

SKY BET CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFF FINAL

COVENTRY CITY V LUTON TOWN

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27 MAY 2023 - 4:45PM

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sky bet PLAY-OFFS | EFL

SKY BET CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFF FINAL

OFFICIAL MATCHDAY PROGRAMME









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Against the odds, Coventry City and Luton Town – who were competing in League Two just five years ago – head to Wembley today knowing victory will end their lengthy absences from the top flight.

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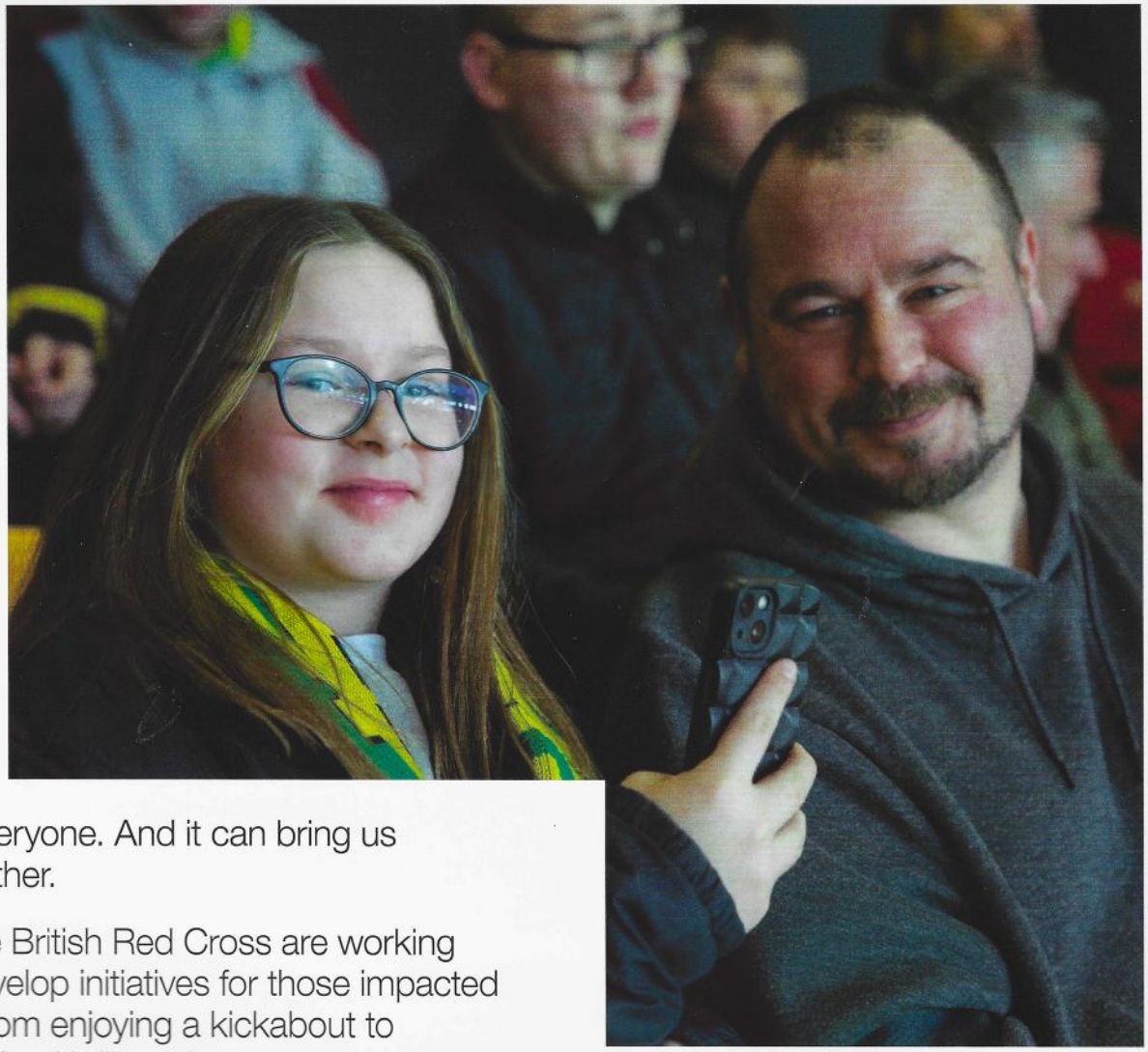
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“Having that dedicated time with Ruby was really special. It felt fantastic watching her playing footbal with the other young people.”

Gary and his daughter, Ruby, attended a game at Norwich City. They are both carers for Ruby's sister, Hollie. Ruby also enjoyed a kickabout with fellow fans before the match.



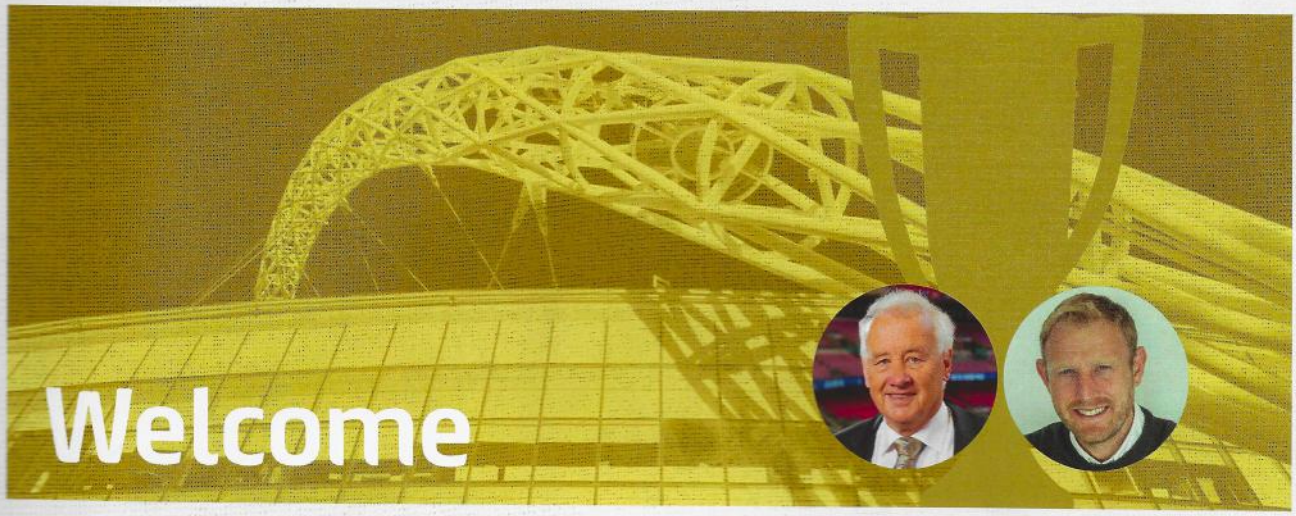
Football is for everyone. And it can bring us closer to each other.

The EFL and the British Red Cross are working with clubs to develop initiatives for those impacted by loneliness. From enjoying a kickabout to watching a match with like-minded fans, we want to help people make meaningful connections and new friends in their community – all through the power of football.

Let's club together.
For more information visit: redcross.org.uk/EFL

EFL | BritishRedCross
OFFICIAL CHARITY PARTNER

The British Red Cross Society, incorporated by Royal Charter 1908, is a charity registered in England and Wales (220949), Scotland (SC037738), Isle of Man (0752), Jersey (430) and Guernsey (CH142).



Welcome

A warm welcome to you all for this afternoon's Sky Bet Championship Play-Off Final between Coventry City and Luton Town.

Both Clubs have overcome adversity and challenges in recent times to reach today's Play-Off Final and are now on the cusp of securing Premier League football next season. They are, of course, no strangers to top-flight football, having been involved at various points in their illustrious histories.

But it wasn't that long ago, during the 2017/18 season, when they were competing in League Two against one another. It is remarkable that just five seasons later, the supporters in attendance today are set to watch their teams at Wembley Stadium in one of the biggest fixtures in English football.

After overcoming adversity, their stories offer hope for football fans everywhere, and today's Final illustrates precisely why we need to safeguard the pyramid and continue with our drive to make all Clubs in the professional game sustainable.

Looking at today's tie, Coventry pulled off a great victory at Middlesbrough after the first leg ended in stalemate. They are no strangers to Wembley in recent years, of course, having experienced an EFL Trophy victory here in 2017 and a year later, they beat Exeter City in the League Two Play-Off Final. Also, who could forget that famous 3-2 victory against Tottenham Hotspur in the 1987 FA Cup Final?

Luton have shown remarkable consistency across the past two seasons in the Championship, and following disappointment at the same stage last season, overturned a first-leg deficit to beat Sunderland 3-2 on aggregate at Kenilworth Road. They too have tasted success in this famous stadium, beating Scunthorpe United in the EFL Trophy in 2009 and, of course, the 1988 League Cup Final when they beat Arsenal 3-2.

Good luck to both teams today.

Finally, I want to place on record my gratitude to Sky Bet and all our commercial partners for their ongoing support of the EFL and our Clubs as we all look forward to another fantastic Sky Bet EFL Play-Off weekend.

Enjoy the match.

RICK PARRY | EFL CHAIR

On behalf of Sky Betting and Gaming, I'd like to welcome everybody to the 2023 Sky Bet Championship Play-Off Final, a game that will once again be played out in front of a packed Wembley Stadium.

Fans of Luton Town and Coventry City will obviously be thrilled at seeing their sides make it this far.

Luton Town's visit to Wembley is just the latest step on a remarkable journey. The Hatters are seeking a fourth promotion in 10 memory-filled years. They have built impressively on last season's run to the Sky Bet Championship Play-Off Semi-Finals and Rob Edwards' men fully deserve their place in today's Final.

Their opponents today, Coventry City, are also on the rise. In his second spell in charge, Mark Robins has already guided the Sky Blues to a Sky Bet League Two Play-Off Final triumph in 2018, followed by a second promotion two years later. Few would have bet on Coventry to be here when they languished at the bottom of the Sky Bet Championship in mid-October, but they will be difficult to beat.

Today marks a significant milestone off the field too, the culmination of the 10th season of Sky Bet's sponsorship of the EFL. A lot has happened in the past decade and both Sky Bet and the EFL have gone from strength to strength.

As well as providing significant investment to the EFL and its Clubs, we have used the partnership to offer a range of exciting benefits to supporters through initiatives such as the Sky Bet Prize Drop, where customers have the chance to win exclusive EFL merchandise.

It was notable that the Government's recent Gambling White Paper highlighted the emphasis ourselves and the EFL put on social responsibility and used it as an example for others to learn from when looking at sports sponsorship.

For millions of fans, having a bet is part of the matchday experience, and the vast majority do so safely. However, it has always been important to both Sky Bet and the EFL that our partnership also demonstrates how responsible betting companies and sports can work together to tackle the issue of gambling-related harm.

We are proud for instance, that nearly 1 million of our customers now use safer gambling tools – that's enough people to fill 11 Wembleys!

Let's hope those filling this incredible stadium today see another great game of football.

Best of luck to both teams.

STEVE BIRCH | CCO SKY BETTING & GAMING



ONCE UPON A TIME...

TODAY, THE LAST PAGES OF A TRUE FAIRYTALE STORY WILL BE WRITTEN AT WEMBLEY, WITH COVENTRY CITY AND LUTON TOWN – AGAINST THE ODDS – STANDING TALL AS THE FINAL CONTENDERS FOR THE ULTIMATE PRIZE.

WORDS: **RYAN GRANT**



Just when the beautiful game appears to have wrung out every remaining drop of drama, up pops a plot like this one.

As the sun sets on a truly incredible season of Sky Bet Championship football, our National Stadium is preparing to be wreathed in shades of sky blue and orange, with top-flight status and a new dawn on the horizon for two Clubs who were promoted together from League Two just five years ago.





For Coventry and Luton, it's been the toughest – yet most rewarding – of all climbs. Only one, however, can win this race to the summit.

The story of this season alone is one well worth telling. After all, no fewer than 48 gruelling matchdays – including two topsy-turvy legs of Semi-Final action – have got them to this point. Football at this level is both unrelenting and unforgiving, with the midweek journeys that end in defeat helping to make the feeling of three points on home soil all the sweeter.

It's a royal rollercoaster of a division, in which only the very best can overcome every last twist and turn – not that either side will need reminding.

Coventry were bottom of the table in October, and spent just over two weeks in the Play-Off places over the course of the 2022/23 campaign, with their Semi-Final a microcosm of their season. Having kept more clean sheets than any other side prior to the Play-Offs, the Sky Blues successfully stifled Middlesbrough – including the division's top scorer – for 147 minutes across the two legs, before making a charge of their own to secure their spot at Wembley.

It was a victory that capped a remarkable revival under manager Mark Robins, the same man who masterminded their rise through the EFL pyramid and put pen to paper on a new four-year contract on the eve of the second leg. Under his stewardship, they have become a force to be reckoned with at this level, building a side spearheaded by 21-goal Swedish international striker Viktor Gyökeres.

Their steely determination, ability to adapt and penchant for promotions will give their opponents plenty to ponder this afternoon, as they look to return to the Premier League for the first time in 22 years.

Indeed, Luton already know a thing or two about promotion, too. A non-league Club less than a decade ago, the Hatters are now just one win away from reaching the top flight for the first time since 1992, with their most recent visit to Wembley a Conference Play-Off Final against York City in 2012. "It sounds surreal, but it's a fact," their manager Rob Edwards remarked following victory over Sunderland in the Semi-Finals, and no-one can take that away from them.

Midfielder Pelly-Ruddock Mpanzu continues to encapsulate what has been an incredible story. He joined the Hatters in 2013, making his debut in a 0–0 draw with Staines Town in the FA Trophy, and has played an important role on the road to Wembley this season, running out no fewer than 36 times in all competitions.

Mpanzu, like many others in the Luton squad, contributes to the direct, aggressive and on-the-front-foot style of play which has served them so well in 2022/23. It makes them a danger to any opponent, something Coventry will be all too aware of.

These are two sides that play to their strengths and do so effectively. With both league meetings between them this season ending level and the stakes higher than ever, it would be bold to try to predict today's outcome.

