

MAD AS A HATTER!

THE LUTON TOWN FANZINE



Issue 65

April 2005

CELEBRATION TIME



So, just how much did that goal mean to you, Chris? Peter Holmes joins Chris Coyne in celebrating a League One title winning goal at Wrexham.

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Ed Lines

Before we go any further, I would like to make it clear that you are reading issue 65 of *Mad as a Hatter!* Due to an unfortunate oversight (yes, I am embarrassed), issue 64 was actually the second to appear claiming to be issue 63, so if you feel you have missed an issue, please check, and if you have two distinctly different looking copies of 63, the second one should be 64. OK?

Now that is settled, and before we get on to the small matter of celebrations that last all summer, a little bit of reflection. In the last couple of weeks we have had a commemoration of the completion of 120 years of the existence of Luton Town FC, and we will soon be marking 100 years of Kenilworth Road being the home of the grand old club. But what I feel is equally worth remembering is that just 20 years ago, a short time by comparison, was the spring that changed football. March 1985 probably escapes the memory of many younger readers of this fanzine, and younger supporters of our club. But the visit of Millwall to Kenilworth Road that month was one of the pivotal moments in changing the game in Britain. That night was linked with events at Heysel and Bradford, and we were faced with the onslaught of the politicians, and their determination to impose their own solutions on us. As a result we had membership schemes, now happily abandoned, away fans bans and all seater stadia inflicted on us. It is likely that the European ban that resulted was, in part, responsible for the money grabbing formation of the Premier League in 1991, and the mess of commercialism that the game now finds itself in. Which division are we playing in next season?

But finally, after 15 years of publishing this fanzine, we finish a season with something to celebrate (we missed the last promotion season!), and this time it means so much more. The season in the 4th/3rd division was just a blip, but League One has been our home for the past 9 seasons, with one exception, and we've only looked like escaping on one previous occasion, but we have always felt that our rightful place is one step higher. This has been a season of glorious achievement, probably more so because it had been so unexpected. Remember last August when we were worrying about how much money the likes of Hull and Tranmere had spent on their star players? Mike Newell and his squad deserve our acclaim and our thanks, because they have not only given us a great deal of joy in watching the mighty Hatters this season, but also a great deal of pride in supporting our team. That is pride which, for many, has been drifting away during the years of decline presided over by the likes of Kohler, Pleat, Lawrence and culminating with Gurney. The future is still uncertain, although there is better reason for confidence now than at any time in the recent past, but we should remain cautious. That however, is for later. For now, just celebrate. And be proud.

Luton Town – 2004/5 – memories of a fabulous season

- The fixture list has few local away games – lots of long outings to the north-west, Yorkshire, and the far south/south-west. We never pick up many points on these trips. It points to a long hard season. Equalling last year's tenth spot would be a fine achievement
- What seem like our two best players – Matthew Spring and Emmerson Boyce – depart on free transfers in the summer
- The opening game against Oldham is played on August 7th in a temperature in the high 20s. We win, but a bit of a grind – and why is Enoch only on the bench? This season is going to be a slog, methinks! (*How wrong can you be!!!*)
- We win six out of six and are five points clear at the top. I e-mail everyone I know to tell them, in case it does not last
- I go away to Sheffield Wednesday, so we only draw! Their programme shows the Owls player with most appearances has played only 43 times. We must have about six with over 150. I have thought subsequently that perhaps stability is the key this year.
- We come out of the Hartlepool game ten points clear. I start trying to define why the big improvement this year? To define it would be re-assuring, and perhaps suppress the idea that it is all a mirage that will disappear when we all wake up.
- So what is it all about? Very hard to say. Underwood? Beresford? Curtis Davies? Vine? More balance and team-shape, especially on the left with Underwood and an improved Sol Davis? I think mainly it is a team playing for each other where the total is far in excess of the sum of the parts. The team spirit and work ethic is phenomenal.
- In autumn, we are top of the league all the time with big leads. Four points is guaranteed top for at least two weeks, seven points three weeks, etc. You just keep thinking about the worst that could happen. Perhaps the team does too, and it spurs them on.
- Away we go to Hull. Pre-match walk on Humber Bridge and subsequent fish and chips most agreeable. Match not at all agreeable. It seems like it is all falling apart as we lose for the third time in a row. Only four points clear now at the top (*How terrible!*).
- We bounce back from our bad run with wins of 4-0, 5-1, and 4-1. Top of the league? We're having a laugh!
- Curtis Davies has been phenomenal, and is playing like Rio Ferdinand... as well as looking like him.
- You can see Nicholls counting to ten in situations where last year he have been booked or sent off. He has already reached 640 this year!
- Into December and Howard gets a three-match ban. We spend the first 75 minutes of the first one (Port Vale at home) looking for him with every ball forward, but Calvin Andrew is not ready to lead the line. It is going to be a tough three games. Wrong again! Enoch comes on to turn the game, and then scores late winners in the next two
- Teletext becomes a standard way of following away games, as we defend top place. It is painful and you feel so helpless, but then you leave the league tables on for an hour after each game, in order to enjoy the fact we are still top by "X" number of points.
- Christmas and New Year takes in four games. Hull are on top form and win all four. I spend the week in Scotland... with a Hull fan. They go top by two points on 3 January

- Stockport at home on 15th January and we go top again, as Hull only draw. We are not hitting early season form, but the team seems to be able to grind out draws and the occasional win. Hull now also stuttering and we stay top. It is a top three, though, now, with Tranmere, and it seems like we are the tired horse. I think about where I will be in May come play-off time
- It has been a feature of the season that, as some players lose form a bit, others pick up and cover for them. Ahmet Brkovic (*my spell checker does not like this!*) has a purple patch at a very handy time, when others are flagging a bit. He scores and creates several important goals, including an 89th minute winner against Hull at home: the ground explodes! We then go on a four match winning run. We have only lost to only one team – Brentford - from 23rd October to 25th February
- As the years go by when you have been a supporter for a long time, many seasons tend to blur together. This season has bucked that trend. I have lived it blow by blow, week by week, and it will stay in the memory.
- Superstitions have really taken hold. When you win most of the time, like we have, it proves the superstitions work! So the car is parked in the same place for every game, there is a table football game at work on Friday lunchtimes which I have to win, I touch the same tree on the way to the ground - too many other things to mention. Against this, it was very unlucky for my nine-year old niece that she took my seat for the Huddersfield game – our first defeat – and received a temporary ban. (*Sorry Alice!*).
- Into March and the final goal of promotion is so near, yet so far. Sheffield Wednesday worry me now. They keep on winning, and have the resources to challenge us right to the death. I go away to Oldham, and we are awful. Nobody plays well. The unsung rock of the team – and my vote for player of the season – Chris Coyne, gives a goal away and we are very lucky to escape with a point. I worry that the players are shot and we are going to blow it even now.
- The Barnsley game confirms my fears from the Oldham game. We are very lucky to escape with a 3-1 defeat in front of the Sky cameras. A nervous Easter waiting for the Torquay game, but not brave enough to listen on the radio... Need not have worried – a 4-1 win, back on track, and all the others lost. Foley's return makes a big difference at this time.
- We have spent most of this season with more points than any team in any division. Mourinho's Chelsea, Wigan, Ipswich, Sunderland - runaway leaders of the Championship, even Barnet - runaway leaders of the Conference. Fantastic! We were the first in the country to 50, 80, 90 points – probably also to 20, 30, 40, 60, 70 – cannot remember.
- Just when you think it cannot get any better, there is the Bournemouth away game. It epitomises the season. Down to ten men after 23 minutes, and you think of inevitable defeat and a long drive home. The players work very hard to hold the 0-0, and then Newell starts making attacking substitutions which stretch Bournemouth, and Enoch brings the away-side house down with an 83rd minute winner.
- I have never been as bothered before about a Brentford vs Tranmere game. It turns out right for us, and promotion is clinched. Hopefully we can maintain top spot now and clinch the title. Whatever happens from now on, though, it has been a fabulous season. Thanks to all the players and the management from this supporter!

The players, manager and coaching staff have done their bit. I hope now they can hold it for next season in The Championship to give time for a definite building schedule be in place for a new stadium by next spring.

...So over to the directors to build (literally) on the great work of the team!

Robert Turner

The Morning after the Night before:

An Evening with Bill Tomlins

15th March 2005

A good crowd turned out for the second Bill Tomlins evening held at the Vauxhall Recreation Centre. Hosted by master of ceremonies Ian Pearce and accompanied on the top table by Cherry, and Mark Chapman from the Supporters Club, top of the league and having a laugh, it was always going to be a cosy evening for uncle Bill. There were no startling new revelations forthcoming, more a confirmation of many of the rumours that have been rife over the last few months.

Bill a youthful sprightly looking 55, began the evening off by thanking the fans for their support this season, highlighting that their efforts were greatly appreciated by both players and officials alike. He then congratulated the playing staff for defying all odds and expectations to have such a successful season.

Very importantly, for the first time in public, he officially welcomed Kelvin Dunn onto the Board as the democratically elected fans representative, and confirmed a 10% shareholding for Trust in Luton. This is great news for the fans. For too many years we have been forced to sit back and watch our club be subjected to mismanagement, fiscal incompetence and poor customer relations. Kelvin Dunn is a fine chap; we now have someone on the inside, and backed not only by the fans but also by a significant shareholding who will work tirelessly with the present board to ensure our club has a successful future.

Uncle Bill (55) admitted that in its present location, the club is still in trouble financially, although as a caveat, he added the debt is controllable; losses are running at 2/3 less than they were a year ago. Later in the evening Bill stated that the club were, at their worst, losing £4.8m per annum. Using the 2/3 figure quoted earlier one can assume that losses are now running at £1.6m per annum. To break even at Kenilworth Road the club would need an average attendance of over 12,000 which obviously exceeds the current capacity, hence the need for urgent relocation.

On the subject of relocating the ground he confirmed that the club had appointed a firm of specialist consultants to assist the club. The focus is mainly on J10, but there will be a plan B in case anything untoward occurs. The club is in consultations with the owners (the Watson Challis Family) about purchasing the land, but will have to pay the going commercial rate. The deal is still not completed but negotiations are at an advanced stage. He confirmed that the club would under no circumstances be relocating to Milton Keynes.

The stadium development itself will be a £19.2m, 15000 all seater, with foundations deep enough to increase the capacity to 25,000 at a later date, ample provision will be made for car parking and public transport. The stadium will be built on a 150,000sq feet site and will include offices and banqueting facilities. The club are in consultation with EDF the power company about moving the pylons. The widening of the M1 at J10 now dictates that the Highways Agency will heavily subsidise the cost of moving these pylons. Hopefully we will kick off in our new stadium in August 2007.

The cost of building the new stadium will mostly be met by the enabling retail development which will also consist of one or maybe two hotels. Despite inevitable protests from the usual Nimby's, Bill is confident that plans for the new stadium will be approved by the Secretary of

State. The KholerDome was rejected because of its size; the then Secretary of State stated a 15000 all seater stadium with capacity to expand at a later date would be more acceptable. The Chairman also confirmed he does not expect the proposed expansion of the Airport to effect upon any safety issues surrounding the location of the stadium.

With regards to the playing budget for next season, although praising the strength of the current playing staff and acknowledging Mike Newell's opinion that the present first team will be capable of playing at the higher level, Uncle Bill (55) stated that there was a need for 3 or 4 new players next season. One offer of around £100,000 has already been lodged for one player. Steve Howard will not be sold before his contract expires, Bill is still hopeful he will sign a new contract and stay at the club. Tony Thorpe did want to return to the club around Christmas time, fortunately it never materialised, and a spontaneous sigh of relief resonated around the hall as Bill stated it was now very unlikely to ever happen.

There is no clause in Mike Newell's contract that allows him to leave were a Premiership club come calling. However, Bill did intimate that everyone at the club has their price and if another club were to bid for the manager or player, the club would not stand in their way if the remuneration was acceptable. He confirmed that the club did receive compensation from Nottingham Forest for Mick Harford.

Bill did say that although the club is ambitious it will not compromise its future by spending money on players it hasn't really got. He went on to say that he was not in total agreement with the FL rules regarding salary capping, believing instead it should be left to market forces. TV money in the Championship will increase by £860,000. Other commercial deals will see this rise to an extra £1m. The club are presently running down many of the Commercial deals that have been in place since the Kholer era, hopefully replacing them with deals that are financially more beneficial to the club. For example, once approval for the new stadium is granted, commercial revenue can be increased significantly by selling naming rights to the new stadium.

There will be a "fair" increase in ticket prices next season. Concessionary ticketing prices are under review, he did assure those long term fans who have previously received discounts for disability and unemployment that they would not lose their concessions. 660 new seats will be put into the back of the Kenilworth Road stand in time for next season, bringing the capacity up to 10500. The ground will be celebrating its centenary next season; a sub-committee has been formed to oversee the celebrations. A centenary replica shirt will probably be sold to commemorate the occasion.

Bill acknowledged that the club's merchandising leaves a lot to be desired, admitting other priorities have taken precedence this year, but matters are now in hand to improve the stock, and availability. Ideally he would like to make better use of the official web site to tap into the overseas market. At present there are over 4,500 regular overseas subscribers to the official site. In the long term, Bill (55) hoped that the club would be able to open a proper superstore to sell merchandise. At the date of the meeting, negotiations were still underway with regards to next season's kit design, manufacture and shirt sponsors. His own personal preference for the away kit is for the traditional black and white, but with a small amount of orange to reflect the club's tradition. There may also be a third kit. There will be a new upgraded ticketing system installed during the close season that will enable fans to purchase matchday tickets online.

The club is still subject to Football League embargoes. Cherry has to submit bi-monthly cash flow forecasts and any new signings and contract extensions have to be ratified by the league

authorities to ensure that they are financially sustainable. The club were forced by the FL to sign a new ten year lease on the Kenilworth Road ground before new ownership was confirmed. Fortunately, the lease is very flexible; there is no penalty clause in the event of the club relocating. The local council are actively supporting the club in its relocation plans and see the development of Kenilworth Road as an integral part of their regeneration plans for the Bury Park area.

The club are in currently in discussions with some potential new investors, not multi billionaire Abramovich types, but successful business men with money and some expertise. Once planning permission has been granted, Bill expects these new investors to come on board. He confirmed that any monies invested by the current board are non repayable and in no way loans or debentures, although he didn't rule out benefiting financially from the new development.

Overall the meeting went very well. Whatever your preconceptions, it is very difficult to not like Bill Tomlins, he is everybody's favourite uncle, all that was missing, was his pipe, cardigan, carpet slippers and his favourite Queen Anne Parker Knoll reclining easy chair. He answered all questions posed, and although he sometimes absent mindedly wavered off tangent, overall, gave a performance of controlled assurance. There are still many hurdles to be negotiated, but the future of the club is looking more secure than it has for many years. Let us all hope that this board will finally be the ones who take the club forwards.

