

MAD AS A HATTER!

THE LUTON TOWN FANZINE



Issue 60

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ENOCH SEEKS EXTRA



Seen in action at Wrexham, star of the season Enoch Showunmi looks to get something more from an away game. It seems ironic that with our sponsorship by Travel Extras one thing separating Town from the play-offs is the inability to get a little bit Extra from our Travels!

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ED LINES

It is interesting to compare this time last year with the present. In both cases the season had tailed off after a challenge for the play-off places, albeit lasting a bit longer this time around. That is where the similarity ends. Last year, we appeared to have a measure of stability about the club. We had our "Sugar daddy" chairman, allowing BFJ anything he wanted. He owned the freehold of the new stadium site and plans for the new ground were imminent (as they had been for years). The future was bright. This time around the flow of money could not be more different, and Mike Newell can have anything he wants, as long as there is no cost involved. Plans for a new ground are said to be imminent, as is the take-over of the club.

The intervening year has seen the sale of the club to a mystery consortium headed by John Gurney, plans for the F1 stadium announced, and then the appearance of the Receiver, heralded as our saviour. Now we await the sale of the club to a mystery consortium headed by Bill Tomlins, who we expect to announce their plans for the new stadium soon after the take-over is complete. The only difference between the two events is that the Football League have been involved second time around. If only they had been so concerned first time around! Having been in administration at the end of the Kohler era, and now in receivership only four years later, we must hope that this time around a long period of stability follows.

On the pitch, the season has been a mixture of disappointment and pleasing achievement. As football fans, we wanted so much more, but should be careful to remember that last August we would have been glad to avoid relegation, if we had a team to be in that position. Our manager was an unknown quantity, who we all knew had not been elected by anyone, and had much to do to earn our respect. It is probably fair to say that he has succeeded (or at least made a great deal of progress) in that respect. Few supporters are to be heard saying that what we need to mount a promotion challenge next season is a new manager – in this, there is a vote of confidence.

So, should we head off into our summer break with confidence? We will return in August with some new faces and some old favourites will no doubt move on. The numbers of both will perhaps say something about our hopes for the new season. We will do well to remember what we had to look forward last August.

I would like to conclude by saying thanks to all those who have helped so much with the return of Mad as a Hatter! this season. Without the regular contributors, it would not have been possible to produce five issues, with such an excellent selection of articles, and without you, dear readers, buying those issues, there would have been no point for any of us. So, thank you all, and have a great summer. We'll see you again in August.

JOE KINNEAR - LET'S NOT FORGET HIM

It's Saturday evening. You're watching the highlights of today's Premiership games, and it's Arsenal versus a choice of 19 sides below them. An anonymous winger flies past Ashley Cole, who clumsily puts him into the North Bank and escapes with a yellow card. Post match, Arsene Wenger is asked what his thoughts are on the Cole incident'. The Arsenal manager declines to comment because he "didn't have the best view". Cast your footballing minds back a few years, and Roy Keane's career ending assault on Alf Inge Haaland. Remember the post match interrogation of Fergie? If you can't, I'll briefly enlighten you. He did not see the incident, and staunchly defended his captain as to the nature of the 'tackle'. Funny that...

If you are wondering what this has to do with Joe Kinnear, then let these images (you've seen them often enough) linger in your mind for a few minutes...

When Dan Strobe wrote a few lines entitled "Why did we like Joe Kinnear anyway" in *Mad* issue 59, it was written with the kind of sensationalist tone that you would expect to find in a tabloid newspaper. There was absolutely no justification of his points, and I'm not saying some of them are not valid but, in my view, they were exaggerated and more importantly points that we as Luton fans cannot actually verify.

To start with, I'd like to say that I enjoyed Joe Kinnear as manager of Luton Town. I never worshipped him, never thought he was better than sliced bread and never talked him up as better than he was. Simply, I liked him. Unlike me, he was worshipped around the ground on matchdays by a large majority of fans, and that is why, in the summer of 2003, it came as a shock and surprise, and was to the detriment of Luton Town, when both Joe and his assistant, Mick Harford, were sacked for whatever reason. And, contrary to popular belief, we actually have no evidence of what those reasons were. We can but speculate. Any reasonable fan of the club would have fallen into one of the categories shocked, surprised or pissed off upon hearing the news.

Let us look into some key points in Dan's article and analyse them so as to give our former manager some chance of justice.

He took at least £400k a year as a wage. On hearing this information within a week of his departure, my first thought was of scepticism. It still is now. I will not dispute the figure quoted because I have seen no evidence, in any form, to suggest that his earnings were of this magnitude. Dan Strobe *may* be correct, but I believe this figure came about by word of mouth and, I say again, no newspapers, radio stations or official websites have published this figure. John Gurney mentioned he was earning "too much", but the truth is it's simply cheap talk.

He sold Taylor for peanuts. If memory serves me correctly, we received somewhere in the region of an initial payment of £400k for the player (perhaps Joe K paid him in his own 'annual salary') with further payments dependant on appearances and international recognition. The reality is that most players in the Nationwide do not have a monetary value any more. Premiership players out of contract become worthless. Yeah, my valuation of Taylor was probably nearer the £1 million mark, but players valuations and their actual worth are bygone days I'm afraid. Check out transfer deadline day 2004. 118 players changed hands, 3 for money. Point made, perhaps?

He gave Luton bad PR when he signed for Forest. I've watched Sky Sports News, checked out Forest websites, and a lot (there isn't much) of what he said was certainly no slagging off. It was the usual banter he always used, pointing out that the way he had been treated by LTFC was a disgrace. And, let's be honest, it was nothing short of that at the time. We all give our ex-employers a little roasting (especially in such extreme circumstances) so should Joe act any differently?

We were relegated under him. This is a pretty daft assessment of the whole picture. Give Arsene or Alex that team of 2001 and tell them to sort it out?? Joe's first five games in charge collected 4 wins for the club, giving us hope before an admittedly awful run of results (no wins in 13?) gave us the chance to get new road atlases to see if the new A roads into Rochdale and Macclesfield were going to make the forthcoming journeys any better.

Does Eddie Gray at Leeds stand a chance of keeping his team up after all before hi have cocked up? Will Joe have cocked up again if Forest go down? I'd look at the financial situation at both clubs before looking any further...

He got us £12 million in debt. Where on earth did Dan Strobe get this figure from? OK, if I read this from a reliable source I might consider it closer to reality. Hell, there's a decent chance that the club is (or was) £12 million in debt. If Dan Strobe can write a convincing account of how Joe personally got the club into this much debt, and where the figures come from, then I will believe it. Or perhaps Joe was on £6 million a year salary?! As you've guessed, I'm struggling to comprehend this cheap statement. If I'm right, Griffiths cost £75k, Forbes £60k and Howard £50k. Financial investments oof a sound mind, I'd say.

Fantasised a dream about Plymouth being our Arch rivals. Go to Old Trafford on a Saturday afternoon and ask which team they'd most like to put one over. Manchester City? Wrong. You see, there has been such a void of time since the clubs used to play each other regularly and compete on even ground that even the the most staunch United fan, who has lived his life within a stone's throw of the ground, would utter the word he'd find easiest to spit out – Arsenal. Both clubs have become the dominant forces in English football for half a decade now and the rivalry between the two, including the managers, has boiled over on more than one occasion. United's biggest game therefore used to be against Liverpool, and briefly for a few years, when they were a force, it was Leeds and it was these clubs that United's following would portray as their main rivals at 3 o'clock. Perhaps then come Manchester City. Likewise at Highbury, Manchester United are despised but who follows? No, not Tottenham. Now it's Chelsea, simply because they are the team most likely to compete intensely until the end of the season.

Now back to the less lofty climes of Kenilworth Road. October 1997, February 1998 and more recently September 2002 are the most recent occasions that Luton have played W*tf*rd. That's 3 games in six and a half years, folks. Now don't get me wrong, the rivalry between the two is still intense (too intense, going back 18 months) but, in reality, QPR and Plymouth, in many fans eyes, have taken over as the teams to beat. Our recent tussle a few years back for the 3rd Division title meant the Plymouth game took on extra meaning. There has been a bit of needle between Luton and QPR since the days when both clubs inhabited grass of a plastic kind. The rivalry had intensified recently with the FA Cup game decided on a dubious last minute decision, and Thorpe's decision to change alliance. It's not that we forget W*tf*rd, it's just that we haven't played them often enough to actually passionately care about their plight, just as any Nottingham Forest fan doesn't give a toss about how Notts County are doing, just so long as Derby aren't sitting above them in the table. Anyway, the way things are going in Divisions 1 and 2, things might just be back to where they used t be...

He slags off players in public. Rewind to that start of this article. Arsene and Alex – contrary to popular belief they're peas in a pod. The point is, that with Joe you got what he saw. You listened to him on the radio, either post match, midweek or whenever, and you thought to yourself "He's speaking my language". Granted, a lot of people would say that what goes on on a pitch on Saturday afternoon should be kept behind closed doors. But at least with Joe he defended his judgement, not only of his players but of officials and opposing players, and he's pointing out exactly what we, as working class folks, are thinking afterwards: another Nicholls fiasco; just another clanger from Emberson. It was always decent to hear the man express his feelings, exactly the same as us. Praise where it's due, and a ticking off where it's due too.

In concluding what I feel is a justified reply and defence of some points made about Joe Kinnear (things which football fans never say at the time, but are always quick to react when a stab in the back is a simple option), I would like to end with two of my own observations.

Dan Strobe, who wrote the original article, and I are both very enthusiastic Town fans. That is why we both felt compelled to write for the fanzine. I'm sure both our viewpoints are shared by fans reading this, but our main aim is simple – to support our football club the best we can.

And to finish, I think it is worth mentioning that Mike Newell, with his coaching team, is doing a highly commendable job at the present, both with the team on the pitch and, more confidently now, with the media off the pitch. He strikes me as a man with intellect, integrity, honesty and an inner desire to succeed with our club. To date, a job very well done.

But when we go back two seasons, and assess a manager who recorded our highest ever points tally, a club record succession of wins, and put the pride back into the club after so many years of disappointment, to see him getting slagged off with some pretty unjustified cheap shots, well, I'm sorry, but I just didn't see that coming. A bit like Arsene and Alex really...

Tony Allbones, The Kempston Hatter

Things that we won't see or hear next season

- Dean Crowe scoring a goal
- Morten Hyltdgaard going for and catching a cross outside his six-yard box.
- Tony Thorpe giving money to charity
- Enoch scoring less than 20 goals
- Singing from the Kenilworth Road end
- Three substitutes being made when there are no injuries
- A keeper wearing the number 1 shirt who is good and we are confident with
- Steve Howard agreeing with a decision that the referee and linesmen make
- Kevin Nicholls' IQ being higher than the amount of cards he receives
- An announcement on the new stadium that we believe
- A message saying that we will be out of administration by the end of the week/month
- A Luton first team that has an average age over 21
- A quiet person sitting behind you
- Barry Ward. Although, by the time that you are reading this, we'll be out of administration so you'll already know that!