For both sides, the last stop on the Championship train is, of course, Wembley – the 'home of football' celebrating its centenary year in 2023. By the side of its carpet-like pitch, hanging perfectly between the dugouts, is a sign which reads 'where players enter and legends leave'... and with good reason.

In recent years, this stadium – and this Final – have given us memories famous enough to list by player surname alone: Windass, Sinclair, Vaz Tê, Zamora. Moments produced under this iconic arch quickly become the stuff of legend, and there's no doubt that today's heroes will be remembered long after they ascend those famous steps to Wembley's Royal Box.

For those stepping beyond the white line this afternoon, today's Play-Off Final represents an occasion beyond compare; a heart-on-your sleeve and eyes-on-the-prize moment in time, when – unlike the millions of supporters tuning in around the world – the thought of anything less than perfection simply won't be entertained. On this, the biggest day of their lives, just one final hurdle stands in the way of glory.

For the fans, the loyal followers who have been there every step of the way, this afternoon will induce a cocktail of competing emotions, with the day's sole certainty only serving to top up the nerves. At the final whistle, we can be sure that one half of Wembley will be breaking out the bubbly, while the other will be left with a sour taste and a long summer of taking comfort in a familiar old saying: que será, será.

Whatever the result, it's been one heck of a ride. It's time to fasten your seatbelts once again, because it all comes down to this.

EFL | Lifebuoy

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ENJOY THE GAME SAFELY

Ensuring good hygiene to all in football stadiums.

Lifebuoy has been trusted around the world to improve hand hygiene habits for over 125 years, and now we're back in the UK reminding consumers to Bish Bash Bosh germs and viruses.

Since launching in the UK in 2020, Lifebuoy has been encouraging everyone to make regular sanitising and handwashing with soap a lasting habit in order to prevent the spread of viruses and diseases.

Zoe Thompson, Lifebuoy Senior Brand Manager, said: "We are proud to have partnered with the EFL to help keep fans safe in stadiums across England and Wales over the past two years and we continue to work together with the EFL to educate the importance of hygiene as part of our Soaper Heroes programme, which in 2022 reached over 71,000 children in the UK."

Lifebuoy has a dedicated 'Tips & Advice' page on its website – lifebuoy.co.uk – providing useful information on why handwashing matters, when to wash your hands and advice on the products that best suit you.

Available in Tesco, Lifebuoy's vitamins liquid handwash provides 10 hours of anti-bacterial protection, ensuring good hygiene by killing 99.9% of bacteria and viruses.

Sign up to the Lifebuoy Soaper Heroes Programme by searching 'Soaper Heroes' or by scanning the QR code below.

SKY BET CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL 2023

#EFLPlayOffs

Saturday 27 May

Wembley Stadium | Kick-off: 4:45pm

Order of Events

2:45pm	Turnstiles open
3:45pm	Team news
3:55pm	Players warm-up
4:38pm	Players enter the pitch
4:41pm	National anthem Performed by Kane Matthews & BSL Interpreter
4:45pm	Kick-off
5:30pm	Half-time
6:15pm	Full-time*

*In the event of the scores remaining level after 90 minutes, half an hour of extra-time will be played. Should the scores remain level at the end of extra-time, the winner will be decided by the taking of kicks from the penalty mark at an end of the stadium to be determined by the referee.



INTRODUCING...

COVENTRY CITY

FACTFILE

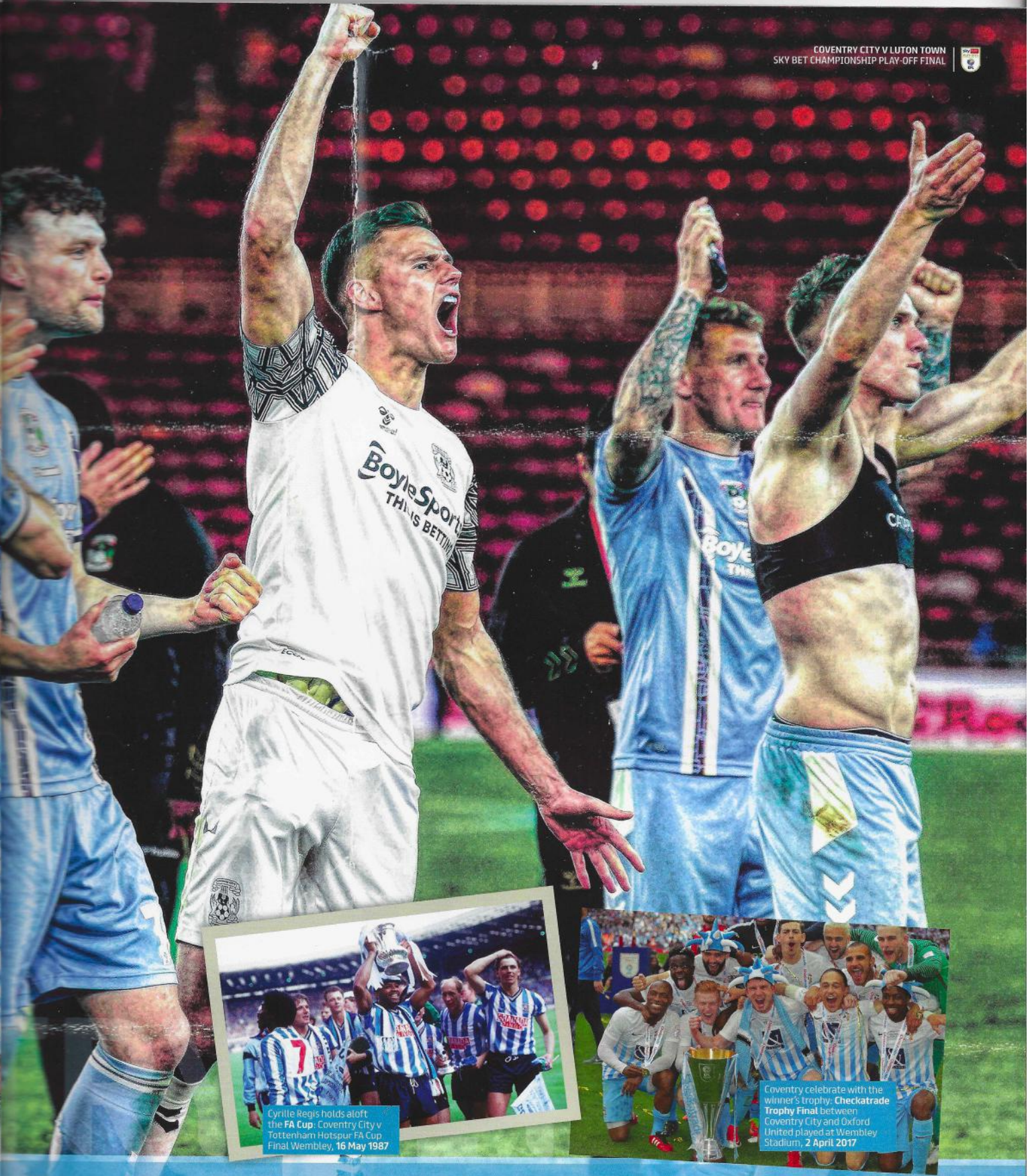
FOUNDED:
1883

STADIUM:
Coventry Building Society Arena

CAPACITY:
32,609

MANAGER:
Mark Robins

CAPTAIN:
Liam Kelly



Cyrille Regis holds aloft the **FA Cup**: Coventry City v Tottenham Hotspur FA Cup Final Wembley, **16 May 1987**

Coventry celebrate with the winner's trophy: **Checkatrade Trophy Final** between Coventry City and Oxford United played at Wembley Stadium, **2 April 2017**

HONOURS

CHAMPIONSHIP
Champions – **1966/67**

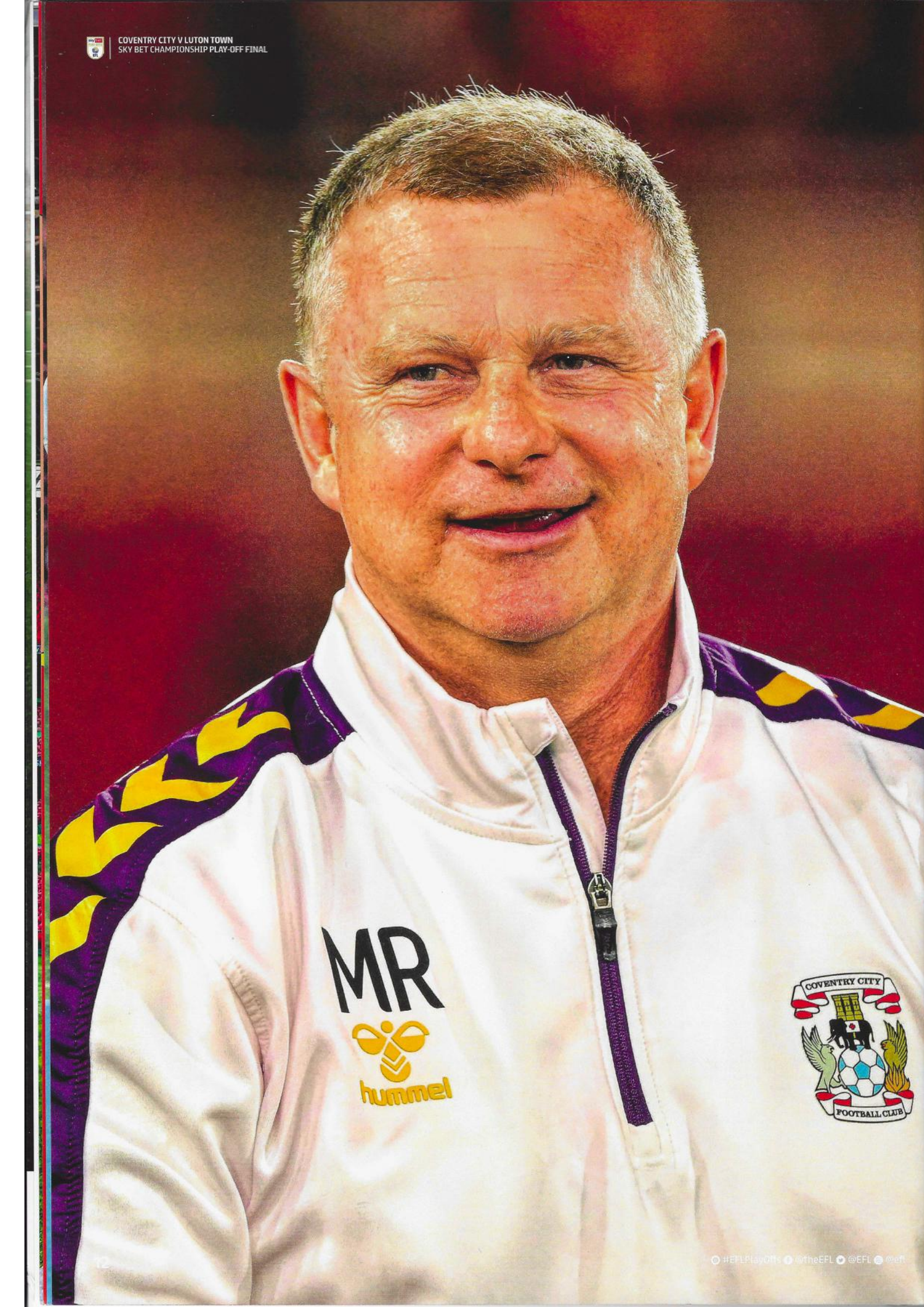
LEAGUE ONE
Champions – **1963/64, 2019/20**

LEAGUE TWO
Runners-up – **1958/59**
Play-Off Winners – **2017/18**

FA CUP
Winners – **1986/87**

LEAGUE CUP
Semi-Finalists – **1980/81, 1989/90**

EFL TROPHY
Winners – **2016/17**


MR
hummel
COVENTRY CITY
FOOTBALL CLUB

COVENTRY CITY MANAGER

Mark Robins

Good afternoon and welcome to Wembley Stadium for today's Sky Bet Championship Play-Off Final.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome all of the Sky Blues fans who join us at the National Stadium for this game. This is our third Wembley appearance in the space of six years and it is a phenomenal achievement for the Football Club.

Our supporters have been fantastic all season and throughout my time as Manager, backing their Football Club and driving us on, and I know many other City supporters will be following and cheering us on from back in Coventry and around the world this afternoon too. You deserve to enjoy this day.

The Club has come together and worked extremely hard to get here on our journey from League Two, and I would like to pay tribute to all of the players and staff involved along the way.

The motto of the Club over recent years has been 'Rise Together' and that has never been truer, as the spirit on and off the field has carried us through some difficult moments.

Those well-documented issues will hopefully dissipate with the start of a new era under new ownership, and the relentless energy and desire we all have to continue to improve and to make the next step as a Football Club. We have a real opportunity to do that today.

We face a Luton Town side who have been on a similar journey to us, but themselves from the National League up to this level. They have hard-working players who get the best out of themselves and they are traits our squads share.

Rob Edwards has built on the good work of Nathan Jones – he is a smart manager, a great coach and has organised the team well, supported by a very good backroom staff. Among them is Mick Harford, who I know going back a number of years and he is a top football person.

Today is going to be a very special occasion. We know Play-Offs can be tense, but the players are ready and we will embrace the occasion, the noise and the atmosphere that will be in the stadium this afternoon. We will play our own game and let's see where it takes us.

To reach this stage, from where we have been, is a great achievement. One more game and one more step can finish the job off – we can make this an incredible, memorable season, with one more monumental effort from everybody.

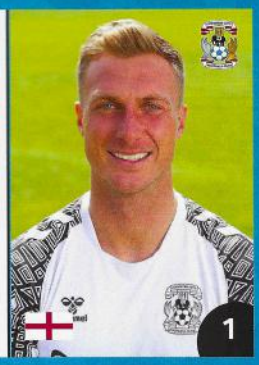
Thank you for your support – enjoy the game.

