and should be an absolute bargain for £40,000. Phil Gray arrived for 10 times as much, and should do a good job once he's fully fit, which he doesn't seem to be just yet. At the same time, we saw several youngsters not just thrown in at the deep end, but thrown from the highest board. Of these, Matthew Spring made the biggest impact, and could well be challenging for a place in the first team from now on. Gary Doherty did reasonably well, but isn't the finished article just yet. Liam George apparently disappointed a lot of people, but this could be because the expectations are so high. His goalscoring exploits in the reserve and youth teams last season are not going to be repeated instantly in the first team, and we have got to be patient. It is now surely time to clear the decks and get rid of some of those squad players who are just never going to challenge for a permanent starting place. It should have been done in the summer, but better late than never.

Patience could be the main message of this issue. We have had to be patient in waiting for a decision on the new stadium, which will probably be announced one day in the dim and distant future. Whether we should read anything into the delays that are still dragging this on, I don't know. I'm starting to think that the decision will be announced around Christmas — but in which year.....

Also on the subject of patience is this issue of Mad. We've certainly kept you waiting for it, and have been delighted with the number of people who have been asking when it would appear. It at least proves that there is still a demand and enthusiasm for our efforts, and we're grateful. The delay has been due to pressure and volume of work (real work, rather than this). Having said that, there was a bit of a shortage of articles as well, but that seems to be picking up now, but remember without your contributions, there cannot be a fanzine.

Eat My Poll! (Part 2)

Carrying on from last issue, we bring you the remainder of the poll results, but warn you that under the categories 'Things to Look Forward To' and 'Things to Dread' include some words that you may find distressing (ie. words like 'Watford', 'losing' and 'to'). If you are of a nervous disposition we suggest that you avoid reading those two pages.

Idiot of the Season

Bontcho Guentchev

God, it's only November and it already seems like the hapless little Bulgar has been gone for years. "His tragedy is that he could be a great player", but "why does he think the fans like him?". Nudged into second place by two votes was Graham Bright - "former MP (ha!)" - basically for "his stance in regards to the KohlerDome — chasing votes". Joint third was Lennie Lawrence, for "being too defensive", "mincing his words", "making erratic changes to the team", having "no tactical idea" and "picking crap substitutes". Alongside Lawrence was Julian James; "One has to admire his spirit in refusing to be deferred from committing further acts of stupidity, usually in front of the referee, just because he has been shown a yellow card". Out of 35 nominations, honourable mentions go to "Thomas and Alexander's hair stylists", "that 'Albino' character", "the bookies who made Watford favourites" and "the man who sits behind me in Block E, Kenilworth Road End — big mouth and nothing intelligent to say, so why does he bother?".

Hero of the Season

Ian Feuer

With a third of the vote, St. Feuer wins this category for the second year running. "Anyone who has to play behind our back four deserves a medal". Second place went to David Oldfield "for 100% effort in every position, as a result he has won back the crowd's respect". Just behind him was 31 goal supremo Tony Thorpe. He probably could have got a few more votes, but "heroes tackle back as well and are not lazy bastards". So, that's one person not sticking up for the arrogant sod.

At this moment I'd like to personally condemn the people who put "whoever scores the winner in the play-off final to take us up". That really put the kiss of death on it, didn't it? Perhaps it would have been better to have waited until the season had ended before filling in and sending us an 'End of Season Poll'. The title rather gives it away a bit, don't you think!

Best Ground

Meadow Lane (Notts County)

Finally stopping Molineux's run of 3 wins in a row in this category (probably only on the technicality that we didn't go there) was Meadow Lane, with a quarter of the vote. "Because you could see really well and it wasn't far to travel, and we met a really nice man called George who gave me a kiss every time we scored — shame it wasn't 10-1!" Four votes behind was "dare I say it" and "God, this

hurts...." Watford ("sorry, but it was"). I suppose we have to give in to the fact that the donkey sanctuary at Vicarage Road isn't that bad — "especially seeing 6,500 Luton fans — a figure confirmed by Watford, but not Luton". A couple of votes further behind was Turf Moor, then the New Den.

Worst Ground

Millmoor (Rotherham)

So, Millmoor didn't impress too many people then. "Toilets a disgrace (actually a wall), seats about three inches apart" and "it was so squashed and the toilets were awful — it was pitch black when you closed the door" were the general views among the 20% of votes. In second place was York, for much the same reasons and mentions also (among 16 nominations) for Wrexham ("how did they ever hold internationals there?") and "Bournemouth's poor excuse for a stadium — rearrange 'Court' and 'Dean' in the same way you would rearrange 'hole' and 'shit'.

Low Point of the Season

Missing out on promotion

Hmm, difficult one this, as it won with well over half the vote. Various aspects came into play in this one, including "Stockport beating Chesterfield", "losing at Walsall — that was the beginning of the end", "approx 9.35 pm on May 14, 1997", "the points dropped at home in the run-in" and "waking up on May 15 and realising that we've not gone up". However, the next two comments sum the whole feelings up; "when Crewe equalised and the past 9 months hard work and success resulted in such disappointment", and "maybe it just wasn't meant to be". Way, way back in second place was the disastrous start to the season, culminating in "5-0 at Bristol and bottom". "Oh, bugger" was the retort from one nameless respondent.

High Point of the Season

Going Top

A joint award for beating Millwall and going top, and then beating Brentford and doing the same, because the feeling of being top of the league was just sensational (for any people who have followed the Town for less than 15 years this is a new experience). This nomination was the only one of over 30 that got more than a handful of votes — with about a third of the vote. "Brentford at home — I thought that we would stay top" and "actually being involved in a promotion challenge for a change" were obvious highs — even though we failed (at the final hurdle) to go straight back up. "I'm afraid the low point (ie. losing in the play-offs) has cancelled out any high points" is perhaps not the most optimistic attitude to have — but then "KFH appearing on TFI Friday (again) and swearing (again)" is a more light hearted look at the season (*although KFH denies any knowledge of what this is supposed to be about — Ed*).

An honourable mention here to "the Gentleman that couldn't be arsed to walk all the way round the 'fields' after Watford away so went through someone's back garden (including fence)" considering many (myself included) witnessed the incident. But finally in this category (and seeing as I'm the one writing this)

"Monday 17 February 1997 — centre pages of the Daily Mirror" and all that Young Sports Reporter of the Week business was (obviously) a personal high point (today MAAH/the Mirror, tomorrow the world!).

The remaining two sections follow in a few pages time. Thanks to everybody who returned forms for the poll, there are just too many of you to name individually.

The Beat

... THE DERBY DAY INQUEST ...

CONDEMNED

the hall of shame

- 1 Those who chose to wear the YELLOW Luton shirt for the day.
- 2 Three Counties Radio, for having a post-match phone-in debate last from Saturday afternoon until Monday night.
- 3 Nikki Jenkins of Three Counties Radio losing her rag to the boy who dared to phone in and ask why fans were in the home section to start with.
- 4 The copper who sat and watched as a deadball rolled and stopped in front of him with no-one else around.
- 5 The coppers who leapt upon the bloke who sensibly kicked that ball back to Alec Chamberlain.
- 6 Nikki Jenkins of Three Counties Radio condemning the actions of that bloke (and supporting the actions of the police).
- 7 Those who chose to vent their anger on the dugout.
- 8 The Kenilworth C Block arsehole with his constant barrage of vile anti-Jewish sound affects directed at Ronnie Rosenthal.
- 9 The Scumford shite who phoned Three Counties Radio with derogatory comments about our ground, our town and its people.
- 10 The PA operator in the main stand for choosing the most inappropriate time of the decade to play "Always look On the Bright Side of Life".

CONDEMNED

Freedom of Speech

I write in response to the article by "the cat in the Luton Hat" in issue 42. Just what is the author on? He seems to have overdosed on spiteful venom.

His main complaint appears to be that other Luton fans have no respect for him. After reading his diatribe I'm not surprised. He waffles on about Luton fans being made up of different groups who all think they're right. So what's new? Society is made up of all sorts of different people, each one having an opinion of some sort and each one thinking they're right. That is their right. So why should Luton fans be any different? Or is it that other opinions don't accord with those of "The ~~prat~~ cat in the Luton hat"?

He then goes on to say that he doesn't like "your (or anyone else's) attitudes. But if you don't print me, then you're taking my freedom of speech and right to an opinion away." This speaks volumes for the sort of person he is. Firstly, you should never begin a sentence with "but"!! (*I'll try to remember that—Ed*) Secondly, he doesn't like the way other people are, but still feels he is entitled to say, and presumably do, exactly as he wishes and we're all supposed to listen intently, taking it all seriously. Well, I'm sorry Mr (or Miss/Mrs/Ms) Cat in a Luton Hat, your writing betrays you as a bigoted arse. Whilst I defend your right to an opinion and for freedom of speech, you will have to learn that this same right should be accorded to others.

These "others" include:

1. The "cheer when we're winning, but whinge when we're drawing or losing" types;
2. The "only go to away games" types;
3. The "MAAH, we've been going 20 years or more, so of course we're right" types;
4. The "big game hunters" who only turn up for cup games, but think they have a right to an opinion;
5. The "go with the flows" who love Thorpey and Skippy now.

Just a few comments on these points:

1. Why can't we cheer when we're winning, but whinge at other times? We pay our money and are entitled to our opinions and the right to freedom of speech and actions!
2. I am afraid I have to agree on this one. Why do people only go to away games and not attend matches at Kenilworth Road?
3. Mr Cat/Hat has a downer on anoraks hasn't he?
4. It's just as well these "big game hunters" turn up to cup matches, otherwise there wouldn't have been anyone at the recent Luton v Colchester match! Secondly, why aren't these

- people entitled to an opinion? They're experts, specialising in cup ties;
5. He states that he has loved the Thorpester when he made his debut. I'm afraid that I'll have to admit to being an anorak here. I've liked Tony Thorpe since watching him in the reserves!