Peter Bulkeley

THE EPITOME

Managers' reigns at football clubs signify eras in the history of a club, and quite often there is a player who epitomises each era. I set out below my own list from the time I started supporting the club. Other fans might agree or disagree with my choices, but it is good a subject for debate.

Alec Stock (1969-72)

The epitome of the Alec Stock era, in my opinion, was **Malcolm MacDonald**. He scored 58 goals in two seasons and bristled with confidence and optimism. Like the Town at the time, he was on the way up with greater glories to follow. For him, the glories were at Newcastle where became the legendary "Supernac" and also for England. For Luton, twenty-six years in the top two divisions, including eleven in the top flight, were to follow.

Harry Haslam (1972-78)

It is difficult to choose the epitome of this happy-go-lucky time. Nobody was larger than life than Harry himself – the attacking football, the smile through thick and thin, and all that orange. Andy King was a chirpy cheeky chappie with a positive outlook, an attacking midfield player, who was sold cheaply to save the club's finances – a candidate. However, I have ruled him out, as he played less than 35 games in the period. One player was Harry's first purchase and played consistently well throughout the time, just as the team did. His left-wing play, a bit plain at first for those brought up on Graham French, became increasingly flamboyant in his later years, just as Luton became more and more orange. There was always, too, the hint that he played for fun, as he trained up north and only came down on Fridays before home matches. Fun was a key feature of Harry Haslam's Luton. So my choice is **John Aston**.

David Pleat (1978-86)

Brian Stein and Ricky Hill both played the skilful, attractive football for which Luton were famed at the time. They both played consistently well over the entire period of Pleat's reign, just as the team did. They both typified the club's rivalry with Watford, mirroring their own contests with Luther Blissett and John Barnes for England recognition. There was the feeling with Stein and Hill that they were unlucky not to play for England more – just four caps between them – and that playing for a bigger club would have changed that. Similarly, the Town were unlucky to be pipped by the bigger clubs to the trophies. Losing an FA Cup semi-final to Everton from 1-0 up with five minutes left was heartbreaking. Then the next year, we lost to Everton again from 2-0 up in the quarter-finals. Of the two, I have selected **Ricky Hill** as the epitome. He just edges it for the affection in which he was held as a gentleman of the game, just as Luton were so popular at the time.

John Moore (1986-87)

John Moore's team finished 7th in the top division, ahead of Manchester United, Chelsea, Newcastle, and many other big clubs. Only thirteen goals were conceded at home all season (that is more like the total per month in some recent years!). The team had a tighter, more efficient edge than before: we actually scored 14 goals less than in the previous year, but were more streetwise about closing out victories. John Moore was/is a loyal Luton Town man, who took David Pleat's team to even greater heights – its highest ever league finish. It was done with the defensive organisation epitomised by its captain who, like Moore, was determined not to let his old boss's departure start a decline. That captain, **Steve Foster**, is therefore the epitome.

Ray Harford (1987-90)

It is difficult to find a player who typifies the absolute high of the greatest day in the club's history, at Wembley in April 1988, and also the sad end when Harford was hounded out by

dissatisfied supporters less than two years later. I have selected **Kingsley Black**, whose overall career followed this sort of trend, though spread over a longer period than just Harford's reign. Black played in the Arsenal game at Wembley at the age of just 18, was transferred to Nottingham Forest for £1.5m three years later, but was dropping fast down the leagues to the last division by his mid-twenties.

Jim Ryan (1990-91)

David Preece had entered a new phase of his career. Whereas earlier he had played second fiddle alongside the stars such as Hill, Stein, and Mick Harford, he was now a senior figure. He coaxed along an assortment of mainly young bucks and pros to stay up there alongside the likes of Manchester United. Like the team as a whole, Preece used all his wit and guile to play above himself. He was short of being a really top-class midfielder, but he was a clever player, nonetheless, and he played much of his career in the top division. Similarly, Ryan's team-sheet did not ooze top division quality, but it somehow applied well what talents it had, and held its top-flight status. **David Preece** is therefore my selection as epitome.

David Pleat again (1991 to 1995)

The team was made up increasingly of raw youngsters and old has-beens. Anyone worth a price was sold. It turned out to be an interim phase. Before it, there were twenty years of success and entertainment in the higher echelons, beginning with the Malcolm MacDonald team. After it, there were bleak times in the lower two divisions, the Douglas, George, Fotiadis strike-“force” which scored about as many career goals between them as Malcolm did in two seasons at Luton! **Kerry Dixon** played in this interim period. He himself was in-between a glittering career as a Chelsea legend and the footballer's inevitable decline into obscurity, Sunday league football with St Joseph's in his case. Also, he played in the 1994 FA Cup run, a last hurrah for him and, so far, for Luton too. Kerry Dixon epitomises David Pleat's second spell in charge.

Terry Westley (1995)

Terry Westley was promoted from youth-team coach to first-team manager, and the jump was too big for him. It all fell apart after early optimism, and the bright, young, and enthusiastic Westley was sacked as we sat bottom just before Christmas. **Bontcho Guentchev** epitomises that short period. A Bulgarian international, with a good record at Ipswich, and lots of promise at the start, but in the end a failure with Luton. He scored four goals in his first five games, followed by six in his next 35.

Lennie Lawrence (1995 to 2000)

We became bored of Lennie's whining and pessimistic pronouncements. On reflection now – in the Joe Kinnear era – we played some good football to feet under Lennie Lawrence, but Lennie was always so lugubrious about it and so unambitious on our behalf. We became established in division two, not what we aspired to, and the club went nowhere as the lease ran out on the ground and there was no sign of a glittering new one being built. It was a time of meekly accepted mediocrity. Having said that, it is now going to be cruel to nominate my epitome player. However, I have to choose one, and it is **Paul McClaren**. He drifted around our midfield for five seasons not doing much, trying to look good, but never the killer pass, very few goals scored, and being generally nondescript.

Ricky Hill (Aug to Nov 2000)

It was a massive shame that one of our past heroes came back to the club and failed. He was bristling with optimism and ideas about an attractive style of play, but he needed to be more pragmatic early on, to buy himself some time. When we were 24th in November, the feeling that Ricky the manager was too nice for the job was difficult to refute. We were all very sad about it, but there was no big protest because we could believe it ourselves. I have chosen **Andre Scarlett** as the epitome of that time. He had skill and enthusiasm but in the final event his lack of

physical stature was fatal to any serious hopes of a long-term league career. Similarly, Ricky's Luton were bristling with hope, enthusiasm and imagination, but somehow the harshness of the real world got in the way.

Lil Fuccillo (Nov 2000 to Jan 2001)

Lil added some extra fight to the Town's performances and the QPR cup-tie summed up the short period. Unlucky to lose the first game from a goal up in the last few minutes, then robbed in the epic away game after extra time, despite being shorn of many first-choice players. I thought that Lil was very unlucky to be sacked so soon after that performance. I have chosen **Stuart Fraser** as the epitome of those few months. Always a battler and a trier, but cut down in a good run of form by a broken leg in the QPR replay, and his Luton and league career never really recovered from it.

Joe Kinnear (2000 to 2003)

One of the features of Joe's Luton was the number of players coming in and going out of the club – mainly coming in and later leaving a huge wage-bill for the administrator to sort out! Coyne, Perrett, Howard, Forbes, Emberson, Nicholls, Valois, Skelton, Griffiths, Holmes, Hughes, Neilson, Hillier, Bayliss, Brkovic, Crowe, and many more! Another feature was that we were universally disliked by opponents. This was provoked by Joe's extravagant pronouncements – “We will win division three by ten clear points” – and by a rumbustious style of play. It was a successful team, though. So my easiest epitome since Malcolm MacDonald: step forward **Steve Howard**, both successful – a prolific goalscorer – and disliked by the opposition for his aggressive style of play which led to many bookings, sendings-off, and suspensions! (My runner-up was Kevin Nicholls, by the way!)

Mike Newell (2003 to ??)

Who will become the epitome of Mike Newell's reign? It is so far an optimistic time, as we are playing attractive football, looking up the table to the promotion places, and looking forward to coming out of receivership. Early candidates are our good young players such as Matthew Spring and Emerson Boyce, and even younger ones such as Foley and Beckwith. Time will be the judge.

Robert Turner

What's that stand for then?

As QPR is known as ‘Quarter Pound Of Rubbish’, it holds that:

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Dons | = Disaster On Negligible Scale |
| Hornets | = Honk On Randy, Noxious Elton's Trouser String |
| TNS | = Tossy Nerds, Sponsored |
| Sky TV | = Stoopid Klutzy Yucky TosserVision |
| Man U | = Megalomaniacs And Nasty Urine |
| Gurney | = Grotesque, Ungrateful Rubbish; Now Extinct. Yeh! |
| Thorpe | = Trust Him Or Realise – Prime Enemy! |
| Hyldegaard | = Hold! You Leap, Dodgy Eagle; Get An Approximate Reach. Danger!! |
| Showumni | = Cast iron guarantee |

Elliot P Smoke

RAVING MAD!!!

Dear Mad!,

Well done on an incredibly good read. I hope I can contribute an item one day. Sorry, but I'm not in the mood today. The roof has had some tiles damaged in the wind and the electric has just been cut off. Damn the weather. I was just getting over the daylight robbery from Plymouth too.

Thanks again,

Phil Wain
Northampton.

As if that last minute equaliser wasn't enough... Ed.

Dear Mad!,

I expect somebody else has pointed out the erroneous article by Graham Sharpe of Luton's abandoned cup-tie with Man. City (issue 59, page 9 of *Mad as a Hatter!*). If not I will relate what my memory comes up with, i.e. Luton were losing 6-2, not 6-1, when the heavens opened after leading 2-0 (Ashworth scored both). Also Law did not score all City's goals. The goal in the 3-1 defeat of City was scored by the other inside-forward, Hayes, not Law.

Incidentally, I, like many other supporters, thought the FA would be meeting as scheduled yesterday (18th March) only to find out the meeting is not until next week. Do you think that the Rio Ferdinand appeal pushed the FA meeting on for a week? If so, another reason to dislike MU. . .!

Cheers,

Terry Worrell,
by email.

Dear Mad!,

"Obviously Luton's a proper football club with a history," was a quote by Paul Underwood on Three Counties Radio the day after he signed from Rushden. Now, we would all obviously agree, but the rest of Paul's "obvious" remarks were not quite so obvious to me.

In fact, Paul used the word "obviously" TWENTY-EIGHT TIMES in a four minute interview. Take away the questions posed by Geoff Doyle, the interviewer, which took approximately one minute, and we are left with "obviously" spoken once every seven seconds!

At one stage, Paul said, "I'm a virgin here... and obviously I must earn respect by doing it on the pitch."

Obviously, we wait with anticipation....!!