Your manager

Mark

COVENTRY CITY

SIMON MOORE GK



1

JONATHAN PANZO DF



2

CALLUM DOYLE DF



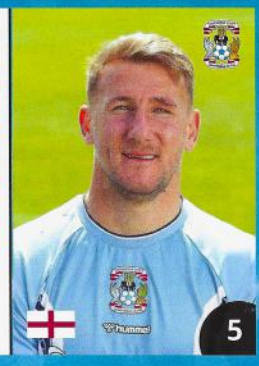
3

MICHAEL ROSE DF



4

KYLE MCFADZEAN DF



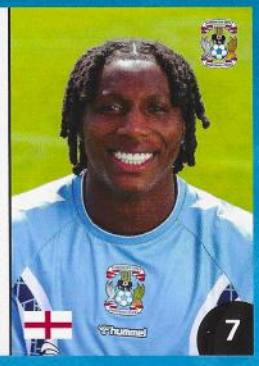
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LIAM KELLY MF



6

BROOKE NORTON-CUFFY DF



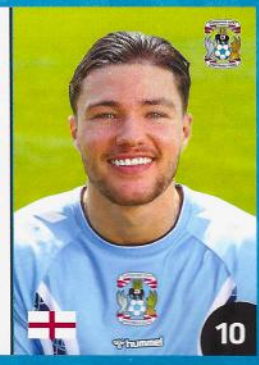
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JAMIE ALLEN MF



8

CALLUM O'HARE MF



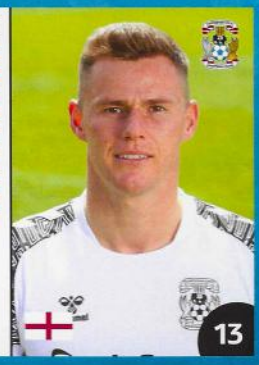
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JOSH WILSON-ESBRAND DF



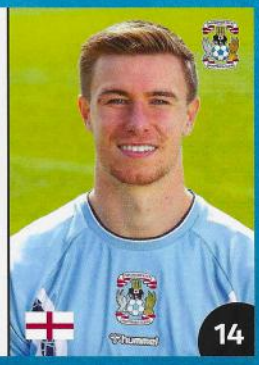
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BEN WILSON GK



13

BEN SHEAF MF



14

LUKE MCNALLY DF



16

VIKTOR GYÖKERES FW



17

SEAN MAGUIRE FW

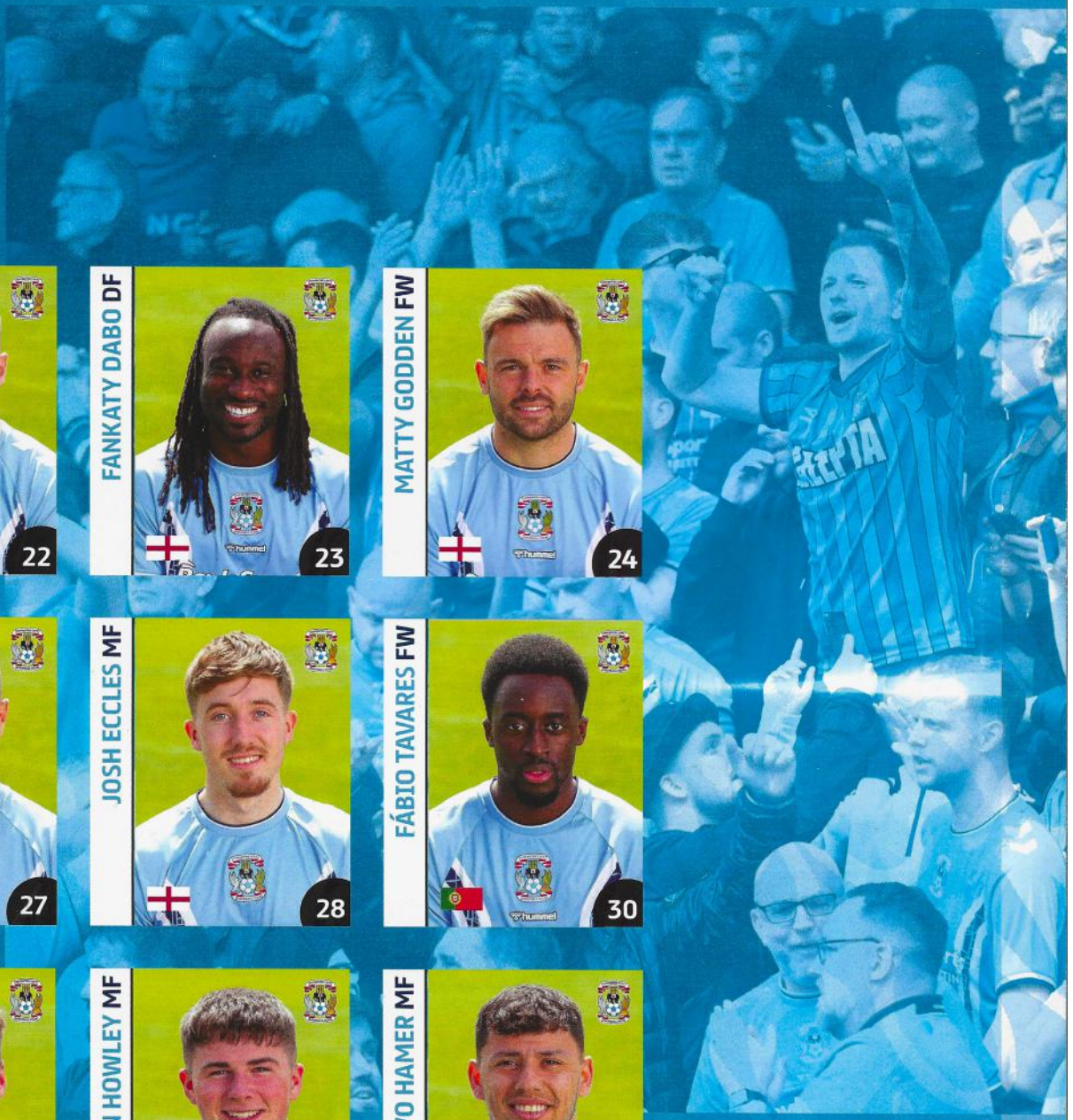


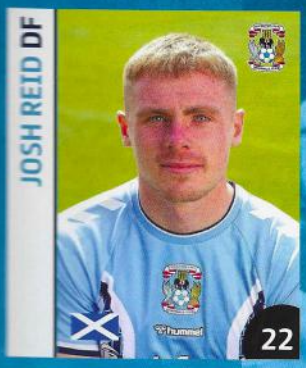
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TYLER WALKER FW



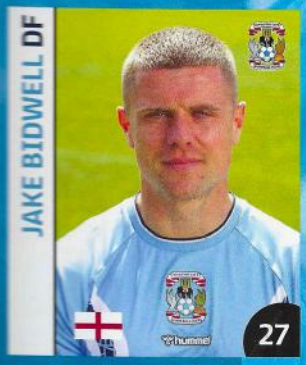
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JOSH REID DF
22

FANKATY DABO DF
23

MATTY GODDEN FW
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JAKE BIDWELL DF
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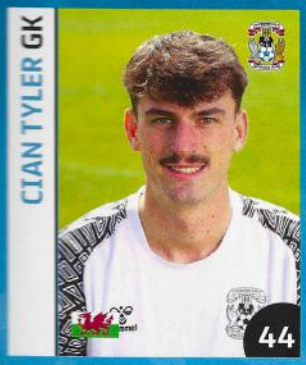
JOSH ECCLES MF
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FÁBIO TAVARES FW
30


JACK BURROUGHS MF
32


RYAN HOWLEY MF
36


GUSTAVO HAMER MF
38


CIAN TYLER GK
44


KASEY PALMER MF
45





INTRODUCING...

LUTON TOWN

FACTFILE

FOUNDED:
1885

STADIUM:
Kenilworth Road

CAPACITY:
10,073

MANAGER:
Rob Edwards

CAPTAIN:
Sonny Bradley



Luton team with the trophy: **Littlewoods League Cup Final** at Wembley, **1 April 1988**

The Luton players celebrate their win: Luton Town v Scunthorpe United **Johnstone's Paint Trophy, 5 April 2009**

HONOURS

CHAMPIONSHIP
Champions – 1981/82
Runners-up – 1954/55, 1973/74

LEAGUE ONE
Champions – 2004/05, 2018/19
Runners-up – 1969/70

LEAGUE TWO
Champions – 1967/68
Runners-up – 2001/02, 2017/18

FA CUP
Runners-up – 1958/59

LEAGUE CUP
Winners – 1987/88

EFL TROPHY
Winners – 2008/09

LUTON TOWN MANAGER

Rob Edwards

Good afternoon and welcome to Wembley Stadium. Not the way I normally open my programme notes, but this has been anything but a normal season!

We had a World Cup break for a start, and during that month while the football world's eyes were focused on Qatar, myself, Richie Kyle and Paul Trollope were appointed to manage Luton Town, a brilliant Club that was already in a fantastic position just outside the Sky Bet Championship Play-Off places.

You don't often get those opportunities midway through a season, with the previous manager, Nathan Jones, having done such a wonderful job that he had been offered a chance in the Premier League, leaving behind a squad that was in great health, with an unbelievable staff already in place.

Then you effectively have a mini pre-season, which has never been normal in winter, to prepare for your first game. From the moment we stepped out at Middlesbrough and saw the 'Welcome Rob' banner from the fans (my only complaint could be that it didn't include Richie and Trolls) any fears we had about where Richie and I had been employed most recently were laid to rest.

Just over six months later, we're one win away from the Premier League, playing against Coventry City at the National Stadium. I'm sure if you'd have asked people to pick the Play-Off Final teams back in August, there wouldn't have been many who would have said Luton versus Coventry!

But here we are, and here both sides deserve to be after 48 matches of a relentless and thrilling Championship season.

Mark Robins deserves so much respect for the job he's performed at Coventry over so many years. The fact that this was a League Two fixture five years ago, and the Clubs went up together to League One, speaks volumes for Mark and his team.

How he has managed with playing away from their home city for two years, and even the delayed start to this season with the pitch issue after the Commonwealth Games, is so impressive. We congratulate him and his team on a terrific season.

We also have to give a massive nod to our players on their achievement in finishing third in the Championship. These lads are such an honest group who are top quality players, and they have gone under the radar for too long. They have been in the top six of this division now for two years and deserve all the credit that comes their way, along with the talented, tireless staff we inherited.

We want to thank every single one of them for the way they have gone about their jobs since we came in. From the first meeting we had, we told them all that we believed in them and that promotion was the goal. They are so close and we're so proud of every single one of them.

Of course, we are just the custodians who have taken this over for the latest leg of an amazing journey that Luton Town has been on for the past 15 years, since the CEO Gary Sweet, chairman David Wilkinson and their consortium of supporters saved the Club they love. We work for an incredible group of people for whom I know today will mean so much.

As a huge part of the story, we have to thank Mick Harford, who 15 years ago took on the manager's job in such difficult circumstances and is still such an integral part of everything we do at Kenilworth Road, and John Still, who I've got to know well and did perhaps the hardest job of all in leading the team back from the National League.

This is going to be such a special day for the fans who have travelled to matches in great numbers in all four divisions, and who have been vital for us ever since we arrived. Today, Wembley will be full, it'll be loud and we can't wait for that moment when we go out and see our supporters in a sea of orange. They can play their part as they have done all season long. We hope then that we can play our part and make sure they are singing all evening long.

It's great that you get to Wembley, but when you get here, it's about winning. After the dark days they have had to suffer in the not-too-distant past, we so hope we can thank them by giving every Hatter a day to remember forever with a place in the Premier League – and English football history.

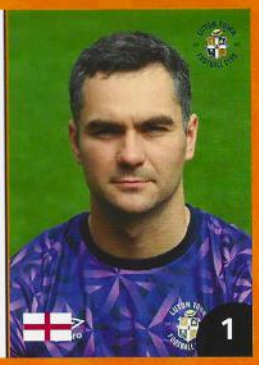
Good luck all, enjoy the game and COYH!

Rob



LUTON TOWN

JAMES SHEA GK



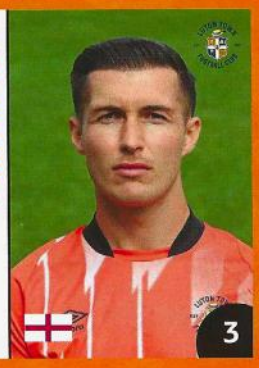
1

CODY DRAMEH DF



2

DAN POTTS DF



3

TOM LOCKYER DF



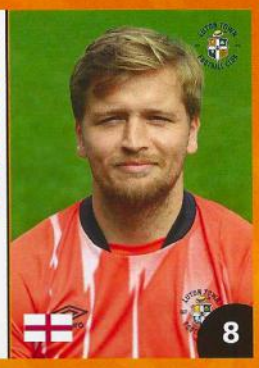
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SONNY BRADLEY DF



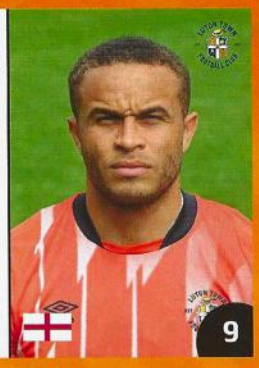
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LUKE BERRY MF



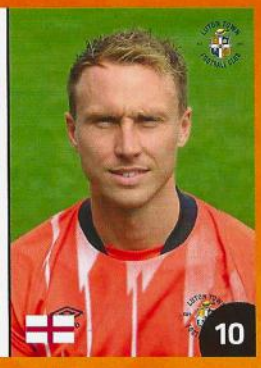
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CARLTON MORRIS FW



9

CAULEY WOODROW FW



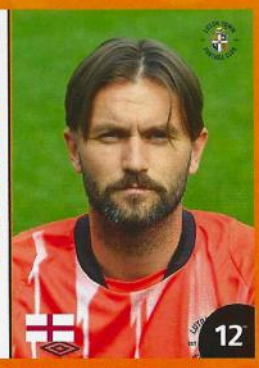
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ELIJAH ADEBAYO FW