Lastly, in his final paragraph, he cites "one more controversial bit". This implies that the previous jumble of ill-conceived and thought out words contained something that was controversial. Sorry to disappoint, but they were only the ravings of a self-important, egotistical, ignorant maniac. If he wants to sit at matches, then that is his right particularly as he has had three knee operations (has he got three legs?). However, if I was him, I'd go to see the surgeon just to check that nothing else was operated on or, at worst, removed.

Kelvin Dunn

BOOK REVIEW

'A HATTER GOES MAD!!' by Kristina Howells.

Published by The Book Castle, Dunstable. £7.99.

This new publication is a welcome addition to the published works that have Luton Town FC as their main subject. Admittedly, the ranks of such works are rather limited, but that is a side issue. Kristina Howells' book plots the course of Luton Town FC from the 1930's through to the 1996/97 season, but through the eyes of fans, players and officials of the club. These memories and comments are presented as letters, which is a style that may not please everybody, but in the main works quite well. The section towards the end of the book with comments from many of last season's favourites (and Kim Grant) is a bit too standardised to believe that they were actually written as letters, and tends to show the lack of imagination amongst that group of individuals that caused us to miss out on promotion. Other than that, my favourite moment was seeing a picture captioned "Luton supporters watching a game from the 1950s", which is in fact clearly from the 1970s (I recognised one or two faces in the crowd!).

In short, a book well worth buying for the dedicated Town fan, if only to show publishers that there is a market for books on Luton Town, without authors taking all the risk, as Kristina has done.

K.F.H.

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO

Winning the Championship.... KohlerDome.... 30 goals from Kim Grant (? - Ed).... Less sendings-off.... A £48m striker (£48 m? - Ed).... Paying less to see the team than if we'd gone up.... Guentchev finally pissing off.... Fotiadis continuing his education in the league.... Hopefully not mucking up.... New ground.... Promotion via play-offs.... Signing of Lightbourne and promotion to the Premiership.... Recognition that Watford fans aren't 'scum', but a bunch of people who share our enthusiasm for something wonderful in our lives.... Local derbies again.... Div 2 Championship.... Beating Watford both times (*doh!* - Ed).... Bontcho leaving.... Winning the Golden Gamble.... No more Guentchev.... 6 points off Watford (*doh!*).... Winning Div 2 and seeing younger players progress through to the first team.... My Happy Hatters team winning the HatterLeague next season.... News of a new stadium — in Luton.... Winning Division 3 with 100 points and 100 goals.... A good run in the League Cup.... Beating Watford home (*doh!*) and away and seeing them relegated.... A return to our traditional white shirts and black shorts.... Supporting clubs hundreds of miles away from where you live just because they're "big, successful, glamorous", etc, becoming very unfashionable — supporting your local team becoming cool.... Coming out to some decent music (Velvet Underground, Sex Pistols, The Orb etc).... Another season of more wins than losses.... Div 2 champions.... 6 points off Watford (*doh!*).... News of a new ground.... Winning a match under the new Government.... Life without Guentchev.... Finishing above the shit (again).... More good half time entertainment at Walsall.... Being able to get pissed — legally!.... Michelle (the girl on the portable tea-stand in front of the enclosure) — she's better than any half-time entertainment the club could put on!.... Luton promoted, Watford bankrupt.... Division One.... Finishing above Watford.... Millwall being top at Christmas — then being relegated.... Young players like Fotiadis and George playing more games when Thorpe goes.... Building on last season — 100 goals and 100 points.... Terracing at some grounds.... Selling Thorpe, sacking Lawrence and rebuilding team from Thorpe's money.... Liam George for Luton in the Premiership.... The girls in the tea-bar (under the New Stand).... New kit.... Going to Blackpool (great pubs).... Getting a good defence (Stevo brilliant - but that's all).... Going up the play-off way.... No Bontcho Guentchev.... The trip to Carlisle.... Playing Forest next year, not Chesterfield.... Graham Taylor being a football manager.... Luton finishing top.... Beating Watford (*doh!*).... Keeping Thorpe.... New ground.... Winning the Championship.... 7 issues of MAAH! (*doh!*).... A home win.... 2 new pub crawls of Bristol.... A weekend in the Lake District when we play Carlisle (*doh!*).... Europe.... Signing Ronaldo.... Seeing where Bontcho's team's results suffer as a result of his "tricky wingplay".... Getting promotion this time.... 6 points off Watford (*doh!*) and a 7 week holiday in Sydney and New Zealand come November.... Orange and black away kit retained — best in the league.... Kicking off one sunny August day in the new Joe Payne stadium — in Division One at least, and wearing a modern black and white kit....

THINGS TO DREAD

Getting relegated to Div 3.... Playing Bristol City and Carlisle.... Not going up.... The play-offs — even if we win at Wembley, I can't stand the stress.... Losing to Watford (*oh bugger!*).... Hearing there's no new stadium in Luton.... Man Utd winning the league again.... British clubs doing well in Europe.... Not going up.... Carlisle away on a Tuesday night in January.... Missing out on the Golden Gamble by one number again.... Losing to Bristol City at Wembley.... Going around the allotments again.... Another season in Div 2.... 'M1 Derby' matches.... Players you've never heard of.... More trips to York, Plymouth and Carlisle.... Another season of crap opposition.... More stupid criticism of Watford FC.... Staying down leading to sale of Hughes, Feuer, Davis and Thorpe.... Another season in Div 2, without Tony Thorpe to score the goals.... Not getting out of Div 2.... Guentchev coming back in a coaching capacity.... Watford finally beating us (*oh bugger!*).... A 3rd season in this crummy league.... Kohler taking the team out of Luton if we don't get planning permission to build the new ground.... Losing at Walsall.... Relegation.... Selling our stars.... Another play-off.... About 9.35pm on a Tuesday night as the Scum scramble yet another undeserved equaliser against us at Shitarage Road.... More FA Cup 1st Round football.... More play-off anguish.... F'ing Carlisle away on a cold, wet and windy Tuesday night in October.... Exile from Luton.... Not going up auto-matically.... Kicking off one sunny August day in the "KohlerDome" — I do not need a constant reminder of one of the worst periods of my time following the Town.... York City toilets.... Carlisle (Scotland).... Being beaten by any team in red (now that Rotherham are down).... The midweek trips to Carlisle and Grimsby.... Carlisle away.... Going to Carlisle.... Losing the play-offs.... Selling our best players.... Keeping Bontcho.... Losing to Bristol City.... Mid-table obscurity.... Cup humiliation.... Carlisle away — midweek!.... Finishing lower than we did last year.... 2nd Division football.... Roots Hall, Blundell Park, Memorial Ground, Vicarage Road.... Losing our best players.... Losing to Watford (*oh bugger!*).... Missing out on promotion again.... MAAH doubling the price.... Gary Waddock retiring.... Ian Feuer leaving us.... Little Tony leaving us.... Graham Alexander's corners.... Tony Thorpe leaving us in Division 3.... Not being promoted.... Not beating Watford.... Grimsby.... Luton finishing 16th.... Being in the bottom half of the table rather than the top half.... Losing to Turnip managed Watford (*oh bugger!*).... Losing the play-off final on penalties.... Staying in Div 2.... No new ground.... Dearer football than Premiership Barnsley (it's true).... Going to rain soaked Oxford.... Marvin v Kinkladze, James v anyone!.... Watford groundhare.... Another 2 hours in the pissing rain at Plymouth.... A freezing Tuesday night in October at Carlisle.... Selling Feuer/Davis/Thorpe.... Not going up — another season in Div2.... Going to Carlisle and Plymouth and getting soaked again.... Going to our favourite club after Watford — Grimsby.... Freezing at Oldham and Grimsby (as always).... *What is it you don't like about Carlisle, and Grimsby and Plymouth, but particularly Carlisle?*

*A W*tf*rd fan and Luton fan have a head on collision. The Luton fan regains consciousness first and gets out of his car.*

*He pulls the W*tf*rd fan out of his car and helps him to the side of the road. The Luton fan says, "Sit still, I've got something in my glove compartment which will help you." He brings back a bottle of Whisky and tells the W*tf*rd fan to take a good long drink, "It'll clear your head," he says.*

*The W*tf*rd fan takes a good swig and, looking to thank the Luton fan, exclaims "My God, you also look in a bad way, aren't you going to have a drink as well?"*

"Oh, I will be having one," replies the Luton fan, "directly after the police file the accident report!"



*It's been a while since we've had one of these, but here's a picture of the W*tf*rd team stopping for a drink on the way home from a match.*

Kenny's Pie in the Sky

Brian Swain, who has seen all but one of the Town's games for 25 years (Mad as a Hatter! couldn't fill a coach for a meaningless Terry Westley Anglo-Italian Cup date in Cesena) recalls the match that never was.

January 13 is a day when you stay in bed to nurse the hangover if you're superstitious. A lot of us must have been tempted to do exactly that in 1987. Luton was gridlocked by a blizzard.

Everywhere from the North Midlands to the South Coast was blanketed, with motorways blocked, trains stranded and airports closed.

Three days earlier, Kenilworth Road's plastic pitch, generally loathed throughout football, had enabled a game to be staged: Luton v Liverpool, FA Cup, third round. Most teams came to Luton with a built-in excuse for losing, having heard managers moan about the surface. Liverpool player-manager Kenny Dalglish let it be known he disliked it. He was to like it a lot less a couple of weeks later.

Liverpool must have thought they had done the hard part with a 0-0 draw at Kenilworth Road, setting them up to finish the job at Anfield. The Kop needed a bit of glory — the Reds were destined to finish second in the championship to Everton, and Runners-up in the Littlewoods Cup to Arsenal.

Late on the night before the replay Britain was advised to batten down for a blizzard. By morning, the forecast was all too true. I left Stopsley at 7am to get into the office in Alma Street by 9, and just made it, with police and the road organisations pleading for people to stay off the roads.