Shirley D Hobbs
Luton.

Obviously...

Team Discipline

Luton, so far have managed to pick up, a not too surprising: 8 reds and 95 yellows in 43 games. This isn't too bad by Luton's standards, although it will probably mean we get a 25k fine from the FL later this season, which is mad really..... but then again as we know, the FL are mad.

Basically, what I'm trying to find out is what would it be like to have a "clean" team. Lets take league leaders Plymouth: 1 red and 57 yellows. This is the most well behaved team in the league (although we and Kevin Nicholls know different thanks to ginger boy falling down asap). This seems to reflect where they are in the division.

If Luton were well behaved would they be top? Maybe, maybe not. Our players have missed a total of 22 games through suspension so far this year....its an awful lot.

So far, we can see clean teams win things, and Luton despite their skill and excellence don't (often) 'cos they are dirty.

To see if we can confirm this ill look at Brentford, Colchester and GRIMSBY. These 3 teams are all in the lower half of the table, with 2 of them very low down. These 3 teams, are with Luton, in the naughtiest team area. This shows bad teams get bad positions.

Hartlepool, Bristol City and Swindon...who are doing well, and we have played recently are high flying in the league. Ill take a look at where they are in the bad boy league.....Oh, all very close to the top. Making, clean teams win more.

From this data, you can see clean teams win, dirty teams don't. Although Luton do a great job from the bad boy teams! We are bad and fairly high in the league.

Here is the bad boy league, so far, if your interested: As you can see it NEARLY shows the true league table, apart from Luton who are well out of position. It's a credit to the boys!

| Team | Red | Yellow | | |
|--------------|-----|--------|--------------|-------|
| Plymouth | 1 | 57 | Chesterfield | 5 94 |
| Hartlepool | 1 | 59 | Peterborough | 6 70 |
| Bournemouth | 2 | 65 | Wrexham | 7 64 |
| Port Vale | 3 | 66 | Wycombe | 7 74 |
| Stockport | 3 | 66 | Sheff Wed | 7 87 |
| Bristol City | 4 | 60 | Oldham | 7 91 |
| Notts County | 4 | 74 | Swindon | 8 76 |
| Brighton | 4 | 86 | Blackpool | 8 82 |
| QPR | 4 | 91 | Luton | 8 95 |
| Tranmere | 4 | 93 | Grimsby | 9 63 |
| Rushden | 5 | 56 | Colchester | 9 94 |
| Barnsley | 5 | 73 | Brentford | 11 68 |

Dan Strobe

Sharpe Angle

After watching the Bournemouth match, seeing Steve Robinson gift the ball to one of their strikers who gratefully accepted the present and equalised, only for said Mr R to be announced shortly after as Man of the Match, I realised that everyone who watches a game sees a different contest from everyone else in the crowd.

So, probably my season-long opinions of various players will be different to yours, but I offer them nonetheless - because I can!

The jury is clearly still out on Hilda the keeper, a man so tall for so long that he has clearly previously never been called upon to have to attempt what we vertically challenged tinies refer to as a 'jump'. When Hilda, who obviously became used at an early age to raising a casual arm to catch anything coming his way, now endeavours to undertake this manoeuvre which normally involves raising both feet and, preferably legs too, from the ground in an effort to gain elevation, therefore raising the body and outstretched arms to such an extent that the ball nestles within the hands safe from the unwanted attentions of opponents, he calls to mind the less than gracious jerking action of a disjointed puppet. He is curiously bulky, too and oddly apprehensive at leaving the safety of his six yard area. Nonetheless, he has pulled off some good saves and was arguably the most assured of our players against Bournemouth. Percentage mark since arrival - 63%.

Now don't tell Sol Davis this, as I suspect he is not a man to upset lightly, but he is something of a one-trick pony - that one trick being a hopeful punt up the park courtesy of his trusty left foot. He should not expect to follow in the footsteps of his predecessor and head for the Premiership in a hurry but he's useful enough in the 2nd Division although his spiteful side comes out too frequently, rendering him vulnerable to frequent disciplinary problems. 72%.

Emmerson Boyce could solve the problem which has dogged us all season - vulnerability to tricky, nippy left sided attackers. Stick him at right back and leave Coyney to tutor Curtis Davis (68%) into the decent player he is clearly capable of becoming and we'd have a much better balanced back four as neither Messrs Keane (65%) or Foley (66%) are yet the finished article at full back and look better midfield prospects. Boyce has been a real star this season, wherever he has played and could well be Player of the Season - 90%. Coyney has been almost equally reliable for much of the campaign but seems to have become a little ragged with pressures not only of captaincy but also trying to keep the kids in check in recent weeks - 88%.

Former on-field skipper Kevin Nicholls also suffers from a tendency to catch the referee's eye at awkward times, but when not suspended, arguing with the management, coming back from injury, and playing where he wants to he can be an inspirational presence, leading by example - 75%.

Steve Robinson finally showed supporters the ability which initially encouraged Joe to bring him to the club. He was quicker, more committed and reliable although his penalty technique still needs working on. 78%

Brko. Well, what can you say? Tackling - he doesn't really go in for that. Passing - mm, not sure about that one, pass. Shooting - well, clear through with just the keeper to beat in a recent match his shot on goal failed even to reach the goal line. Heading - I refer you to

tackling. He must have something going for him to get as many starts as he does, perhaps he has just stayed fit and been in the right place at the right time, but I'm afraid at this level he doesn't cut the mustard. 60% Nice bloke, though, apparently.

Steve Howard - could he have been ever so piqued by the attention paid to Enoch, do you think? Has certainly appeared less than enamoured with his new partner from time to time but that may just have been frustration as the novice began to learn his trade. Has had to deal with injuries, playing at centre half - which he did very well - and was perhaps unsettled more than realised at the time by the speculation over his future when Joe went. Has still weighed in with a decent tally of goals but does seem to have become a more selfish player in recent weeks. 80%

Enoch Showunmi will be better judged this time next year but has enjoyed a genuine fairy-tale start to his career which hopefully will now progress rather than stall. Opponents will be much more aware of him next season but to judge by the improvement in heading and passing ability already beginning to reveal themselves there is much to anticipate from Enoch. 75%

Adrian Forbes still retains great enthusiasm in his game despite a season punctuated by injury and having to play in various different positions. You can't help but warm to his all action style even though you suspect he should deliver a little more end product than he frequently does. Wholehearted player who is a great benefit to the team. 80%

Lee Mansell. What has gone wrong with this boy? He was one of our brightest prospects a couple of seasons ago. Is he destined to suffer a Liam George/Andrew Fotiadis fate? One can only hope that whatever has impeded his progress of late is rapidly overcome during the close season and that he again demonstrates the bright potential which had him marked out for great things so recently. 60%

Peter Holmes has been in and out of the club so often that no-one is ever quite sure whether he is playing for us or not. At the moment, through injury, one of his most promising spells was cut short. He looks the part, sometimes plays the part and has potential which he should be ready to realise imminently if he is to make it. 67%

I hope Paul Hughes and Russ Perrett can regain full fitness if they stay around as they both still have plenty to offer while Alan Nielsen and David Bayliss are useful squad players, Ian Hillier doesn't seem to have trained on although he's almost worth playing for his throw-ins, Matthew Spring was having a pretty good season before his injury and can certainly still do a fine job for us.

Mike Newell (75%) has impressed with his calm - sometimes a little too calm - progress through his debut season, and also via his loyalty to his players even in defeat, but judgement of his abilities has to be tempered by the fact that so many of his selections have almost been imposed on him by circumstances. I personally would take Joe back tomorrow and still suspect that Mike has mixed feelings about the looming presence of Mick Harford, which is a two-edged sword for him. Joe Kinnear has now signed an extended contract with Forest and he may well come looking for MH in the close season.

So, there you go, that's just my opinion - and, when all is said and done, what do I know!?

Graham Sharpe

Over the years, we have had countless captains. Some good, some bad. For every Steve Foster there's been a Tony, um, can't remember his name again. So, just in case you've forgotten what they were like, I am proud to present....

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO... LUTON TOWN CAPTAINS

Steve Foster - Instantly recognisable for his headband. Just like Terry Butcher's bandage in the World Cup, he wore it because he was tough and practised karate chops with his head - probably. Inspirational captain anyway.

Brian Horton - Ran around a lot, shouted a lot, so he was naturally a good captain. He also had a footballing brain, which helped him become a manager.

Paul Fitcher - Also shouted a lot mostly at his twin brother who was in the team and he was the oldest. That's all I can remember of him.

AND NOW THE ONES THAT I CAN REMEMBER.....

Gary Waddock - Blonde hunky midfielder who signed from Bristol Rovers. Not really a player who would shout a lot at his players but he gave us some free tickets at Wrexham so a sound bloke. A touch defensive but compared to Paul McLaren was Alan Shearer.

Trevor Peake - Experienced centre back, now coaching at Coventry. Captain the year we went down from Division One, but this was probably due to the truly terrible players he was captaining such as Gavin Johnson, Riseth and Rob Matthews. Came back for one last appearance at home to Wrexham, making him the oldest player ever to play for the Town (making my Dad look young *(and me! Ed)*). And probably all Town fans who saw that match agree that he was terrible that day! It wasn't his fault the handle of his zimmer frame fell off.

Captain Marvel - Took over after Stevo left for Burnley, and was club captain for about four years. His mazy runs left the Luton fans chanting his name, and he also left the Luton fans knowing that they were in for a real treat every week. And who can forget his goal against the scum? Twist, turn, twist, shot, deflection and goal. Brilliant. Now manager of the Under-19's (or Under 15's as they are really), and his expertise is rubbing off onto them as they are winning their league, and at the time of writing are unbeaten. A Luton Legend.

Steve Davis - Good player, but not a brilliant captain. Good enough for the level that we were at but very quiet. A centre-back in the mould of Foster

(without the headband). Could also play as a striker. If we were losing with ten minutes to go he was often the only player likely to score.

Tony Tr*e** - Another captain prepared to lead by example. He always had the team's best interests at heart, and because of his actions he still has fans singing passionately about him. Got a rousing reception when Luton visited Loftus Road which he won't forget in a hurry. A fifth stint at the club would be interesting!

Chris Coyne (Aussie) - As a player, quite brilliant as a central defender. One who Curtis Davies etc. can look up to. However, not quite captain material, maybe due to him not getting on with our various keepers over the years; maybe he doesn't shout enough encouragement.

Matthew Spring - A great player. Always runs around a lot and without him, the midfield lacks any creativity, and always gives 110%. As a captain, however, he isn't right. He doesn't motivate enough and although he is a good example to the youngsters, he isn't captain material. Sorry Matty.

Kevin Nicholls - As a player, he is a nutter. Running around, he tackles first and then considers the consequences later. Does this make him an ideal captain? At least he leads by example although he often makes you think he won't stay on the pitch for 90 minutes.