TtWC

SHORT CUTS

A couple of pieces from earlier this season. Both, in their own way, say much about different styles of management....

●What to make of Coca-Cola's UK domestic football promotion, launched this week? Unmatched in the fizzy drink company's involvement in the beautiful game (UK version), it offers a prize of £250,000 to one fan for his club to spend on a new player. The promotional blurb suggests that 'no doubt' the winning fan will 'take the opportunity to tell the club exactly who the money should be spent on!' Without having any say at all in the final decision. Which might be fine if you were giving it to Mike Newell, but more a little more disconcerting if it's Barry Fry.

Tunnelgate 2: It's Luton

THE mystery of the shaking tunnel during Brentford's FA Cup clash with Luton Town has been solved. Fans were bemused when the extendible canvas contraption — through which players leave the field at Kenilworth Road — started vibrating furiously at half-time.

Talk can reveal that there was an old-fashioned bust-up. Ill feeling between the teams spilled over following a first-half fracas in which Brentford striker Isaiah Rankin appeared to have been floored by a Luton player. Witnesses claim Rankin was confronted in the tunnel by a Luton midfielder before two experienced Brentford hard men leapt to their team-mate's defence. A scuffle, rather than a punch-up, ensued, until police and stewards arrived.

MEET THE MANAGER

I have met many managers, players and other football club staff on evenings such as this so it came as no surprise when Mike Newell came in late looking like he wanted to be somewhere else and also when the MC for the evening announced that we wouldn't be too long as Mike wanted to get off. As it turned out we had a good 90 minutes of his evening with some 'time allowed for stoppages' and I think the guvnor (aka Micky Enwright) warmed to the task eventually. I didn't take notes or record the evening so the text below is from my own memory and any omissions or errors are mine too. I have paraphrased most of the questions and answers.

QUESTION: *What have been the high and low points of your time managing Luton Town?*

MIKE NEWELL: Hartlepool away this season was the best football we have played for a whole match and 3-2 flattered them considerably (*your author agrees*) whilst Hartlepool last year when we lost 4-3 was unjust as we played well that day too but conceded soft goals. Nothing personal in either memory!

Q: *Were there any grounds you did or didn't like playing at?*

MN: Anfield is where I learnt my football as a boy on the terraces so I loved playing there. Fortunately, I have a good personal record at Anfield too. I never really liked playing on the plastic despite Luton's good home record at the time. Grass can never be matched as a surface so I wouldn't want to see a return to artificial pitches at all.

Q: *Enoch Showunmi did well at the end of last season and you said he improved over the summer so why hasn't he played more?*

MN: Enoch was raw and he still is. Sometimes the crowd get frustrated at his mistakes but he does some unbelievable things in training so we know he has something. Enoch is only 22 so we are prepared to be patient with him. He is an athlete with tremendous pace and it was difficult leaving him out after Chesterfield but Howard and Vine have done well so they are first choice. Having said that we have won all five of the games when Howard hasn't played, so...

Q: *Are you worried that we don't get enough goals from our strikers?*

MN: We could score more but how high in the table do you want to be? I think it's the sign of a good team when you get goals from all positions.

Q: *Rowan Vine's work rate is tremendous and he does well off the ball but don't you think he could be more consistent in front of goal.*

MN: Yes. Seriously, I think Vine is too deliberate sometimes. He wants to score the perfect goal but

often it is the mis-hits or slices that go in and they all count. He is tremendous off the ball so I have never considered leaving him out, even when McSheffrey was here.

Q: *On the subject of Vine, he has taken at least two blatant dives against Bristol City away and Colchester away which is not what Luton fans want to see; have you spoken with him about it?*

MN: No (*sternly*). I haven't seen any evidence of that. He got an elbow at Bristol (*sorry Mike but that is cobbler's — author*).

Q: *Have you considered playing Russ Perret at full-back as it is a shame to leave a top quality player like him on the bench?*

MN: No. He is not a full-back.

Q: *What is your weekly routine, considering your family live in the north-west?*

MN: I go home after the game on Saturday and either return on Sunday night or Monday lunchtime depending on whether we have a midweek fixture or not. Sometimes I watch a game up north on Monday night and don't get down until Tuesday.

Q: *How have the team viewed the support this season both home and away?*

MN: To see a large following at an away game is a tremendous boost to all the lads and they really appreciate it. At home the crowd are not always as vocal but we often tell the players that it is up to them to raise the crowd. The atmosphere after we scored against Hull was great. I just wish we had scored earlier!

Q: *How has the departure of Mick Harford affected the training regime?*

MN: Brian Stein has taken over all the training and is doing a good job. Brian is a loyal man and I haven't felt the need to bring someone else in despite the board allowing me to do so. I think that some people are made to be coaches and some are managers and I have seen a lot of coaches get thrust into the limelight and fail to cope. Brian likes being a coach and I have

always wanted to be a manager so I let him get on with it.

Q: What about Mick's leaving in general?

MN: You cannot fault a man for having ambition and we wish him well. Mick was good for us and we miss him but it was his decision to leave. My only query is about the timing: he had two previous opportunities to leave and join Joe but he finally left when staying was obviously the better option.

Q: Do you know Paul Jewell?

MN: He is the same school year as me and also from Merseyside so we get along well. I played with him briefly at Wigan in the early days but not as much as some people think. Now we are good friends and speak often. We both scored at Spurs in the FA Cup one year but they came back to tie the match and beat us 5-0 in the replay!

Q: What about signings?

MN: There are currently a couple of players in this division that I am looking at for next year and I know they can play at a higher level but I won't name them. As for Feeney and McSheffrey: Feeney desperately wants to play for Luton, which I like, and I think he will be available when Stockport are definitely relegated; McSheffrey wants to play for Coventry as he is a local boy but if they let him go then I know he enjoyed his time here so that is still possible.

Q: We have signed a young lad from Tottenham, can you tell us about him?

MN: Danny Stevens is a good player but Spurs think he is too small to make it so have let him go. We have played him in a couple of reserve games and he has done well so we are giving him a year. He can play on the right-hand side or centrally. Everyone is in first-team contention but I am not looking to throw him straight in now (*why does the official website never*

To summarise, Mike displayed a typical scouse wit and got a very good reception with much praise for the success we are having. He gives plenty of credit to the players themselves and none to John Gurney who apparently had no idea who Mike Newell was (it was set up by a third party). The Eric Morecambe suite was packed by the usual suspects who are always respectful to guests so I don't know why they are all so worried by the prospect of meeting the supporters club? Maybe it is because "some supporters have absolutely no idea about the game" though Mike thinks most of us see the game in a very similar way to the insiders. Mike also said that no team ever won the league not playing football which gives some insight into his footballing philosophy. Long may it continue.

Cliff Saunders

have details on these things, only the unofficial one? – author).

Q: What about contracts?

MN: Steve Howard will not be signing a new contract this season; I think his agent has told him to let it run out. I cannot say whether he will be playing for us next season, even if we go up. Sheffield Wednesday and Nottingham Forest are the only clubs to have made offers for Howard. Paul Hughes will be looked after by the club and we just want to get him fit, so I haven't thought about his contract for next year yet. His virus is a strange one but Luton are not the sort of club to let a man down.

Q: Which game will see us promoted and which game will see us as champions? (Cue groans of putting the mockers on it from the audience)

MN: I am just looking at Bristol City and Swindon Town. The players want the title and I think they deserve it but you cannot afford to think about it this early. There are still lots of games to think about.

Q: Why do the players always kick for touch when they kick-off, it is very frustrating?

MN: I have no idea! The argument is that it gains territory early on but there are some things that I just let the players get on with. When you are doing well you are loathe to change anything.

Q: We have had some terrible refs recently such as away at Huddersfield and Bradford, what do you think?

MN: I think we could be here all night talking about officials! Seriously, I think they are given too much to think about these days (*here, here – author*) but there are definitely too many bookings given out for trivial offences.

Q (you know who): What do you think about players feigning injury, like that coloured lad last week?

MN: Terrible. What colour was he Jack?

OH, HAPPY DAYS!!

For us West Country based Hatters our lack of success against the Bristol teams has been a cause of great pain and humiliation reaching its nadir in 2001 when I remember watching the already relegated Luton succumb meekly, 3-1, to a disinterested City side at Ashton Gate. I am still yet haunted by memories of an evening game in the 90's when we were on the wrong end of a 5-0 thrashing and as the only Hatter in the Nova Scotia after the game was forced to endure some fairly heavyweight gloating, not only from my City supporting mates but anyone else in a red shirt that they could rope in. In fact during the time I have lived in the area, 20 years this year, we had not won in Bristol once (Bath doesn't count) until this year and rarely at the Kenny, especially against City. Last season was much better. We were robbed of victory at Ashton Gate in what must have been the 15th minute of time added on, but victorious in Luton with a last gasper after City had pegged us 2-2. Rovers have always been a nicer bunch altogether (they always said 'thank you' for the points) and our losses against them over the years have almost been a pleasure, plus the pasties at the Memorial are superb. Besides, they have largely disappeared from our radar for the time being.

This season, however, has been a joy. A win in Bristol just before Christmas seemed to be as good as it got. And then came the home match.

I drove to Luton with a car full of City fans (Clark was invited but preferred instead to watch Rovers v Rochdale, the tart). I have to admit, after years of Bristol agony, that I feared the worse even though Newell had cunningly avoided the curse of 'manager of the month' for February by deliberately losing at Port Vale. I can think of no other explanation for what we witnessed at Vale Park. The City fans were quite bullish after a couple of half decent results and good away form of late. We parked up at the station and pausing only briefly to admire the architectural delights en route and to buy a pie we made our way to the Kenny.

Now, I should explain that one of my Scrumpy mates is of the drumming variety. I know, always has been embarrassing and is now passé as well. He should grow out of it soon. But this necessitated us rendezvousing with other members of the South Bristol Majorettes in, of all places, the conservative club in Bury Park.

Confession time. I went in.

As I was the driver, I was less worried about the possibility of crap beer than not being able to contract out of the political levy contained within the price of a pint. Having dragged me in there, the little drummer boys' went off early 'to set up' and I was left behind at Tory HQ with the non drumming members of the party in an area of town, where let's face it, there are few near alternatives.

Still, on to the ground. Arrive in time for kick off, which I find a little unsettling, and take my place to view the ensuing carnage. I won't go into details of the match but suffice to say that the regular text updates of the score to my brother at Rovers v Rochdale appear to have aroused more interest amongst the Rovers fans around him than the match going on in front of them, which ended satisfyingly 0-0. Serves the poof right.

As I walked back to the car I must confess I felt a little embarrassed by what I had just seen. The boys' played great, the difference Underwood made was profound, but City were, by any standards, woeful and in truth the score should have been much more. It was almost like bullying someone who was incapable of defending themselves. I soon got over this feeling and looked forward to reflecting on the match with a captive audience for the duration of the 130 miles back to Bristol. After waiting in the car for an hour I began to worry that they had decided on the train as a less painful alternative but then they washed up looking more than a little sorry for themselves and very wet. It transpired that this was as a result of a stroke of genius on the

part of Luton police. Given that it had started to sleet and rain fairly hard after the game they resolved not to keep the City fans behind in the traditional manner by locking them in the ground for 20 minutes. Nope, the ground has a roof. Much better to let them leave the ground and keep them stood in the rain in Oak road. Brilliant. It cheered them up no end.

The journey back was very quiet. I tried to raise their spirits by singing, but that seemed to make it worse somehow.

Dropped off in Bristol and bought a Green 'Un. Then home to Portishead with the last remaining City fan for a celebratory drink. It is customary on these occasions to frequent a less than salubrious pub in the high street that has an enlightened interpretation of the licensing laws and their application to closing time. For some reason my mate Dave didn't seem up for a session so we popped into a more refined pub for an hour or so.

"It'll seem much worse in the morning" he moaned.

"Certainly will!" I agreed cheerfully.

The reaction of the local press was interesting and reflected the expectations that the City faithful harbour. This is where they differ from Rovers and come to that, clubs such as Luton. The Bristol evening post really turned on the team. All sides get a beating from time to time but to the Bristol media it was as if the world had stopped. How, they asked, can they lose so comprehensively to a club such as Luton? Not that surprising really, we are top of the league. I guess that it's the notion that City have of themselves that they are a 'sleeping giant' that makes it all the more pleasurable to beat them as opposed to Rovers. The fact is they have never achieved anything (I ignore the Leyland Daft Cup deliberately) but somehow consider themselves better than smaller clubs who have. This weight of expectation must affect the team and could explain their tendency to choke on the big occasion. Shame really.

Meanwhile, I still have a drum and a "Cider Army on Tour" banner in my boot. Any offers?

Junior Clark

BACK ISSUES

Will nobody ever take these off my hands? We've still got tons of them, and we will almost give them away. The only issues we've actually run out of are numbers 10, 11, 22, 24, 26, 27, 35 to 38 and 47. Issue one is free, and all others up to issue 55 will cost you just 40p per copy including postage, but that will drop to 25p per copy if you order more than 3 at a time. For issues 56 to 60 the price is £1.00 each including postage. Cheques should be made payable to *Mad as a Hatter!* and sent to the address on page 2. Please don't send cash by post as it never seems to arrive - although this should not be seen as a slight on our wonderful postmen!

Were you surprised when the PFA League One Team of the Year was announced? Me too, in fact I was so surprised that I sent an e-mail to the PFA asking what on earth they were playing at only picking six Town players. I have since received a reply apologising for this travesty of justice. Apparently, the original team of the year was different to the one they publicly released, and it is my pleasure to introduce to you all:

The Real PFA League One Team of the Year

1. Marlon Beresford (Luton)
2. Kevin Foley (Luton)
3. Sol Davis (Luton)
4. Chris Coyne (Luton)
5. Curtis Davies (Luton)
6. Paul Underwood (Luton)
7. Ahmet Brkovic (Luton)
8. Kevin Nicholls (Luton)
9. Rowan Vine (Luton)
10. Steve Howard (Luton)
11. Steve Robinson (Luton)

(Paul Hughes and Lee Mansell cruelly overlooked)

So there you have it. I hope that clears up any surprise you felt when seeing the official team. Enjoy the summer and enjoy Championship football next season!

What do you think of it so far?

Well, I certainly picked the wrong season to try to cut down on my football. The dream start, the inevitable blip, then, incredibly, stretching away again and even having a good Easter (compared to Hull, anyway). Writing this the day after promotion was confirmed by Tranmere's defeat at Brentford, we only need three wins from the last four games to be champions. Only!

What a change from last year, which had so much promise, despite all the problems associated with being in administration, but fizzled out tamely in mid-table. Time to reflect on the players that have made it such a memorable season.