That left manager John Moore with a problem. He was not to know that, surprise, surprise, the police view on impassable roads was a tad over the top. But the club could hardly wheel out the team bus and set off in an "up yours" gesture to the cops. So club chairman David Evans organised a charter flight from Heathrow.

The Luton News editor thought my 100 per cent attendance record at Luton Town matches, stretching back to 1972, would have to suffer an honourable blemish. But, with a couple of mates, 60 fags and a boot containing wellies, a spade, a bottle of whisky and several splits of dry ginger, the Swainmobile set off. It took over an hour to get from the town centre to junction 11 of the M1, but then, praise be, the motorway had one lane open. You dropped your wheels into the two tracks cut into the snow and ice, and plodded along at a steady 20 mph.

And God bless the cops; their dire warnings had worked a treat. The M1 and M6 turned out to be a stately procession, with very light traffic. It was slow but steady, and we had time to pull off at Walsall to drink lunch.

We arrived at Anfield at about 5.30 after an eight-hour crawl, just in time to hear a radio flash saying the game was off because Luton were still at Heathrow: Take-off slots were in short supply, and went to regular customers, leaving Moore and his team fretting impotently in an aircraft that never got off the ground.

Fretting was not the word I would apply to Dalglish. Knowing the Anfield press bar was well stocked, I had off course done the last few yards of the journey, and thus was the only travelling journalist to hear Dalglish sound off. He was livid. Luton fails to make the right arrangements to turn up for the slaughter, but a travelling journalist was proof that they could have done it if they wanted. He ranted about the expense and inconvenience, and after going on about programmes, stewards, turnstile operators and so on, his anger reached a crescendo when he remembered that the meat pies had already been ordered. They were inside the ground while the customers were not.

Unluckily for Dalglish that was the line the tabloids seized on. It was not quite reported in context, but it made a good line..... Dalglish rages over thousands of pies.

I had a moment of glory, interviewed by regional TV and local radio, who took the point that if Luton Town had spent all day cooped up in a slow-moving coach they would hardly have been in the right shape to take on Rush, Dalglish and co. I understand they cut out my last line saying I hoped Mr Dalglish would find somewhere to put his pies.....

We all made the trip successfully two weeks later, by which time the pies had been given away to old peoples homes on Merseyside. With Steve Foster playing the game of his life, the Town held on for a 0-0 draw after extra time.

And when Liverpool came south for the second replay Dalglish was the man who found it a hard trip. Brian Stein curled in a beauty in the first half from an 18-yard free kick, and in the second half was upended by Jan Molby for a penalty which gave Mick Harford his first goal of the season. Scouser Mike Newell completed the 3-0 romp when Foster battled through the middle and laid on an inviting pass beyond the reach of Alan Hansen.

It was not fluke, and piled on the agony for Dalglish, who is not quite the most sporting loser I have ever met. Earlier in the season a Newell hat-trick

and a goal by Ricky Hill had seen off Liverpool 4-1.

And after the second humiliation Dalglish was furious. His post-match interviews were not about how well the Town had played, nor about his expensive stars' inability to break through in 120 minutes at Anfield. Luton, he said, should have been thrown out of the cup for their non-arrival on the date of the first replay.

And, he added, plastic pitches should be banned for cup football. He might have had a point: we lost on the artificial pitch at QPR in the fourth round.

Brian Swain

GIVE LENNIE A CHANCE

During the game against W*tf*rd a section of the Kenilworth Road end started chanting "Lawrence out", and I understand that the same feelings were heard from the Enclosure too. I'd like to ask these people how Lennie can be held responsible for all of the injuries we've had. That's the only reason for our poor start to the season, and now we've gone four games without defeat and conceding only one goal, I think that Lennie is proving that our first eleven are capable of finishing in the top six again.

I wonder if those same people will still be calling for Lennie's head when we win Division Two and are crowned champions above W*tf*rd!!

Cheer on the team to VICTORY.

S.T.

FA Cup blues

It's the draw for the first round of the FA Cup, which we've eventually found going out live on one of Sky's many channels. There, doing the draw, are smiling Graham Kelly, George Best (sober) and Rodney Marsh. Excitement mounts as the southern half of the draw gets under way. With every home club that is drawn out there is excitement or apprehension at the prospect of visiting each club. And then... "Number 15," "Luton Town" — a groan, as it's a home tie, "will play Torquay United". Oh, such excitement. At least we don't have to go to Devon again, and Trevor and Lyndon can see the match without having to wreck the editor's car in the process of missing out (sorry boys). But Torquay again — anybody else get a feeling of deja vu?

"Mad" Merchandise



Have you got one yet? Because Jimmy Ryan hasn't. The new '74 away shirt from Mad as a Hatter! is available now, in wonderful white, blue and orange. Made in England in 100% cotton with an embroidered LTFC 'football' badge, and definitely not a replica of the one modelled in the picture. Already modelled at Town games by a select few, this is now on general release, and can be yours for just £28.95, including post and packing, and comes in two sizes — L & XL.

The home shirt, as pictured, is still available, but now also priced at £28.95.

Another excellent product - Luton News

Please send me a 1974 home/away* shirt. I enclose a cheque for £28.95

Name:..... Size: L/XL*

Address:.....

.....

.....

(*Delete as appropriate)

Cheques payable to Mad as a Hatter!

Send orders to: 38 Twigden Court, Mount Pleasant Road, Luton, LU3 2RL.

Kenilworth Road Aerial Photo

10"x8" Aerial colour photograph

A visual reminder of the ground's character before the days of the Taylor Report (and before the Kohlerdome?)



ONLY £3.50

Two versions available — new (as above) and old (as in Issue 34). Special price for the pair - £6.00

Please send me the new/old aerial photo. I enclose a cheque for £3.50/6.00

Name:.....

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Cheques payable to Mad as a Hatter! Orders to the address on page 2.

YELLOW BRICK ROAD

In a quiet gathering in the heart of Fantasyland, Snow White, Tom Thumb and Quasimodo are involved in a deep and meaningless discussion. All are convinced that in their own realm they are untouchable. Snow White makes the sweeping statement that "I am the most beautifullest girl in the world". Her two companions are not disposed to go into outright argument over this, but Tom Thumb asks "How do you know that there is no-one more beautiful?" Of course, she doesn't have an answer. Tom Thumb then follows this by saying, "There is no doubt, at all, that I am the smallest person in the world." Again, the other two cannot cast much doubt on this, but ask how he can be certain. Next along is Quasimodo, a truly revolting character to look at, and there is little argument when he claims, "I am truly the ugliest person in the whole wide world." But Snow White asks "How can you be certain that there is no-one uglier? There could be a troll with a twisted and gnarled face hidden away in a mountainside cave somewhere who is uglier than you."

There follows some considerable discussion between the three over the merits of each claim, and how to settle the matter once and for all. Eventually they settle on a visit to the Wizard of Oz, the great authority on everything, who would surely know the answers. And so they set off down the yellow brick road and after a long and tiring journey arrive at the Wizard's castle, where they are granted an audience.

Tom Thumb and Quasimodo, being gentlemen, agree that Snow White should be first to see the Wizard. So, she enters the room and emerges half a minute later, looking absolutely ecstatic. "What did he say?" asks Tom Thumb. "I am the most beautifullest girl in the whole world," she replies "he's absolutely certain."

Tom Thumb goes in next, but is back in barely 10 seconds. "It's true" he exclaims, "I am the smallest person in the world. There are some who are only just bigger than me, but none quite so small." Quasimodo is quite excited by this and rushes in to let the Wizard confirm that all three are the ultimate in their chosen area.

He is gone for some time, and Snow White and Tom Thumb become concerned, speculating the just looking at Quasimodo has made the Wizard ill. Eventually, after thirty minutes have passed, Quasimodo comes out with a puzzled look on his face. Snow White needs to know the answer and, in a complimentary tone, asks "Did he tell you you are the ugliest? Surely there can be no-one more ugly than you, dear Quasi."

Quasimodo doesn't answer, but continues to walk away, apparently deep in thought. Eventually, he stops, and as a tear drops down his hideous face, turns and shouts..... **"Who the **** is Ian Dowie, anyway?"**

MORE FREE SPEECH

Question: How is it possible to score 31 goals, unprecedented since Malcolm MacDonald, and still get abuse and no respect from Luton fans? Tony Thorpe must wonder this.

First of all, who else will score this many who is on our books? If Tony scored every shot, he'd break the laws of probability. Also, he'd be sold and Luton would be back to square one. And finally, I'd rather have a lazy striker who scores than a hardworker who doesn't. Matt Le Tissier — genius, but lazy. Would you not pick him in the hope of one match winning goal?

Basically, Luton fans want perfection and everything yesterday. They're as two faced as hell, and heroes last two minutes. Who's our leading scorer? That's the bottom line.

Now, Kelvin the cock up kid. If he's so great, why did he choke against Watford? Because Kelvin is an indecisive tree who can't handle pressure situations. And if you can't do this, well, enough said. I'm sick of hearing that it will be a shame to drop Kelvin when Feuer returns. For God's sake, goalie jerseys never sold before we bought Ian! Feuer is the best outside the Premiership, no questions asked. And, bar Seaman, Schmeichel and Given, he's better than half the Premiership too. Knowing Ian personally, I know it means the world to him to be here, and to be loved by Luton fans. Appreciate Ian for what he is — Luton's best ever keeper. He's too good for us, and who in their right mind would bow to Kelvin?

Got to say it — Paul "Macca" McLaren, our best player so far this season.

Now, finally, my major hate. Marvin Johnson. Why, for God's sake? 10 years of incompetency, own goals, and severe lack of talent. David Preece gave 10 years of commitment, skill and class. Did he get a so called 'Sportsman's Dinner'? (Yes, I believe he did - Ed) So, you cheer for your loser hero. Just watch every time he clears a ball. Straight to an opposing player 85% of the time. Own goals — Wolves, the Les Sealey incident, to mention only two. So he's a Luton lad? Julian James and Richard Harvey are a damn sight better than 'Mindless Marvin'. But what notice do they get taken of them?