So there you have it. I think it's fair to say in recent years the quality of the Luton captain's has fallen short of the glory days. Where have the inspirational leaders gone?

I haven't seen a Town captain that I remember for being inspirational, but hopefully that will change in the near future. Who can we look to in the future - Enoch?

Peter Bulkeley

CONTRIBUTIONS

Thanks to all who have contributed this season - without you, there would be no fanzine. We do intend to continue next season, and will need your help. Whether you are a regular or past contributor, or a newcomer, please send your articles, letters, cartoons, press cuttings, photos or whatever, either by post or email to the addresses below. Deadline for the first issue of next season will be around mid-July.

Snail mail: 195 Cutenhoe Road, Luton, LU1 3NQ.

Email: keith.hayward1@ntlworld.com

At the F.A.

What really goes on with Sven & Tord

The date is March 29th and Sven and Tord are talking about people who could possibly take England to Euro 2004 glory. They had just attended key weekend games and are meeting to report their findings...

Sven: Hello Tordy, good game was it? Luton playing away somewhere.

Tord: Yeah, it was thanks.

Sven: Good, good. So, what did you find?

Tord: Well, I think I've finally found someone who is worse than Heskey, he could be the person that we could blame for going out in the early stages of the tournament. Although I think that the public might smell a rat if you call up a Nationwide player to the squad, especially a Division 2 player.

Sven: Well, tell me who it is anyway - I'm sure I could use him in a few meaningless friendlies for one half.

Tord: Um, I think his first name was Tony, but I can't remember. Tony Thingy. Generous bloke - handed out £10 notes before the game to all the fans. Really popular as the fans sang about him all game.

Sven: OK. Actually, I'll stick with Heskey for now - he must play well sometime. Was that it?

Tord: No, I also saw a genius when I was there. I've been watching the game for.... well, a long time, and I've never seen anyone like him. He scored a brilliant goal and, there are no words to describe his natural talent. Just brilliant. There is only one problem.....

Sven: What's that then?

Tord: His parents are Nigerian, and he might be called up by them first.

Sven: Not if I have anything to do with it. Pass me the telephone.

(He phones up the Nigerian FA and asks for the national team manager)

Christian Chukwu: Hello?

Sven: Hello, erm... (To Tord) What was the player's name again?

Tord: Enoch Showunmi

Sven: Thank you (To Christian) Hello, it's Enoch here. Enoch Showunmi.

Christian: Erm, you're not that gifted young star in England are you? From Division 2?

Sven: No I'm not. I'm a footballer, Half Nigerian but I'm useless. Don't call me up. Bye.

Christian: Eh, wait a moment.....

(Hangs up)

Sven: You see? We'll be able to get him no problem now.

Tord: You're a genius Goran. He'll never smell a rat, definitely not.

Sven: Thank you. How good is he again?

Tord: Out of this world.

Sven: On second thoughts, I won't call him up. I don't want to do too well; I'll sign him up when I go to Real Madrid in August. Thanks anyway.

Peter Bulkeley

A LEGEND IN HIS OWN STINKING TOILET

Boo-hoo, Maradona is critically ill; I am quite beside myself with grief. Why are all radio and TV presenters fawning over this deservedly ill cheat? He was an overrated, one-footed midget and was never fit to tie the bootlaces of Charlton, Best, Finney, Beckenbauer, Cruyff, Scifo, Platini, Pele or many others. The slimy git was the biggest ego in a decent Argentinean side with no other stars. As far as I am concerned, Maradona deserves all the ill health problems he has because he has wasted God's gifts to him and abused his own body. I thought the football industry was supposed to be against drug taking? However, it seems that any recreational substances, including excessive alcohol, are accepted as a certain indication of normal young men just having a good time. Maradona should be held up as a bad example of a flawed individual who has wrecked his body, his reputation and his life rather than a good example of a skilful footballer. Paul Gascoigne was a better player in his prime but no better a person off the pitch. His health problems are also self-inflicted.

I am sure Maradona cheated all over the world and I remember him for much diving and feigning of injury, which unfortunately seems to be the norm these days. However, he will be remembered in England for one thing only. Argentina should be expunged from the record books as winners of the 1986 World Cup because they only got there after the most blatant (and unrepentant) piece of cheating in football history. As for Maradona's second goal in that match, when all the England players fell over, if that makes him the world's greatest player then John Barnes cannot be far behind as he scored a similar goal against Brazil in the Maracana. We all know John Barnes was as close to the greatest attacking midfielder in the world as Peter Reid was to the greatest defensive midfielder in the world.

Maradona RIT: Rest In Torment you scumbag.

Cliff Saunders

The Beautiful Game

Looking back - differences between the game in 2054 and 2004

One Christmas, many years ago, **Dean Brennan** upset the then **Luton Town** manager **Joe Kinnear** by putting on two stone over Christmas. In a time when diets were crudely understood, what we now refer to as Bosoms were clumsily referred to as 'performance enhancing drugs'. Bosoms were banned and frowned upon. Ludicrously, **Brennan** left **Luton Town**. Even more ludicrously, no one missed him. It was only well after he 'retired' (something everyone did when they turned old and mad) that he was given loads of Bosoms and turned on the style. **Brennan's** time in the wilderness is every bit as unthinkable as the game would be now without his twenty-three stone frame dazzling and terrifying **Fox's Glacier Premiership** opposition.

The game has advanced. Back then, attendance was optional. Thousands of Citizens not only went through whole seasons without wearing a replica top, but unthinkably, many went their whole life without even going to a match. The focus, even as late as 2010, was for clubs to compete 'fairly' and on a level playing field. If you said to anyone back in 2004, that Bosoms, flying, small weapons and canned laughter would all be essential parts of the game in 2054, you'd be given pretty *short shrift*.

What hasn't changed is that football in Luton is struggling. The **J10 Gurneydome** of 2054 is looking decidedly shabby. Its facilities are out of date and don't work. **Luton Hotspurs** are continually running scared of **Over-Lord Pleat**, who had his facial when the technology hadn't quite come far enough to correct all resemblance between his mouth and his anus. **Over-Lord Pleat** has threatened *not* to overrule the Football League in **Luton Hotspurs'** favour several times recently, and his watery-eyed threats are even causing **Saint Harford** some concerns. The latest dispute surrounds the St John's stretcher which rather shamefully lists to the right, and is only capable of subsonic speeds.

Still, things are relatively rosy on the playing side. The playing staff are both happy, and **Dean Brill** looks set to break in to the team at any moment. After winning ten years of his thirties back in a National Poker game, he's still a youthful 55. He still needs experience and goalkeeping co-ordinator **Rob Beckwith** is still inclined to bring in freelancers, but **Brill** has fixed his funny hair and is destined to be back soon. **Kevin Foley's** return from a dead leg is also imminent.

Luton Hotspurs have relied heavily on weekly draws in putting their teams together and were famously the first club to field a complete team of fourteen players in this way. Recently, the policy has worked wonders. Players from the **Pukka Premiership** have plied their trade at J10 on occasion and we were even recently blessed by the appearance of 'Daddy' **Showunmi** from **Planet ArseManchester FC** in a break in the **Scottish Widows Coca Cola Smackdown Interplanetary League**. His ability to fly more than compensated for a team which, that day, also featured some rather strange, ugly 'players' who swung aimlessly for anything which came to them, as hard and high as they could. With 'Daddy' securing us the win it didn't matter, but if **Hotspurs** ever draw Messrs **Sinnot**, 'Mo' **Rubbish Johnston** and **Dog-face Hessenthaler** again, we're in trouble.

Still, as everyone knows, the main focus of the Beautiful Game is making money. €4000 might sound a lot for a cup of tea, but books have to be balanced. Also, there are hefty

finances every time we contravene house style. Football teams are nationalised of course, but that doesn't mean that teams are not subject to strict financial strictures.

And *something's* got to pay for the third quarter entertainment, even if they are **Stiltskin** in helicopters, and even if they do insist on ruining **Hotspur's** anthem *Wherever I Lay My Hat, That's My Barrett Home* every match. Still, it's better than the 'theme' song **Luton Town** used to run out in 2004. *Give Me All of your Loving* was a popular 'hit' of the time, before the great **Blues Brothers/Rocky Horror Bad Cult Purges** of 2023 meant that all copies of such songs were converted to high-grade and then used for recreational nuking in the **Exxon united states of america**.

What of the future? Well, plans are afoot for opting out of the **NatWest Prefab Homes Div II** and buying a place in one of the **Premierships**. Clearly it won't be the **Pukka** or the **Kingston Windows**. Far too expensive. More promising is a move north of the border to the **Morelli's Hydrogenated Premier of Scotland**, and so join teams such as **The Dundees**, **Arbroathian Academicals**, **The Auld Thistle Engineers of East Fife** and **The KFC Combined Might of Glasgow FC**.

Finally, the folk of **Still Mad as a Hatter**, have asked me to point out the plight of some of the **Hotspurs'** old rivals. We will do so, but do *not* condone the activities of **SMAAH**, which as you'll all be sickeningly aware include drinking ale, peddling their addled views on the outlawed **Anglia TV** and scandalously referring to the **Hotspurs** as 'The Town'. So, for anyone who's really interested, **Herts Watfordy-Moose Kiss the Bride? FC** were absorbed into the perennially sinking **Walk this Way MK Dons Sponsored by The White Stripes FC** and continue to be rubbish.

Elliot P Smoke

SHORT CUTS

It has been said that you would need to take drugs to be able to watch **W*tf*rd** on a regular basis. From this cutting, found in the business section of the *Daily Telegraph*, we can probably conclude that the writer has taken something, and become confused as to what it is that he is addicted to. How else could we explain his talk of skilful play and exciting games? Come to that, how else could a scummer enjoy the regular thrashings at the hands of the mighty **Hatters!**

Drugs - just say no!

football. Back home, I used to watch **Watford FC** play every fortnight and became addicted to the skilful play and exciting games that came with supporting the team. I need something to replace this void in my life. A recent trip to see **David Beckham's** team, **Real Madrid**, battling **Barcelona** showed promise, but it was nothing compared with the spectacle of a **Watford vs Luton** derby.

OUT OF CONTENTION, STILL IN ADMIN

02.03.04 TOWN 0 AFC BOURNEMOUTH 0

Hatters did not disgrace themselves against a team who had scored six goals just the week before against Wrexham. Indeed, their striker, whose 2 minute hat-trick now holds the record for the fastest in Football League history, was not even seen with a chance. Morten Hyldgaard's goal remained unthreatened all night, as the Cherries were unable to penetrate Luton's defence. No one among the home supporters was heard complaining about Ahmet Brkovic's performance and, for once, Sol Davis escaped without further yellow cards. Enoch Showunmi did not put a foot wrong, and it was hard to find fault with any of Luton's squad. Bournemouth's faithful following had nothing to shout about and returned disappointed to the south coast, their team having gained no points from a game that, in other circumstances, might actually have taken place.