Marlon Beresford His goalkeeping made a difference last year, when he was here briefly on loan. Amazingly, Barnsley didn't want to keep him after we had to let him go. He's been worth a few victories this year (Blackpool at home and Bournemouth away, to name just two) and his absence in games like Hull away has been crucial. I wrote at the time (Mad 63) that we were unlucky to lose that game 3-0, but the unluckiest thing about that game was not having Bez in goal. A draw that day would have made our lead over Hull six points (going into the MK Dons game), and even a 1-0 defeat would have made our goal difference five better, rather than three. I hope these goals don't turn out to be the difference between 1st and 2nd come May 7th.

Kevin Foley He was good last year, but he's better now. The only question is, should he really be playing at right back? Trouble is, we haven't got anyone better at that position, even though Foley is better in midfield. We missed him against Barnsley, when he was on duty for Ireland and his contribution in the next home game, against Blackpool, was massive.

Alan Neilson Hasn't had many games, but we won four out of the five he played in February when Underwood was out and Foley played in midfield.

Warren Feeney Too soon to say, though his debut against Blackpool was promising. Something to look forward to for next season.

Russell Perrett Finally got back in the side after missing most of last season. Started against Torquay when Coyne was suspended and deservedly kept his place for the next game. Sent off at Bournemouth in a carbon copy of Coyne's dismissal against Barnsley. They're very similar players, with Coyne just having the edge because of being almost ever-present, whereas Perrett has been injury-prone.

Paul Underwood We only saw him for about 20 minutes last season, when QPha clobbered him. Having him on the left wing has meant that Brkovic has been able to play in his more natural position on the right, so we've gained two players for the price of one. His only bad performances seem to have been when he was carrying an injury. When fit, his contribution has been crucial.

Kevin Nicholls Doesn't seem to have been booked as much this season, though his red at Hull was stupid. We'd already lost the match, and his idiocy meant we might have extended our run of losses beyond three. Fortunately not! His commitment and strength in midfield has been invaluable; pity about some of his passing. We're the team with white shirts and black shorts, Kev. His contributions are just about the only things worth reading in the match day magazine these days; having an articulate captain must be worth something.

Rowan Vine Some people have been disappointed that he hasn't contributed more in this season on loan from Premiership club Portsmouth, but he's not really a top flight player. He's made some goals, scored some goals, but sometimes when he's got the ball at his feet and goes on one of his runs, you just know it's going to end with a shot into the side netting.

Steve Robinson Two operations have kept him out of the team for about a third of the

season. When he's been fit, he's been good. Apart from Foley, we haven't got anyone to take his place without weakening the team (Holmes, Leary, O'Leary, Mansell). Of the six league defeats this season, he played in only two, Hull and Walsall, which speaks for itself.

Chris Coyne Hardly missed a game, and his presence in the defence has been part of the reason for our record of conceding an average of only one goal per game. Having said that, he's been making some uncharacteristic errors recently, notably resulting in his sending off against Barnsley. Could be a loss of concentration, perhaps some mental tiredness after two hard seasons.

The Leary Brothers (Michael and Stephen O) They've both shown some promise and had some good moments, but, as I said before, the team looks weaker when they play. I can't see them being good enough for the team we'll need for next season.

Enoch Showunmi He's obviously been disappointed not to get more games, but he's still learning how to play at this level, so I think Mike Newell has done the right thing in making Vine the starting partner for Howard. But Enoch has made his mark, with half a dozen goals, some of them vital, and some useful contributions when coming on late in the game to give their defenders something different to think about. It's noticeable that we've won all but one of the games that Howard has missed, and in two of those it's been Enoch's goals that made the difference between winning and drawing.

Ahmet Brkovic The Croatian Sensation has been a revelation this year. When he said in the Luton News that he had set himself a target of 10 goals this season, most people just laughed. But he's beaten that easily, and what goals they've been. His ball skills have improved as his confidence has grown, and the few games he's missed have been some of our worst performances (defeats to Barnsley and Hull, draws at Peterborough and Colchester). Probably the most improved player this season.

Steve Howard Not his best season for us, but he still makes a difference to the way we play. It's in games when the referee allows their centreback to dominate him that we tend to struggle, and then he has his rash moments, like at Brentford. His 20+ goals again this season have been more than useful (think of his equaliser at Oldham or his winner against Blackpool in recent games), but sometimes we can be a little unimaginative when we pump the ball forward for Steve to head on, and I don't think Vine has the faintest idea which way it's likely to go after more than 40 games.

Curtis Davies Cultured and confident, what a contribution he's made to our success this season. How long can we keep him, though, with Premiership teams interested and the club needing the money? Let's hope for at least one more year.

Sol Davis Another much improved player this year, partly because he's had a proper left sided midfielder in front of him. This has not only given him help against some of the fast wing men that have given him trouble in the past, but also allowed him to go forward more, knowing that Underwood can cover. No coincidence that he's actually scored (twice!) this season, his first ever league goals, and could have had more.

Peter Holmes A Ricky Hill signing, as I recall, and there's still room for improvement. He's scored some goals recently, but he's still making wrong decisions with his final ball and still produces more groans from the crowd than roars of approval.

Mike Newell I'm sure we were all impressed with Mike's efforts last year. The club in administration, no money, no players, injuries and suspensions galore, he did an amazing job to keep us in with a sniff of promotion until the last few weeks. Nearly all the players he's brought to the club have done well for him (Beresford, Underwood, Vine, Showunmi), he's got better performances out of players who had not been as good as they ought to have been in the past

(Brkovic, Davis), he's looked after the youngsters who were thrown in at the deep end last season (Brill, Foley, Davies) and there's a great team spirit now. OK, partly that's reaction to the lifting of the anxiety of last season, partly it is success breeding success. But let's give some credit where it's due: well done, Mike Newell. Thanks for a great season.

Will Larter

News just in: In the last half hour, Hull City have exclusively revealed that they are planning to change their badge next season. The traditional Hull City tiger has been replaced with a logo which reflects on the strengths of the City team. MAAH can exclusively reveal the new badge (see below).

Reaction to the new badge so far has been positive from the Hull City staff, fans and more importantly from Stuart Elliott.



"The Future is Bright, The Future is You!"

We're on our way to the Championship! And yet, how many supporters of Luton Town Football Club truly believe that they are members of a Club and that that Club belongs to them, listens to them, is open to them, and is willing to ask them, its members, for help? The answer is not many and yet, I argue, that it is returning to the Club formula that is essential to Luton Town Football Club being able to compete in the future.

Looking around football, you see the massive strides Charlton have taken by making the Club the fans, or, at least, by having the fans take back the Club... and yet, in Luton, we seem unable to even bring enough weight to bear to get ground for a new stadium: Where's the members of the Club coming together to influence the politicians? Where's the requests from Our Club for help marketing their product (posters into local pubs via members, widespread promotions into schools)? These are just a few examples of how a powerful, members-based Club, could start to seriously impact on the ability of our football team to compete at the highest levels.

Looking around the various supporter's groups today reveals various disparate groups which all appear to have limited capabilities: LTSC and Trust in Luton, both seem to have very well-meaning people involved but both require an exercise (to various degrees) in openness, PR, and the use of IT; MAD provides a forum for articles, opinions etc, but has no remit to represent supporters; On the IT side, lutonfc.com has a message board with 95% crap, but 5% pure magic, Whosh started off with a members-feel, but as numbers have grown it has lost that members-feel. In short, we have several, medium sized groups but no strong, powerful, IT savvy, politically astute, and, perhaps critically, well-financed supporters grouping.

Hang on, a well-financed supporters grouping? So, to the point... does Luton Town Football Club really need more people to come into the Club with money? Or, are we (the members) better off in the longer term having that money being put in to building a strong and powerful supporters grouping with an efficient infrastructure in place which can then support its Club?

All opinions/abuse/ideas welcome to... LutonFuture@yahoo.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Mad as a Hatter! is available on subscription at the bargain price of £6.50 for the next five issues, including postage. Cheques payable to *Mad as a Hatter!* should be sent to the address on page 2. Overseas rates are available on request.

Ten Reasons Why I'd Rather Be In League One

There's always one miserable whingeing sod that is not happy when life is good. That person is me, so I present 'Ten Reasons Why I'd Rather Be In League One'

1. I will miss the nervous excitement of the FA Cup 1st Round Draw, when we get Northwich Victoria away or Lincoln at home. Our cup run may become our cup afternoon out.
2. Our chance of securing glory in the LDV will have gone for yet another year
3. We can play Watford home and away and pick up six points without having to try too hard
4. The Championship is a silly name for the Second Division!
5. There are less foreign players so I won't have trouble pronouncing them (or spelling them)
6. The Hatters won't gain lots of 'glory-seeking' fans that wouldn't dream of watching them in Leagues One or Two. Where were you at York City away? Sitting comfortably supporting The Hatters on Sky or The Championship is not quite the same is it?
7. Ticket prices will be far more expensive in the Championship
8. The quality of refreshments at away grounds deteriorates as you move up the league. No more Cornish pasties at Torquay, have you ever tried the food at Moan U?
9. We won't lose all my local games against Wolves, WBA, Leicester etc. and people at work won't laugh at me
10. We won't have the worst ground in our division

Ho hum – never mind, if it has to be The Championship in 2005/6 then I'll have to just grin and bear it, and probably moan a little.

Join me at the same time next year when I present the sequel 'Ten Reasons Why I'd Rather Not Be In The Premiership'.

Russell Bulkeley

Walsall

Pondering Present and Past Promotions

Our last three promotion seasons (81/82, 01/02 and now 04/05) have all been different. We won at home to go up in 81/82, won away in 01/02 and didn't even have to play on the day of reckoning to get promoted this season, thanks to Tranmere's away defeat at Brentford.

Memories of the 81/82 campaign are particularly strong, as it was my first season of going to watch Luton. Almost losing away at Rotherham the week before (but drawing thanks to a late penalty save by Alan Judge), set us up for that great night at home to Shrewsbury, eventually winning 4-1 after a nervous first half and being pegged back to 1-1. Finishing with 88 points (a new record in the old old Division 2 at the time, although the introduction of 3 points for a win that season no doubt had something to do with it!) and only losing 4 games all season - great memories.

Of course, our next promotion had to wait 20 years and although it was a great season, it was tinged with disappointment that we couldn't win the title that year. Finishing 2nd with 97 points must be a league record, and hopefully Hull will know how that feels come the end of the season! I'm sure some Luton fans will have recognised the irony in winning at Swansea to go up. Back in 80/81 it was Swansea who pipped Luton to the 3rd promotion spot that year on the last day of the season.

This season's achievement is particularly impressive, considering the situations we've found ourselves in over the past two years with Gurney and then Administration. Who would have thought it possible that the raw, young, gangly teenage striker we used to call 'Mike 'I'll jump when I like' Newell' would end up being an astute, unassuming and successful league manager? He's only been at the management game for less than 3 years and yet he's already had two promotions with two different clubs!

Of course, what we really want is the inaugural Coca-Cola League One Title trophy. We fully deserve it, having been top for almost the entire season (bar the first table when we were joint-top with Colchester (whatever happened to them?) and the couple of blips in January and March when Hull found themselves at the top, panicked and we quickly resumed our rightful place back at the summit.

However, timing is crucial. At the time of writing, we've got four games to go and are only three points ahead of Hull. It's going to be tight, but then Luton has never been known for making things easy on us supporters! Just think back to the classic relegation dogfights we had in the past against Man City, Derby, Derby again, etc. Last day nerves apply in equal measure for promotion as well as relegation. Hull won't care that they've not been top for more than a couple of games, as long as they slip into the numero uno position after the last game. Timing is therefore everything.

It might all come down to our last game of the season, away at Doncaster. However, as long as I wear my lucky away shirt and bring my mobile with me then we can't lose. The only time I've not had the two together at a match this season was against Huddersfield and Barnsley at home - the only two games I've seen us lose (to date)!

As for next season's prospects, let's worry about that after this one is done and dusted. We've won promotion on a shoestring; now let's go for some silverware as well!

Anon.



SMASHING TIME — Luton's Steve Howard sees his powerful shot at the Bournemouth goal blocked by Cherries defender Eddie Howe

STEVE WHO?

A couple of cuttings which show why some teams have had difficulty marking Steve Howard this season. They just don't know what he looks like! The Rowan Vine picture was from the *MK Citizen*, who you might think would have recognised the bloke who scored the hat-trick. Chris Coyne was wrongly identified by the *News of the World*, who also gave us our new Spanish signing.



STEVE PALMER shares a joke with Luton's Steve Howard. Picture: Phil Smith.

Positive

But the visitors emerged after the break in more positive mode, and they looked the side most likely to break the deadlock.

Howard headed wastefully over on 66 minutes, before substitute Juan Feeney went close to scoring against his old club in the 73rd minute.

But Showunmi sealed it with seven minutes remaining, lashing in from close range to leave Luton just one win away from promotion.

THE FIRST TIME

You know when someone in the office comes in and says "I've got a World Cup Final ticket here, corporate hospitality thing but I don't really like football and the wife wants me to go to Homebase at the weekend. Does anyone want it?" You don't? No, me neither but a similar thing happened to me on a lesser scale when I was fifteen and at school in Hemel Hempstead. I had a friend who was a Town fan and he arrived one day looking for a person to attend the forthcoming league match against Ipswich Town and hence gain a voucher for a ticket for the FA Cup quarter-final against Millwall. Yes, that cup-tie - I hope the bloke who used the voucher appreciated it!

As a youngster, I was never indoctrinated with a particular club. My father said the old players were better, of course, but he had no particular allegiance despite watching a bit of Arsenal and Fulham as a kid. My dad's enthusiasm as a youngster in the fifties was for speedway but this interest had long passed by the time I came along. I discovered much later than a number of my mum's family had been Brentford fans, living as they did in Acton and Hanwell but I don't think they were regulars in the seventies and certainly never took me along. So I was a football fan without a cause and was restricted to TV-football only. In the late seventies this included the FA Cup Final (or Arsenal v this year's opponents as I saw it), the World Cup Finals tournament (or Scotland being embarrassing in England's absence) and the European Cup (or England wonderfully thrashing Johnny Foreigner). I remember watching Arsenal v Ipswich in 1978, Liverpool v Bruges a few days later and filling in my wall chart for the Argentina World Cup over the summer. This was followed by Tottenham Hotspur in the Cup, Nottingham Forest in Europe and finally England in Spain with the commensurate sticker album.

Along with most kids at the time I would claim to be a Liverpool fan despite never having been to the city let alone the Anfield football ground. Even then though, I remember asking my dad who our local football team was and getting a choice of answers including Luton and W*tf*rd so I was none the clearer. I distinctly remember seeing the end of season table in 1982 and feeling proud that both my local teams were carrying all before them so I stopped claiming to be a Red and started saying "no-one really" when interrogated about my team. They do say that most fans follow the team they are first taken to see so when I attended Kenilworth Road on that spring day in 1985 a passion was inevitably roused.