So, that's the end of my speech. Just hurry up Valentines Day, when I can take out my frustration on us beating the scum down the road. And that's the bottom line.

The Cat in the Luton Hat

David Preece milked the testimonial for all it was worth before saying "Up yours" and bugging off to Derby. And he probably got paid a damn sight more than Marvin in his ten years with the club.

RAVING MAD!!!

Dear "Mad",

News from my holiday — whoever painted "LUTON" on the English Bridge in Shrewsbury will be interested to know that it is still showing. What a pity they're now in the third division!

Ray Aspden

Luton.

Dear "Mad",

Final proof, if it were needed, of the mental deficiencies of our neighbours from W*tf*rd is provided in the collection of soccer writing "My Favourite Year", edited by Nick Hornby. Asked to recollect his most memorable season, scummer Olly Wicken recalls 1974/5, the year they were relegated to Division Four!

At least now, in the harsh reality of the 1990s, he sees some sense by concluding: "I was young, wide-eyed and oblivious to the truth. Watford were a crap club."

All the best,

The Swindon Hatter,

Swindon, Wilts.

Dear "Mad",

After the cuttings you had in the last issue from the *Luton/Accuracy on Sunday* news(!)paper, it was stunning how quickly they struck again. The day after the Oldham match, they managed to publish two match reports, identical, opposite each other.

The Luton Hatter,

Luton.

Dear "Mad",

1. I have decided against writing a Watford report.
2. Could you please let me know when the Lennie Lawrence book of excuses is to be published.
3. I am still not drinking at Town games, though I must admit a decision to miss the youth team game at Ashton Gate was of great benefit in my quest!

Yours (not) in alcohol,

Phil Darton,

Islington, London.

Dear "Mad",

Greetings from South East London. In these times of suspect loyalties, a brief mention for my 7 year-old daughter Sally.

Proud possessor of (what I imagine is) the only Luton kit in South East London which she braveley wears to school despite the mockery of others.

When faced with the obvious, and presently true, accusations that "Luton are crap" she stoically replies, "I know they are — but I can't help supporting them, like my dad, uncle and grandad". There's honesty for you — choice doesn't come into it!

Anyway, it could be worse — her mum's family are Shrewsbury Town regulars! Incidentally, not every schoolkid here is a Man Utd, Arsenal or Chelsea supporter. One of her best friends is Brazilian and sports an extremely obscure Brazilian League team shirt, while I've even seen one unfortunate in Carlisle United's bizarre Eddie Stobart trucks yellow, green and red striped top in her playground.

Barry Mills,
London SE4.

Dear "Mad",

What a great response by the travelling support yesterday (Sept 27th, at Bristol City). We had a 90 minute defensive shambles. Three down after half an hour. Not a shot on goal during the whole match. Yet not a word of criticism, not a single negative chant and not a whinge to be heard. Reaction of Luton Town and Middlesbrough to an injury crisis — compare and contrast.

Naturally we reserve the right to have a go when all the players are fit again. But I did feel proud to be a Luton Fan yesterday.

See yer,
John Clark,
Bristol.

Dear "Mad",

It's a Tuesday evening, and I'm sitting here, with it pissing down outside, feeling depressed. Why, you may ask? I've just booked up for bleedin' Carlisle on the Bobbers. Just south of the Scottish border, 600 miles round trip, and probably a sound thrashing. Still, should see a few sheep. Anyway, on to a few points I must make.

1. Why does everyone think Simon Davies is crap? Fair enough, he's played shit for us so far (as of October 15th) and looks out of place, but two words spring to mind. Manchester United. Any player who has played for, signed for, or signed out of Man Utd would be, I'd say, a bloody decent player. They don't take crap on their books. In concluding then, he must be pretty good.

2. Why does Thorpy take so much stick. He sticks the ball in the net most weeks. Out of 31 goals last season, he only scored 4 of them in losing games. When he scores we do well, when he doesn't we don't seem to do well. Forget him being lazy (even I don't like lazy bastards), he does a job that only Brian Stein (10 years ago) could do. After scoring over 300 goals, and playing and captaining England in World Cups, Gary Lineker is now raking it in at the BBC. And I never saw him leave the penalty area once.

3. Why, all of a sudden, do a majority of people think that Watford are world beaters and "the best team in the division". Add Ronny Rosenthal, and two

strikers from 3rd division clubs (Thomas and Hyde) and you have Watford FC 97/98, as opposed to Watford FC 96/97. Some team then that finished 13th last season, ten places below us. And now they've got the turnip back at the helm. That'll be all for now.

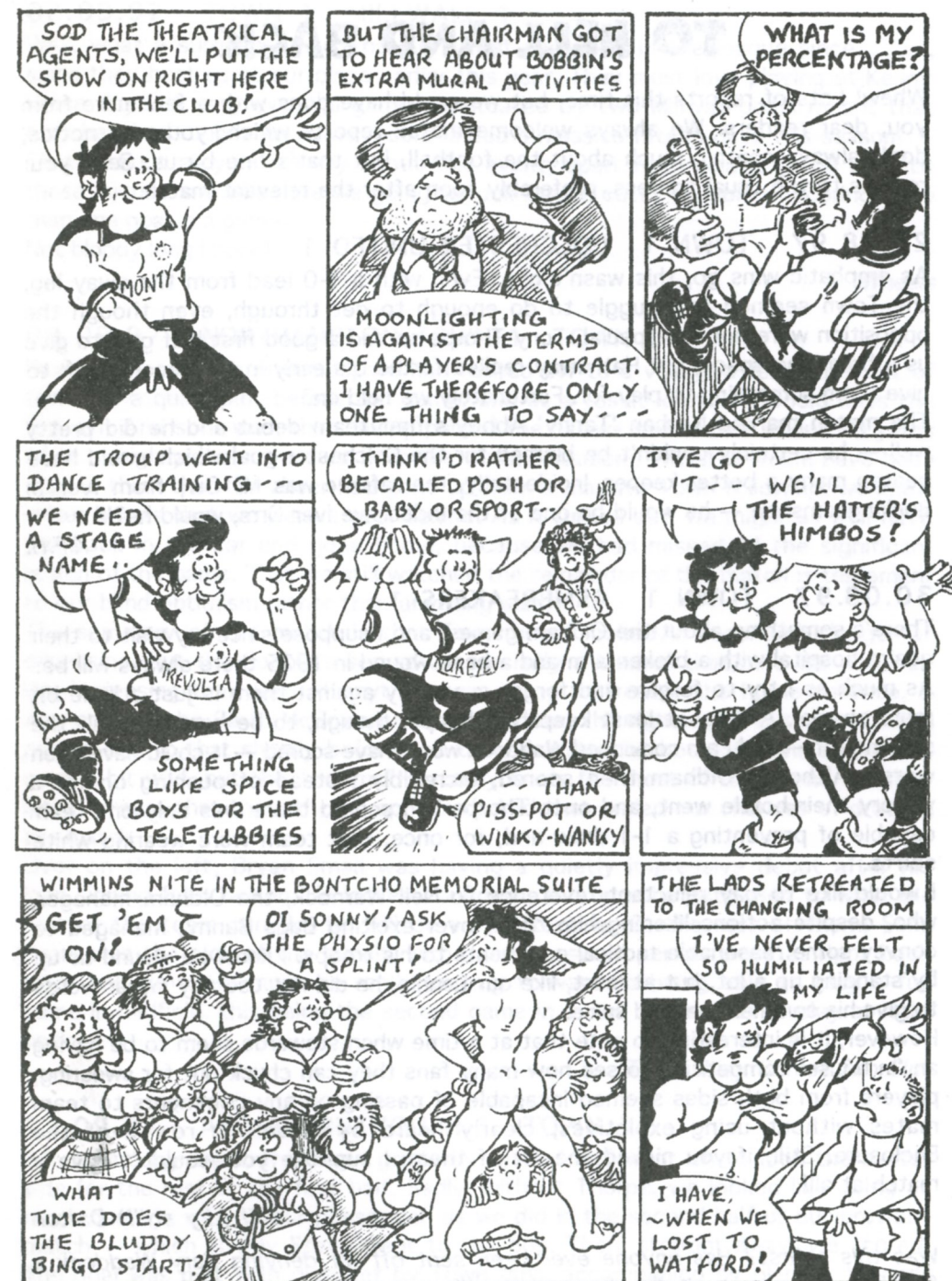
Adios then,

Tony Allbones, the Kempston Stud.
Kempston, Beds.

... THE DERBY DAY INQUEST ...

always look on the bright side of life

- 1 They still haven't beaten our first team for over a decade.
- 2 They weren't wearing pus yellow so it almost didn't seem like we were playing them.
- 3 They have to bring 17 coaches for protection while over twice as many of us still go to their hole in our cars, roam freely and park where we like.
- 4 They think we're all hardcases.
- 5 They won't get promoted.
- 6 We won't go down.
- 7 It'll be OUR turn to massacre THEM on St.Valentine's day.
- 8 We haven't got Elton John behind us.
- 9 The man who put back England's footballing credibility by ten years is now leading them.
- 10 It still took ten years.



TO HELL AND BACK

Whew! Lots of reports this time, but we could have done with a few more from you, dear readers. We always welcome match reports which, you may notice, don't always contain much about the football, but that's fine by us. Send your reports to the usual address, preferably soon after the relevant match.

26.08.97 TOWN 1 COLCHESTER UNITED 1

As emphatic wins go, this wasn't one. Even with a 1-0 lead from the away leg, the Town seemed to struggle to do enough to get through, even though the opposition were not too special. Tony Thorpe scored a good first half goal to give us a breathing space, but Hathaway replied for the U's early in the second half, to give them something to play for. Fortunately we held on.

The match marked Nathan 'Tanny' Abbey's first team debut and he did pretty well — he certainly couldn't be blamed for the Colchester goal which would have beaten many a better keeper. Incidentally, the referee was Mr Orr, from Iver in Buckinghamshire — he would be one of the indecisive Iver Orrs, would he?!!