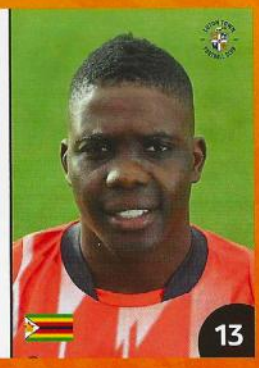
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HENRI LANSBURY MF



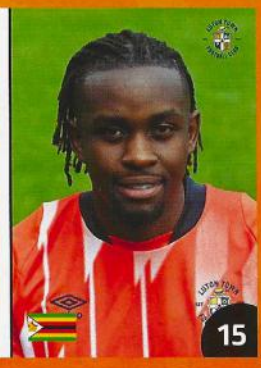
12

MARVELOUS NAKAMBA MF



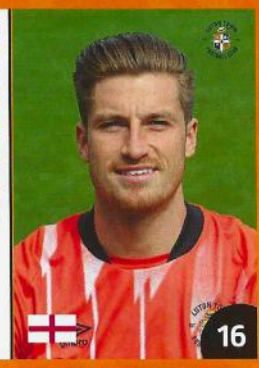
13

ADMIRAL MUSKWE FW



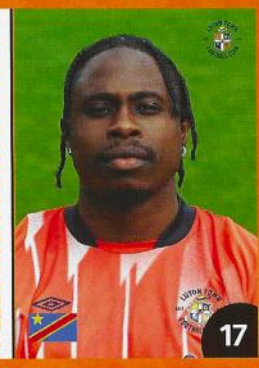
15

REECE BURKE DF



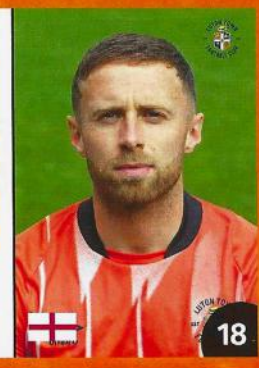
16

PELLY-RUDDOCK MPANZU MF



17

JORDAN CLARK MF



18

LOUIE WATSON MF



20



ALLAN CAMPBELL MF 22

FRED ONYEDINMA MF 23

JACK WALTON GK 24

JOE TAYLOR FW 25

ARIBIM PEPPLE FW 27

ELLIOT THORPE MF 28

AMARI'I BELL DF 29

LUKE FREEMAN MF 30

GABE OSHO DF 32

ETHAN HORVATH GK 34

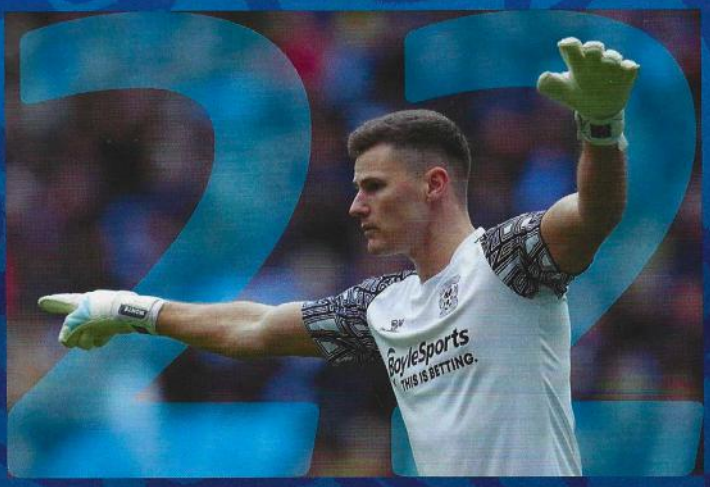
ALFIE DOUGHTY MF 45

JOE JOHNSON DF 48

COVENTRY CITY'S ROAD TO WEMBLEY

Following a slow start to the season, Coventry City showed resilience to rise above adversity and position themselves just 90 minutes away from a return to the top flight for the first time since 2001.

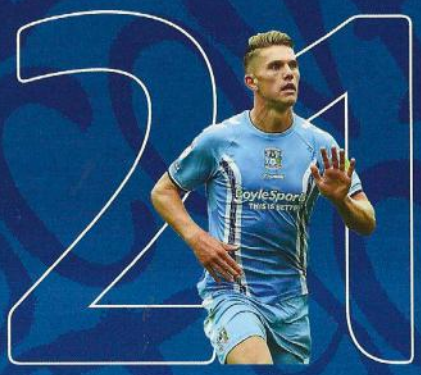
This is how the Sky Blues paved the way to Wembley Stadium.



Coventry City goalkeeper **Ben Wilson** won the Sky Bet Championship Golden Glove with 20 clean sheets, before adding two more to his tally in the Play-Off Semi-Finals.



Mark Robins returned to the Sky Blues for his second stint as manager in March 2017, making him the third longest-serving boss in the EFL.



Swedish frontman **Viktor Gyökeres** is the top scorer for the Sky Blues in 2022/23 with 21 goals.

POSITION:	5TH
PLAYED:	46
WINS:	18
DRAWS:	16
LOSSES:	12
GOALS SCORED:	58
GOALS CONCEDED:	46
GOAL DIFFERENCE:	+12
POINTS:	70

Semi-Final First Leg
Sunday 14 May
Coventry City 0
Middlesbrough 0

Semi-Final Second Leg
Wednesday 17 May
Middlesbrough 0
Coventry City 1
Hamer 57'



The Sky Blues have lost just **twice** after taking the lead in games this season, winning 18 and drawing on four occasions.



The **number of days** Coventry spent at the bottom of the Championship table between August and October.



Viktor Gyökeres' tally of **11 goals** away from home is the highest of any player in the second tier this season.



Coventry have scored **six times** during second-half stoppage-time – a joint-high in the Championship.



The Sky Blues could return to the top flight after a **22-year absence**.

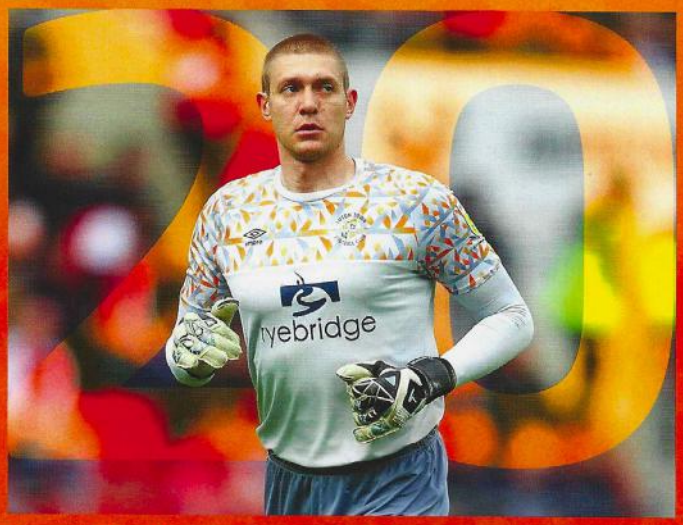


The **number of players** Mark Robins has utilised this year.

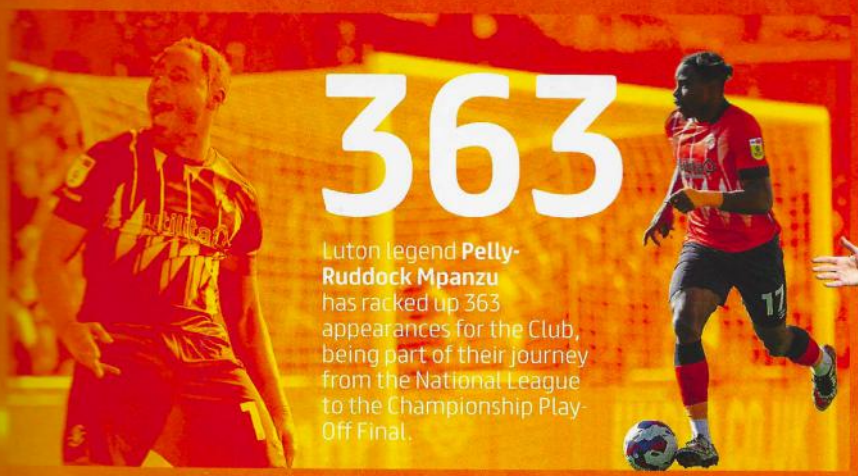
LUTON TOWN'S ROAD TO WEMBLEY

Having replaced Nathan Jones in November, Rob Edwards has impressively steered the ship at Luton Town, guiding the Club to the cusp of the top flight, something they haven't achieved since 1992.

It's time to take a look back at how they reached the Sky Bet Championship Play-Off Final.



Stopper **Ethan Horvath** has kept 20 clean sheets during the 2022/23 campaign.



363

Luton legend **Pelly-Ruddock Mpanzu** has racked up 363 appearances for the Club, being part of their journey from the National League to the Championship Play-Off Final.

20



Top scorer **Carlton Morris** has 20 strikes to his name this season.

POSITION:	3RD
PLAYED:	46
WINS:	21
DRAWS:	17
LOSSES:	8
GOALS SCORED:	57
GOALS CONCEDED:	39
GOAL DIFFERENCE:	+18
POINTS:	80

Semi-Final First Leg
Saturday 13 May
Sunderland AFC 2
Luton Town 1
Adebayo 11'

Semi-Final Second Leg
Tuesday 16 May
Luton Town 2
Sunderland AFC 0
Osho 110', Lockyer 43'

13

The Hatters have claimed **13 points** from losing positions in the Championship.

14



The Hatters entered the Play-Offs on a **14-game unbeaten streak** dating back to the middle of February.

46

Luton commanded just 46.6% of **possession** during the 46-game campaign, putting them in the bottom third of the division.

10

Carlton Morris has scored 10 match-winning goals this season – a divisional high.

50

The number of **points** amassed by Luton from a possible 75 since Rob Edwards took over the managerial reins in November.

30

The **number of players** to feature for the Hatters in the league this season.

WORDS: **JACK WYLIE**

THE SUPER SWEDE

Watch **Viktor Gyökeres'** 2022/23 highlight reel and you'll quickly find yourself running out of superlatives.

He's arguably the most prized asset in the Sky Bet Championship right now and, to the envy of the rest of the division, the big Swede is on Coventry City's side, playing in Sky Blue and White.

Having struck 17 times in the league during his first full season at the Club, Gyökeres surpassed that tally by early March this term and finds himself on 21 goals, with one more outing still to go.

"That's just what I'm there for," he humbly assesses. "I try to put the others in good areas and then when I get the chance, I try to score. That's what I aim for every game.

"I demand that from myself because that's what I need to do when I'm playing up top at Coventry. I had a target to do better than the season before and I've done that. But it's not over yet, so I won't relax now."

He might not share the same tone of performative arrogance that his Swedish compatriot Zlatan Ibrahimović possesses – instead, exuding a more subtle and restrained demeanour – but there's a look of steely determination in his eyes and an unyielding firmness in his convictions; the 24-year-old's ruthlessness in front of goal embodies just that.

And yet, Gyökeres' game is about so much more than scoring goals.

Equally adept as a creator, the 6ft 2in striker has registered double figures for assists, meaning he has been directly involved in 32 of Coventry's 59 league goals, accounting for over 54% of the Sky Blues' output.

Among his 11 assists is perhaps the most pivotal strike of Mark Robins' side's season, when he teed up Gustavo Hamer to score the only goal in 180 tension-filled minutes against Middlesbrough in the Play-Off Semi-Final.

What happened next was a blur for Coventry's talisman.

"I got the ball in behind from (Ben) Sheaf – it was a really good ball – and then I got the touch behind the goalkeeper, but I saw the defender was on the goal line and my touch went a bit to the left," he describes.

"I saw Gus coming with pace towards the goal, so I decided to leave it to him and he's not a bad finisher. I believed in him and he scored – it was a really nice goal.

"When something like that happens, it just goes black and I can't really remember what has happened. I just remember when I stood there, I tried to catch my breath with Gus and I was hugging him.

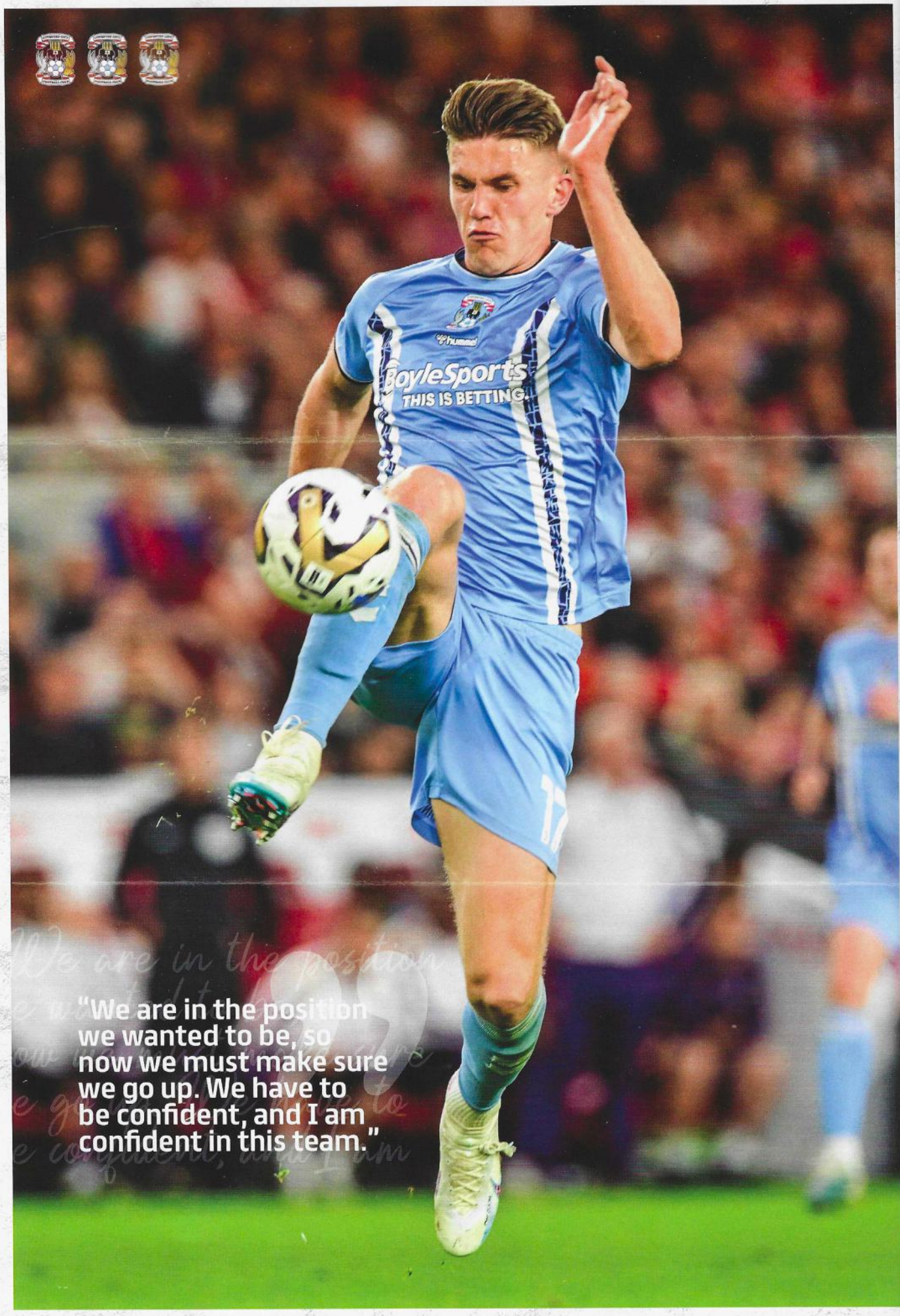
"It was an unbelievable moment and then when the referee blew the final whistle, that was even better, I would say. It was an amazing performance from us and the celebrations with the fans afterwards were incredible."