Will Larter

06.03.04 TYKES 0 TOWN 0

"Scorchio!", said the weather girl as we rolled into Barnsley on a balmy bright Brazilian day. The whippets were brushed and the pigeons combed as the Town came to play. Shades were the order of the day for the travelling fans, as the currant bun beamed down into our faces as we took our seats in the towering North Stand.

The surprising thing about Barnsley is that, well, it looks a lot better than I thought it would. From the motorway the housing is pleasant 1930s semis, without the hint of a slagheap in each garden or soot clinging to the brickwork. Is this really the site of a dying old industrial town that time is passing... *(can we have less of this and get back to the footy?)*

Paul Hart, the new manager of Tykesville, was paraded before the game to the locals. After the financial hell of Forest this place must have looked good. Even if it was a case of scattered fans planted amongst the acres of red seats.

The only drawback of being the Tykeshire manager is having Ridsdale, the destroyer of Leeds, as your boss. Mind you looking on the bright side, if all goes well chaps, we could be playing the white shirted wonder boys, just a few more stops up the M1, next season.

For a nil all draw this was not bad at all. With plenty for both sides to shout about, as both teams followed the open expansive method of play. Or is that

another ball game? For two teams that can be physical there was little trouble. Well, there was one idiot who decided to send quiet man Sol crashing to the turf in the first minute, but by the end of the game he had learnt his lesson.

Both teams could have won this game, with the forwards having plenty of attempts on goal. The defences had other ideas though. When the keepers were beaten, goal line scrambles kept the score card blank. Good to see that old boy Beresford received good applause from his old fans. But let's be honest, he would have done better staying down south.

Holmes, after his poor night at Grimsby, came on for Brko in the second half and had a good game. It was good to see that Nicholls, after his long lay-off, had calmed down and was actually playing proper football. Though he did win the awful pass competition — again.

The only down side to this day was trying to get round Brumland on the M42 to the match. With Crufts on at the NEC the whole motorway network around was stuffed up. So it was a case of down the M40, up the A46 and M69 to the M1. How this crowd ever expected to win the right to replace Wembley beats me, when they cannot even organise the parking for a dog show.

Normski, the Cheltenham Hatter

13.03.04 TOWN 3 BLACKPOOL 2

Keeping this one brief, as no-one else sent in a report, Town took a first half lead though Boyce, and then extended the lead on 66 minutes when Peter Holmes side footed Enoch's superbly judged pass into the net. 3 minutes later the visitors were awarded a penalty, which they converted. The goal of the game came with 15 minutes to go, when Enoch showed he has more than one trick, and placed an excellent free kick from 20 yards out past the keeper. A lovely powered, curling strike. Still time for the Seasiders to pull another back, but no last minute equaliser this time.

KFH

16.03.04 PORT VALE 1 TOWN 0

Presented with the choice of a piss-up in London, or a trip to the Potteries, I was bound to make the wrong choice. Which is how I found myself at Vale Park. It all started to become clear as we changed trains at Crewe and couldn't find a decent pint. Things improved a bit on arrival in the Potteries as our "taxi" ferried us to a favourite pub. Things were looking up, but the match hadn't started.

It didn't improve. Once in the ground, we seemed to be surrounded by people who had nothing better to do than moan about every aspect of the Town performance.

And at that stage we were still placed quite handily on the fringe of the play-off places and a draw would not have been a bad result. Admittedly, it would have been more encouraging to have seen the team look a bit more confident when they crossed the halfway line, or to get the impression they had some idea which way they were trying to go. It was, ultimately, no surprise when the ball looped past Hylda into our net – in the 90th minute, again. Just as well we hadn't been getting too excited then.

KFH

20.03.04 TOWN 1 PLYMOUTH ARGYLE 1

This was it. The big match. A must win game against a team with whom an unlikely rivalry has developed since BFJ's unkind comments against them a couple of years back. Comments probably made with the intention of winding up his own players, but which have been backfiring for 3 seasons now.

The atmosphere for this game was excellent, as befits a top of the table clash, and the match was hard fought. I can't really remember much about the early stages, apart from the strong wind causing both sides trouble controlling the game. We had a couple of chances from Boyce and Howard, while Muff had one where Friio went close before he got a yellow card for diving in the box – blatantly. Just before half time though a superb free kick from Robbo found Coyne diving to head the ball into the net. Rapturous applause, and a half time lead.

Time to feel confident perhaps, but this was not to last. The second half was barely under way, when Hylda was penalised for holding onto the ball for too long. It didn't seem too long, but the ref clearly wasn't taking any chances with us time wasting to hold onto the lead. With the free kick awarded, players from both sides rushed into the penalty area crowding round the ball, and in the melee Nicholls raised an elbow and Lowndes fell to the ground. Whether there was any contact at all is contentious, but the ref had little choice but to show Nicholls the red card. For the rest of the half Town defended with grim determination, and just when we thought we had secured the points, Muff got a corner, and from that Adams got the ball in the net. Another 90th minute goal conceded, and in the circumstances it was difficult to remember that we had still got a point out of the game. It felt like defeat, and in terms of the rest of the season, probably was.

KFH

27.03.04 QPR 1 TOWN 1

There was an article in a recent issue of *Mad* suggesting that we should only hate W*tf*rd. Very commendable, but you don't hate the scum any less just because you hate a few other teams too. There's nothing wrong with hating QPR — just

look at our appalling luck against them recently. There seems to have been a rivalry between us for years, although I'm not sure why. Besides, Rangers have got loads of scum rejects — not that *they* would be in for much abuse. Not today.

Thanks to some inept policing, I walked half way round the ground only to be told to go most of the way back again for the entrance to the upper tier of the away end. Because of this I missed Judas's entrance onto the pitch. Certainly heard it, though. It was great to see that so many Town fans let him know what we thought of him, rightly so for shafting us just days after his 'stick together' speech. We've seen loads of quality players sold over the years, but because most of them had clearly bettered themselves it's no wonder that Thorpe is the most abused ex-Hatter ever.

We didn't get to see much of new boy Underwood after an injury meant he was replaced early on by Holmes, who didn't last long either. Hughes was subbed too, after a poor challenge, but at least these injuries led to the introduction of Forbes with his comedy hair, and Foley. Our only good chance of the first half was a header from Boycie, which was cleared off the line. Soon after, we went behind from a Furlong header in the final minute of the half. God, we're consistent against QPR.

The Town settled down once the second half started as Nicholls and Robbo started to get a grip in midfield and big Enoch always worried their centre backs when a chase was on. Showunmi forced a good save from the home keeper, Lee Camp, whose name gave us all a good laugh for a while and rekindled memories of Mr Spoons. Loftus Road is a great ground for atmosphere and with a near capacity crowd, the place was buzzing. Surprising to hear the Town fans make more noise after going behind instead of the usual silence. This support was rewarded when Enoch produced a classy finish which gave us the last laugh for a change. That was the end of our chances as the home side attacked once more. Greedy Bastard had been substituted by now, having accomplished precisely zero, but had two of their later chances fallen to him...

We can be pleased with a point from this game, especially considering there was no Coyne, Davis, Spring or Howard. Thankfully, as ever, we've got some good youngsters — Keith Keane has kept his place in the side on merit and Curtis Davies has looked good against the two best teams in the league. About a year ago, when we last played here, BFJ bought a slightly better team along but, once we went behind, we weren't interested. Today's performance would suggest that Newell can get a better response from his players. But it's a shame that we're always 'just a few more days' from coming out of administration. Luton have got the makings of a good side, but if Tomlins and his boys don't get their fingers out soon (this was written on the morning of the Oldham match) then agents definitely will and with so many players out of contract in the summer, we'll be in the shit next season.

Richard Ward

03.04.04 TOWN 1 OLDHAM ATHLETIC 1

Some things are bound to happen. And so it came to pass that Dean Crowe, formerly of this parish and without a goal since God knows when, returned to Kenilworth Road with his new club. Maybe it was something to do with not feeling so small, now he is in a team of players of similarly short stature, or wanting to get his own back on some past mistreatment. Whatever, it was somehow inevitable that he would score for Oldham. So, when he put in that cross – it surely wasn't a shot, was it – it was no surprise that it found the net. And, from where I was sitting, it was difficult to blame Hylda for not getting to it.

By way of consolation, we had to wait only a minute or so until the equaliser, when the infinitely more prolific Enoch headed (yes!) in a cross from Brkovic. Back on terms so quickly, we looked forward to the onslaught in search of the lead. It never came. The best of a poor second half was a couple more chances for Enoch, but that was it. We had to settle for the draw, and the play off hopes took another knock.

KFH

06.04.04 HARTLEPOOL 4 TOWN 3

An amazing match began in an unusual fashion in that it actually started! Rain in Milton Keynes made me worry early on but, when we arrived at the Victoria Ground, Teesside actually looked dryer than Buckinghamshire. After the game there was barely a dry eye in the Luton end as a team that failed to give up had a valuable away point snatched from their grasp in the 89th minute by a debatable penalty. It looked out of the area to me but if it wasn't then the referee has to be asked why he did not send off Curtis Davies. It was one of those incidents where Davies had to cover a breakthrough down the Hartlepool right and went flying across the pitch. He was either going to get the ball and the man, or take the guy out and unfortunately for Curtis he was a little too late. He didn't even get spoken to. Now, I am not one for criticising referees as they have a hard job blah, blah, blah. However, this one was appalling. Not only did he not know the rules but he was biased in the extreme. There is an idea about having two refs in a game with one in each half: at Hartlepool this is not required as there are 2000 spare refs in the stands. Every time a challenge was made the official waited for a reaction and then gave it how the home fans saw it. Surprisingly, they never gave it our way!

It cuts both ways too as we had a perfectly good goal disallowed for offside (how can you flag offside in a goalmouth scramble situation?) but apart from Davies, Sol Davis should have been red carded instead of yellow for a deliberate handball when he was the last man. In fact it is crazy how such an entertaining game emerged with such an invasive refereeing performance. In fact the only person

more unstable than the man in black was the man in blue. A man of about 50-something wearing a pale blue twin-set with black tights and black court shoes was sitting in the front row of the away fans stand and exhorting the mighty Hatters to greater things. Who he was I have no idea but I got the feeling I had seen him before; probably shouldn't admit to that though. Do others clubs have weird fans too?

Despite the poor referee I felt the result was about right. Hartlepool United are a good footballing side who pass and move in the same way as Grimsby Town used to when Clive Mendonca was up front for the Mariners. After twenty minutes it was 1-1 with Hartlepool equalising an early Steve Howard far post header which was completely against the run of play. The Town looked ragged as a makeshift defence, missing the reliable Emmerson Boyce, twisted and turned in a vain attempt to thwart the Pool passing. We had a very young right hand side with Davies accompanied by Keith Keane at the back and Kevin Foley alongside Michael Leary in front of them. The home side exploited our inexperience well so we were stunned when Leary fired in a 20-yarder from the left after coolly picking his spot. Just before half-time we had a 'Charlton moment' when Ahmet 'déjà vu' Brkovic judged the bounce better than the opposing centre back and was clean through with just the keeper to beat. Bizarrely, Berko tried to take the goal off its footings and though he struck it well, the ball cannoned back off the bar when 3-1 would have been curtains in most matches. Still I did here someone say that it was closer than they expected him to get it...