The deal was this: I had to get to my mate's house and then he, his uncle, his cousin, his brother-in-law and so on would take me to Luton. They would pay for my admission and in return collect the voucher to enable them to purchase a cup ticket for their absent friend. Further to this I got some time in the pub with coke and crisps, a bag of chips prior to the game and a 3-1 victory with a young Tim Breacker running rampant down the right wing; and I was supposed to be doing them a favour! The game was great entertainment and the view from the top of the then open Kenilworth terrace was perfect. I scored a couple of points myself when the Hatters got a penalty. Ipswich had Paul Cooper in goal who was famous for saving penalties and whom I knew from watching Football Focus on Saturday mornings. "He'll save this." I declared confidently as Mick Harford (I think) lined up the spot kick. The raised eyebrows from my companions were followed by slightly annoyed and very bemused looks when Cooper did save the kick, and I was quite glad that it made no difference to the final result!

So, I was hooked and have my old friend Richard Marshall to thank; though Tim Breacker also did his bit. Attendance was limited over the next four years as I attempted to forge an amateur playing career but I gave up deciding that I was a better spectator than performer. I have never regretted this decision and only wish I had gone more often over the 1985-1989 period as this is arguably the best in Luton's history. My main hope for the future is that I am not priced out of the game as the current tariff for the Kenilworth end is over four times the rate for my first game!

Cliff Saunders

A Change of Attitude

Drawing to the end of season, and a very successful one at that, supporter's minds inevitably begin to think about the player of the season. Not for a long time can I think of the club having so many candidates. For literally ten or eleven players the case could be argued more than reasonably that they have been the best. However, to my mind three candidates in particular stand head and shoulders above the lot. They are not necessarily the most talented players in the squad, but each of them has dramatically improved upon last season to this, showing a healthy change of attitude. The three players have been the rock upon which this promotion winning season has been built; Sol Davis, Kevin Nicholls and Ahmet Brkovic.

Sol Davis arrived at the club with the unenviable task of replacing the excellent Matthew Taylor, with a good reputation as a tough tackling full back from the Swindon supporters. In fairness no reasonable supporter expected a Taylor clone who would go on marauding runs up the left flank shooting at goal whenever an opportunity arose, but many expected a bit more than we got from Sol last season. Where last season Davis would invariably knock a long hopeful ball up to Steve Howard, he now looks for a more creative pass along the floor inside or outside.

Playing a huge role in Sol's change for the better has been Paul Underwood. Unders has been a fine addition to the squad and no-one has benefited a greater amount than Sol. A pass is always available to Underwood and it can be played to him with the confidence that it won't then be lost. The second half to the season has seen Davis be ever more adventurous down the left wing and this has all to do with having Underwood then tucking in behind him. This partnership may not be as glamorous as that of the Taylor/Valois axis but it has certainly been as effective. Perhaps the most surprising change to Sol though has been that in his character. Where in the past he was liable to pick up stupid cautions every other week, he now only tends to be carded for a mistimed challenge. I've got no problem with a full back being cautioned trying to help the team with a tackle, but there was nothing more infuriating than watching a player cautioned for needless dissent. Sol has eliminated this from his game this season and he is a far better player for it. Credit to must go to the management, as last season Mike Newell could be heard tearing his hair out on Three Counties Radio whenever Sol picked up another suspension for what could have been easily avoided. Whatever Mike said to him last summer it has clearly stuck. Not forgetting the input of Mick Harford, who in my opinion has influenced the way the back four defend as a unit. Watching the warm-ups alone, before a match it's interesting to see the defence prepare as a collective and work for each other.

Kevin Nicholls: For my money the player of the season. Kevin's change in the way he conducts himself like Sol Davis has been immense compared with last season. This has clearly helped him perform to a higher standard without taking anything away from his willingness to tackle hard. A player you would hate to see on the other team if you were lining up for the opposition, I'm sure. Captain of the club, this season has seen Nico lead by example through what he does, rather than by what he says. He has scored vital goals in big games and has been an excellent creative influence. I've always felt that Nicholls has been under-estimated as a player and this season has proved so. Not only the penalty taker for the club, he strikes fine crosses or shots on set-pieces and has been nothing short of a revelation as the fulcrum in midfield. His performance sets the tone for the game all round even when he's not on top form. Nicholls allows the likes of Brkovic and Underwood the time to play as he goes round doing a lot of the dirty work in the centre.

Ahmet Brkovic: The Croatian Sensation. I would never have believed I could see such a change in performance from a player. Until the start of this season I always wondered what Mike Newell and Joe Kinnear before him saw in Brkovic. We heard both managers praise Brkovic for the skill he illustrated on the training ground, but didn't believe it - he never showed much talent on the pitch. It seems like all of a sudden the stars aligned last summer and Brkovic started performing

well on the pitch. Not just well, but actually very, very well. Where in the past he wandered around aimlessly, he now struts with poise and purpose. He hardly ever wastes a pass, shows a great deal of skill and from nowhere has an unerring ability in front of goal, where in the past he couldn't hit the proverbial barn door. Brko's tally this year is one of the prime reasons we have found ourselves in such a great position in the league. Last season we were too reliant on Steve Howard finding the net, this time round Ahmet's goals from midfield have made a massive difference. I'll hold my hands-up - I thought this guy should have left the club a long time ago, and I'm glad to say I've been proved wrong. Congratulations on a fantastic season Brko and may it continue for many more.

Lastly, as I mentioned briefly with Sol Davis, as well as the players individually improving there can be little doubting the reason for the change; the management. Mike Newell, Mick Harford and Brian Stein have done a fine job instilling a change in the player's attitude and willingness to improve. These three in particular have improved greatly. The real skill of management and coaching is in improving players you already have, not necessarily looking for a quick fix and buying new ones. Well done to the management and to the players for a fantastic season, let's hope we see further improvements as we move into the Championship.

Steven Sharpe

SHORT CUTS

Not sure how the cutting on the right will come out, but it shows the top of the table in Argentina, and we are assured that the leaders, the splendidly named Newell's Old Boys, went on to win the title. It must have been in the stars...

And, below, bigger clubs casting envious eyes in our direction?

	P	W	D	L	F	A	PTS
NEWELL'S OLD BOYS	13	7	4	2	14	6	25
VELEZ SARSFIELD	13	8	1	4	16	13	25
ESTUDIANTES	13	6	6	1	16	6	24
RIVER PLATE	13	6	4	3	21	18	22
BOCA JUNIORS	13	6	3	4	17	9	21
BANFIELD	13	5	6	2	19	11	21
SAN LORENZO	13	6	3	4	18	14	21
LANUS	13	5	6	2	18	16	21
GIRASSOL LA PLATA	13	6	3	4	14	16	21
COLON SANTAFE	13	5	5	3	15	11	20
QUILMES	13	5	4	4	10	11	19
INDEPENDIENTE	13	5	3	5	17	18	18
AL MAGRO	13	4	6	3	18	10	18
ROSARIO CENTRAL	13	4	5	4	10	10	17
ARSENAL SARANDI	13	2	7	4	9	12	13
ARGENTINOS JUNIORS	13	3	3	7	7	11	12
RACING CLUB	13	3	2	8	10	15	11
HURACAN TRES ARROYOS	13	1	4	8	11	24	7
INSTITUTO	13	1	4	8	7	22	7
OLIMPO	13	1	3	9	10	22	6

Everton chase

Davies and Keane

Spanish giants target £7m Robinson

THE ROAD MAP?

As you probably know the 'Road Map' is now a popular way of planning for the future (often incorrectly) used by Governments and business alike.

I have been left wondering how a Luton Town fan's 'Road Map' would have looked at the start of the 2002/3 season, if we were aiming for promotion to the Championship for the 2005/6 season. It may have included several of the following:

- Big Joe and Mick
- Watson-Challis bankrolling the club
- An assortment of high cost/waged players
- Promotion by playing aggressive, in-your-face football

Unfortunately, with the benefit of hindsight, this "Road Map" would have resulted not in promotion but in financial ruin and no more LTFC.

Who would have drawn the map that would have included the drama that has unfolded over the past two years? Even more amazingly, how has the route we have taken proved so successful? Why have we been transformed from a club under performing in 2001 to a club over performing in 2005? Simple - Chairman, players, fans and Mike Newell.

The Chairman, his team, and in particular Cherry Newbery deserve a lot of credit. Bill has an obvious love for the club, a long term plan and huge amounts of commitment. His leadership has seemed to be calm, assured and popular. Strangely, exactly the opposite of his predecessor.

The players deserve huge amounts of credit for a simple reason - loyalty. Funny word that.

The support, especially away from home, has been immense. Hope to see you all next year.

But the person for whom I hold most admiration is Mike Newell. There is no doubt he inherited a decent set of players. However, I cannot see how any other manager would have been able to gel the players, bring on the youngsters and make such shrewd signings (McSheff, Enoch, Underwood and Vine).

Despite all these factors, I am still astounded at the position we find ourselves in. Where will this particular 'Road Map' lead us? Well, in the longer term we're obviously stuffed without a new ground, so I hope the Chairman's optimism is well founded. Championship football - bring it on!! But more importantly this map will lead to a future for Luton Town, and this was far from guaranteed 3 years ago.

Andrew C

THE LEAVING OF LEAGUE ONE...

What I'll Miss:

Leaving this division there is much to miss, some of the things that make me sad are:

- Whipping MK Dons, Stockport, Bristol, Bradford and Torquay
- Being top and winning non-stop
- Having an empty seat next to me so I can sit properly
- Barry Fry and his comments
- All other managers calling us "The best", and "Run away winners"

What I'm glad to leave:

BUT, leaving this division there is much to gain, including:

- A proper away following coming to the Kenny, thanks Torquay, Barnsley, and nearly every other team
- A proper noise made at the Kenny
- Our players getting recognition for their efforts
- A possible series of matches with the Scum
- Getting to visit nice grounds
- Seeing skilful footballers unlike the Brentford bunch
- Sh*t refs, oh no, still got them...

!!!Up the HATTERS!!!

Dan Strobe

UP, UP AND AWAY!!

05.03.05 TOWN 5 BRISTOL CITY 0

Hurrah! The Bristol jinx is well and truly broken. Not only do we win down there for the first time since the Sex Pistols were in the news but we thrash the bollocks off them up here. City were woeful but Luton Town made it count for once. We started brightly, as so often we do at home, but this time we scored that early goal and that set us up for the rest of the game. It was a lovely move finishing with the newly restored Paul Underwood pulling back a low cross for Ahmet Brkovic to calmly side-foot home. Underwood had a good game, marred only by a bad miss with his head in the first half and a booking in the second which may affect his availability in weeks to come. This would be disappointing as the former Rushden utility man filled in competently for the nearly indestructible Sol Davis who limped off in the second half. Davis was smiling at the final whistle though due to his second professional league goal which was Luton's third of the match after the Robins' keeper had fumbled a Steve Howard effort from outside the box. How our left full-back managed to be on hand at the end of a swift counter-attack only he knows but you don't score goals without taking chances so full marks to Davis.

Sandwiched between these worthy efforts was a Kevin Nicholls penalty, and it was nice to see him put the ball in the net again after his rare miss at Bradford. Whether it was a penalty or not is debatable but Rowan Vine got the referee's benefit this time when he fell over in the box. If Vine is unhappy with the inference in that last sentence then he needs to get up and get on with it more often instead of looking to the officials every time he fails to get in a clean strike. Football is a man's game and a player is more likely to get decisions in his favour if he attempts to stand his ground more often and fall down complaining less often.

So, it was 3-0 at half-time and we deserved it. Even with a healthy lead of course, one is always wary of an opposition backlash after the break so we steeled ourselves for the inevitable West Country onslaught: I am still waiting. Bristol City were as bad in the second half as they were in the first and had their goalkeeper had an off-day we would have scored at least eight. As it was we had to settle for five with Peter Holmes getting the next. He had a good game, covered all areas of the pitch and was frequently found in the opposition's penalty area so it was just reward when Holmes met an excellent cross after an equally excellent run from Vine. The Portsmouth loanee could have had one himself a bit later when Phillips in the Robins' goal saved (again) from Howard and Vine somehow failed to squeeze home the rebound. Luckily, the Croatian Sensation was alive to the second loose ball and 5-0 it ended.

The much-maligned Keith Keane (okay, maligned by me especially) had a decent game and the centre-back pairing of Curtis-for-England-Davies and Russ Perret (or Pér-rét as I heard one supporter call him) were largely untroubled. Maybe they are so good that they just look untroubled but if Lita of City can play for the U-21s then why is Davies not in the team? Our midfield looked well-balanced on this showing and despite Kevin Foley's recent superb performances in midfield, I think we need him to play right-back if everyone is fit. Today's team was virtually first-choice despite five recent starters (Foley, Chris Coyne, Alan Neilson, Stephen O'Leary and Steve Robinson) being absent, so I disagree with some this season who have insisted we have a small squad. What we do have is a winning squad and a certain BFJ is to thank for that.

Cliff Saunders

12.03.05 TOWN 3 SWINDUMP 1

It looked from the start that we were in for another walkover. Early on, the Croatia Sensation stole into the box to get on the end of a crossfield punt and was fouled for a penalty, which King Kev calmly dispatched. The second followed shortly, when Swindon's defence opened up leaving Ahmet and Rowan Vine to almost get in each other's way but Berko hit home. However, before half-time Swindon scored from a corner and the game got a bit nervous. A bloke behind me started bawling the odds to the Luton players, which at one goal up and 13 promotion points clear in the league seemed a bit harsh. Underwood hit the bar with a flyer in the second half as Luton tried to press on but, in the end, the 3rd goal was only courtesy of the Swindon keeper doing a Nathan Abbey and dropping an easy cross onto Holmes who skipped around him and made it 3-1.

Good to see Mick Harford back too, even if it was as Swindon's assistant manager. We even gave him a special song: Micky what's the score, Micky, Micky, what's the score?!? Equally cruel and funny, ho ho.

Afterwards Steiny commented that the players were disappointed with this game as they failed to play champagne football. A 3-1 win and the players are disappointed?! It would have been unheard of even a couple of season ago and goes to show just why we are doing so well this season.

B. Dave B.

19.03.05 OLDHAM 2 TOWN 2

Why do we reserve our worst performances for games at the bottom of the table? First Peterborough, then Port Vale and now this. The game started in fairly subdued fashion, and it was a surprise when we scored after five minutes. A chip into the area was chested down by Peter Holmes and Paul Underwood volleyed it into the far corner of the net. After that we played some neat football, but there was no urgency or incisiveness about our play. The pitch was half sand and the ball bobbed quite a bit, which made for a scrappy first half. Chances were few and far between, though Marlon Beresford made a decent save in front of the Luton supporters.