It's a clear indication of the love and commitment Gyökeres has for the Club that gave him the platform to showcase his immense potential.



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"We are in the position we wanted to be, so now we must make sure we go up. We have to be confident, and I am confident in this team."

"For the last two seasons, the fans have been unbelievable supporting us as a team every game, home and away," he declares. "You feel like you are one of them and it's been amazing to connect and get to know them at the games – they are unbelievable."

In hindsight, it seems obvious that the Swedish international would have all the tools to take the Championship by storm, but it wasn't always an inevitability that he would rise to stardom.

During the first half of the 2020/21 campaign, Gyökeres endured a frustrating spell on loan at Swansea City that was eventually cut short, managing just one goal in 12 appearances – including just two starts.

Then the Sky Blues came to his rescue, and his fortunes have been on an upward trajectory ever since.

"I think the difference is game time," he evaluates. "When you play a lot of games, you get confidence, you get used to playing with your team-mates and obviously, you get used to doing things that you're good at on the pitch. That's the main reason as to why I have done well here at Coventry.

"We get a lot of help from the staff and the coaches as well, and I have good team-mates to help me, so everything has been good so far."

From outcast to out of this world, Gyökeres is renowned as one of the biggest talents outside of the top flight, capable of the spectacular as well as willing to do the dirty work for his team.

Consistent with his character, he doesn't read into the hype.

"It's nice to be known and complimented about your performance, but I don't really let it bother me much," he says. "My mentality is just to take things one game at a time.

"You can't live on one performance, you need to be at your best every game. The next game for us is a Final, so my only focus is on preparing properly and being at my best."

Having been capped 13 times for his country, the former Brighton & Hove Albion forward is no stranger to a big occasion.

But the prospect of playing at Wembley Stadium for a place in the Premier League is one that has even caused the ice-cold Scandinavian some struggles to keep his emotions in check.

"It feels unreal," admits Gyökeres. "We've talked about this for a long time that we will make the Play-Offs and go all the way, but to actually make the Final is an unbelievable achievement and I think we deserve it because we worked so hard all season.



"Of course, playing for your country is a really big thing. I've played a few games with the national team and that's been amazing to have the opportunity. But this is a completely different game with a lot at stake.

"Wembley is a really good stadium. I've never played there before so, of course, we are looking forward to it and especially for a game like this – it's unbelievable. We are just going to enjoy it and we will try our best to win."

It's a far cry from October, when the West Midlanders were cut adrift at the bottom of the Championship following a tumultuous start to the campaign.

Issues with the Coventry Building Society Arena pitch prompted multiple postponements in the early knockings of 2022/23, but it's merely a distant memory now.

Of course, it was Gyökeres who kickstarted their rise up the table, producing the decisive strikes in wins against Middlesbrough and Cardiff City to lift the Sky Blues away from danger.

And they've not looked back since.

"We'd prepare for games and then they'd get cancelled, so it was a really tough start to the season," he explains. "But we had a lot of games in hand and we always believed in our target to get promoted.

"We didn't think about the league table, we didn't look at it, we just took it game by game. When we got going and were able to play the home games, we started to play as we did last season and we performed really well from there.

"We had good spells and a few bad ones along the way, as you always have, but I think the difference with this season compared to last season is that we made sure that even in some bad spells, we got at least a few points here and there.

"If you set a target together as a team, I think you need to believe it and it felt like everyone did. It's not easy, it's not like you just set a target and then you achieve it every time, but I think we put the hard work in every day at the training ground and in games.

"We have a really good togetherness in the team, which has really helped. Everyone works for each other and we know each other really well. I think that's why we are here in this moment."

Today, Luton Town stand in their way of clinching a historic return to the top flight, following 22 long years in the wilderness.

"We don't just want to be there in the Final and play the game, we want to win it," Gyökeres asserts. "Luton are a really good team, so it's going to be a tough game. They work really hard, they're really good at what they do and we need to make sure we stop them playing their way.

"We are in the position we wanted to be, so now we must make sure we go up. We have to be confident, and I am confident in this team." ■

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A View from the Studio

With almost 500 career appearances across the Premier League and EFL, it's fair to say former Nottingham Forest, Southampton and Leeds United midfielder David Prutton knows a thing or two about football. A League One runner-up with Sheffield Wednesday, a Play-Off Finalist with Leeds and now Sky Sports' lead EFL presenter, the former midfielder provides some pre-match analysis and predictions...

What are your thoughts on the two teams?

I think it's a wonderful Final for us all to watch. The word fairytale has been thrown around quite a bit, but I think it's a fitting word for these two Clubs given the recent years of their history and how far they've come rising up the ranks. Both managers have done it in a slightly different way too, which is to be admired. If you are a football romantic, this is definitely the Final for you.



What would winning the Play-Off Final mean for each side?

It would be a monumental achievement for either side given the background, the recent history and the turmoil both have been through. It would be Club-changing, for Luton especially given they've never been in the Premier League but have been in the old First Division, then for Coventry, it's been over 20 years since they were last in the Premier League.

Obviously, from a financial perspective, it would have a transformative effect on both Clubs and most importantly, for the fans, I think it would mean everything. Luton fans have followed their side from dropping out of the Football League right back to where they are now and Coventry fans have watched their side drop to League Two and come back up again. So, there's no denying it would mean everything to both Clubs.

Who are the ones to watch?

In games such as this, your eyes are drawn to the goalscorers, such as Carlton Morris and Viktor Gyökeres – both have been outstanding this season and have been worth their weight in gold. But away from the goalscorers, Tom Lockyer for Luton has been a real rock, Liam Kelly for Coventry has gone from League Two to potentially the Premier League for Coventry and has played his part when called upon. There are so many players who we can talk about but what makes these squads special is the collective of players, how they have come together and how they work for each other, and I think you'll see that this afternoon.



Who could be the surprise package?

From a defensive point of view, I think Kyle McFadzean for Coventry. He's a player that's very, very experienced, has played a lot of professional football and while I've focused on the goalscorers for the ones to watch, I think McFadzean's age and experience will be key today.

Who's your prediction for Player of the Match?

I might be tempting fate here, but I'm going to go with Carlton Morris of Luton Town.

Who will be the first goalscorer?

Viktor Gyökeres.

What will be the final score?

Is predicting penalties a cop out? I'm going to go with Viktor Gyökeres scoring the first goal, Carlton Morris will get the equaliser, it's going to finish 1-1 and then I think Luton will win on penalties.

WORDS: **HOLLY HUNT**

A place in the divisional Team of the Season, perhaps the most important goal of his career and now a game away from the Premier League, it's been quite a few weeks in the life of **TOM LOCKYER**.

The stand-in skipper hit a century of appearances in a Luton Town shirt in the first leg of the Sky Bet Championship Play-Off Semi-Final and it epitomises just how far he's come in the last 10 months.

UNDER LOCK AND KEY

At the beginning of the campaign, there was a strong possibility that Lockyer might depart Kenilworth Road after being named as a substitute for the Hatters' opening four league fixtures and failing to come off the bench.

The 28-year-old started to seriously consider that his future may lie elsewhere and there was interest from his former team Bristol Rovers – the Club where he spent the most part of his career.

"I was coming into the last year of my contract and not in favour and not playing," he says. "What was going through my head was, 'how do I get into the team and how do I affect it? If I can't get in the team and I'm not in the manager's plans, where can I go and play?' If you're not wanted, you try and move on to where you are wanted.

"Before I joined Luton, I played literally 40 games every season since I was 18. To come in and not really play – I had a stop-start season last season with injuries and started this season on the bench – it's not what I came to Luton to do. I came to Luton to be playing week in, week out.

"Football's weird, isn't it? To have reached 100 appearances is a massive milestone and one I never thought I'd reach when I was sat on the bench at the start of the season."

Lockyer was handed a start in Luton's home tie in Round One of the Carabao Cup against Sky Bet League Two opponents Newport County. The game ended in a 3-2 defeat for the hosts, who were dumped from the competition in what then-boss Nathan Jones dubbed "one of the worst performances ever".

But an injury to Sonny Bradley created an opening for Lockyer to break into the line-up away to Swansea City in the league just over a week later.

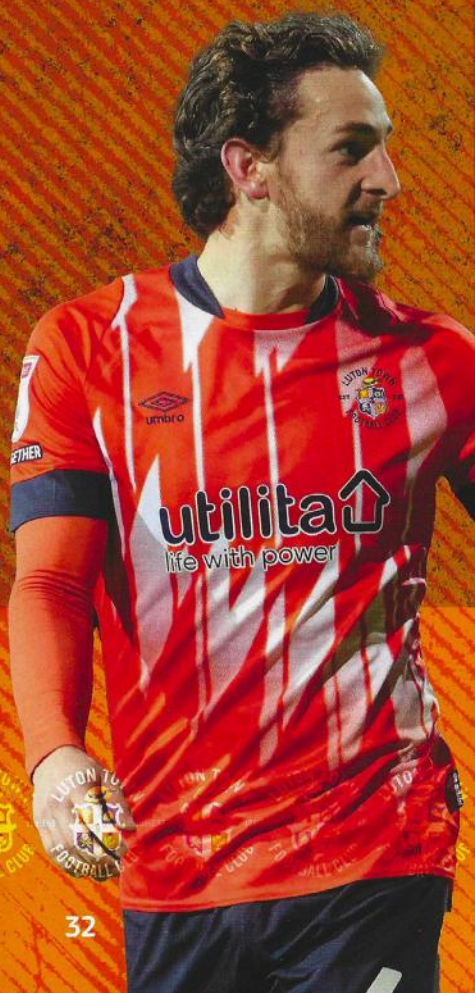
"I didn't get off to a good start and it took a few games until he changed it up," the Welshman says. "I thought it was a chance to get games if I wasn't going to be playing in the league. I scored against Newport and then we were out of it, so just like that, I thought my chances to impress were going to be few and far between.

"I got my opportunity, which was away at Swansea. On the day, we got a clean sheet and we won 2-0, so it was a perfect start to life back in the team. Looking back now, I wouldn't change it.

"I've really enjoyed playing in the middle of a three and I think we've nailed down the back three now and we all understand


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each other really well. The defence is always the base to a solid team."

Last month, the Cardiff-born defender was named in the Championship's Team of the Season at the annual EFL Awards, before cleaning up at Luton's end-of-season awards.

"It's really nice to be recognised on a personal level," he explains. "I think a few other boys were a bit unlucky not to get in but for me, it's a massive achievement. I've had a few other awards over the season as well. Let's hope there's one more at the end of it."

With a game to spare, the Hatters secured a third-place finish in the Championship and it gave Lockyer – who has spent his career fighting for promotion or scrapping to stay in the league – a chance to catch his breath.

"It's very rare in my career that I've gone into a final day with nothing to play for," he admits. "It's either one of the two ends. Third in the league overall is a fantastic achievement on its own. If you can't get automatics, the best way is through the Play-Offs, but it's the most nerve-wracking as well.

"For a while, it looked like we were going to hunt down second, but we were just a little bit out of touch. It all goes down to Wembley and anything can happen."

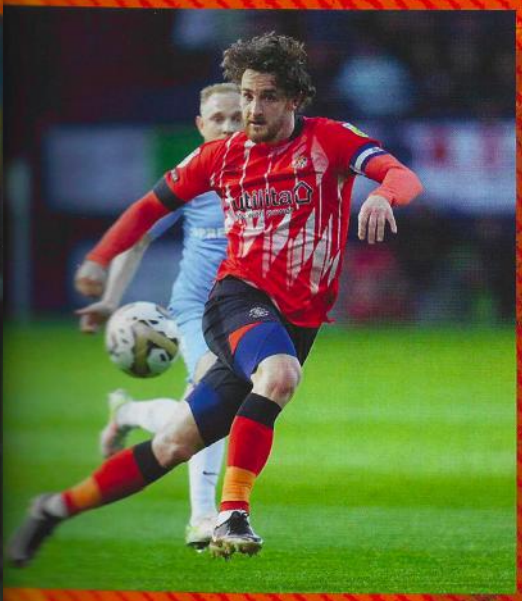
For the first time in the Club's history, Luton won a Play-Off game, beating Sunderland AFC in the second leg of the Semi-Final on home soil to book their place at Wembley.

The Hatters came from behind, trailing 2-1 in the first leg, and Lockyer, who donned the armband for the evening, grabbed the match-winner, heading home to make it 2-0 on the night and 3-2 on aggregate.