The second half was much like the first with Hartlepool dominating but Luton refusing to roll over and always looking dangerous up front. Why does Howard only want to play against his old side? This was easily his best performance for some time and if only he and Enoch Showunmi could work out a way of playing together: things would be rosy up front. Luton Town have three front men as the coaching team so I am a little disappointed that the lack of rapport between Howard and Showunmi has not been worked upon more effectively. Nevertheless, it was not the strike force that Luton lacked in this game but the midfield, which chased and harried all match but never looked in control. Despondency set in when two goals in two minutes put the home side ahead and, as usual, the Luton faithful demanded immediate action from the bench when previously no dissenters were heard. No changes were made and thankfully so because not long after Leary got his second of the game when he was first to a rebound from a towering Chris Coyne header. Leary deserves praise for following this up because I think attacking the second ball is an area where Town players could improve immensely. Steve Robinson also deserves praise for his set pieces which are miles better than Matthew Spring's, though I still wish Spring was fit to play. Coyne needs to get more headers on target as he wins many but troubles the crowd more than the goalkeeper.

So overall, no individuals had particularly bad games but as a team we frequently looked all at sea. The play-offs are probably beyond us now and that may be no

bad thing but the youth-teamers who have come through this season and the impending lifting of sanctions bodes well for a concerted push next year. Be patient: we will be champions one day.

Cliff Saunders

10.04.04 TRANMERE ROVERS 1 TOWN 0

We came away from this game thinking three things. The first was that Liverpool is a horrible place, with Liverpool supporting people, and I can't stand Liverpool fans (continual moaning about Houllier, being a big club, blah blah blah. The Liverpoolians who don't support Liverpool or Tranmere are OK), and the only time that it'll be worth visiting is if the Town ever go there again. Thanks to the roads in Liverpool, we went on a tour of Wirral looking for the ground before we stopped a local and asked for directions. Good thing we were early. The second thing we were thinking was we couldn't believe we didn't get anything from the match, and the last thing was that if Tranmere are the form team in this division, then we'll surely go up next season. A lot of the players worked hard, and were let down by the small minority of players. Hilda again gave Hall a glorious opportunity to put Tranmere ahead when he started to come for a ball that wasn't dangerous and was being dealt with by Sol, but luckily Hall hit the post. Hilda then continued to play badly, but was not at fault for the goal. It was an opportunist overhead kick which went in off the post. However, that was after Enoch and Mansell had stolen the show. Great work from Enoch (yet again) saw him go from the halfway line to the right wing, and square it for Mansell. The home fans would say that Achterberg made himself big and knocked it gloriously over the bar. Mansell actually hit it straight at Achterberg, and it hit the Dutch keeper and went over. From the resulting corner Leary cleared off the Tranmere line from a drilled shot outside the area, although he didn't really know much about it. About ten minutes after the goal, we won a penalty after Howard was 'fouled' in the box, but it was no worse than the three other 'fouls' on Howard in the box earlier. Luckily for the ref, he didn't have to put up with moaning Scousers for the rest of the match, as Robinson missed the resulting penalty, which he hit to the keepers left and was an easy save. The rest of the match saw us have more possession, more chances but no goals. We would have had some probably if we replaced a few of the dead wood that was out there. Boyce and Coyne were once again very good in defence, Enoch was good and did his best up front, and Foley and Davis were good enough. Leary tried hard but wasn't helped by being the only adequate midfielder. As for the clowns - Mansell was terrible (again), Robbo did nothing, Nicholls had a relatively poor game and Howard was creating nothing. Hilda continued to look like the new Embo. Luckily we only had a short 100 mile journey home, as we realised the play-offs are a distant dream.

Peter Bulkeley

12.04.04 TOWN 0 SWINDON TOWN 3

He had to go. Now don't misunderstand me, we were three goals down and heading for defeat already but that does not excuse a referee making up his own rules as he goes along. The ref at Hartlepool was dreadful and the ref at Tranmere equally bad but only in the second half (and no worse than the football on show). The third leg of our recent officiating relay took the whistling baton and ran with it strongly. Whether he was poor throughout I cannot recall because the wrongness of one decision regarding one player was virtually criminal.

The Swindon number 2 is a guy called O'Hanlon. True to their team's general attributes he is a big man, very tall but with little skill and giraffe-like (giraffine?) movement. This player barely touched the ball all game but spent most of his time climbing all over our front two. Consequently, he was booked after about half-an-hour for persistent offending, which he could scarcely moan about as he had been obviously warned only five minutes previously. Not content with one yellow card, O'Hanlon pushed the referee's patience (and application of the rules) to the brink by committing another foul straight after his yellow card and just before the break he hauled down a Luton striker who was about to break through the line. He had to go. The ref consulted his assistant on the far side who was waving furiously, and awarded a free kick. All that remained now was for the second yellow card to be issued and Swindon Town would have to play the second half with a man short. He didn't even speak with the player. Cowardice? Bias? Stupidity? Whatever the reason the referee failed in his duty and should be banned for three games in my opinion. Even this wasn't the end of it! During the second half, Enoch Showunmi broke through on the left only to be rugby tackled by O'Hanlon. As we knew by this time that the referee was somehow related to the Robins centre-back, it came as no surprise to see him award a free kick against Showunmi as any other decision would have had to have resulted in a belated but deserved red card for O'Hanlon. If any readers were in the executive boxes near to this incident, I would be very interested to hear what Showunmi's misdemeanour was on this occasion. Awkwardness maybe?

As I said, the game was lost elsewhere as though Luton Town had its first choice defence in place for a change; they played like they were the youth team. Sol Davis and Emmerson Boyce were good individually but as a unit the back four were all over the shop. The midfield were never in control as we missed Matthew Spring again. Michael Leary plays like Spring but he is not at the same level yet; he seems to see the pass well but has trouble executing it. Kevin Nicholls had a good game and should have been moved into the centre much earlier with Leary left to try his luck out wide. Only Nicholls seemed to have an idea of how the game was supposed to pan out and it is this cognisance which we are missing at present. Other sides have a game plan and the ones who beat us, like Hartlepool United and Swindon, play to the plan with all personnel up to speed and following instructions. Do Luton not get instructions or do they forget them?

The one thing that is annoying me about Mike Newell at the moment is his reticence to change a losing team. When the game is not progressing as we would like, Newell changes nothing. In the last few games where we have not played well there have been few positional changes and no alteration to the formation; and the only substitution is the obvious Forbes-for-Brkovic/Mansell move when the game has already gone away from us. I would like to see us try a couple of different plans in the last few games as, despite Newell's protestations, our playoff hopes are fading fast and we need to look to next season when we can mount a powerful, post-administration push for promotion... Probably...

Later on we created chances but failed to take them, though it would have been harsh on Swindon if we had got a point. We had a good shout for a penalty turned down: which probably cancels out the blatant handball that Boyce got away with at Tranmere; and the atmosphere petered out. So the best team won, which wasn't us, with the only consolation being that Tommy Scumbag didn't score, but whatever else happened in this match: he had to go.

Cliff Saunders

17.04.04 TOWN 2 BRISTOL CITY 2

No mistake in the headline score this time – that's what many Hatters fans thought they'd seen when they stormed out of the ground as soon as City netted their late equaliser. I suppose on the form of recent weeks they couldn't be blamed. I was so disgusted with letting that one in that I was rooted to the spot, and as a result was still in place to see Town's even later winner!

The scoring had been opened by Steve Howard with a well placed header from Robbo's free kick, and increased ten minutes into the second half with Boyce's perhaps dubious goal, which City insisted hadn't crossed the line. The video evidence wasn't convincing one way or the other. City pulled one back three minutes later to give us a tense last half hour. Just when it looked like we had done enough to snaffle the three points, the inevitable last minute equaliser materialised. A City corner, a goalmouth scramble, ball in net. 2-2. Town faithful storming out of ground. Moments later, there is another goalmouth scramble, a Keane hits the ball – the press called it a great volley, but it looked like a miskick to me – and it bounces over the defence to hit the deck just over the line. To eliminate any doubt a City defender hammers it into the roof of the net. For the first time this season Town benefit from a last minute goal.

Arriving at the pub afterwards, we are greeted by a few who were struggling to know what to be more disgusted with – Luton's ability to concede a 90th minute goal, or themselves for leaving the ground!

KFH

20.04.04 TOWN 1 AFC BOURNEMOUTH 1

Damn. Just when you know that you need a result to have any chance of making something of the season, you get blown out of the water instead. The way Town started this game, they looked up for it. After 15 minutes, a superb set piece taken by Robbo found the head of Steve Howard and put the Town in the lead. In the next 10 minutes, Town had two or three great chances to increase the lead but the goalkeeper (Mr Nervous-at-corners) and the woodwork intervened. Bournemouth must have been buoyed by their survival, and applied pressure of their own in the last part of the first half. But come half time, the better side had been Luton.

So, the second half was going to be one sided? It almost was, but not quite as we expected and hoped. Town looked lacklustre and short of ideas, and struggled to impose themselves. Meanwhile Bournemouth looked livelier and looked likely to make something of the game, and is due course they scored the inevitable equaliser. The only surprise was that it didn't have to wait until the 90th minute. What followed, however, was astonishing. Bournemouth, a point behind Town at the start and who must have needed nothing less than 3 points to keep their season alive, appeared to play for the draw. Town looked desperate and they looked comfortable, and increasingly happy. Had they miscalculated? We'll never know...

KFH

24.04.04 WREXHAM 2 TOWN 1

I have always conspired to miss Wrexham away before, probably because it is just such a long way from Luton. This season it is the 2nd nearest game to where I live (which is in England before you start getting any ideas) and I knew it would be my last game of the season, so I thought it would be very rude to miss it.

It was probably the hottest day of the year so far, so by the time I got to Wrexham a pint was most welcome. A few other Luton fans emerged, and a toast to what had happened 16 years ago was made (oh how times have changed in that 16 years!). This was probably the best part of the day, and after being persuaded by Dayoff that we should visit a completely random pub in the opposite direction, we ended up at the ground (via the Wetherspoons of course!).

The day then went downhill rapidly. The sense of the team just seeing out the season was overwhelming. Both teams were poor in the first half, although we did hit the bar. Two goals by Wrexham and an immediate reply from Stevo caused an ounce of excitement, but to be honest I was just looking forward to getting back to England and another pint.

Having walked through the local "yoof" on the way back to the station we were

greeted (in Welsh first) with the news that the train was 10 minutes late. Not a position of strength when you have a 5 minute connection at Chester. Still, I can think of worse places to spend an hour drinking waiting for the next train home, especially when home isn't that far!