Just before half time, Steve Howard lost control of the ball near the centre circle and from the clearance Chris Killen sprinted past Chris Coyne and scored past the advancing Beresford. Worse was to follow. The second half had barely started when Coyne's casual pass back to Beresford was easily intercepted by Luke Beckett, in his first game on loan from Sheffield United, and he made it 2-1 to the Latics. They could have gone further ahead when a free kick just outside the area narrowly cleared the bar. Luton's efforts at getting back into the game were sporadic, and often came to nothing due to poor control, poor communication, poor judgment, or just Kevin Nicholls passing the ball to an Oldham player.

Sol Davis was having a good game, and could have scored when his run from halfway was not challenged, but his right foot shot was straight at Mildenhall. With a quarter of an hour remaining, Mike Newell brought on Enoch Showunmi in place of Rowan Vine. Shortly after, possibly at Ahmet Brkovic's suggestion (he was certainly shouting something at the bench), Underwood was taken off, Brko moved to the left wing and Kevin Foley to the right, while Keith Keane came on at right back. The two substitutions gave us renewed energy, because Unders had certainly been struggling to go the pace and Enoch, as well as winning the ball in the air, made a couple of good runs down the left, one of which ended with a powerful left foot shot, again straight at Mildenhall. Brko did one of his trademark bicycle kicks across the goalmouth, and Sol slammed the follow-up into the side netting.

And of course we hit the post. There were some promising moves developing now, but time was running out and we had no luck in front of goal. In what must have been the third and last minute of stoppage time, a neat interchange of passes down the right between Foley and Holmes resulted in a beautifully weighted cross and Howard rose majestically in the six yard box to nod it in at the far post. Ecstasy and jubilation all round - but why do we have to make it such hard work at these places?

Will Larter

25.03.05 TATTERS 1 BARNSELEY 3

No excuses for this one. Yes, the referee, Mr Joslin, was poor but this was a simple case of being outplayed, out-thought and out-fought. Having attended all six of our league defeats this season, I felt that this, along with possibly Brentford, was as bad as I've seen. It's hard to really pinpoint why things didn't go well. Berko and Robbo missing were big blows. playing Enoch out of position was an error of judgement on Super Mike's part, but there were too many players who simply didn't perform on the day. Chris Shuker hardly endeared himself to us, and quite honestly I was bloody annoyed with his comments ahead of the game, but fair play to him and his Barnsley team mates. They came with a game plan, stuck to their task very well, and were worthy winners. By the time this appears in print we will be up, maybe not as Champions but up nonetheless and, by God, that is a hell of an achievement in itself. Let us all be proud of what a "little" team can do. Wednesday and Hull take note.

The match was either going to go one of two ways: a blistering Town display showing the world what we are capable of or a complete anti-climax. Sadly for us it was the latter. We looked nervous and completely missed Berko and Robbo in the middle. Chris Coyne has had a fantastic season and may well make the Division One team of the season, but looked a yard slower than of late, and may still have been struggling with his injury of a few weeks ago. Paul Underwood was a doubt right up until kick-off and Enoch started out of position on the left. For the first fifteen minutes or so Town looked bright and generally up for the game, but the Tykes settled into a rhythm and scored three times in ten minutes. Firstly Mr Shuker (who else?), then a very unfortunate own goal by Curtis (although it looked like they might score in the attack anyway), and a well taken goal by Chopra from 12 yards after Curtis slipped at the crucial moment. Defensively we looked dreadful and could well have conceded earlier when the inside of Beresford's right hand post was struck. Luton had a few half chances but simply didn't do enough to look like scoring. Enoch's second half strike was a well worked goal but far too late to save our blushes. As he turned away to celebrate he tweaked a back muscle and was subbed only a few minutes later. Which rather summed up the afternoon.

At half time it had become a damage limitation exercise, especially as goal difference may prove to be important, so Marlon's penalty save from Chopra's poor effort could yet prove to be important. Coyne's sending off late on was hardly debated, and there can be no complaint from any of us. All in all a very disappointing afternoon, the loss of three valuable points, Coyne banned for Torquay away, Enoch injured and the goal difference down to just +30. A bad day for Luton.

That said we're still going up, it just delays the inevitable a bit longer. To all the doubters among you, all I can say is:

"COME ON YOU RIP ROARING HATTERS!!!"

28.03.05 ENGLISH RIVIERA UTD 1 HATTERS 4

Still in shock from 'Bad' Friday's reversal in front of the nation's watching millions... or should that be thousands (or even hundreds)? We decended on the south coast in the hope that normal service would be resumed. Alas, after only a few minutes we conceded a sloppy goal and the Gulls then had a couple of half chances, but midway through the half the Town started to take control, scoring twice - first with a Nico poacher, then Holmes rounded off a lovely move involving Stevo and Foley. Stevo clipped the bar just before the interval and things felt very comfortable at half time.

Stevo then literally busted the net to make it 3, and then when Marlon saved his second penalty of the weekend we all felt victory was inevitable. Vine added a celebratory fourth and the day was rounded of perfectly by the news that both Hull and Tranmere had lost... What a day!

We are going up, say we are going up!

Steve F

02.04.05 TOWN 1 BLACKPOOL 0

Hit a nerve...

The difference between winning the championship and not is grinding out results when you're not at your best.

The Blackpool match is a prime example. It was a very nervous victory, but three points is three points - and another huge step towards going up. We took the lead inside 15 minutes with Stevo heading home a Holmes corner for his third goal in four games.

The goal should have settled us down, but it didn't. That said, Blackpool hardly threatened, and when they did they struggled to hit the target. Sol was probably lucky Russ Perrett was alongside him when he decided to haul back Keigan Parker who was threatening to run clean through, with the ref deciding a yellow card was sufficient punishment.

The match also marked the debut of Warren Feeney, who had missed the last two matches due to his commitments with a not very good international side. Feeney was only given 20 minutes to shine, and flashed a shot wide after being put through by Enoch, but did little else. But to be fair, nor did the rest of the team!

Scoop

09.04.05 AFC BOURNEMOUTH 0 TOWN 1

The game/weekend that everyone was looking forward to.

Nobody knows how many tickets we could have sold for this one, but 1,200 was certainly not the answer. A few (ahem) beers were enjoyed before the game in Bournemouth and near the ground. It has to be said that build up to the game was great, and was added to by those who cycled down for charity (well done chaps!).

Should Perrett have been sent off? Should Vine have scored in the first half? To be honest, the fact that I'd been drinking since opening time means that I can't really give an opinion. The game seemed to fly by and Enoch's goal triggered celebrations of mammoth proportions in the stand(s!). The ten men were magnificent, and their celebrations at the end go some way to showing why we have been top for virtually the whole season.

The hard work was done and it was time to enjoy Bournemouth's night life. This is the second weekender I've done in Bournemouth, and I am now rooting for them in the play-offs, but only if they build another stand behind the goal and give more than 1,200 tickets to visiting teams.

The Cheshire Hat

16.04.05 CHAMPIONS 1 FRANCHISE 0

You're not from Wimbledon... you're not from Wimbledon...

The atmosphere hardly screamed 'promotion party', but that's maybe because there is (at time of writing) still a job to do in terms of securing the title.

It wasn't quite as bad as the nervy win over Blackpool the previous home game, but it was anxious nonetheless. Especially when my sister, on duty with text updates of the score at the KC Stadium, called at 4.50pm to say Hull had got a last-minute penalty.

There was good news though - Faggot saw his effort saved and the tortoises' match against Swindon finished goalless. And, with the mighty Hatters holding on to victory, courtesy of a Ben Chorley diving header into his own net, we moved five points clear at the top, with nine more to play for.

Two-horse title race... what two-horse title race?!

One more thing, how on earth did the match sponsors choose Marlon as man of the match? He made one save all afternoon - albeit a brilliant save to tip a header over the bar just after we went ahead. Were the sponsors complimenting him on his goal kicks?

Scoop

23.04.05 WREXHAM 1 TOWN 2

The St Georges Day Massacre

If winning promotion without a ball being kicked in anger proved to be something of an anti climax, the fates finally conspired that the Championship title was settled on St George's Day in Wrexham. I believe the final score was 2-1 to the Hatters, but who really cares. We won; we are the deserved Champions, undoubtedly the best team in this league by the proverbial country mile.

Season ticket seating arrangements at the Kenny dictate that the crumbling old ground can at times have something of a sterile atmosphere, thus it was fitting the League trophy was finally won in front of the massed hordes who have travelled the length and breadth of the country to support the town all season; and how we all celebrated at the final whistle was a joy to behold. There were Can-cans, there were Congas, there was singing, there was more dancing, there were hand shakes, there were kisses, there was back slapping and there was hugging, and finally there we were, in Wales, Luton Town, the new League One Champions.

The players and club officials were magnificent, the travelling supporters equally tremendous. I doubt if ever before has such a close bond has existed between the players and fans at our club; the joyous post match celebrations exemplified this. Each and every Luton fan inside the ground felt as if we had been invited to an exclusive very select party; children were ecstatic, women were shrieking, fully grown men with receding hairlines and expanding waistlines, veterans of previous promotions and cup glory, were close to tears. Something very special occurred in Wrexham, the memory of the day will go down into Luton Town folklore as one of the best in its proud 120 year history.

Champagne celebrations carried on long into the night. At long last our much maligned town has something it can be truly proud of, let us all hope that finally, the club and town itself can work closely together and go forward from here to build the new stadium the club so desperately needs and deserves.

Nous sommes imbattable, we are unbeatable. We are the Champions.

TtWC

Sharpe Angle

So – promotion – great, well done Mike Newell and the players. But some of the congratulations should also be conveyed to someone who seems now to have become an enemy of the club – no, not Cherry Newbery, who also deserves to bask in some of the reflected glory – I am thinking of Big Fat Joe.

Yes, I know he blotted his copybook with his sour remarks about the club while he was at Forest – but, be honest, how lenient would you be prepared to be about a former employer who owed you a six figure sum and refused to cough up?

Anyway, Joe was the first manager to give Luton Town back its pride after Lennie Lawrence and the like's apparent desire to see us remain 'a n ice little club' which knew its place.

Admit it, Joe's stirring and winding up of the Plymouth fans and several others during our brief tenure in the bottom division, made for a fantastic atmosphere at so many games, and as for his immortal remarks, including the one about displaying his rear end in Harrods window, well, they deserve a book of their own.

And was it not Joe who brought to the club the most classy player ever to wear the colours – Jean Louis Valois? And what about Steve Howard, Sol Davis, Kevin Nicholls, Ahmet Brkovic, Steve Robinson, Russ Perrett, Chris Coyne, didn't he have something to do with their arrival and, in Howard's case, turning him from, can you believe, a midfielder, to a striker?

Okay, you might say that Joe's style of play was less stylish than Mike Newell's – perhaps, but soft-centred passing performances do not get you out of the bottom division. What, too, about that absolutely sensational run of consecutive victories at the end of our last promotion season which so nearly did the impossible and pegged back Plymouth – terrific.

I think supporters at least should be magnanimous enough to forgive and forget and to allow Joe to be restored to his rightful position as one of our all time icons, even though if we told him he had been reinstated to favour he would most likely tell us to **** off!

>>>> <<<<

After sitting and watching the first half of the FA Cup semi final between Arsenal and Blackburn, in which Blackburn players cynically kicked and hacked at anything that moved in a red shirt, and quite a bit that didn't, we arrived at Kenilworth Road to see the game against MK Dons, in which their players cynically kicked and hacked at anything that moved in a white shirt, and quite a bit that didn't.

That disappointed me particularly as Danny Wilson was a player who didn't need to resort to such tactics. Coming from Mark Hughes, who had the cheek to go on the radio and suggest that Arsene Wenger had no right to complain against his side's method of play, I expected it. After all, he was a dismal manager of Wales after their one result of any note under his command against Italy, and his players would not be pursuing that style of play in which, for example, several players all target one opponent and commit enough fouls on him to receive a yellow card and then move off to allow a colleague to take over.

But MK, who should not even exist, resembled nothing so much as a thuggish, half-witted pub side which knows no better.

Okay, I accept that sides with limited resources have to make the best of what they got and they are not there just to be fodder for better teams, but by and large these type of tactics are completely pointless as the better side almost invariably eventually produces a goal and goes on to win while the kickers and hackers end up with a reputation just like the old Wimbledon who, er, of course, are not exactly unrelated to the current MK Dons, are they – ah, it all begins to make sense.

By the way, in both of these games the referees were appallingly lenient and unwilling to clamp

down on the perpetrators of the foul play. One early red card for this type of play and also for foul and abusive language would soon cut it out.

>>>> <<<<

I was sitting in my office the other day when I was suddenly transported back to Saturday, December 6, 1969.

Ring any bells? No? Well, it was one of, if not the, most humiliating days of Luton Town's – and my – history. It was the day they were knocked out of the FA Cup by Southern League side Hillingdon Borough in the Second Round.

And who was the Hillingdon Borough local paper reporter given the task of reporting on perhaps the finest day in that club's history?

Yes, it was me.

Someone at work had found a programme from that game whilst clearing out some junk at their home and had spotted in it my name. Thinking it couldn't possibly actually be me, they had brought it in to give me a small laugh at such a coincidence.

No, it was me alright, I told them as it all came flooding back, and that was the day on which my fledgling career as a rookie reporter at the Hillingdon Weekly Post almost came to an end.

I was initially quite happy about having to cover the game. After all, Luton, with the likes of Malcolm MacDonald, Graham French, Alan Slough and Chris Nicholl in their ranks, were going to bury Borough and I would write a generous piece about how defiantly the minnows had thwarted their glamorous rivals until finally giving in to the late winner which allowed the League lads to move on towards the serious business of the 3rd Round.

I wrote the programme notes, which cost supporters one shilling to read – 'Hillingdon have it all to gain, they have nothing to lose' I wrote. As for Luton, 'currently riding high on top of the 3rd Division, they are expected to win and to do so with considerable ease.' I rounded off my piece by lying, 'Let's hope for an exciting tussle, a keen match, plenty of thrills and a fair result'

What I really wanted was a 9-0 bashing for the team I covered on a weekly basis.

Hillingdon Borough, whose player/manager was the legendary ex-Fulham player, Jim Langley, won the match 2-1 after Luton went ahead in front of a record 9330 crowd, then sat back and ended up chucking the game away.

This was a real blow – especially as I was now expected to write a report praising them to the skies. I moped back to the office and asked to be excused penning my piece until I had calmed down a little and may be able to write a more balanced story.

No, we're going to do a special, celebratory issue and your report will be the central part of it, I was told.

I wrote a very downbeat piece explaining that Hillingdon had somehow squeezed through against the run of play and should really have been hammered out of sight.

You can imagine how well that went down with the locals when it appeared – there were protestors outside our offices, letters by the sackload demanded my dismissal.

Quite why they didn't get rid of me, other than the fact that the paper, which brought out fourteen different editions each week, boasted only eight reporters and could ill afford to lose one, I'll never know. Mind you, I was switched from Hillingdon Borough to Harrow Borough for the next season.

And Jim Langley didn't send me a Christmas card.

Graham Sharpe

42 Years, 5 Relegations, 6 Promotions

(unless they've cocked it up)...