He recalls: "As soon as I saw Alf (Alfie Doughty) was shaping to put it in, I thought, 'just sprint and attack it as fast and as hard as I can'. He did the same at Middlesbrough for me from a corner and it ended up perfectly on my head. I looked round and the ball was in the net."

Lockyer has five goals to his name this season – scoring in back-to-back games against Middlesbrough and Blackburn Rovers earlier this month – and manager Rob Edwards joked that he might have to throw him in up front.

"It's a nice little scoring streak I'm on now," the Wales international comments. "I said to Carlton (Morris), 'the season isn't over yet'. He's been awarded top goalscorer, but I said, 'don't take your





eye off the ball because I'm coming for you'! It's still not over and I could do something to try and get the Golden Boot.

"He told me if he scored 20 goals this season that he'd pay for Portugal for a golfing trip for us. He got his 20, so we'll see what happens in the summer!"

But Lockyer had regrets after offering to share his Player of the Match accolade with team-mate and best friend Morris in the wake of victory over the Black Cats.

"It was going to be a joint award, then we saw it was a special one with the Play-Off badge on and not just a normal one," he laughs. "I've claimed that one now."

In November, over a year since he last played for his country, Lockyer was included in Wales' first World Cup squad in 58 years. Hatters team-mate Ethan Horvath was also selected to represent the USA at the tournament as the pair flew out to Qatar to join up with their respective national teams.

"Every decision I've made in Club football has been with the intention of representing my country as many times as possible," Lockyer affirms. "To get the call-up and be on the plane will live with me forever. I was the best cheerleader in the whole World Cup and that's self-proclaimed as well.

"To say I've been to a Euros and a World Cup, it's so far-fetched. When I was growing up, Wales were getting 3,000 fans and losing to nobodies."

Lockyer, who came up against Luton in non-league during his days at Bristol Rovers, had his first experience of the National Stadium in the 2015 National League Play-Off Final. Darrell Clarke's side beat Grimsby Town 5-3 on penalties to bounce back to the EFL.

"I've been to Wembley before and walked up the steps to get the trophy," he remarks. "To win it in the manner we did – on penalties after extra-time – was no good for the nerves, but looking back, it doesn't matter how you win it!"

Now, he wants to put Luton's Play-Off hoodoo firmly in the past after the Hatters lost out to Huddersfield Town in the Semi-Final 12 months ago.

"It's almost chalk and cheese compared to where we were last year," he adds. "Last year, we stumbled into the Play-Offs and it cost us a few injuries because we were chasing it to try and sneak in there.

"I wasn't really worried if I'm being honest. All respect to Sunderland but I thought if we could start brightly and get the crowd behind us and make it an ugly game for them, I knew we'd be alright. It's a good sign that we're able to mix it and do both.

"Our team is a completely different one now. It's a lot better and a lot more rounded. We're in a lot better place this year than we were last year."

The centre-half, who described it as an honour to "lead the team into battle" even if only on a temporary basis, could captain the side today in what is the biggest game of their season.

Lockyer and Luton's pathways have gone hand-in-hand and they have a chance to make further history together this afternoon.

"We've kind of mirrored each other," he notes. "Our paths have crossed before and if we can make that next step together, that would be amazing.

"We need to have one eye on the bigger picture. We don't just want to go to Wembley and have a day out; we want to try and get the end goal, which is obviously promotion."

"WE DON'T JUST WANT TO GO TO WEMBLEY AND HAVE A DAY OUT; WE WANT TO TRY AND GET THE END GOAL, WHICH IS OBVIOUSLY PROMOTION."

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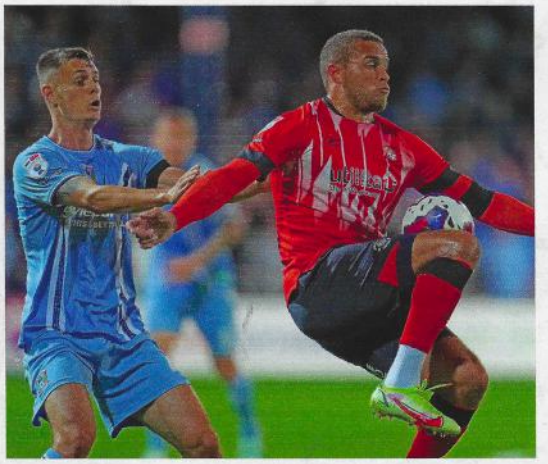
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HEAD-TO-HEAD

Coventry City v Luton Town

If previous encounters between the Sky Bet Championship Play-Off Finalists are anything to go by, today's showdown is likely to be a close one to call.

Check out this recap of what happened when both teams faced up during the regular season.



14 SEPTEMBER 2022 | KENILWORTH ROAD

LUTON TOWN 2
COVENTRY CITY 2

Coventry stopped the rot as they picked up their first point since the opening day of the campaign with a 2-2 draw at Kenilworth Road back in September. Mark Robins' side, who sat rock bottom of the Championship standings, had to come from behind twice to put an end to their four-game losing streak.

The Hatters' leading marksman Carlton Morris made it five goals in as many outings to continue his impressive start to life in Bedfordshire. The striker fired the hosts into the lead from close range inside five minutes before the Sky Bles responded through Viktor Gyökeres, whose composed finish levelled proceedings with 11 minutes played.

Luton quickly regained the advantage through Morris, with the summer signing from Barnsley slotting home to grab his and the hosts' second of the evening.

But Gustavo Hamer rescued a point for Coventry in the second period as the midfielder took aim from 25 yards out with just over an hour on the watch to provide some much-needed cheer for the West Midlanders.

SKY BLUES
WINS
37

DRAW
18

HATTERS
WINS
25



11 FEBRUARY 2023 | CBS ARENA

COVENTRY CITY 1
LUTON TOWN 1

It took just 38 seconds for Tom Lockyer to open the scoring at the Coventry Building Society Arena in February, when the two teams played out a 1-1 stalemate. The defender opened his account for the season in the league as he reacted fastest to tap in Alfie Doughty's cross into the box.

On the stroke of half-time, Matt Godden stepped up to convert a Sky Blues spot-kick after Gabe Osho was adjudged to have fouled Swedish star Gyökeres. It was Godden's first goal for the Club since August and it came at the perfect time for Coventry as he rolled the ball down the middle of the goal.

City were reduced to 10 men when Josh Wilson-Esbrand was issued his marching orders late on in the game for a challenge on Luton's Fred Onyedinma, but the home side held on as the spoils were shared once again.



WORDS: MICHAEL PARR & OLIVIA FOX

Clubs Supporting Their Communities

Football Clubs across the country are helping people lead healthier, more active lifestyles. Luton Town and Coventry City run a variety of programmes that cover a wide range of ages and look to address some of the critical issues which affect the health of their community.

Luton Town

Adult obesity is a growing problem across the country. As people age, their lifestyles change and they tend to become less active. FIT FANS is a free health programme for men and women – aged 35-65 – that focuses on addressing this by helping people lose weight, get fitter and lead a healthier life.

These sessions take place at the Club stadium, using the unique affinity people have for their team and the special emotion that fans feel for their home ground to add a bit of stardust to the activity.

Funded by Sport England, the success of FIT FANS is down in no small part to the social aspect of the sessions. Since 2019, thousands of fans have lost a combined total of over 18 tonnes of weight and improved their lifestyle as a result.

Luton Town are one of over 40 EFL Clubs that run FIT FANS. Each Club runs the programme under their own brand – in Luton's case, FIT HATTERS.

Kate Walsh, a lifelong Luton Town fan who also plays for the Ladies' team, is a great example of how the programme works. Kate had to take an extended break from playing the game due to ill health, which in turn affected her mental health and self-esteem.

As a season ticket holder at Luton Town, Kate was no stranger to the FIT HATTERS adverts, but never considered it because of her own football career. When she knew something needed to change, she felt that this was the perfect opportunity for her.

She comments: "While I have been overweight for many years, it hadn't really bothered me when I was active and playing football, but when I wasn't able to play, I started to feel fat and useless.

"The team at Luton Town running FIT HATTERS have been amazing and, because it's my Club, I feel at home and very attached to the programme. I also feel very well supported."





Having followed the programme's educational, physical and nutritional advice, Kate is "feeling better than ever". She has type 2 diabetes and was advised to begin medication after her condition deteriorated in recent times.

However, Kate is determined to improve her own blood glucose levels with the methods she has learned on the FIT HATTERS programme. It has also helped Kate's anxiety by giving her a positive focus each week, even when her life gets stressful.

Kate is not alone in seeing life-changing results. On average, 90% of men and 85% of women lose weight during the programme, with many losing a clinically significant amount (women over 3kg and men over 5.5kg by the end of the 12-week course).

More importantly, the evidence also showcases that lifestyle change and weight loss are sustained over the following 12 months.



Coventry City

Another growing health problem that Football Clubs are helping to tackle is dementia. In England, it is estimated that 675,000 people have dementia. The majority, although not all, of these individuals are over 65 and have other underlying health conditions.

The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on everyone, but for those with dementia, it was especially perilous. Social isolation meant a significant impact to daily life and a disruption of normal routines and care for over two years.

Research has shown that extended isolation is linked to worsening cognitive ability, as well as an increase in mental health issues, including loneliness and depression. Even when people were able to slowly return to their pre-pandemic routine, for older adults with dementia, a return to the 'old normal' has been harder to manage due to a decline in cognitive health.

Recognising that those with dementia were disproportionately negatively impacted by the pandemic, Sky Blues in the Community worked with Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Partnership Trust to identify the local need. Consequently, Sky Blues in the Community (SBitC) received funding from the Warwickshire Social Impact Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund to deliver 'Dementia Active'.

Dementia Active is delivered by SBitC in partnership with Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Partnership Trust. The programme offers support from SBitC's senior coaches, as well as staff from CWPT's specialist secondary care dementia service.

The aim of Dementia Active is to tackle social isolation and increase physical activity, which in turn promotes self-care, increases support networks, increases cognitive stimulation and supports mobility.

Another key focus is ensuring participants benefit by socialising. The programme encourages conversations and creates welcoming, positive, relaxed environments for participants from across the social spectrum and age ranges to come together and make friends.

Moreover, Dementia Active supports carers to benefit from respite, socialise with other carers and develop a support network. At a Dementia Active session, there is a menu of weekly activities covering a range of sports, including football, cricket, badminton, basketball, table tennis, bowls, indoor archery and more.

Tailored to ability and mobility to ensure everyone can participate, sessions involve warm-ups and cool downs, 'feel-good' exercises, drills, skills and games, with a view to ensuring everyone is relaxed, having fun and socialising.

"My son is 20 and has dementia as a result of a neurological condition," a parent of one participant explains. "We found that there were no services in the community for him, so it was just so lovely to hear about this Dementia Active group, where he could come along and engage in the bits that he liked.

"He's played badminton, he's been bowling, throwing bean bags and he loves the archery! The staff at Sky Blues in the Community are so supportive and they engage with him one-to-one. It's amazing!"

A year on from winning the Sky Bet League One Play-Off Final with Sunderland AFC, **CALLUM DOYLE** returns to Wembley this afternoon hoping to repeat the success for Coventry City in the Sky Bet Championship showpiece.

On loan from Premier League champions Manchester City, the 19-year-old defender has been incredibly impressive in his first season at this level and played his part in keeping the league's top marksman, Chuba Akpom, at bay across both Play-Off Semi-Final legs.

Here, the England youth international offers his opinion on a range of topics by taking on the EFL's A to Z.

A to Z

CALLUM DOYLE

A Analysis – Define your three best attributes as a player.
Passing, dribbling and long-range shots.

B Bromance – Who is your best friend in football?
It has to be Josh Eccles.

C Cinema – What's the best film you've watched?
Smile, the horror movie.

D Disguise – What's your go-to fancy dress outfit?
That's a tough one. I'll have to go with a Peaky Blinder.

E Eat – Name your favourite food.
Chicken.

F Fanatic – What's your favourite memory as a football fan?
Watching Manchester United when I was younger. Probably the Paul Scholes goal against Barcelona in the Champions League Semi-Final. That was a good night.

G Grades – What was your favourite subject in school?
Looking back at my grades, probably none of them! I'd have to go with PE.

H Hobbies – What do you do when you're not playing football?
I want to say golf, but I'm not very good at it!

I Idol – Who did you look up to when you were growing up as a kid?
It'd have to be Cristiano Ronaldo.

J Job – What would you be doing if you weren't a professional footballer?
I'm not the brightest, so probably a bricklayer.

K Karaoke – What's your karaoke song of choice?
John Legend – All of Me.

L Love – What do you love most about playing professional football?
Winning games.

M Mystery – Tell us something we might not know about you...
I can juggle.

N Notable – Who is the most famous person in your phonebook?
I don't have that many. I'd probably say Aiden McGeady.

O Opponent – Who is the best player you've played against?
Chuba Akpom.

P Present – What's the best gift you've ever received?
A football when I was younger.

Q Quality – Who is the best player you've played with?
Viktor Gyökeres.

R Rewind – If you could relive one moment from your career so far, what would it be?
I'd relive last year's promotion with Sunderland.

S Souvenir – What's your most valuable piece of football memorabilia?
Probably my Euro Under-19 medal.

T TV – What series are you currently watching?
The Night Agent on Netflix.

U Unique – Give us your unpopular opinion...
Pineapples should not go on pizza.

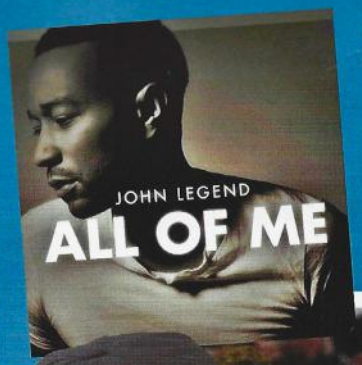
V Vacation – What's your favourite holiday destination?
New York.

W Wisdom – What advice would you give to kids aspiring to become a professional athlete?
Just always work hard.