K.F.H.

30.08.97 TOWN 1 ARMBREAKERS 1

There's something about the Oldham games, and I suppose since my visit to their quaint hospital with a broken arm and a head wound in 1975 there always will be. As much as I try to forgive and forget, a victory against them is just a little bit more special. A draw at least keeps me happy, though, to be honest, until the sending off — and I am convinced Waddock would have scored — it could have been worse. Although Oldham then scored, incredibly instead of pushing on for a victory their bottle went, and once Thorpe had scored there was only one team capable of preventing a 1-1 draw and, for once, that team were wearing white shirts.

I would like to pay reluctant reverence to Neil Warnock, the Oldham manager, who, despite actions likening him to an over exciting Bugs Bunny, managed to convey some reasonable tactical comments to his troops. I know he wound us up by standing up a lot, but at least, like our Lennie, he did not use any swear words to give his comments added spice.

However, it is interesting to note that at a time when stewards seem to be having an 'in house' competition to see how many fans they can chuck out for swearing, players from both sides seemed incapable of passing on any comments to team mates without using expletives, clearly heard by myself in row E of the Enclosure. Still, if you nicked the lot of them, I suppose you wouldn't have a match at all!

Phil (dry still!) Darton

Was this a first? Has anyone ever been sent off for denying Gary Waddock a "goalscoring opportunity" before. It's hardly a likely scenario, is it? — Ed.

02.09.97 TOWN 1 MILLWALL 1

Well, what a surprise..... The Lions first away win in the league since....., since they beat us at our place earlier this year. They must love playing at Kenny these days. A very average game punctuated by two Millwall goals meant that our cherished unbeaten home record lasted a massive fifteen days this season! That's about all you can say about this event, apart from what's going on with these injuries and when are we going to look like an outfit capable of scoring more than one goal in a game?

Not bloody long I hope!

Wheels

09.09.97 NORTHAMPTON TOWN 1 TOWN 0

Having set our own priorities, we had rushed off to a village a few miles out of town for a quick pint before the game, and as a result knew we would miss the kick off. And so it was, that having parked the car we had walked about 10 yards when a mighty cheer went up from the distant stadium. Whilst it would have been nice to think that the cheer had gone up from a massive Town following, we knew in our hearts that we were a goal behind. As it turned out, we might as well have got back in the car and gone home, because we had missed all the significant action of the game. That we still watched the remainder of the match is testament to our blind optimism rather than anything else.

The summary of the match is that Town never looked in too much danger of equalising, but the Cobblers served up precisely a load of that, and did not look like increasing their lead. If anything was going to trouble the home defence, it was going to be Gavin McGowan marauding down the right wing, but the officials put an end to that shortly before half-time. Admittedly, both of Gavin's offences were a bit wild, but the "victims" certainly made the most of them, and did their bit to ensure that the red card appeared. And that ended our chances of drawing the match.

Over on the left, Bryan Small was having a quietly impressive debut after his loan signing from Bolton. He looked confident, and once he gets used to what the rest of the team can do, he will be very effective. Of the rest of them, Sean Evers was the pick of the bunch, with a very assured performance at right back after half-time. He must be really looking forward to being able to play a full game in midfield, this being the second game in a row he has had to play at right back.

The Ashley Grimes Fan Club

13.09.97 AFC BOURNEMOUTH 1 TOWN 1

After a dodgy start, the Town gradually settled and went on to look the better side for the rest of the first half. Sadly, without Thorpe, we looked like doing as much damage with all our possession as we did in the second half of our previous match — which is why Steve went to the bog. Then, straight away, we scored! The goal was met with disbelief by Town fans, accompanied by glances towards

the ref and his assistants. But there was no two ways about it — we were one-nil up! So we cheered.

The second half — pathetic. Except the defence. We have just got to buy Small (when did Luton ever buy big?) — easily our top man. McGowan wasn't far behind. Trouble was, whenever we won the ball, we gave it straight back to Bournemouth. Not surprisingly, Simon Davies was subbed — how patient should we be with him? This didn't improve things, and we spent the entire second half on the rack (against bloody Bournemouth!), managing to create just one chance, a Marshall one-on-one with their keeper.

Typical of Luton, just when we thought we were getting away with a lucky result — we didn't, as Bournemouth got a hugely deserved equaliser, and could have gone on to win.

I know we have loads of players out, but the way we let Bournemouth peg us back for the entire second half was exasperating, the passing piss-awful, and unless we buy a creative midfield player (or Davies gets his act together), and an experienced (tall?) striker — but not too old, this club will go nowhere. Except further down.

The Thin Controller

16.09.97 TOWN 1 WEST BROM 1

Despite the competition of more than one live European match on TV, those who turned up for this were surprised to say the least. In fact, you would have thought that West Brom were the struggling 2nd Division side and Luton were near the top of the First, such was the vibrant start to this game. Neat slick passing that caused our opponents no end of problems, especially the lively Douglas whose goal on the turn in a tight situation was just reward for the one he had scrubbed out (for what, we may never know). In fact most of us did not know it had been disallowed until we noticed a free kick being taken by the goalkeeper. West Brom levelled after Top Cat's friend failed to come for a cross that Bob Taylor gobbled up with his head.

The second half was punctuated by both teams having their woodwork struck, when Waddock hit the post for Luton and Taylor for the Baggies. The Waddock effort would have been one of the goals of the season, as it had Miller beaten all ends up.

The strangest decision the referee made all night was the back pass from their full back which the keeper picked up just under the bar. We have, in the past, seen them given for a more innocuous brushing of legs.

Now, the second leg could be interesting.

Anon (You will know who you are, but sadly we don't)

Getting carried away? Looks like it's a speciality for our Marv. He got stretchered off in this match, and by my reckoning that is now the sixth time in his career with Luton that he has left the pitch in the same manner. Is tis some kind of record?? — Ed.

20.09.97 TOWN 2 WREXHAM 5

On the way to this game we had a considerable debate about who should be in goal for the Town. Should it be Dibble, to get used to playing with the Town defence, in readiness for the return match with West Brom, or should it be Kelvin, who had been showing some good form and gaining experience? The record will show that Lennie Lawrence took the former option, but as the match only gets played the once it will not also show that it was blatantly the wrong option.

It should have been obvious that a goalkeeper who had been unable to find a club would have a major question mark over his ability, and should only be used in the direst emergency. By the end of this 90 minutes it was obvious that if Kelvin was going to face a challenge for the number 1 jersey during Feuer's absence, it would have to come from Nathan Abbey.

It would be wrong to say that this defeat was totally the fault of Officer Dibble. It wasn't totally his fault — just mostly his fault. His goalkeeping was stunningly bad, and must have frightened the life out of the defence in the opening minutes, contributing to their nervy performance. Dwight Marshall going off injured after less than 10 minutes will not have helped either, but what Dibble was doing as Wrexham's first effort on goal went past him and into the net, I will never know. After 26 minutes we were 2-0 down and looking to be well on the way out of this match, but 15 minutes later Steve Davis gave us some hope with a towering header. Five minutes after the break new signing Phil Gray opened his account for his second time at the club beating a couple of defenders to the ball to roll it into the net, and equalise. At last, there was some hope for the Town fans.

That hope did not last long. A few minutes later at 4.15 pm, Lennie made a tactical substitution, and the second club record of the season was set when Trevor Peake became the oldest ever player to appear for the Town, replacing the young (?) Richard Harvey. It also turned the match. Peake showed that age is no barrier when all that is required to play the game is a good footballing brain. Unfortunately, a good pair of legs are also required, and Peake hasn't got them any more. A few minutes after this master stroke, Small pulled back a Wrexham player, giving away a penalty. 2-3. Almost straight from the kick-off, Peake let a ball bounce over his head and Dibble stood and watched as it was tapped over his head as well, and into the net. 2-4. Wrexham had never won at Kenilworth Road, until now, and rubbed salt into the wound with a fifth goal ten minutes later. There are, of course, extenuating circumstances. A back four who were, with the exception of Davis, not the obvious choices for their positions. An injury to Marshall, adding to the existing injury list. But Dibble and Peake — that's down to Lennie. Are we on the way to another relegation battle?

K.F.H.

23.09.97 WEST BROM 4 TOWN 2

Heard secondhand in the pub from someone using a personal stereo, and viewed on teletext, this seemed like quite a good match, and rather out of character for the Town side who had played on Saturday. Actually being in contention for much of

the match came as quite a shock, even if the result was, in the end, much as we had expected.

P.J.Smith

27.09.97 BRISTOL CITY 3 TOWN 0

Having followed the excellent Clark pub crawl (issue 42) on the way to the game, I was suitably anaesthetized on arriving at Ashton Gate. This was just as well, as the expected Town youth team took the field with a substantial quota of debutants, and probably less experience than any Town team for many a long year. As City have been something of a bogey side for Luton in recent years almost all the Hatters fans present were expecting nothing more than a defeat, and our expectations were realised after only three minutes when Alan White was adjudged (there's a word you only see in football reports) to have fouled a home player, and City took the lead with a penalty. Following this it was likely to be a case of 'lambs to the slaughter', and so a 3-0 deficit at half time was no better or worse than anticipated. However, after half-time the Town performance was a bit better and, amazingly, no more goals were conceded. Admittedly, there was never any threat of Town getting back into the game, but this was an honourable performance in the injury hit circumstances. The debutants all acquitted themselves fairly well, and it was delightful to see the players applauded off at the end of the match by the Town fans, rather than getting the slating that usually follows a defeat. Personally, I was impressed with Alan White who, in spite of being heavily involved in two of City's goals, actually looked a pretty good player for £40,000, bearing in mind his total lack of league experience. Of the youngsters, Liam George was a touch disappointing, but the expectations were high, and Matthew Spring and Robert Kean looked fairly confident. Fortunately, we didn't require to use a third substitute, because I don't know how we would have dealt with the name Colin Omogbehin. Imagine, 'There's only one Colin Omogbehin' — it just doesn't quite scan, does it?