...10 unsuccessful relegation bids, 6 failed promotion battles and only 15 mid table seasons since I was blessed by the discovery of Kenilworth Road. But this one was different. Normally you can see it coming. Especially the relegations. But usually you can also tell if you have a potential promotion winning team. A proper one that is, not one which might just scuff into the last play off position if it has a bit of luck. In 1968 for instance we knew that we would be close despite the dreadful previous season. Keith Allen and Max Dougan had already turned things around and we had good young players.

1970 was a mere continuation, though it ranks as the most determined bid so far to cock things up. We had a tremendous team which had finished third the previous season. But two wins and six defeats in the ten games after Christmas almost denied the team of MacDonald and Nicholl. Luckily Bristol Rovers proved even more determined than the lads to avoid promotion and so that richly talented side who should have walked the division managed to scrape to promotion.

1974 doesn't count. It was a statistical fluke. We were an above average upper mid-table side. Today we would have been a fair bet for the play-offs, no more. 50 points is the lowest ever total for a side finishing second in a 42 game season, a mere 15 old points (or 23 new points) behind Middlesbrough. It was hardly surprising that we came straight back down again, although in the end the team made a decent attempt to avoid relegation denied only by Leeds United's perfidy in their final game at Tottenham. Never has a side so richly deserved to lose a European cup final.

1982 was sublime. We had been building up to it for several seasons. Promotion was never in doubt. It was us top, the rest nowhere. I forget who finished second. Whoever it was were not fit to lick our boots.

And that was it for the next 20 years, though of course for the first ten of those we could not have won promotion (though a championship would have been nice). In 2002, back in the fourth division, promotion was the minimum requirement, and it turned out to be a bit of a stroll.

Which brings us to 2005. I certainly did not see this one coming. With Spring and Boyce off to pastures new, and Howard nearly going too I would have settled for avoiding a relegation battle. Certainly the play-offs would have been my most optimistic ambition. I still can't quite work out what has gone so right. Curtis Davies has been superb as he has gained experience (though still with residual Marvinesque tendencies), but how has Brko suddenly become one of the most effective midfield players in the division? And why have Underwood and Vine, good honest players both, made such a difference?

Not that I am complaining. Now we have to start worrying again what will happen next year. I do not underestimate this side. Beresford has been excellent. Davies, Coyne and Davis are well up to standard though we need another defender and some cover. I am surprised that Nicholls has not replaced Beckham in the England side and Brkovic will manage. We shall have to see how the rest of the midfield develops. Will Howard score goals? Who knows? But the answer to that may determine whether we have another relegation scrap or whether we lay waste the division on our way to join the rich and corrupt. I know which my money is on...

Clark

PS: You may have read elsewhere in this organ that a correspondent writing under the Clark name admits to drinking in Luton Conservative club prior to the Bristol City match. I should like to make it clear that the aforesaid Clark has no connection with me and that I have never drunk in Luton - nor indeed any other - Conservative club. Furthermore, the imposter Clark is nothing but a dilettante. Where was he in '68?

Following Luton at Easter

The Easter fixtures, home to Barnsley on Good Friday, away to Torquay on Easter Monday, seemed to offer a great opportunity of seeing the Town pick up six valuable points and having a bit of a holiday at the same time. The moving of the Barnsley game to Friday was so that it could be on Sky, of course, and I enjoy watching the Town on the box a little less than the team appears to enjoy playing on it. No decision to make there, then, the question was, how to get to Torquay?

With my forthcoming bike ride from John O'Groats to Land's End in mind, this looked like a good chance to get in some training, so on the Thursday I caught the train from Sheffield to Leicester and cycled to Bedford, where I enjoyed the hospitality of the Kempstons and a few beers at the Wellington (beer is an integral part of the training regime, of course). On Friday I cycled through God's other county* to Luton, arriving in plenty of time for the game; enough time, in fact, for a pint or two at the Bricklayers. Lovely sunny day, good crowd despite the TV cameras, unfortunately the team failed to turn up. No need to say more.

After the game I cycled through Dunstable to Ivinghoe, at the foot of the Chilterns, where I stayed the night at the youth hostel. Bit of a misnomer, that. I mean, I'm 50, but most people there were older than me! Saturday saw me cycling through Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire to the Cotswolds in Gloucestershire. Another good day for cycling, and the chance of a pint in the village of Hook Norton, home of the brewery of the same name, too good to be missed.

The youth hostel in Stow on the Wold provided a bed for the night, and the next morning I continued towards Torquay, following Fosse Way, the old Roman Road, as far as Bath, then turning off to Bristol. Not enough time to cycle all the way to Devon before Monday's game (not at my pace, anyway), so I caught the train to Totnes and stayed at the youth hostel nearby. On Monday, after pottering about the lanes of South Devon for a couple of hours, I made my way into Torquay. The Crown & Sceptre, half a mile from the ground, was easily found with plenty of time for a pint or two before the game. Strangely, most of the customers were Luton supporters.

The team's performance more than made up for Friday's horror, especially as Hull slipped up with a draw on Saturday and a defeat at Oldham on Monday. After cycling 275 miles in five days, I felt I was entitled to put my feet up on the journey back to Sheffield, by train.

I'll be tackling the big one, John O'Groats to Land's End, between 31st May and 11th June. If anyone would like to sponsor me, please send cheques payable to "Médecins Sans Frontières" to me at 68 Summer Street, Sheffield, S3 7NT, or you can make pledges by email to will.larter@capita.co.uk, or in person at the Bricklayers on 30th April.

Will Larter

* The first one being Yorkshire, of course.

SLUMMING IT

Ever considered that it's not just us that has erm... a "strong dislike" of a certain town in Hertfordshire? Ever noticed how certain elements of the press are none to slow to throw a bad word in that direction?

Great, isn't it?! Here's a couple of examples.

somebody mowing a lawn. Ray Khandpur, the salon's manager, who says he is not willing to have his chest waxed, refuses to divulge names but says that at least one Chelsea footballer is a regular here along with several Watford players. He refuses to say what treatments they have.



Watford

PROS

- Victoria's big chance to go back to HER home town
- He could join as player-manager after the departure of Ray Lewington
- A truly great chance to show off his impressive leadership qualities
- Could play in whatever position he wants

CONS

- Too close to the mother-in-law perhaps
- No trophies, er, ever
- Away days at Burnley and Stoke might not appeal
- Could he handle the white-hot pressure of the M1 derby if Luton are promoted?

Arch rivals



Wembley had its twin towers, the Stade de France has its magnificent pointy bits and Vicarage Road has the Bill Mainwood Programme Hut. They don't make lop-sided fibreglass portacabins like they used to.

watford v Ipswich

3pm tomorrow, Vicarage Road

Tickets: £25-£30 (£15 concs, £5 accompanied under-16s). Tel: 0870 111 1881. Referee: Kevin Wright (Cambridgeshire)

Facts: Watford have conceded at least three goals to Ipswich in five of their last eight meetings and have not beaten them since September 1998. Standout bet: Kuqi to score first: 7-1 (bet 365)

Ray Lewington reckons his young Watford side suffer from an inferiority complex. Perhaps that is understandable living in a soulless satellite town. They play some entertaining football but seem to have lost their sting. When Danny Webber doesn't score it's a fair bet no one else will.

Verdict: WAITFORD DOWN ON THEIR LUCK

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Hoof and Villa

As everyone knows, there was a time, not that long ago, when the knee breaking Oak Road seated stand was the home terrace. It was a wonderful place to watch a game and in the early and mid eighties, a great place to be entertained from pre-kick off right the way through to slinging out time. Back in the earnest eighties (a crap time apart from LTFC and the odd band like The Ramones), lesser teams were punished and despatched on the pitch while on the terraces wit and style reigned supreme.

It beggars belief now, but the Oak Road used to be split into three cages, each of which 'accommodated' about three or four thousand fans. Ridiculous. Luckily, such numbers rarely turned up. When they did (mainly when we played Spurs and W*tf*rd), people often disappeared or fared in the same way a sachet of ketchup might if tightened in a vice.

At all other times, there was room to lounge and swear with impunity, and to study the beautiful tap-off and sprint around tactics favoured by our tiny, skilful players. Me and my chums revelled in this stuff. If we didn't win, we were still playing damned attractive football, just like West Ham and the aforementioned Spurs, and nothing like the paltry kick up the pitch despicabilities served by the aforementioned W*tf*rd.

Getting bodily picked up in a surge during the biggest games was immense fun, although such fixtures meant missing the sartorial finesse and lively, informed banter shared by 'Hoof' and 'Villa'. Hoof and Villa were (perhaps still are) two gents who attended every game. Their attention to footballing matters, it has to be said, was continually sidetracked by Hoof's extremely clever metaphors. Well, the one metaphor he had anyway, where he described the players as pints of beer. Hoof used to bet, partly as a way of enthraling Villa, and partly as a way of getting booze. Villa might say something about the game, to which Hoof would carefully answer that 'they're not players running out there, they're pints of beer.' Villa loved it so much he kept coming back for more, time and time again and used to take every opportunity to set up Hoof.

Hoof wore Pringle v-necks, smoked Hamlet cigars and had a catchy little tune called 'Hoof it', which might have got to the opposition, but never did. It went:

Hoof it, hoof it, hoof it up the field;

Hoof it up the field (just) as far as you can.

It was a strange song. Scanned and everything, but puzzling... though not unendearing... It was certainly shite. Villa loved it and, after a while, heartily joined in. Villa was besotted with Hoof, who was at least two feet taller. Hoof epitomised the downward slide of the post Empirical English gentry. While his grandfather may have been from the same gene pool as Basil Rathbone, his Dad likely hailed from the Terry-Thomas school of caddery. Hoof's youth was probably styled on the work of Robin Askwith, but he'd become like "Boycie" from *Only Fools and Horses* with a touch of Mayor McCheese. Villa was Wolfy's slimy moustachioed weasel buddy from *Citizen Smith*. Kind of Peter Lorre if Peter Lorre tried to be an 80s casual hoolie type, with all the 80s casual hoolie brain, but none of the malevolence. Bless 'im.

Hoof used to shout 'fresh meat Trevor' whenever Trevor Aylott ran anywhere near the opposition. Villa loved this. To everyone else, it became tiresome. It was probably no coincidence, but after promising much in a target man kind of way, Aylott left sharpish.

Hoof and Villa were dull yet decent. Given the choice between them and the receding, swearing bespectacled fathers leaping out of the chairs near us in the Kenny these days, I know who I would rather pick. I would rather hear daft homemade ditties about "hoofing" than unleashed kitchen cupboard reps unloading their week's frustrations as angrily as possible, or hear the

masses append 'Knees Up Mother Brown' with the dreary, tawdry, shit-witted dirge which makes toe-curlingly crude commentary on the career status of Mrs Thorpe (mother of Tony).

K1



TWO FINGERS FOR MR GURNEY

Obviously this season has been an absolute delight for us, fans of Luton Town, and after the events of the summer of 2003 has represented a strong case of giving a certain John Gurney 'the finger'. It is even better to be able to change that to a large V-sign though, with the second finger being provided by the egg chasers of Bedford Blues. As previous victims of Gurney, their fate at that time probably helped speed the opposition to him at Kenilworth Road into action, and possibly saved our club. So, it is a delight to report that both clubs have enjoyed success this season, and we offer warm congratulations to our county neighbours for their recent victory in the Powergen Challenge Shield. Even if we haven't the faintest idea what that's all about.

THROWING-IN OR THROWING-UP?

Following my article on offside in the last fanzine I was inundated with requests for a similar piece on the throw-in. Okay, it was my brother who requested it but nevertheless I thought you all might be interested in the history of this rule too. The data has been collected from various sources such as my own personal library of football books and the now indispensable internet.

Contained below are the actual written rule changes according to records I can find. As you will see, it has not been deemed necessary to alter Rule 15 since 1931 though the television era which seemed to force FA/FIFA/UEFA to set up annual rule-change meetings who then feel obliged to justify their own existence by tinkering with the laws on an annual basis will probably have ideas of their own. For one season in the early 90s, the kick-in (as an option) was tried instead of the throw-in in the Ryman/Diadora league. I happened to meet a manager of a club in that league during a training course and he had informed his players that anyone using the kick-in that season would be instantly substituted. An admirable case of the workers defying the management with common sense I think.

The problem with all these new rules or new emphases is that a lot of the basic rules seem to get ignored. When was the last time you saw a foul-throw given? Why do referees spend ages telling players where to take the throw from when taking it from the wrong place is an offence? The officials should tell the player once and if he sneaks forward more than a couple of yards then he should be penalised. I am sure I have seen referees give a player a second chance too, where he blows up and sends the player back to where he should have taken it from. One annoying aspect is when the linesman waits for the referee to give the direction of the throw before agreeing with it, but this is actually in the linesman's instructions. If the linesman is not sure of the direction he may consider giving it to the defending team but should always be positive and adamant. However, if the referee thinks differently then the linesman must alter his signal to agree with the referee.

YEAR	RULE CHANGE
1848	The first rules are drawn up at Cambridge University and include a throw-in rule for balls that go over the side-lines but throws can be taken with one hand only and hence thrown some distance. These rules were not used everywhere but the fact that a goal had to be kicked prohibited scoring by throw-in in all the early rule books.
1856/57	The Sheffield rules are drawn up by the first official football club which was founded in 1855 [don't write in as I know this date is disputed].
1862	The Uppingham rules of 1862 had a form of rugby line-out instead of the soccer throw-in and the player who kicked it out had to retrieve it and put it back in. It had to be put in at right angles from the touchline.
1863	The original Football Association is formed and its rules largely agree with the Uppingham method. However, the player who first touched the out-ball had to put it back in and the ball was not in play until it had hit the ground (similar to today's drop-ball).
1877	The London Football Association and the Sheffield Association agree to use the same rules.
1882	The International Football Association Board is established to look after the rules for everyone. The two-handed throw-in was introduced and all handling during the game finally banned (except for goalkeepers of course).
1895	A player taking a throw-in must now stand on the touchline.
1898	The number of official rules reaches 17 of which The Throw-in is number 15 (and still is).
1920/21	The rule that a player cannot be offside at a throw-in is introduced.

1925	The rules are amended so that a player taking a throw-in must have both feet on the touchline. [Obviously players used to stretch the rules even in those days!]
1931	The penalty for a foul-throw is changed from a free-kick to the throw being given to the opposing side. [Referees take note – this is still the case...]

LAW 15 – THE THROW-IN - THE CURRENT RULE –

A throw-in is a method of restarting play. A goal cannot be scored directly from a throw-in [note – a goal-kick or corner-kick is awarded if the ball is thrown directly into either an opponent's goal or your own goal respectively].

A throw-in is awarded:

- ◇ when the whole of the ball passes over the touchline, either on the ground or in the air, from the point where it crossed the touchline and to the opponents of the player who last touched the ball.