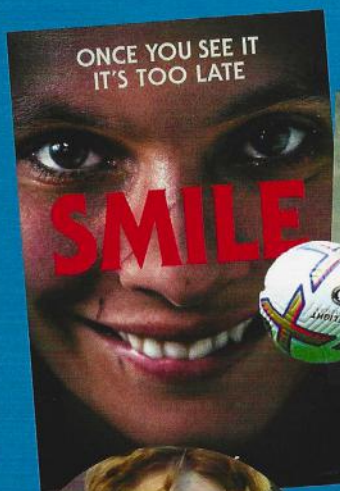
X Xylophone – Can you play any musical instruments?
Not a chance! I had recorder lessons when I was younger, but they didn't go well.

Y Yikes – What's your biggest fear?
Probably heights.

Z Zoo – What's your favourite animal?
Lions.



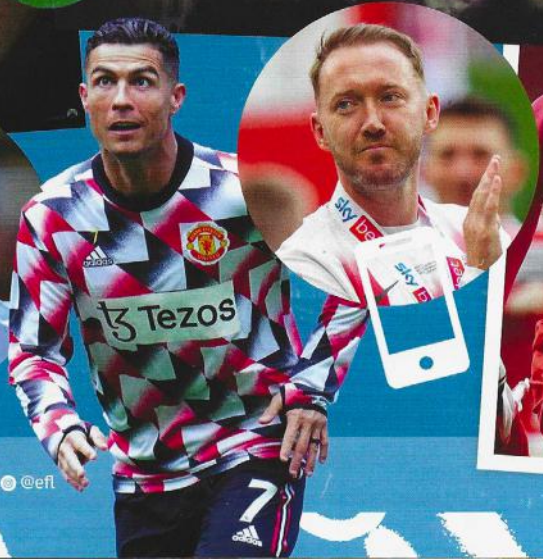




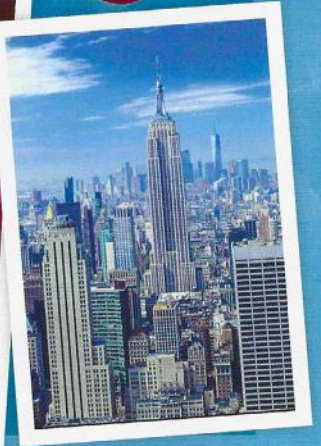












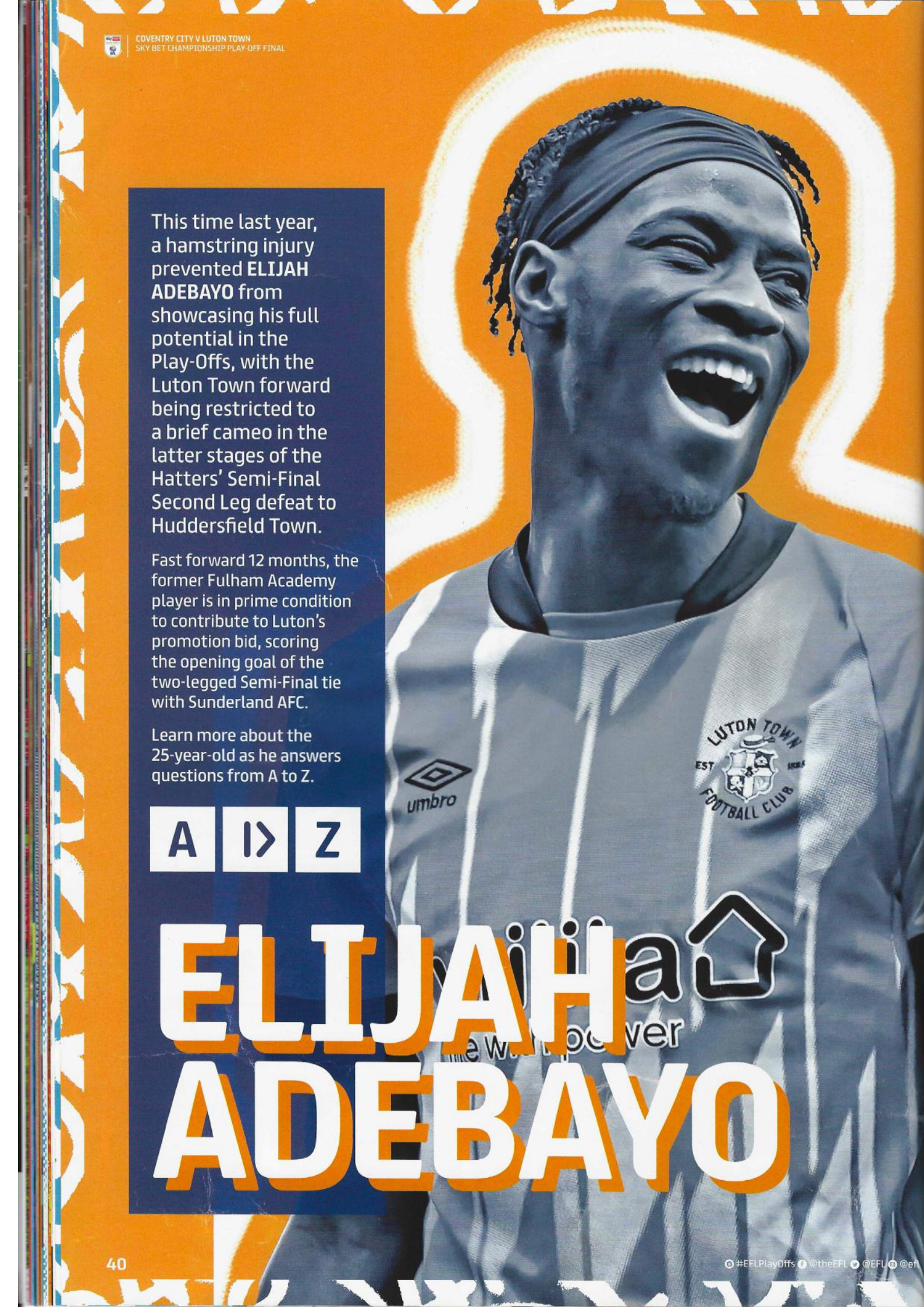
This time last year, a hamstring injury prevented **ELIJAH ADEBAYO** from showcasing his full potential in the Play-Offs, with the Luton Town forward being restricted to a brief cameo in the latter stages of the Hatters' Semi-Final Second Leg defeat to Huddersfield Town.

Fast forward 12 months, the former Fulham Academy player is in prime condition to contribute to Luton's promotion bid, scoring the opening goal of the two-legged Semi-Final tie with Sunderland AFC.

Learn more about the 25-year-old as he answers questions from A to Z.

A > Z

ELIJAH ADEBAYO



A Analysis – Define your three best attributes as a player.
I'm good with my feet, a good finisher and good dribbler.

B Bromance – Who is your best friend in football?
It's Patrick Roberts.

C Cinema – What's the best film you've watched?
Mission Impossible.

D Disguise – What's your go-to fancy dress outfit?
I went as the Riddler to a fancy dress party recently.

E Eat – Name your favourite food.
Black cod.

F Fanatic – What's your favourite memory as a football fan?
Watching Fulham beat Juventus 4-1 in the Europa League.

G Grades – What was your favourite subject in school?
RE (Religious Education).

H Hobbies – What do you do when you're not playing football?
Chill with my dog or play Call of Duty.

I Idol – Who did you look up to when you were growing up as a kid?
Zlatan Ibrahimović.

J Job – What would you be doing if you weren't a professional footballer?
Probably just a coach, I've never even thought about it!

K Karaoke – What's your karaoke song of choice?
Ginuwine – Differences.

L Love – What do you love most about playing professional football?
Nights like the Play-Off Semi-Finals. We play 46 games to get to have a moment like that. The feeling I had after that Semi-Final, I never wanted it to end.

M Mystery – Tell us something we might not know about you...
I used to attend a snooker club.

N Notable – Who is the most famous person in your phonebook?
My mum.

O Opponent – Who is the best player you've played against?
Jérémie Boga.

P Present – What's the best gift you've ever received?
My first phone.

Q Quality – Who is the best player you've played with?
Patrick Roberts.

R Rewind – If you could relive one moment from your career so far, what would it be?
It would be the Play-Off Semi-Final Second Leg, over and over. Not necessarily the game itself, but the feeling afterwards.

S Souvenir – What's your most valuable piece of football memorabilia?
I have a signed David Silva shirt.

T TV – What series are you currently watching?
Beef on Netflix.

U Unique – Give us your unpopular opinion...
Bagels are better than sliced bread.

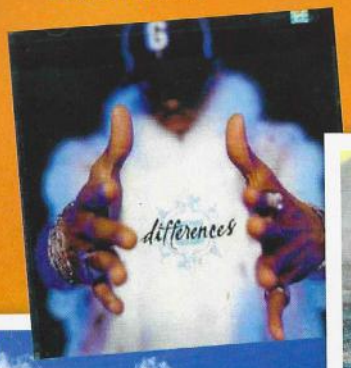
V Vacation – What's your favourite holiday destination?
Hawaii.

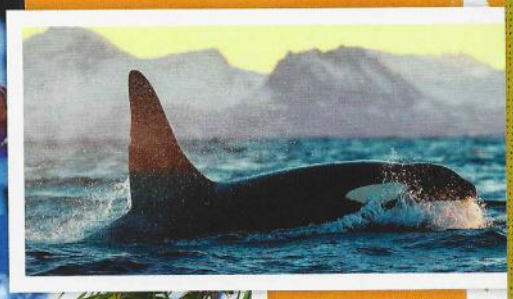
W Wisdom – What advice would you give to kids aspiring to become a professional athlete?
Don't listen to what you might hear outside, focus on being yourself, have self-belief, have self-confidence, work hard every day and be the best person you can be.

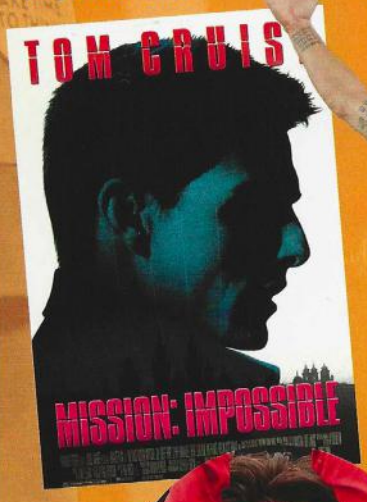
X Xylophone – Can you play any musical instruments?
Absolutely not!

Y Yikes – What's your biggest fear?
Being stuck in the middle of the ocean.

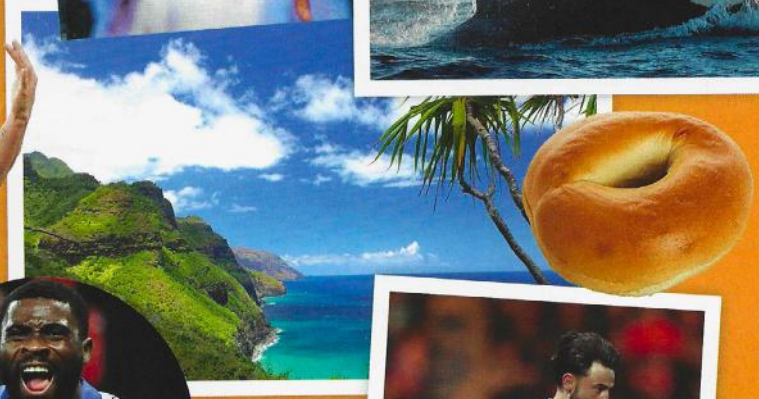
Z Zoo – What's your favourite animal?
Killer whale.















sky bet CHAMPIONSHIP | EFL

SKY BET CHAMPIONSHIP STORIES OF THE SEASON

It's been a season of highs and lows in the Sky Bet Championship, but another memorable campaign comes to its climax this afternoon.

Take a look back at some of the highlights from 2022/23...

WORDS: HOLLY HUNT



THE HORNETS' NEST

Watford celebrated 100 years of Vicarage Road in late August, as the Hornets – who moved to the 22,200-seater stadium in 1922 – paid tribute to the occasion when they hosted Middlesbrough.

On the anniversary of its opening, Watford celebrated a century at their long-serving home when Boro came to town.

And the mood was jubilant at full-time as Watford claimed maximum points with a 2-1 win. The hosts came from behind but Ismaila Sarr equalised before summer signing Vakoun Bayo snatched a 93rd-minute winner for the Hornets.



UNLIKELY HEROES

When Queens Park Rangers keeper Seny Dieng opted to make his way up the pitch for a last throw of the dice at the Stadium of Light in August, even he couldn't have expected the outcome.

The Hoops stopper nodded in the equaliser in the 92nd minute, rescuing a point for the West London visitors against Sunderland, who held a 2-0 lead up until the final five minutes, when Ilias Chair pulled a goal back before Dieng levelled for QPR.

Later in the season, Coventry City's Ben Wilson took a leaf out of Dieng's book in late April. With the Sky Blues trailing Play-Off rivals Blackburn Rovers and the clock running down at Ewood Park, the stopper had nothing to lose as Coventry were awarded a late corner.

Wilson bundled the ball over the line to restore parity at 1-1 and rescue a vital point for the visitors.



AKPOM'S VINDICATION

Chuba Akpom's redemption story is perhaps among the most astonishing in the EFL, let alone the Championship. It was well chronicled that, at the beginning of the campaign, the Boro striker was expected to be heading for the door, with the 27-year-old seemingly not in the Club's plans.

But after finishing the campaign with the division's Player of the Season accolade in one hand and the Golden Boot in the other, Akpom has turned his fortunes around under boss Michael Carrick as the prolific marksman became the first Boro player since Bernie Slaven in 1989/90 to hit 20 league goals.

Akpom ended the regular season with 28 goals, becoming the first player to find the back of the net in a ninth consecutive home Championship fixture after finding the back of the net in a 3-1 win over his former loan team Hull City.

+ + + +

IN GOOD KOMPANY

With seven games to spare, Burnley made history when they clinched promotion back to the top flight. A 2-1 win against Middlesbrough at the Riverside was enough to see the Clarets bounce back at the first time of asking.

They wrapped up the title at Ewood Park just over a fortnight later as Vincent Kompany's side took the bragging rights in the Lancashire derby over Blackburn Rovers.