K.F.H.

04.10.97 TATTERS 0 S*T 4

Saturday 4th October 1997 will stay in my mind for many years to come. It goes without saying that the result, above all, matters more than anything else, but off the field events before, during and after the game were the worst I have seen in well over 10 years of watching both Town and neutral matches. An awful lot has been said of the appalling run of injuries the club has endured in recent weeks and I do not intend to dwell on this, but all I will say is that there were enough so called experienced players in the Town side that day to have coped a hell of a lot better than they did. Yes, I have sympathy for Lennie Lawrence, but if the players had shown half the fight the supporters did, the result may have been closer (but then again, pigs might fly).

It's pointless discussing the match as there is bugger all to talk about. Suffice to say Town were poor and W*&%£\$d are still shite..... nuff said!

11.10.97 TOWN 3 PLYMOUTH ARGYLE 0

We've hit rock bottom — now the only way is up

Why, oh why, oh why, oh why did you choose this game to play an absolute blinder Kelvin? Why couldn't it have been just seven days earlier in the really important match? Anyway, what a great way to get his confidence back, by making 4 or 5 world class saves.

After hitting the lowest of the low on October 4 it was very important to get 3 points from this game — and hopefully with members of our real team trickling back (James, Alexander) we can get back on the rails and start charging up the table.

I was very impressed with the full debuts of Ginger (Gary Doherty) and Matthew Spring (both 17), and it was Doherty's flick that put Thorpe through to make it 1-0. Half-time came, and as we were winning we were able to clap the team off the pitch (blimey — how many times has that happened this season?).

Plymouth had chances to get back into it in the second half but Kelvin was (thankfully!) up to the task, and Thorpey (what is it with him and Plymouth? 3 games, 7 goals) somehow had the ball fall into his path and he made no mistake.

While on the subject of Thorpe, even he was trying today (well, in the second half). Tackling, running for the ball, jumping for headers when Kelvin kicked it to him — I could hardly believe it.

With the score at 2-0 came the only blemish on the game — that being the disgraceful sending-off of Spring. Although I haven't seen it on TV (so I can't speak with hindsight), the incident was right in front of where I sit — so I got it in full, glorious technicolour. Fair enough, Spring slid in and caught the Plymouth bloke in the knee, but it was a genuine 50-50 challenge (taking the conditions into account). So, when the ref reached for his book we all jumped up in outrage, shouting "a booking's a bit harsh, ref" (or words to that effect!). And what does the ref go and do? Pull out a bloody red card. On his debut and everything (the mobile phone network would have taken an ear-bashing at that point).

A well deserved round of applause at this point for the Plymouth manager Mick Jones, who gave the referee a piece of his mind (and a shove!) over the crap decision. Surely it told the ref something when a manager was sticking up for someone on the opposing side.

At least the one man deficit didn't affect the result — and we even added another thanks to Simon Davies' first goal for the club (I'm still trying to work out how he's played (and scored) in the Champions League). And, but for a couple of bad balls by Skippy, we could have nicked another couple at the death.

Anyway, I knew after half an hour that we would keep a clean sheet; we hadn't conceded a goal and we're very good at not conceding in the last 60 minutes of matches, aren't we Lennie?

And to top it all off, England qualified for the World Cup as well. The atmosphere down the Newt & Cucumber was unbelievable (I've never experienced anything like it before).

The Beat

18.10.97 WIGAN ATHLETIC 1 TOWN 1

Wigan work it out.....

After the previous month it made a change to be going into a game with players returning from injury, and on the back of a win, but we knew that this was going to be a difficult match with Wigan having a good home record (it's probably something to do with the crappy ground). There was a good turn out of Town fans with many on the way to a few days in Blackpool or the Lake District, and notably fewer than usual travelling for the day.

Wigan started by coming close to scoring as early as the second minute, but the Town enjoyed the better of the possession during the first half, although few real chances were created, and those that were fell to Alexander and McLaren.

The second half started much the same as the first with the home side coming frighteningly close to scoring in the first minute. Again they managed to miss out, and the Town got back into the game, and after 18 minutes of the half took the lead. Oldfield took a throw in to Thorpe, who laid off the ball (a new Thorpe here?) for Oldfield to smash the ball in to the far corner of the net. Unfortunately, the joy of the Hatters fans didn't last long. A few minutes later Wigan had a penalty appeal turned down when Jones fell in the area, but moments later Martinez also went down when running across the edge of the box, and this time the ref gave the spot kick and Jones stepped up to equalise. Late in the game Town almost snatched the 3 points when a Steve Davis free kick (we all wondered whether his back would go again!) struck the foot of a post, but it was not to be. No matter, four points from six — could this be the start of a promotion campaign?

K.F.H.

21.10.97 FASHION VICTIMS 0 BOYS IN YELLOW 1

I would walk 300 miles for one of your goals....

Never has a cliché been more transformed into reality as in the moment that Alan White met one of Luton's refreshingly new dangerous looking corners to give Lennie's injured army a narrow yet totally effective 1-0 win.

One slight criticism of Alan was that he veered so much to the right after scoring, he missed by just the finest of margins the few hundred hardy Hatters followers in his celebration. Therefore his clenched fist of triumph was made to the suffering Carlisle fans. Still, as they had been winding us up for the 85 minutes the score had remained 0-0, it didn't matter too much. (A fashion note to the twit in the Carlisle shirt, which was short sleeved and worn over a white jumper — get a sweatshirt!)

An honourable mention to the ref who showed a nice touch of humour with us away fans when, in the final minutes, he put his watch to his ear in a mock show of making sure it was still ticking. This was made funnier still when Town duly held on for the final shrill of his whistle and a famous 1-0 Cumbrian win.

On a footie note, this is probably the best we've played away this season.

Phil 'Diet Coke (or Pepsi)' Darton

21.10.97 CARLISLE UNITED 0 TOWN 1

An alternative view

A game that Town should have had wrapped up long before the 85th minute winner from the ever improving Alan White. In the first half Tony Thorpe had a goal disallowed for offside — that was after a very slick move from midfield. It has to be said that for the amount of possession the Town enjoyed, it was the home side that were more prepared to have a pop at goal, albeit from long range, Kelvin Davies having to make a couple of fingertip saves to deny Carlisle.

In the second half Carlisle made more of a game of it, especially in the middle of the park, so much so that the Town's best chances came from set pieces near the end. The first of Alexander's excellent corners seemed to hit the outside of a post and bounce away, the second was when White lost his marker, dropped back and nodded past the flailing keeper.

The Town following was very creditable when you bear in mind the long distance, and waking up in Carlisle seeing happy, smiling Luton faces was most excellent.

N.J.G.

Report on Border TV news the following morning — Michael Knighton, the "I've met aliens" Chairman of Carlisle United was reported as saying he had no intention of appointing a manager. Kind of makes you glad we got David Kohler — kind of.

Further to this, the Mail on Sunday dated November 2nd, had an item about Mr Knighton, in which he claimed that if experience in football is what it takes to make a good manager, then he's a banana. Methinks the protests from Carlisle fans who want to get shot of him could now get very interesting.

25.10.97 TOWN 2 BRENTFORD 0

I believe in miracles,

Where you from,

You sexy thing....

Errol from Hot Chocolate running the line at Kenny Road and the Town winning their third from four matches. Now I really do believe in miracles. Three simple words describe this match:

LUTON ARE BACK

Not the best of displays you'll see from the Town, but once again it was all about points in the bag against a Brentford side who, without Asaba, aren't the force to be reckoned with that they were last season (yeah, I know they were shit last year but they were still up there and they did reach the play-off final).

Alexander put us 1-0 up in the first half with a real loopy, up-and-under, top the ball shot after Gray had headed down an Oldfield cross. And, by the way, that was the first time in the league this season that we have scored in the first 30 minutes of a match (not a lot of people knew that.....).

Thorpe settled the matter in the second half as he got on the end of a brilliant header by Skippy after he had run into space to head a corner goalwards.

Apart from this a fairly scrappy match, although at times the Town showed

skilful touches and flair (!) — but can someone please tell Thorpe that he doesn't have to try and walk the ball into the net every time he gets it in the penalty area (only a minor criticism!). Hopefully, now we've started to climb up the table the sombre atmosphere in the stands might improve. Altogether now: "I believe in miracles....."

The Beat

01.11.97 WYCOMBE WANDERERS 2 TOWN 2

It was strange to hear "We hate W*tf*rd" being chanted at an away game. Strange because it was the home supporters chanting. At least we now have one thing in common with Wycombe. What we don't have in common with them is style of play, which for Wycombe is long ball bombardment. The opening goal, after 11 minutes, came when we almost invited Wycombe to score after a throw in. The rest of the first half was a real battle, between Town's attempts to play real football and Wycombe's physical game. Eventually the football paid off, and we equalised through Skippy, when the ball just about crossed the line, off the bar. The second half was a different story, and the Town genuinely dominated, so when we went behind again it was an absolute travesty. Gray fouled on the edge of the Wycombe box, the ref plays on, and before you knew it we'd lost a goal. Against the run of play is an understatement. Fortunately, this was with twenty minutes left — too much for Wycombe to waste — and the equaliser came, this time a lovely header from Thorpe over the keeper caught off his line. A draw, but a win was what the performance deserved with numerous chances squandered. But what the hell, the run continues. A year ago we'd have managed to lose this game.

K.F.H.

RADIO DAZE

Three Counties Radio (sorry, Radio Hertfordshire) on Tuesday 21 October: Presenter David 'I don't favour Watford - honest' Croft was speaking to some WFC fan when the conversation got onto the callers daughter being a Manchester United fan. Crofty, absolutely outraged and astounded, said something along the lines of 'how can you allow her to do such a thing?'