At the moment of delivering the ball, the thrower must:

- ◇ face the field of play;
- ◇ have part of each foot either on the touchline or on the ground outside the touch line; [note – an acrobatic somersault may be performed as long as the thrower lands in the correct position before releasing the ball.]
- ◇ use both hands;
- ◇ deliver the ball from behind and over his head.

The thrower may not touch the ball again until it has touched another player. The ball is in play immediately it enters the field of play.

Infringements/Sanctions - throw-in taken by a player other than the goalkeeper:

If, after the ball is in play, the thrower touches the ball a second time (except with his hands) before it has touched another player: an indirect free-kick is awarded to the opposing team, the kick to be taken from the place where the infringement occurred.

If, after the ball is in play, the thrower deliberately handles the ball before it has touched another player, either:

- ◇ a direct free-kick is awarded to the opposing team, the kick to be taken from the place where the infringement occurred;
- ◇ a penalty kick is awarded if the infringement occurred inside the thrower's penalty area.

Infringements/Sanctions - throw-in taken by the goalkeeper

If, after the ball is in play, the goalkeeper touches the ball a second time (except with his hands), before it has touched another player: an indirect free-kick is awarded to the opposing team, the kick to be taken from the place where the infringement occurred.

If, after the ball is in play, the goalkeeper deliberately handles the ball before it has touched another player, either:

- ◇ a direct free-kick is awarded to the opposing team if the infringement occurred outside the goalkeeper's penalty area, the kick to be taken from the place where the infringement occurred;
- ◇ an indirect free-kick is awarded to the opposing team if the infringement occurred inside the goalkeeper's penalty area, the kick to be taken from the place where the infringement occurred.

If an opponent unfairly distracts or impedes the thrower: he is cautioned for unsporting behaviour and shown the yellow card [note that there is no strict stipulation for a minimum distance away from the thrower that an opponent must stand.].

For any other infringement of this Law:

- ◇ the throw-in is taken by a player of the opposing team.

Further information can be taken from an *England Football Association Memorandum* thus:

- ◇ The thrower should ideally be no more than 1 yard back from the touchline.
- ◇ The thrower must use two hands in a continuous motion. Beware the thrower using the strength of one arm/hand to propel the ball, this is illegal. The ball must not be dropped from above the head.
- ◇ The thrower must deliver the ball from behind and over their head in a continuous motion. This does not mean that the ball must leave the hands from an overhead position. A natural throwing movement starting from behind and over the head will usually result in the ball leaving the hands when they are in front of the vertical plane of the body. The throwing movement must be continued to the point of release.

Referees very often penalise a thrower, if the ball is released in front of the vertical plane of the thrower's body, but this is still a legal throw – so long as the arm movement is continuous before the ball is released and the ball was delivered from behind and over the thrower's head. Throwing the ball at an opponent is considered unsporting and should be punished by a direct free-kick and possibly a booking for the thrower.

So, there you have it. There has been much more history to the throw-in than I imagined there would be but no reference to why the ball was originally thrown in instead of kicked in can be located. This is football after all!

Cliff Saunders

THIS FANZINE NEEDS YOU!!

It's been a good season for the fanzine as well as the team, and it's been a delight to have so much good quality writing to publish. As always, the date of the next issue is at the mercy of the fixture planners (or the computer as we called it in a more innocent age). The plan will be to have a new issue on sale at the first home game of the 2005/06 season, with a deadline of approximately 2 weeks earlier. So, please send in any match reports, articles, letters, cartoons, cuttings or whatever else by post or email to the addresses on page 2. Thanks.

My Spring Tour - 3 successive away games!

Port Vale, Oldham and Torquay (might still be 5 - Bournemouth if I get a ticket and Wrexham to come, can't do Doncaster due to playing league cricket)

I can't remember the last time I did three successive away games - living in deepest Gloucestershire, often playing, or work/family getting in the way. I always get irrationally excited on match days, up early and can't wait to get going. In fact out goes my daily professional persona and I revert to my adolescent tribalism. You know: one dimensional, chanting in the bathroom, quick check on team news on Ceefax or on the web, unable to listen to one's spouse or children over breakfast as I scan the paper for any news about the Town. In fact unable to do anything (top tip - never attempt DIY on match days) but focus on the game ahead. Let's get going. Come on you Hatters!

I have my rituals at away games; scarf out of the window (home knitted orange with blue and white flashes circa late 70s - yes, I am that sad bastard), listen to Fighting Talk in the car, arrive in good time to have a couple of pints in a pub with a mix of home and away fans (apart from Cardiff!), a bit of grub and arrive at the ground with time to pick up a fanzine and programme.

Port Vale (the pre match vibes not good!)

In the end I travelled up on my own after being let down at the last moment and although it was my second visit ominously I got lost. Stupid really, saw another Luton car and like an idiot followed it. After several circuits (some repeated) of the Potteries I eventually found the pub by the ground to meet my mates. Big mistake, pub heaving, not easy to drink (if you got to the bar) without endangering your teeth as you try to sup. By the time I got into the ground programmes were sold out, "might have some in a few minutes" kept being repeated. However the game started and we were soon in front - no worries now. I think I was as complacent as the boys on the pitch as I mentioned knowledgeably to Pete (he was only watching Luton for the second time this season) "Oh we never lose once we are in front". As the game wore on we gradually lost our way and their equaliser looked a fluke, but then I am biased. The second half was painful as we stuttered unable to put our normal fluent passing together and our defending looked dodgy. The second goal was no surprise and neither was the penalty later. A flat day out further compounded by getting lost again and stuck in roadworks!

Oldham Athletic

One problem about going to games from here is getting people to go with, several journeys on my own (saddo). I often travel with a mate who supports the other team. This one was different, Neil who lives opposite and isn't really a supporter of any team is trying to do all 92 league clubs and this was his visit to Oldham. He was doing three grounds over Easter after this game. It was a new ground for me too. A warm welcome from home fans in the club bar made up for the real ale being off, and the weather was excellent. I had been previously warned how cold it could be at Oldham. Game off to a great start with Underwood's thumping drive. Another couple of near misses put us in good heart. Sadly the centre of defence went "walkabout" on 35 minutes to let Killen burst through to hit a good goal. Poor Chris Coyne normally awesome looked off the pace all game then gifted Luke Beckett yet another goal for him against the Town. A sticky ten minutes followed where they could have scored again. This was now reminiscent of the Vale game - surely we were not going to lose again. My mind flashed back to the fateful week in October when we lost three games on the trot. The Hatters at last started to push forward with purpose and in numbers; we now began to start using width and remembered where Sol was (we had been getting worried that he might have needed treatment for hypothermia earlier in the game). As news of Hull's goal feast at Bournemouth seeped through and we were just about to give up, Super Kev (who never gives up) crossed for Big Steve to head home. It shut up the pratts near me who had been giving Stevo stick all match!

Torquay United

Great day out with my boy. Started by shouting abuse and "bloody hooligans" at the Tory Fox Hunting Brigade in their green wellies gathered in our village while the scarf billowed provocatively out of the window. Good beer, followed by fish and chips on the front. Then the match! Dodgy start - goal behind after 6 minutes and the Gulls front men pulling us all over the place. Super Kev equalised after Howard's knock down. Now we started to play with more fluency and the second goal was a real beaut! Howard receives the ball on the left hand side just in their half, he hits a Beckham like pass across the pitch into the path of the running Foley he steams down the flank crosses perfectly for Holmes to head home. We are flying and should have scored again before half time. In the second half Underwood's speculative shot is palmed up by the "dodgy keeper" into the path of Howard who crashes into the net with the ball. Extensive "high tec" repair work involving groundsmen, chair and ties needed on the net afterwards. Berko goes close before Vine thumps home number four. Last part is notable for 7 minutes added on time for finding chair and net repairs! Howard played his best game for ages looking sharp, holding the ball up well, his distribution was excellent and was dominant in the air. Nicholls, like he was at Oldham was the heartbeat, never giving up snarling at the opposition and colleagues alike and playing decent football. Mike Newell is a gifted manager, bringing the best out of these players. Up the Hatters!

PS. Anyone in Glos/ Bristol area want to share a lift to games?

The Frampton Hatter

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FOR A NO OBLIGATION QUOTE

Up, Staying Up and Coping with Players Leaving.

We're up. I'm guessing somewhere else in this issue is another contributor's player-by-player marks-out-of-ten season review. Well, as we're up, I think every first team player and every member of the squad who has filled in deserves 10/10 and Mike Newell and his coaching team 11/10!

As for next season, staying up in the Championship would be an achievement in itself. Last issue of *MAAH* someone said that only 3 of the current squad would cut it at that level, and if we're talking about promotion to the Premiership they've got a point - however, just to stay up, that's another matter. All we have to do is be better than three other Championship teams. Just 3.

Just better than the following 3:

1. Whichever team comes up with us in the playoffs. Tranmere, Brentford etc. We've bettered them this season in League One - why not next season in the Championship?
2. Brighton or Twatford? These two teams have been hopeless this season and whichever of these two stay up this year will still struggle next season too. (Just a quick "Come on Brighton!" for this year though!)
3. Another Team to pick? Hull for instance. Maybe not, I've got a feeling that all their extra money will tell and under Peter Taylor they'll stay up. Coventry? Crewe? Gillingham? Plymouth? Or will another big club be this season's Forest (previously Sheff Wed and before that Man City) to make a balls up and be relegated?

And finally do not underestimate Mike Newell. He's had three seasons in football management and has had two promotions. At the start of this season we had lost 3 of our first team players and we still went up. He replaced an established defender (Boyce) with a youth teamer, covered the loss of an established midfielder (Spring) with a reshuffled midfield, and replaced a forward (Forbes) with a loanee. And we went up. Remember that for next season. Hope is important.

B.Dave.B.

VOTE NOW!!

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 (if we don't lose your votes in the meantime, like last year), when there are few match reports to do so. It is also traditional for this to be your opportunity to moan about the dross we've had to watch all season, to tell us who should be sacked and who should be executed, and where the blame should lie. So, should make interesting reading this time round...

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

Best Young Player

Best Town Performance

Worst Town Performance

Best Goal scored

Best Goal Conceded

Best Opponents

Worst Opponents

Idiot of the Year

Hero of the Year

Best Ground visited

Worst Ground visited

High Point of the Year

Low Point of the Year

Things to look forward to

Referees

If, in addition, there's anything you'd like to say about *Mad as a Hatter!* please feel free to mention it. We'll try and take on board any useful comments.

THE SPENDING BUG

Hello from Oz. Just thought I would add this to the article on Luton's Worst Players. With every one getting excited about Luton splashing the cash on new players and the transfer day deadline looming (at the time of writing), just remember our history on buying players, you can expect it with freebies or trainees, but a majority of them have not been what we as fans expected. Reading some of these names will either put a smile on our faces or make us cry. I will start with most expensive first and from the season 89/90 (when I started going to matches and Jimmy Ryan was manager) to the present day.

£750,000 Steve Davis, Burnley, Solid player, but Terry Westley had a habit of buying players from relegated sides and sadly that year none of them lost that feeling.

£585,000 Ian Feuer, West Ham, keeper only bettered by Marlon Beresford, giant of a man, saved a penalty against the scum.

£425,000 Mark Ovendale, Bournemouth, all this for a keeper that couldn't save, catch or keep goal, given a free transfer.

£400,000 Philip Gray, Fortuna Sittard, not that good second time round, another player who returned to disappoint as with Dibble, the Steins etc.

£325,000 Mick Harford, Derby Co, SUPERMAN, what a legend, already had scored the own goal to keep us up, then on this debut scores that cracking overhead kick against Oldham.

£275,000 Philip Gray, Tottenham, classy striker for us when fit, but always seemed to want a transfer.

£250,000 Kim Grant, Charlton Ath, did Lennie ever buy any good players? Couldn't score in a brothel.

£205,000 Johnny Vilstrup, Lyngby, hardest shot in Denmark, shame he couldn't hit the ball.

£200,000 Simon Davies, Man Utd, another Lennie buy, the only thing he ever did at Kenilworth Road, was score the winner for Macclesfield on his return.

£200,000 John Taylor, Bradford City, didn't score for a whole season, but before that was a very determined player.

£180,000 Steve Thompson, Bolton Wanderers, only bought by Pleat so he could swap for Oakes/Linton, so the poor bugger was set up, never really shone, but ended up in the Premiership with Leicester.

£160,000 Steve Claridge, Cambridge Utd, we must be the only club he never scored many for, still doing it for Wycombe. Couldn't trap a bag of cement for Luton, sold back to Cambridge after a couple of months.

£150,000 Kevin Nicholls, Wigan Ath, Captain Fantastic, great leader, Captain of the League 1 Championship winning side! Brought for £25,000 rising to £150,000 depending on appearances.

£150,000 David Oldfield, Leicester City, another bought by Westley from a relegated side, tried hard.

£150,000 Dwight Marshall, Plymouth Argyle, a good striker & very quick, popular player.

£150,000 Darren Patterson, Crystal Palace, tried to kill Keane (Roy), then they sold him to us, about all really.

£150,000 Chris Kamara, Leeds Utd. I remember starting the booing at the home game with Grimsby (bogey side hammering us 4-1 at the time). Came with such an image, just couldn't play football.

£110,000 Scott Oakes, Leicester City, swap deal with him and Linton coming and Thompson going. Luton's Player of the early nineties FA Cup run, plus some screaming goals (Derby at home etc).

£110,000 Des Linton, Leicester City, OK for a squad player.

£100,000 Vidar Riseth, Kongsvinger, poop for us, sell him and he ends up at Celtic for £1.5 million, what did Lennie do wrong (where should we start... - Ed).

£100,000 Graham Alexander, Scunthorpe Utd, Solid.

£100,000 Trevor Peake, Coventry City, slow as hell, but very good positioning, Luton's oldest player ever.

£100,000 Peter Thomson, NAC Breda, bloody hell, KRAP.

£80,000 Rob Matthews, Notts Co, why did we buy him? He sent us down from the old Div 1 (now Premier). Shocking player and person. I HATE HIM, where would we be now if it wasn't for him...

£75,000 Adrian Forbes, Norwich City, Fast.

£65,000 Carl Griffiths, Leyton Orient, a version of Gary Lineker - well he scored heaps from inside the box.

£60,000 Sol Davis, Swindon Town, hard as nails.

£50,000 Ian Benjamin, Southend Utd, their top scorer, scored a cracker against the Scum with his head, falling backwards live on the TV, never really played again, shocker.

£50,000 Paul Showler, Bradford City,

scored against the scum at their place.

£50,000 Steve Robinson, Preston NE, coming in to his own now.

£50,000 Steve Howard, Northampton Town, great player for Luton, and the history books will show it. Scored heaps for Luton, taking us up into the championship.

£50,000 Chris Coyne, Dundee, Mr Reliable, unlucky not to be captain, very solid.