The Cheshire Hat.

END OF SEASON POLL

It's traditional at this time of year to ask you for your opinions on the seasons that is just finishing. This helps us to provide a review of the season based on your views, and to fill some space in the first issue of the new season, when there are few match reports to do so. As in the past, we're keeping this as a freestyle voting system, asking you to provide your nominations in a number of categories (cut down a bit from what we've had in the past), along with some comments justifying your choices - that bit is not compulsory, but it helps.

Please send our nominations in the following categories, and any others you can think of, by post to 195 Cutenhoe Road, Luton, LU1 3NQ, or by email to keith.hayward1@ntlworld.com.

| | |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Best Town Player | Idiot of the Year |
| Best Young Player | Hero of the Year |
| Best Town Performance | Best Ground visited |
| Worst Town Performance | Worst Ground visited |
| Best Goal scored | High Point of the Year |
| Best Goal Conceded | Low Point of the Year |
| Best Opponents | Things to look forward to |
| Worst Opponents | Referees |

If, in addition, there's anything you'd like to say about *Mad as a Hatter!* like what we can do to improve it, whether we should continue to bother, that sort of thing, please feel free to mention it.

Mike Newell – Unloved & Unappreciated?

What do you think of Mike Newell? The majority of us fans are backing him 100%, especially given our 'against the odds' success in his first season. However, there seems to be a minority who still question him. On the message boards, in the ground and even in these hallowed pages. Why? Here are the arguments raised but also my feelings as to why the Mike-moaners should reconsider.

HE'S NOT BFJ

The problem with these supporters is that they don't necessarily have a problem with Mike but it's more the fact that they want BFJ back. Whoever was going to replace BFJ was not going to be accepted. The thing is BFJ has gone. He's not coming back. If you're going to continue bitching unless BFJ comes back - go and support Forest. Or accept it and move on.

Summary: BFJ's not coming back – Mike is a successful replacement

THE HARTLEPOOL FANS SAY HE'S NOT VERY GOOD.

These supporters have listened to the Hartlepool fans saying this and saying that. His teams don't kill off the opposition; he lost us the title etc, etc. Fact: Mike Newell took over the Hartlepool team and in his first season as a manager kept them on track for promotion as runners-up (how many top-placed teams lose their manager mid-season and drop out of the promotion race – it's more often than not). Another Fact: We were runners up the year before and celebrated our first promotion in ages – not bitched about BFJ not getting us the championship.

Summary: Hartlepool fans are ungrateful idiots

CONFUSION WITH MICK HARFORD

These fans ask, "why isn't Mick 'God' Harford, Luton's new manager?" Also confusion amounts over who is who's boss, when Mick is the Director of Football & 1st team coach. What these fans should bear in mind is that firstly Mike's Gurney-lead appointment should be forgotten as it wasn't his fault. And then look at the results. It seems we've accidentally stumbled on a winning management team. Who does what behind the scenes shouldn't ever cloud the improvement since it's happened. Luton is a much better side with Mike as the manager and Mick Harford as Director of Football and coach. Never underestimate a great management team – just remember the best example of this being the Brian Clough/Peter Taylor partnership.

Summary: The Management team of Mike & Mick is working – don't knock it

MIKE NEWELL THE PLAYER

As a player Mike is never going to be remembered as one of our utmost greats. It's unfair to compare to him to Mick 'God' Harford. Mick is way beyond a legend, which is why at the moment Mick gets the crowd chants ahead of Mike. Mike did well but most of his success came elsewhere. However looking at the future, Mike is the manager now and should be judged by that first and foremost from now on.

Summary: Judge Mike on his management record - which is looking good so far

THE TRANMERE GAME

Mike played Eno up front on his own for this game; playing for a draw to bring back Howard for the replay was his plan and, as it didn't work, he got slated for it by a lot of fans. Even with injuries and suspensions, he still could have started with Crowe and this is a valid point. This was a tactical decision and it didn't work. However, those who made the trip to Thurrock for the first round of the FA Cup will remember the results of the Crowe/Showunmi partnership and probably agree it was worth trying something else even if it didn't work out. And don't forget that Crowe wasn't 100% fit as well.

Summary: Put it down to Mike trying a new tactic that didn't work. Given the circumstances this was still probably the best attempt instead of retrying the Eno/Deano combination that failed against non-league Thurrock.

ADMINISTRATION COMPARISONS

Bit of a weird one this but some people don't think we can judge Mike while we are still in administration. Given that there are other teams in the division in administration as well – this isn't that sharp. Our results/league position is knocking spots off Oldham and Notts County.

Summary: Judged against other Div 2 teams in administration Mike is again shown to be doing amazingly well. If we actually make it into the playoffs, surely he'll come round serving us loaves and fishes at half-time!

LENNIE LAWRENCE

After years of putting up with Lennie, these fans are just used to moaning about the manager. To actually praise Mike would probably put them into shock.

Summary: Lennie's long gone – stop your manager moaning. Get used to Luton having a successful manager. Mike looks like continuing BFJ's legacy and leading Luton forward.

FINAL SUMMARY: I think it's fair to say that the majority of Luton fans all agree that Mike's first season in charge will go down as a great one and also have faith that he'll continue to take us forward. So come on all you doubters – join us! MIKE NEWELL'S BARMY ARMY!

B.Dave.B.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Mad as a Hatter! is available on subscription at £6.50 for the next five issues. Cheques, payable to Mad as a Hatter!, to the address on page 2. Please do not send cash by post as it very rarely arrives.

Talbot and Newell – The phone call (Monday 5 April 2004) In Search For A Star

Brian Talbot (Oldham manager) picks up the phone: Hello?

Mike Newell: Hello Brian, it's Michael here. Michael Newell.

Brian Talbot: Oh hello Mike. Did you enjoy the match Saturday?

Mike Newell: It was ok I suppose. We should have won, like we always beat your teams.

Brian Talbot: Whatever. Have you phoned me for a reason or was it just to insult me?

Mike Newell: No no, I phoned you for a better reason than to insult you. Well, I have been reliably informed that we will be out of administration by the end of the week. Therefore, our transfer embargo will soon be lifted and we will be able to sign players without having to get rid of them first. At the club we have a few positions where we are short on players. One of these is on the right wing. This is where you come in.

Brian Talbot: No, I'm afraid that I cannot help you there. We have only just come out of administration ourselves and we have a shortage of players as it is. Therefore I must respectfully reject any offers that you make for our players

Mike Newell: So you haven't got any players that are for sale?

Brian Talbot: Nope, none at all.

Mike Newell: Oh dear, that's a shame because I was also promised quite a lot of money. And I think you could really do with the money, eh?

Brian Talbot: Hmmm. Ok then, tell me who you are interested in and I might think about it.

Mike Newell: That's more like it! Well, as I said we're short on players. Some of the ones we have are useless as well, like the little guy that we just got rid of, umm Den I think his name was. Anyway, on Saturday I was very impressed with that guy on the wing.

Brian Talbot: Which guy on the wing? Not...

Mike Newell: Yes. The one who lobbed Hildy, um Hilden, um our goalie on Saturday. Great goal, obviously a natural goalscorer. Any chance we could have him?

Brian Talbot: Haha, very funny Mr Whoever you are. Are you a bored Stockport

fan, or do you just find it very funny to waste my time?!

Mike Newell: Eh? No! I'm interested in that winger... just what we need.

Brian Talbot: Of course you are. Now, if you don't mind, I've got more important things to do like watching the grass grow, ok?

Mike Newell: No, wait! (Line goes dead)

Cherry: How did it go?

Mike Newell: Not sure. I think he might be tempted with the offer. If only we could sign him.

Peter Bulkeley

WHAT TO DO IN THE SUMMER

Yes folks, it is that time of year again when I issue an advert on behalf of Northamptonshire County Cricket Club. Northants can be considered to be Luton's first class county as Bedfordshire are always playing at a lower level, and I see many Luton shirts at Northants matches though maybe not as many as previously. This recent lack of Bedfordshire support has been, I believe, due to Northants withdrawing its regular game at Wardown Park, regarded by many as the best non-league strip in English cricket. Fortunately, top flight cricket is returning to Luton this year as Northants host Worcestershire at Wardown Park in one of the new-fangled 20/20 games on Monday 5th July. This is a late afternoon/early evening floodlit extravaganza with the emphasis as much on the peripheral entertainment as the 20-over cricket match taking place. The usual face painting and bouncy castles will be in evidence I am sure, and if you are thinking about taking young children to their first game then this is the event for you. Don't be worried that they may get bored because this is not an all day game and there is plenty of frenzied batting to keep them interested on the field as well as off.

If you are a proper cricket fan too, then <http://www.nccc.co.uk/> will give you details of all the other fixtures for Northants this summer. Highlights include a potential second round knockout trophy game at either the Oval or in Dublin (depending on the Surrey v Ireland game!); a tour match against New Zealand on the 20th June; floodlit games at both Old Trafford and The Oval in the Totesport National League, and there is even an international game at the County Ground Northampton on 13th August when England Ladies take on New Zealand Ladies in the 3rd 1-day international. The Northants first team have been promoted to the first division of both the county Championship and the National League this season so you have the opportunity to see the best players in England against an up-and-coming team led by former South Africa and Australia (bizarrely) test player Kepler Wessels. One more thing, if you are considering a season ticket it is less than half the cost of your Luton Town one! Hope to see you there.

Cliff Saunders

FUTBOL SUR AMERICA

Part 3:

Inca Heartland to the Land of the Jesus Look-a-likes!

Following Ica, the next match we took in was 2 weeks later in Cusco, the capital of the old Inca Empire and starting point for any trip to Machu Pichu. We arrived on the Sunday morning, the day of the game and I decided to go for a walk around Cusco, a quite pleasant city. It wasn't long till I managed to attract the attention of the far too numerous postcard vendors in the Plaza De Armas, the main square of Cusco. The standard patter of these postcard vendors, average age 9, is to ask what country you are from and then to rattle off the names of the head of state and the prime minister. Quite amusing and it does normally tug on your heart strings enough to purchase a couple of postcards at a rip off rate. To make the whole transaction even more amusing, the lads adopt a famous name. Step forward Michael Owen. He refused to leave my side for the morning so I put him to work for me and sent him out looking for a Deportivo Wanka shirt. Despite his efforts, he had no joy, so to reward him I gave him the football I had carried around with me following a kick about at altitude (4,400m above sea level, not a good idea). He was beside himself as it was the first football that he had ever owned and he promised that from now on he was going to be my guide while I was in Cusco. Top lad. When I told him that we intended to watch his local team, Cienciano, play Ica later that day he said it would an honour for him to take us to the game, which we did. He even haggled the taxi driver down to a bargain price and pointed us in the right direction to the trust worthy touts. Once inside the ground Michael Owen was the perfect host, getting the vendors over to sell us snacks and giving me the low down on the Cienciano players as well as introducing me to some choice Spanish words. It's here that I feel the need to confess. You see, despite being the rich Gringo, I actually fleeced Michael Owen, not intentionally I hasten to add. Taking him to the football caused him to miss a days trading in postcards, which was bad of me. Making him pay the taxi and pay for the snacks in the ground was also bad of me. Failing to give him the money later on was just unforgivable and I deeply regret it. After walking back into the city, we said goodbye to Michael Owen, with myself taking a few postcards off of him and that was the last we saw of him. I had another 10 days in Cusco but never saw young Michael again. I had every intention of giving him back the money but I keep getting a horrible image in my head of him returning to his mother out of pocket and copping an almighty hiding for it.