To be fair, if my daughter had the option of being a W*tf*rd or Man Utd supporter, I'd buy her a bloody Old Trafford season ticket for life. Well, wouldn't you?

The Beat

Ed's comment: Can't agree here. Surely, it's better that the kid supports a local club, however despised, than joining the ranks of the Premiership glory hunters. If we ever encourage children to support clubs like Manchester United, then we are encouraging the death of our own clubs.

SHORT CUTS

Football's big guns took over at the beginning of the 1970s. Tottenham, Aston Villa and Nottingham Forest were all triumphant during that decade before Liverpool's four year domination from 1981-84. Luton Town had their only win to date in 1988 and Forest won the trophy in the next two

From last season's Coca Cola Cup final programme. It's not often you see Luton described as one of football's big guns.

evidence.

□ LUTON goalkeeper Andy Dibble's bit part in Glasgow Rangers' nine successive Scottish championships was to play seven games last season. But Dibble still had a tattoo done on his arm reading Nine In A Row, which is now causing him embarrassment.

Comment on Top Cat's mate after matches against Wrexham and West Brom (away).

TEAM OF THE WEEK

(4-3-3)



MIKE STOWELL
(Wolves)
Goalkeeper.
Braved injury to safeguard win at Barnsley.



DAN PETRESCU
(Chelsea)
Defender.
Elegant wing-back display against champions.



DARREN PEACOCK
(Newcastle)
Defender.
Commanding and alert in derby match with Boro.



COLIN HENDRY
(Blackburn)
Defender.
Earned praise in the 0-0 shut-out at Anfield.



GRAEME LE SAUX
(Blackburn)
Defender.
Nearing his best form after long lay-off.



NEIL ADAMS
(Norwich)
Midfield.
Two more goals for the club's top scorer.



ROY KEANE
(Man Utd)
Midfield.
Better than Paul Ince as a midfield destroyer.



MARK PEMBRIDGE
(Sheff Wed)
Midfield.
His switch to a central role was vital at The Dell.



DAVID OLDFIELD
(Luton)
Forward.
Hat-trick for his high-rising club against Preston.



IAN MARSHALL
(Leicester)
Forward.
His first treble for the club against rivals Derby.



DWIGHT YORKE
(Aston Villa)
Forward.
Lit the fuse with two midweek goals against Coventry.



BOSS OF THE WEEK

MARTIN O'NEILL
(Leicester)
Kept his side above the relegation zone with a 4-2 win over Derby after FA Cup heroics.

This cutting has been hanging around for quite a while, but is worth printing because of having our Skippy in such exalted company.

Pleat down on his knees

Ian Ross looks at the Premiership fixtures and finds Wednesday's manager in prayer

LITTLE more than a year after David Pleat was surveying life from the summit of the Premiership the Sheffield Wednesday manager is now facing up to the fact that, unless the points begin to pile up, he may soon become surplus to requirements at Hillsborough.

"I know I could be out of a job in six weeks. That's life. Then again it could be six months or six years. Who knows?" said Pleat, whose side are one place off the bottom of the table, have won once and visit Aston Villa today.

The Owls fans have begun calling for change, chants of "Pleat out" filling the air during their 5-2 spanking by visiting Derby in midweek. "The game went horribly wrong," said Pleat. "It was as though six black cats had crossed our path in one day."

His squad has been severely hit by injuries, and the trip to Villa Park could make or break his 27-month tenure at the club. "I go to sleep every night hoping and praying the injured players will recover quickly because we

need to get some solidity back in the team," Pleat added.

Ah, the thoughts of SOG (that's Senile Old Git, an affectionate nickname, for those of you not in the know) a man suffering serious problems just now — like a crap team. Were his half time pep-talks as positive as this?

The fear of failure unsettles your life. It never leaves you. Your head is going all the time wondering what can be done. It drives you wild, and in the end, it probably sends you barmy. An emotional insight into managerial pressures in the modern game from Sheffield Wednesday's David Pleat, apparently reprieved by the win over Exeter

LENNIE'S VERDICT

HATTERS BOSS LENNIE LAWRENCE SAID:

I'm sick and disappointed. My fears about our defensive inadequacies were fully realised and we let the fans down with a couple of daft goals that killed us off. Nonsense would be a police way of describing their second one. Presently, unless we get three at the other end, we can't hope to win games.



The second goal may have been a mix up, but was it really criminal? Even the police were concerned!

Ben Laurance



LET'S face it: two months ago, only a few sad individuals with a passion for pub quizzes would have known what a baht was. A cartoon character, perhaps? Or maybe a word describing a type of fly-swat favoured in the Punjab?

Ah, so it's the currency of Thailand. Well, there's one to tuck away, together with nuggets like who won the FA cup in

1959. (The answer, by the way is Nottingham Forest, who beat Luton Town 2-1.)

But now the currency markets of the Far East are in turmoil. And even for those whose interest in finance never gets beyond the cost of their mortgage, the baht — plus its neighbours the ringgit, the rupiah and the rest — have worked their way on to front pages.

Lest we forget? More references to our beloved Luton Town. This time from the financial pages of *The Observer*.

And from the pages of the northern (Milton Keynes) edition of the *Accuracy on Sunday*, it looks like Kim Grant has faded just as much as his performances did!!



● Kim Grant: On the move south to London

SUBSCRIPTIONS

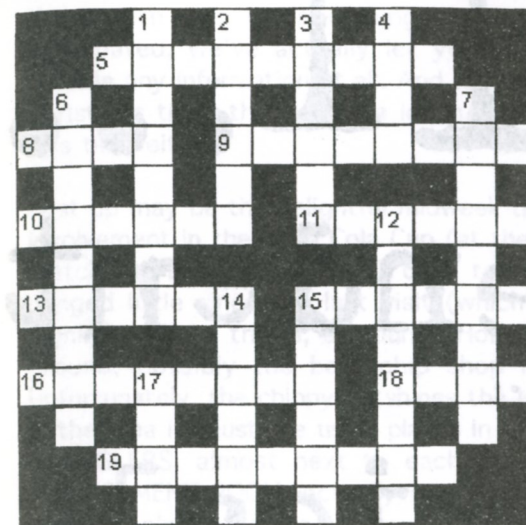
Mad as a Hatter! is available on subscription at £5.50 for the next seven issues (overseas surface mail £6.75, air mail rates available on request) from the usual address. Cheques payable to *Mad as a Hatter!* Please do not send cash by post as it rarely arrives.

Women are now the Premier League of tennis. But men are like Luton v Oldham

Pity the organisers of the French Open. The men's quarter-final line-up yielded an average world ranking of 58. The semi-finals were worse, bringing echoes of the FA Cup semis a few years back which could have produced a Luton-Oldham final. But at Roland Garros there was no Manchester United or Chelsea to save the day. Matters were so desperate that

Written by Kate Battersby (any relation to Tony?) in the *Evening Standard* way back in June. So now we know that Chelsea were just "saving the day" by beating us in that Cup semi-final. Isn't that nice?

Hatterword



Thanks to our contributor *Frenchie* we are able to bring you this fine crossword. It may not be of the same standard as that in *The Times*, but we'll offer a prize of some sort anyway. To make it easy for you, there are two sets of clues.

Answers (photocopy this page if you don't want to cut up your copy of *Mad*) should be sent to the usual address (see page 2), by the end of November, and if there are more than one, we'll draw the winning entry, and send the winner a generous (?) prize.

CRYPTIC CLUES

Across:

5. See 13.
8. Youth star from Mali (4).
9. He skips through ancient meadow (8).
10. I'm clean... but I have these thoughts about our defence (6).
11. Scum shirts (6).
- 13 & 5. Axe lager and harm crazy midfielder (6,9).
15. No news about how numbers are attached to shirts (4,2).
16. God, scot sounds less (3,5).
18. Mad 4, fondly remembered director (4).
19. Julian - he should be in the changing room (5,4).

Down:

1. Home is where their home is (8).
2. Reveal what our midfield do to our defence (6).
3. Sometime single Mervyn (3,3).
4. Rice pudding - summer loss (4).
6. Riddle spun yarn for winger manager (5,4).
7. Type of haze recommended for watching the lads (9).
12. Clear new cock-up for Lennie (8).
14. Mixed up Maidenhead youth talks too much (6).
15. British Standard Ceri breaks for writer (6).
17. Are Skippy and Waddock this? (4).

QUICK CLUES

Across:

5. See 13.
8. Youth player, --- George (4).
9. Skippy (8).
10. Unclean (6).
11. Unpleasant colour (6).
- 13 & 5. Midfielder (6,9).
15. Affixed (4,2).
16. Deity keeper (3,5).
17. Morecambe (4).
19. Position (5,4).

Down:

1. Westernmost team (8).
2. Flash (6).
3. Eventually (3,3).
4. Hughesy (4).
6. Ex-winger and manager (5,4).
7. Quality of beer, wine, etc. (9).
12. Lennie (8).
14. Plenty to say (6).
15. Writer (6).
17. Not foul (4).

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TOWN TRAVELS

What with this issue coming out several weeks later than we originally anticipated, we've actually let you down on a few away trips by failing to provide any information at all. And with the next issue expected to be out around Christmas time, there's not a lot in the way of away matches to tell you about this time either.

First up may be the delightful midweek trip to Grimsby, now delayed due to their involvement in the Coca Cola Cup (at the time of writing it is rumoured that this match will be put back by 7 days to 25th November). Blundell Park will have chnged little since our last visit (which we'll avoid mentioning in depth). The highlight of the trip is, of course, Hobson's fish and chip shop just outside the ground, possibly the best chip shop near a league ground in the country. Unfortunately, the chippy outshines the local pubs in a very big way. For drinking in the area it's just the usual places in Cleethorpes. WILLY'S PUB & BREWERY and SMUGGLERS, almost next to each other on High Cliff Road, and the NO. 2 REFRESHMENT ROOM, actually on Cleethorpes railway station, a tiny one room bar that always seems to have good beer. Nearer to the ground there is THE LEAKING BOOT, which always provides safe drinking for away fans.