£40,000 Alan White, Middlesbrough, 0-4 at home to the scum says it all.

£30,000 Ian Hillier, Tottenham, might not be here next season.

£25,000 Landry Zahana-Oni, Bromley, WHY?????????

£25,000 Paul Holsgrove, Wokingham Town, Jimmy Ryan's only signing.

£15,000 Fred Barber, Peterborough United, famous for his mask, can't even remember him playing.

£10,000 Chris Brooks, Ilkeston Town, ????

£10,000 Tony Adcock, Peterborough Utd, scored heaps for them, same as Fred.

£10,000 Nathan Jones, Merthyr Tidfil, another ghost.

£5,000 Justin Gentle, Borehamwood, ??

£5,000 Dean Standen, Welling Utd ???

Nominal Rocky Baptiste, POOP.

Nominal (or a free, records show different versions) Peter Holmes, Sheff Wed, still putting in solid displays.

So, when the board finally let Newell spend some hard earned cash, let's hope it's better than some of the names from the past.

PS: We Luton fans in Perth, Western Australia, are having a promotion meetup/pissup to celebrate winning the championship. Good Luck to all Hatter Fans.

Mark Newman, Australia

RAVING MAD!!!

Dear Mad,

Greetings from sunny Cornwall. This note is well overdue, so apologies for not getting in touch sooner. The fanzines are much appreciated, every word devoured and enjoyed, and I am glad you have been able to keep *Mad* as a *Hatter!* going.

I have only seen the Town three times so far this season, but how pleasant it is to live among a hard-core of Plymouth support and enjoy the Town's good results. I had worried a little when Mick Harford left, because he was very influential on the training ground, and much respected by the players, but with things going so well surely we can't cock it up now, can we?

My football watching is Falmouth Town in the Carling South Western League. It is taking time to get over Kenny withdrawal symptoms, and maybe they will last for the rest of my life, but I get some pleasure out of watching a bunch of honest part-timers doing their best. The drawback is that while I always hope Falmouth Town will win, I don't feel any real pain or pleasure over results, and for the first time ever I often leave the game before the final whistle, so that I can be back in the bar (whisky £1.60 a double compared to Kenilworth Road's £3.60 last season) in time to see the results come through. Luton Town is still what really matters.

And retirement? I love it, except for the weekly pangs on Saturday when I know it is Bickland Park instead of Kenilworth Road. But we are living in a lovely part of the country, a town I have known and loved all my life, so just to be here is a dream come true.

Once again, thanks for the fanzines, and best wishes for the rest of the season.

Sincerely,

Brian Swain

Falmouth.

Dear Mad,

I enjoyed the article 'Worst Town Players... Ever?'. This is a difficult topic, as what defines a worst player? For example Darren McDonough was not great but he was playing in the top division - in a lower league he might have been very good. Some others were playing in struggling teams but might have been better in a more successful side.

The only two players with whose inclusion in the article I would disagree are David Geddis - who can forget his winning goal against Hull - and Damian Matthew who I thought did ok in his brief loan spell.

With regard to the 1970s, there are not so many candidates as we had fairly good teams most of the time and there were no loans and squads did not change around so much but I would nominate a few players who made a reasonable number of appearances from which to be judged:

Bobby Thomson. Came at end of career from Birmingham in 1972. He did play 2 whole seasons in old 2nd division and we won promotion in spite of him as he was always slow. In Div 1 he was found out and lost his place to Steve Buckley which was like night and day!

David Carr. Anonymous midfielder who somehow managed to make 43 appearances between 1976 and 1978, but was never worth his place.

Dixie Deans. Most remembered for his display as sub goalie at Notts County in 1976 which was in fact the only memorable performance he ever made although he did manage 6 goals in 14 appearances.

Steve Taylor. Came with good goalscoring reputation from Oldham in 1978. Scored once

in 20 games which says it all.

Graham Jones made 39 appearances between 1975 and 1979. Similar comments as for David Carr above. Sometimes they were in the same team together!

Regards,

Andrew Wallace.

Dear Mad,

Just a short note to congratulate my fellow contributors to the last edition of the MAAH fanzine. I believe it was the best edition for some time and I really enjoyed reading it. Special plaudits are due to the prolific Tony Allbones (three articles) and to TtWC whoever he may be for the hilarious Euro-sketch on page 10. However, I am not convinced that Tony's assertion that "this fanzine has never printed... a 'Worst XI' team." is entirely accurate as I seem to recall many such essays. What I am convinced about is that Paul Holsgrove is quite definitely the worst Luton Town player in the last 20 years. To start a game and be substituted after 25 minutes (not for injury) must be close to unmatchable in the professional ranks. However, this was not enough for our Paul as he also managed to turn a game single-handedly as a second-half substitute. We were at home to QPR and 1 up as I recall; Mr. Holsgrove came on and proceeded to feed the up-and-coming Les Ferdinand who equalised and probably scored the winner too (my mind is a little hazy on such things).

I also feel obliged to stick up for Steve Thompson, the ex-Bolton midfielder who was exchanged with Leicester City for Scott Oakes and Des Linton. Thompson had been signed for Luton for the princely sum of £140,000 and later proceeded to forge a long career with the Foxes; whilst Oakes and Linton managed to achieve stardom in just one game on the telly for Town. If only all our games had been televised, Waster Oakes might have got his arse in gear more often. In fact, if performance is gauged against potential then Scott Oakes would be a great contender for biggest ever Luton disappointment. Steve Thompson was a reliable midfielder in his prime who Luton fans never saw the best of in his few games: whilst Oakes and Linton were two young pretenders who flattered to deceive like most of Pleat's 'in the know' signings. Leicester let them go for a reason.

Geoff Aunger wasn't that bad either. Good first touch but a distinct lack of pace, Aunger suffered from not being given a regular start in a consistent position and from being Canadian. Chris Kamara on the other hand got a regular spot but will always stick in my mind as the man who guided a neat back-header into the path of a Cambridge United forward to give them an unbelievable comeback draw after being 3-0 down with 17 minutes to go. That match remains one of the worst footballing memories in my era. Nevermind, I am looking forward to the fanzine continuing its comeback in the next issue!

Cliff Saunders

Milton Keynes

Dear Mad,

Younger readers — please bear with me as I set the scene; older readers will remember. Long, long ago we did not have the Internet or local radio so our only source of team news was the *Luton News* and even this was hard to come by if you did not live in Bedfordshire. So often we arrived at Kenilworth Road with little or no idea as to the team. Of course the bloke behind us knew someone who knew (probably through bumping into Graham French in the pub) and you would never believe how many people knew someone whose aunt was a landlady to one of the younger players who had told her who

was in and who was out. So in the hour before kick-off there would be much speculation as to who would be playing and who would not. I put it to you that the mark of a truly poor player would be the total dismissal of his chances of playing by all the pre-match experts. "Well, he can't play *him* after last week." "Surely there must be a youngster who is better than *him*." And so on. And then when the team was announced over the Tannoy one could hear the intake of breath and the groan when *his* name was given. Week after week, the same. "*He* must do really well at training." "Perhaps *he's* related to the manager. No other reason to pick *him*." Every week. So, good readers, I give you the name of the player who caused the most head-shaking over the longest period that I can remember. Forget about the one game flops. I give you: DAVID CARR. Forty or so games in the second division in the mid-seventies. No goals. And, to the best of my recollection, no redeeming features. At least Drain Turner scored that cracking goal against The-team-that-must-not-be-named. Never can I remember a player who caused so much grief over so many games. Bontcho Guentchev may have been a flop but he did have a pedigree and could, on just a few occasions, show a touch of genius. But David Carr? No, nay, never. So that's my first nomination.

The other way of looking at the greatest flops is to count the money. I am not aware that David Carr cost anything. So how about those who troubled the accountants? Sadly we have to look at Ricky Hill. Not the Ricky Hill who was, is and ever more shall be one of the finest players ever to strut his stuff for the Town but his misguided namesake who may well be the worst manager we have ever seen and certainly knew a thing or two about throwing good money after bad. Remember ROCKY BAPTISTE, the Kanu of the lower leagues? Not that he cost us anything much. But Ricky paid money — £100,000 no less — for PETER THOMPSON. Remember? But it gets worse. In my 'umble opinion, Ricky's worst deal was MARK OVENDALE. Seriously. True, he came to us with a good reputation — best keeper in the division, I think. And a dodgy hip. And a price tag in excess of £400,000 at a time when we were heading nowhere. Now I suggest that even the best goalkeeper in the world will let in goals if he has a dodgy defence in front of him and I also suggest that a great goalie won't score enough to make a difference. Surely all that money could and should have been better spent. So those are my nominations. Forget the loan players and one-game flops. A truly great flop either has to play again and again until the crowd is reduced to despair or has to cost money and the more money the worse. May we never see their like again. Please.

Steven Whitehead

A Wingrave Hatter

Dear Mad,

A couple of things - first I think that your correspondent was a bit harsh on David Geddis. He was actually a class player. I remember well an excellent equaliser in a game against Bolton.

Second, I was listening to the wireless earlier and heard the disruption by Hearts fans of the minute's silence for the death of the pope. I do not wish to offend anyone, but why should there have been a minute's silence in the first place. It was entirely inappropriate. I seem to recall you asking the same question when some rich bloke who owned Chelsea (can't even remember his name) managed to crash his helicopter. A couple of years ago there was a minute's silence for the queen mother. Again, I do not wish to offend anyone, but in my opinion she was an old woman of questionable political affiliations who spent her long life spending your money and mine on gin and the gee-gees. At a match at Bristol

Rovers a bloke near me started singing "Who drank all the gin?" and was thrown out for his trouble. But he spoke, or rather sang, for me.

Sometimes it is appropriate. I am happy to observe a silence for some great football character, or even some fan whom I've never met but held a season ticket for 50 years or something. These things mean something to the game or the club. But we have too many silences now. And what do you do if you wish to convey that you have no respect for the subject of the silence? Maybe we should have a general silence before each match in which each fan can decide for him or herself whom they are being silent for. In fact come to think of it the neighbour's cat croaked on the same day as the queen mother...

Practically there now. Only receivership can stop us now.

See yer.

Clark

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

For the benefit of younger readers, Paul Holsgrove was the one and only signing of manager Jimmy Ryan during his time in charge of the club.

Holsgrove lads all on target for world's most relative hat-trick



THE football family Holsgrove are the toast of Non-League football after their unique feat last weekend.

When Lee scored in Windsor and Eton's 3-3 draw with Heybridge Swifts it completed an amazing hat-trick — all three brothers finding the net for the same team in the same match!

Eldest brother Paul started the ball rolling and youngest brother Peter netted the second but the prospect of Lee scoring looked remote as he was sat on the bench awaiting his league debut for Windsor.

But that all changed when he came on after the interval and his nonchalant chip midway through the half had awayaks searching their record books.

It was great when Lee got on the scoresheet having only come

By NIAL CAMPBELL

on at half time," said Peter Holsgrove, who is hoping the experts from *Guinness Book of Records* will confirm the brothers' feat.

"The disappointing thing for us was that once Lee had put us in front, we didn't go on and win the game. That would have capped the whole day."

The Holsgrove's father, John, had an illustrious professional career that saw him play in the top flight at Wolves before a

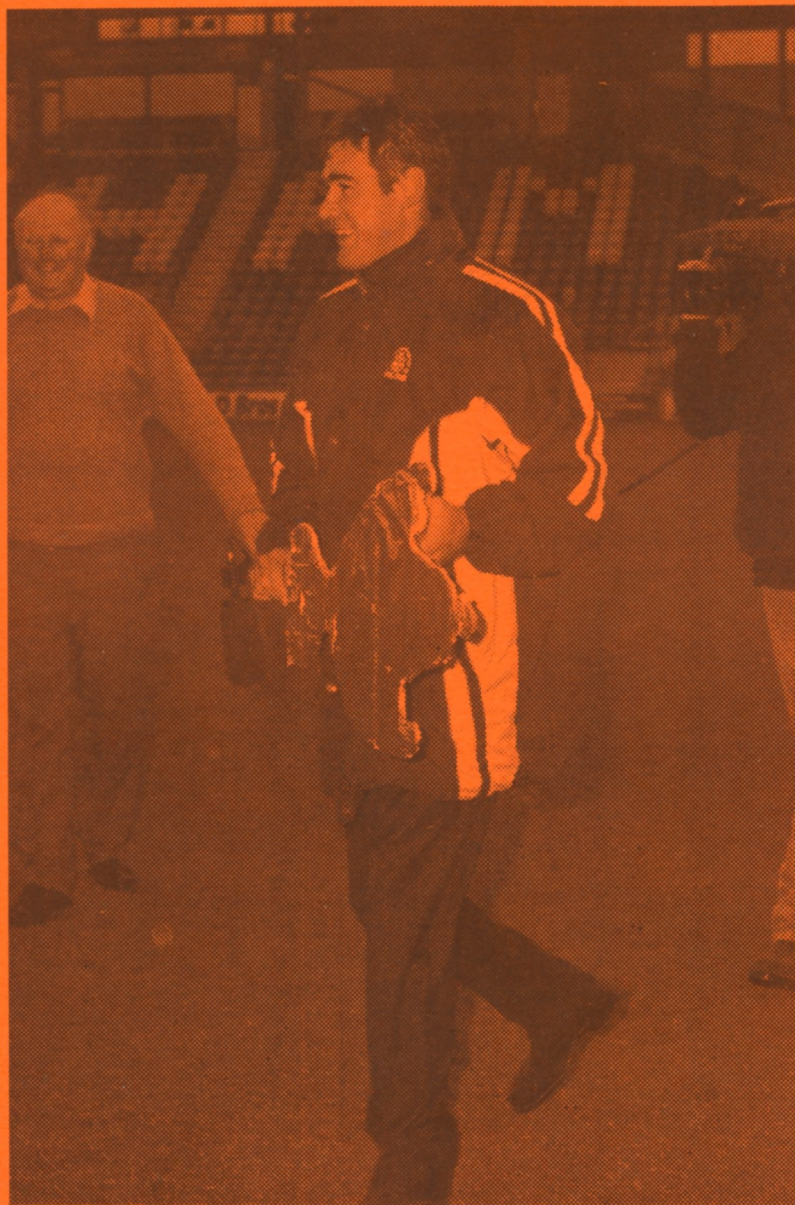
move to Crystal Palace. Paul began his career at Aldershot and had a succession of clubs before winding up at Windsor where he is an assistant to new player manager Dave Carroll.

It was his influence that got Lee playing again with his two brothers after they all turned out for Hayes in the Ryman League last season.

Lee had stopped playing last May and he is still yet to attain proper match fitness so when he does, what odds on a repeat performance?

WE ARE FAMILY: Signing for Hayes with then manager Terry Brown

MAN OF THE MOMENT



Mike Newell looks a happy man, but still slightly embarrassed at all the attention, as he joins the title winning celebrations at Wrexham