So after the urchin fleecing episode in Cusco, it was time to head off into Bolivia. Next stop on the grand football tour was the local derby in La Paz between Bolivar and the excellently named The Strongest. Yet again it was a drab draw, ending up 0-0 but the ground this time was quite a smart version of the ramshackle, bog standard would be South American Olympic stadium that is the norm. The best bit of the whole game was when the Strongest fans started whistling the theme tune to the Smurfs on account of Bolivar's kit being sky blue shirts with white shorts. Like I say the game was very drab! I should give a mention here to probably the best catering in a football stadium that I've ever experienced. I was able to dine on fine steak sandwiches which were just amazing in their tenderness and all round taste, far superior to some dog burgers I've had in my time!

After a pleasant time in Bolivia, during which Luton beat the scum 2-1, I headed off to Chile on my own, saying goodbye to Objet, Ian and Bridget. I spent a week up in the north of Chile, taking in the Atacama Desert and just relaxing in a very nice chill out town by the name of San Pedro de Atacama. It was strange to cross over into Chile from Bolivia and took a while to get accustomed to the 1stworld once again following time in the 3rd world. The moment you cross the border from a dirt track in Bolivia to the tarmac, smooth roads of Chile, you know things are going to be different. Sure enough it was and traveling around Chile was no problem at all, like

going to Spain for a couple of weeks really. During my time in Santiago, I took in a match between Universidad de Chile and Cobrelao, the team from the Atacama Desert city of Calama. Again, it was a drab 1-1 draw and nothing special happened during the match. Prior to the match though, I was struck by the amount of Jesus look-a-likes that Santiago boasted. To a man, they sported long hair and straggly beards which just seemed so strange after the facial hair free time I had spent in Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. Special mention must go to the food once again, BBQ chicken and avocado sandwich with chili sauce. Class. The stadium was once more the usual drab concrete bowl but this one boasted a rather sinister history in that it was used during the Pinochet years as a detention and torture center by that regime. In 1973 an international match staged there took on farcical status when the then Soviet Union refused to take part in a World Cup qualifier against Chile on account of the fascist Pinochet regime. That, and the fact that the murdered ex-president, Salvador Allende, was of a Marxist persuasion. So come the day of the game, Chile turn up, kick the game off and walk the ball into the empty net upon which the referee abandons the game.

Mark Araci

Ball Persons

(Ball Boys to the less politically correct)

Am I the only person following Luton Town Football Club to be totally bemused by the ball boy situation at our glorious club?

Admittedly, the nature of the ground with the crowd near the pitch and every available space in use means that it is not often the ball is found in 'no-man's land'. But week in week out, we seem to travel to lesser teams than Luton who have slick efficient lads collecting the balls as their donkey centre halves hoof the said objects into the normally empty stands.

Tranmere was a recent example. Granted their team can't play football so they have a lot of practise chasing the ball, but the boys all had a spare ball and threw them to the players immediately the it went out of play.

What do we get at the home of football? Four disinterested and half asleep individuals that at best notice that the ball has come their way, and at worse stand there looking gormless whilst the players collect the ball for themselves. I appreciate this is all you can really expect when their average age is about 5. Have the stewards perhaps told them that if they run onto the pitch they will get arrested and banned from the club for life?

Occasionally, one of the boys (or girls) raises their game and actually collects the ball (sometimes without even being prompted by the nearest steward), but there is little chance that it will end up being propelled in the direction of the nearest player. Now I cannot claim to be the world's greatest footballer – my career faltered after a 0 – 0 draw whilst playing for the Cubs – but I can at least aim the ball vaguely in the direction required. Why can we not find four teenagers in the whole of Luton that can do the same?

Is it perhaps a cunning ploy by the club to reduce the number of minutes that the ball is actually in play during the match? Let's face it, we do concede a lot more goals in stoppage time than anyone else.

Can we please do someone about this next season?

Russell Bulkeley

SHORT CUTS

Diamond comeback

RUSHDEN twice came back to secure a draw in this entertaining clash at Nene Park.

Luton are now a settled side under the stewardship of manager Mike Newell and Director of Football Mick Harford despite pre-season troubles that threatened to bring about the end of the club altogether.

Yesterday saw the first change in Newell's starting line up since mid December and it was the Hatters who opened the scoring with a goal from danger man Adrian

Forbes. Paul Kitson refused to let Luton have it all their own way however and levelled with a header.

Luton midfielder Peter Holmes put the visitors ahead again and it took a penalty late in the game to give Rushden a share of the points.

Ritchie Hanlon did the honours after Paul Robinson was judged to have handled the ball in a goal mouth scramble.

The game finished 2-2 with 2,300 visiting fans in the stand.

From the *Northants on Sunday*, a sister paper of our own favourite the *Accuracy*, but does anyone remember that successful R & D penalty?

QUEENS PARK RANGERS (1) 1

Furlong 45

LUTON TOWN (0) 1

Showunmi 76

QPR manager Ian Holloway: We were a new team out there with the players coming in and we lacked a bit of cohesion. I always felt that with these players we could go and get the winner.

Luton manager Mike Newell: I don't think anyone can say we didn't deserve something out of the game.

We've played the top two in consecutive weeks and I couldn't ask for any more effort.

Blinder: Kevin Gallen. **Stinker:** Tony Thorpe.

Queens Park Rangers (4-4-2): L. Camp – R. Edgill, C. Carlisle, A. Gnani, M. Bignot – K. Gallen, M. Bean (sub: J. Cureton, 82min), R. Johnson, M. Rowlands – A. Thorpe (sub: K. McLeod, 72), P. Furlong. **Substitutes not used:** C. Day, S. Palmer, G. Ainsworth. **Booked:** Rowlands, McLeod. **NEXT:** Bristol City (a). **FORM:** DDWDDW

Luton Town (4-4-2): M. Hyldgaard – K. Keane, E. Boyce, C. Davies, A. Neilson – K. Nicholls, S. Robinson, P. Hughes (sub: A. Forbes, 35), P. Underwood (sub: P. Holmes, 19; sub: K. Foley, 36) – E. Showunmi, A. Brkovic. **Substitutes not used:** D. Brill, L. Mansell. **NEXT:** Oldham Athletic (h). **FORM:** DDLWDW

Referee: A. D'Urso. **Attendance:** 17,695

Shots on target: (h) 5 (a) 5. **Fouls:** (h) 17 (a) 17. **Offsides:** (h) 6 (a) 6

And from *The Times*, interesting to note that they share our opinion of a certain QPha striker.

Luton 1 Oldham 1

LUTON boss Mike Newell refused to criticise his players for dropping two points after the taking the lead against Luton.

Dean Crowe, making his full debut for Oldham, gave the home side the lead but their joy was short-lived as Luton responded immediately with Enoch Showunmi stealing in to head home.

Newell said: "We had the clearer and better chances but were not at our best. It's difficult to be at your best when you have to chop and change."

Crowe is flying high

By BOB HAYES
Luton 1 Oldham 1

DEAN CROWE got on the scoresheet for the first time in 20 months — but has a more important goal in sight.

The father-of-two was offloaded by Luton on transfer deadline day last month.

But he marked his return to Kenilworth Road with the goal that grabbed a precious point for relegation-threatened Oldham.

Now Crowe hopes it will help his case for a full-time deal with the Latics.

Crowe, 24, said: "I'm being paid weekly and boss Brian Talbot has given me the rest of the season to prove myself. That's what I aim to do."

Crowe fired home a 30-yard shot on 32 minutes — moments after striker Enoch Showunmi headed Oldham into the lead.

The thoughts of manager Antic

On saving Luton Town from relegation in 1983

▲ I'd just come on as a substitute. Brian Stein was out on the right, and I remember looking where the goalkeeper was. Pow! I scored. Everywhere I played, I've always scored important goals but I'll never forget Maine Road 7

And from our old favourite Raddy, a man who apparently owns a dog called Luton, a sign of his affection for our club.

Hartlepool v Luton (Sub Darlington v Rochdale)

Sitting in the car park at Hartlepool, listening to Moan U on the adio, to be told that Hartlepool v Lincoln is now off. Two minutes later hear that Hartlepool v Luton is off as well. Brilliant. Have a walk around, talk to some amazed Poolies, enter the ground via an open gate to see a field of green, no signs of water. I didn't actually walk onto the pitch, but...

What to do now? Having decided to spend the weekend in Harrogate I didn't really want to go back early and join the other half shopping. So, Darlington her I come. Arrived at the Reynolds Arena a 2.55. VERY easy to find on the ring road. But no street parking. First shock. Club car park massive, but £5 a go. Second shock. Long queues at the ticket office. Spoke to a steward who confirmed that tickets had to be bought before going through the turnstiles, except for away fans. So, off I go to join what I expect to be a couple of dozen Rochdale fans. Third shock. Enter ground to see around 500 'away' fans, most of whom seem to be chanting for PNE, Preston's game at Sunderland having been postponed as well. My chant of "I am Luton Town" is quickly drowned out! Programmes have obviously been long since sold out.

The game. Awful. Two very poor teams, both with a left back that made Kimble look good. The only player who stood out at all was Wainwright for Darlington but, as I often feel with Matthew Spring, he cannot do it all on his own without decent support. Preston fans got bored very quickly and a lot left at half time. Unfortunately a crowd of 5,500 in a ground built for 25,000 tends to get a bit lost, but on the few occasions that they woke up a surprisingly decent atmosphere was achieved. I had often felt that Luton were underselling themselves with a proposed 15,000 capacity, but I'll change my mind having seen the Reynolds Arena, as long as plans allow for extension later. It must be better to nearly fill a smaller ground than have an above average crowd fill only 20% of capacity.

Car Park - very easy to get out of, despite the high charge and with the ground on the A66 ring road, very close to the A66M and A1M easy access available.

So, a new ground ticked off (although I've stil never seen a game at Hartlepool).

Trust member 1101

JERRY MAGUIRE 2

THE LUTON STORY

ENOCH
SHOW-ME-
THE-MONEY

ACTUALLY, IT'S
PRONOUNCED
SHOWUNMI!



THE GOALKEEPER'S FEAR
OF THE PUN-ALTY

B. Dave. B.