The next awayday is York City, on 29th November. Although the ground won little acclaim after last season's visit, the pubs in the city came in for much praise. The pub crawl before the game was one of the highlights of the season, and having repeated it in the summer, the challenge is to find something new. One of the best pubs is the MALTINGS, at Lendal Bridge, a superb free house which doesn't need to employ bouncers — the sight of the landlord would frighten off the average bouncer (children are welcome here). Also very impressive on last season's visit was the WAGGON & HORSES, on Gillygate, where both the beer and the hot dinners were most impressive, and good value. A third pub on the same side of the city as Bootham Crescent is the MINSTER INN, on Marygate, which is off the busy road into the city.

The last away game before Christmas is the trip up the main line from Luton to Chesterfield. No doubt we'll all be looking forward to seeing a match there this season! A good deal is available on the trains with a 'Heart of England Day Out' ticket at £15. Enquire at the station for details, but it must be booked in advance. Chesterfield has a few decent town centre pubs, which are conveniently on the way from the station to the ground (with a minor diversion) such as the MARKET HOTEL, New Square, a Tetley Festival alehouse with a good range of beers, and the RUTLAND ARMS, Stephenson Place, a Hogshead pub, also with a range of guet beers. A little further afield is the ROYAL OAK, Chatsworth Road, a busy free house which, if memory serves, is right opposite a big B&Q store, but still not far from the ground.

The Sharpe End

I received a letter from a Mr Paul Clegg on September 12, 1997. It said: "Please give me a price for Luton Town winning the European Cup before 2002".

I had to ring the chap to ask if he was winding me up, but it transpired that he wasn't — an acquaintance living in South Africa, but originally from Harpenden, had asked him to check out the odds for him!

I did notice that the letter had FA Cup written in at first, which was then crossed out for the insertion of European Cup.

I told him he could have 10,000/1, but that I wouldn't be losing any sleep about having to pay out, and that if he'd seen what I'd seen so far in season 1997/98 I'd be advising his friend to have a few quid on Luton winning the FA Vase in a few years time.



Let's hope the injury crisis afflicting the club as I write this (Sept 18) turns out to be a blessing in disguise, enabling Lennie Lawrence at last to build his own team, and to clear out some of the, with respect, dead wood.

Since Lennie arrived he has really been working with his predecessor's squad which, it was unanimously agreed, wasn't up to the job.

He brought in Kim Grant, of course — well, everyone's entitled to make one mistake. Why is it, though, that only now that he has departed we are told that a big part of the problem was his frequent trips to Ghana, after which he was no use to man nor beast for a week or two. Why didn't Lennie put his foot down from the start and point out who was paying his wages?

Paul Showler is, in my opinion, excellent value for his modest fee, and a player who, it has yet to be generally realised (*probably because he's never fit - Ed*), benefits from being given a ball to run onto rather than a pass to feet.

Simon Davies? Well, early days, but early impressions suggest a man who has modelled his game on Ricky Otto — another one-foot wonder. And he can hardly be happy that as a star signing he was pulled out of the action, allegedly for his own good and that even during the depths of the injury crisis he could only make the subs' bench at Northampton. Doesn't suggest a great deal of faith in his ability, does it?

Gavin McGowan and Brian Small could become permanent fixtures — McGowan looks to have modelled his temperament on Ceri Hughes!

Meanwhile, who are the players whose injuries should act as an excuse to move them on?

Well, Mitchell Thomas, Julian James, Richard Harvey and Darren Patterson are just not likely to improve at this stage of their careers — nor has any of them been playing so well as to be indispensable at the time of their injury.

Graham Alexander is a little more difficult to weigh up. He is still (just) young enough to fulfill the potential which he shows, albeit in too brief flashes — flattering to deceive all too frequently — and where the bloody hell are those goals he should be getting every three or four games? Worth keeping in the squad, though.

Messrs Feuer, Fotiadis, Thorpe, Davis, Oldfield, Waddock are still capable of forming an effective basis around which to construct a top quality Second Division side and the jury is still out on the current version of Dwight Marshall. More worrying is the enduring inability of the side to match physically aggressive opponents — that is, the majority of teams we're likely to come up against this season.

I had to suffer Racing Post tipping Luton to lose at Northampton because, they said, "Straight talking Hatters boss Lennie Lawrence told us on the eve of the new campaign that his side were vulnerable to teams with a physical presence." Well, tell us something we can't see with our own eyes — but why hasn't he done something about it?!

In my opinion the current demand for a new striker is only addressing part of the problem. I don't believe we have ever properly replaced David Preece in midfield. Ceri Hughes, another unreplaced ingredient, would lay on the occasional inspired pass and would notch a few vital goals, but Preece could put players into the danger area or set them free from marking with a single pass — that's the ability we're crying out for.

Phil Gray should certainly take some of the burden from Tony Thorpe's shoulders — always providing Tony doesn't get the hump if he's no longer the glory boy! There's still the problem of getting the up to the strikers, though.

Graham Sharpe

Luton Town centre back
in new club shocker!!

STEVE DAVIS has
splashed out £50,000 to
become a director of
Third Division Leyton
Orient.

William HILL HatterLeague

Update 1

Welcome to the first update of the season for the newly renamed William Hill HatterLeague. Thanks to this renaming, in acknowledgement of a sponsorship from William Hill, we are pleased to announce that the prizes for the competition have now been increased. The first prize for this season will now be a £50 free bet for the winner, £25 for the runner-up and £15 for third place. This means that the *Mad as a Hatter!* William Hill HatterLeague is now the most lucrative fantasy football game around, as it is the only game where you could become a millionaire by winning (OK, so the odds may be a bit steep for that, but....).

Down to business. The first thing is a correction (there's always one) to the points system published in issue 42. Points for assists are awarded as follows:

- +1 point for a striker or midfielder
- +2 points if it is a defender or goalkeeper

Also, please note that assists are awarded at the discretion of the judges, and the "last Town player to touch the ball before the goalscorer" is not an absolute definition of how assists are awarded.

Players points so far are as follows (note that we have added Phil Gray and Alan White who will be available for transfer immediately, and whose points will accrue from November 22):

<u>Code</u>	<u>Player</u>	<u>£</u>	<u>Pts</u>	<u>Code</u>	<u>Player</u>	<u>£</u>	<u>Pts</u>
<u>Goalkeepers</u>							
201	Ian Feuer	0.9 m	-7	203	Nathan Abbey	0.3 m	-7
202	Kelvin Davis	0.3 m	8				
<u>Defenders</u>							
211	Gavin McGowan	0.4 m	-12	215	Darren Patterson	0.6 m	-7
212	Julian James	0.4 m	17	216	Mitchell Thomas	0.4 m	-7
213	Marvin Johnson	0.5 m	-4	217	Richard Harvey	0.3 m	-8
214	Steve Davis	0.8 m	10	218	Alan White	0.5 m	0
<u>Midfielders</u>							
221	Graham Alexander	0.7 m	7	224	Sean Evers	0.3 m	2
222	Gary Waddock	0.6 m	5	225	Simon Davies	0.4 m	4
223	Paul McLaren	0.5 m	22	226	Paul Showler	0.5 m	0
<u>Strikers</u>							
231	Tony Thorpe	1.0 m	18	235	Stuart Douglas	0.5 m	1
232	David Oldfield	0.7 m	10	236	Liam George	0.2 m	1
233	Dwight Marshall	0.5 m	0	237	Kim Grant	0.2 m	0
234	Andrew Fotiadis	0.8 m	0	238	Phil Gray	0.8 m	0

Who would have thought, when we started the game, that having Ian Feuer in your team could be a liability? Or that Paul McLaren could be the top scoring midfielder player? Just goes to show the unpredictable nature of this game. But with some of the results we've had, it would have been bad news to have any defenders in your team. Anyway, we are now seven games into the season (Brentford at home being number 7), and the leading standings are as follows:

<u>Pos</u>	<u>Team Name</u>	<u>Manager</u>	<u>Pts</u>
1	VANISHING POINTS	Bobby Payne	62
2=	HILARY'S HATTERS	Hilary Williams	53
2=	HE SCORES A GOAL, BUT NOT FOR US	Mrs J Wurst	53
4=	THAMESLINK HATTERS	David Trillwood	51
4=	DERBYSHIRE 1968	Dave Pearson	51
6=	LUTON 3 ARSENAL 2	Steve Lindsay	46
6=	SCUM SPICE - DER, HOLIDAY TO TURKEY!	Terry Lennon	46

At the top of the table Bobby Payne's lead is extended to nine points following the award of five points as Manager of the Issue, but in the next few places it's fairly tight. An honourable mention to Dave Pearson who maintains the high position in which he finished last season's HatterLeague.

Down at the bottom of the table, we're back into the negative points syndrome that we last saw in our first season. The bottom two places could owe something to too many pints of Beacon, but 76th place shows that the editor does not have the ability to bend the rules of the game (and as I write this I can't even remember who is in my team!).

73	HATTERS UNITED	Ryszard Buczynski	-15
74=	SIT UPS	C P Robson	-16
74=	THE ONLY WAY IS UP FC 97	Patrick Sammon	-16
76	INSIDE INFORMATION	Keith Hayward	-20
77	HARRY HASLAM LEGS ELEVEN	Maxine Whiting	-26

Although this is very much an early stage of the game, Mike Hann's team 'STILL TRYING TO BE DIFFERENT' are up in the dizzy heights, for Mike, of 11th place, and higher in the table than either of his sons. Mike, of course, was the runaway failure of last season's competition, but he can't have envisaged the injury crisis of recent weeks.

The overall entry this season is down to about half of last season, so with less to choose from we might actually get round to giving a prize for the best team name — but no promises on that. While we are on the subject, a message for Martin Blake — you didn't give your team a name, and since you are, currently, within striking distance of the top of the table, it might be a good idea. We look forward to hearing from you.



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