Kompany became the first manager in the Club's history to finish a campaign with over 100 points with a 3-0 triumph over Cardiff City on the final day, becoming the first Championship side to do so since Leicester City in 2013/14.



MANAGERIAL MASTERS

It was a landmark day in the dugout at Kenilworth Road as Sunderland boss Tony Mowbray's 800th game in football management ended in a 1-1 draw with Luton Town.

Mowbray, who has managed the likes of West Bromwich Albion, Middlesbrough, Coventry City and Blackburn Rovers, was named the new Black Cats boss in August after departing Rovers at the end of last term following a five-year stint in charge, helping Sunderland to a top six finish in his first season in charge.

Elsewhere, another veteran of the game made his return to the EFL. Neil Warnock came out of retirement to step into the breach at Huddersfield Town for a second spell. The 74-year-old, who managed the Terriers between 1993 and 1995 in his first tenure, steered the ship to safety. Huddersfield finished the term nine points clear of the drop zone, having been in 23rd when he took over.





LONG-AWAITED RETURN

Nine months after suffering a cardiac arrest, Wigan Athletic striker Charlie Wyke made his highly anticipated return at the end of August in the Latics' 1-0 win over Birmingham City.

And Wyke, who collapsed in a training session in November 2021 before being resuscitated, rippled the net for the first time since making his comeback in October. The Latics slipped to a 3-1 defeat to Cardiff City, but it was a goal that meant much more to Wyke.



FREDDIE WOODMAN

NORTH END'S MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

Ryan Lowe's Preston North End remained unbeaten after the opening seven games of the season – and achieved it without conceding a single goal.

The incredible defensive feat has only been replicated by two other teams in the history of the top four divisions – Portsmouth in 1922/23 and Hereford United in 1984/85.

Goalkeeper Freddie Woodman was still yet to be beaten in a North End shirt having signed from Newcastle United in the summer, while defenders Liam Lindsay and Jordan Storey had also been ever-present in the historic rearguard effort.



LIAM LINDSAY

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THE 2022/23 SKY BET CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON IN NUMBERS

28



The number of goals scored by Golden Boot winner, **Chuba Akpom** (Middlesbrough).

40

Phil Jagielka was the oldest player to appear in the Championship this term, representing Stoke City at the age of 40 years, eight months and 21 days.

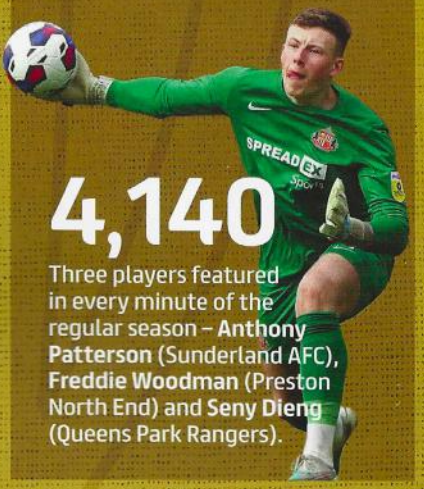
64

Players from 64 different **countries** featured in the Championship during the 2022/23 campaign.

5



Manuel Benson was the division's most prolific scorer as a substitute, netting five times off the bench for Burnley.



4,140

Three players featured in every minute of the regular season – **Anthony Patterson** (Sunderland AFC), **Freddie Woodman** (Preston North End) and **Seny Dieng** (Queens Park Rangers).

1,342

The total number of **goals** scored in the Championship this season.

97

The number of **penalties** awarded in the Championship this season, with 68 being successfully converted.

44,944

The highest **attendance** in a Championship fixture this season, when Sunderland hosted Watford at the Stadium of Light in April.

26

Middlesbrough recovered a league high 26 points from losing positions.

6

Coventry City, Stoke City and Sunderland all scored six goals during second-half stoppage-time – a divisional high.

20

The number of clean sheets kept during the 46-game campaign by Golden Glove winner, **Ben Wilson** (Coventry City).

16



Birmingham City's **Jobe Bellingham** was the youngest appearance maker in the Championship this season, aged 16 years, 10 months and 28 days.


sky bet
PLAY-OFFS
EFL
MONTÉ

THE GOLDEN TOUCH

With a Golden Glove and a place in the Team of the Season already achieved this season, Coventry City's **Ben Wilson** is hoping for a fairytale ending to a phenomenal campaign.

WORDS: **TOM JARVIS**



Described as 'magic' by the Sky Blues faithful, the City shot-stopper has certainly been protruding his powers in 2022/23, with 18 clean sheets in the regular season.

Not wanting to rest on his laurels, Wilson then followed that up by producing two further shut-outs in the Play-Off Semi-Final against a high-flying and a high-scoring Middlesbrough side.

A tactical masterclass saw Mark Robins' side book their place at Wembley this afternoon, and City's stopper can't hide his delight.

"I don't think words can actually describe it," he says. "The feeling at the end of the Semi-Final was just outrageous, I just sprinted towards our fans with pure ecstasy.

"I suppose the best word would be unbelievable!"

That result and performance epitomised what a fantastic breakthrough season it has been for Wilson, who had not previously nailed down a number one spot at the Coventry Building Society Arena or at any of his previous 12 Clubs.

Reflecting on the campaign, he explains: "I think the season in general for myself has been the biggest season so far.

"It's the most games I've ever played consecutively and obviously to achieve what we have so far is a credit to each and every single one of the lads. For me, it's an amazing feeling."

Patience has been key for the 30-year-old, who admits self-belief was probably the missing ingredient to his game prior to this season.

"You just go game by game to be fair and it's a case of not looking too far ahead and thinking how many games you are going to play," he adds.

"Before this season, I was always in and out of the team. I knew I had the ability to play week in, week out, but maybe the confidence that I had to back that up wasn't there.

"This season, it has just grown and grown and the belief that the manager, the coaching staff and all the lads have shown in me has helped me grow each game."

Back in July, Wilson may be forgiven for thinking he was set for another season as an understudy as he was named among the substitutes on the opening day at Sunderland AFC.

But that disappointment felt like a turning point for the goalkeeper, who was given his chance in between the sticks in the league at the end of August and hasn't looked back since.

"Coming into the start of the season, I was desperate to play against Sunderland on the opening day, being a boyhood Sunderland fan.

"I had a great pre-season and I was ready; I'd looked after myself, I had done everything right and I was absolutely gutted not to play that first game.

"But after that, something just clicked in my head and I just kept growing by training hard and waiting for my opportunity and thankfully, I got it and took it.

"At the time I was thinking, 'I have only got a few games and if I make a mistake, I will be back out of the team'. I think the biggest part was trying to overcome that.

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"As the season went on and the confidence grew, I started to believe that I was actually a number one goalkeeper and began to live and train that way every day."

After a difficult start to the campaign, Wilson was integral to the Sky Blues' resurgence up the Sky Bet Championship table and was rewarded with a new contract in January.

City's No.13 was delighted to extend his stay at a place that he says has very much become like home.

"Just to be a part of this Football Club in general is amazing for myself," Wilson states.

"I have never been so happy at a Football Club and have never felt so at home with the way the fans treat me and everyone else here does too – even the chefs, for example. They all make me feel like an important part of the Club."

Wilson has certainly repaid that support off the pitch with his performances on it, ranking inside the league's top 10 for both saves inside the box (31) and saves outside the box (73) in the regular season, while the keeper also boasted an impressive 73.1% save percentage to help Coventry secure a fifth-placed finish.

Those impressive statistics were recognised with a place in the Championship Team of the Season. That and the Golden Glove have been the icing on the cake for a memorable campaign, Wilson admits.

He says: "Personally, I couldn't have wished for a more successful season.

"Even after reaching 10 clean sheets, I could never have pictured winning the Golden Glove, but game by game the clean sheets started racking up.

"We went through a spell of not keeping them and I think Luton equalled us at one point, but with a few games left and a very difficult run-in, the lads really dug in and helped me get over the line."





That togetherness has been the key to Coventry's defensive strength this season, and Wilson was keen to pay tribute to the whole team for playing their part in that.

"They've been absolutely amazing, it's like having a brick wall in front of me," he reveals.

"They joke saying I haven't really had much to do to earn this Golden Glove, but credit to each and every one of them who have played in front of me this season – they have been unbelievable.

"Not just the defenders, all the way to the front with Viktor (Gyökeres), each and every single player has done a job defensively for us."

As Coventry City fans look back on 2022/23, perhaps a moment they will reflect on most favourably is not one of Wilson's many crucial saves, but of course, his famous injury-time equaliser to rescue a point against fellow Play-Off chasing Blackburn Rovers in April.

A big moment, not just because he became the first goalkeeper since Steve Ogrizovic to score for the Sky Blues, but because it helped see the Club secure a Play-Off spot by one point ahead of seventh-placed Rovers.

Wilson recalls: "I don't know if I was more ecstatic at the end of the Semi-Final or that game against Blackburn!

"The feeling of scoring that goal was just incredible, although my celebration was a bit questionable!

"I think for more of what it meant; we were in the Play-Offs by one point, so to look back on that and see how important it actually was, it was absolutely out of this world."

It's been 22 years since Coventry City lost their place in the Premier League and today, they are potentially 90 minutes away from a famous return under the Wembley arch.

It has been a long road of overcoming adversity to get to this opportunity, and Wilson feels it would be the dream reward for the years of hard work in rebuilding the Club's fortunes.

"Each and every single person in that dressing room deserves it," he says. "The core of this team has stuck together for the last four years and all the lads in there absolutely deserve it.

"They've been incredible from start to finish with everything else going on, so I feel no-one deserves it more than them."

Asked what a Premier League promotion would mean for him personally, Wilson adds: "No-one can see my smile right now when thinking about it, but words can't describe it!

"It would be an incredible feeling as it is what everyone dreams of as a young child. If we make it then we deserve it, and words will never be able to sum it up."

Standing in City's way this afternoon is a Luton Town team who themselves have defied the odds to give themselves a shot at English football's top division.

Previewing today's Sky Bet Championship Play-Off Final, the City goalkeeper says they go into the game full of confidence, with the results to back it up.

"I think we go there as a good footballing side who are strong defensively and we've got nothing to lose," he concludes.

"This is a team that is full of confidence, with one defeat in our last 19 games, so we have got nothing to fear.

"We'll go out there and give it our all and whatever happens it has been an absolutely amazing season."

EFL and Utilita

Utilita Kids Cup 2023

Schools from across England & Wales have travelled far and wide, met testing weather conditions and prevailed through hard-fought fixtures, but they've made it: the Utilita Kids Cup finals have arrived!

The six-a-side contest kicked off late last year with support from competition ambassadors such as former England lioness **Fara Williams** and Ex-Premier League star **Glenn Murray**.

Since then, schoolchildren across the country have been battling for the chance to live out their ultimate dream – playing at Wembley.

Making it this far is no small feat. In partnership with the EFL, the Utilita Kids Cup sees over 14,000 youngsters play in what is one of Europe's largest school football competitions.

The teams are first split into three divisions – Championship, League One and League Two - depending on which club they are representing, before again being split into two groups, North and South. Now, the winners of each group will face the ultimate challenge.

Now, the winners of each group will face the ultimate challenge.

But who will have what it takes when the pressure is high, and passionate Wembley crowd watching?

Please welcome our finalists to the big stage...





Championship Final - Saturday 27 May

Sheffield United (Concord Junior School) vs Watford (Brookmans Park Primary School)

League Two Final - Sunday 28 May

Stockport County (Disley Primary School) vs Walsall (Cooper and Jordan C of E School)

League One Final - Monday 29 May

Shrewsbury Town (Baschurch Primary School) vs Plymouth Argyle (Bickleigh Down Primary School)

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“This is an experience of a lifetime, and one I will never forget from when I played in this competition back in 2015.

Adam Wharton, Blackburn Rovers Midfielder



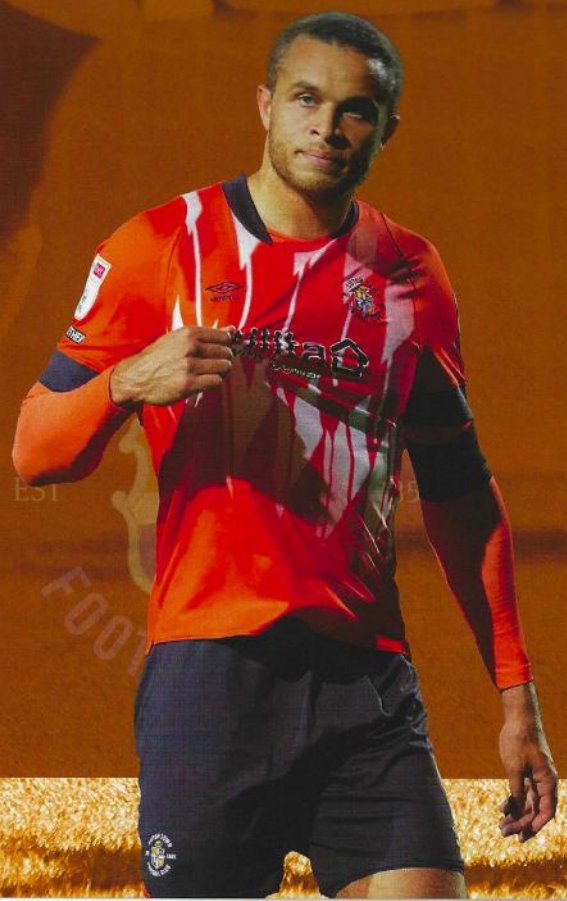


THIRD TIME LUCKY

In 2014, Luton Town embarked on their first season back in the EFL after five years away.

Fast forward nine years and now, after a third-placed finish in the Sky Bet Championship and victory over Sunderland AFC in the Play-Off Semi-Final Second Leg, top-flight status is on the horizon for the Hatters for the first time since 1992.

WORDS: **ABI RODWELL**



A tough yet rewarding climb, Luton's rise is a compelling story – against the odds some might say – but it is one of hard work, sustainability and humility.

The Club's recruitment has been shrewd to say the least and their signing of Carlton Morris last summer has proved to be one of the signings of the season. Prolific throughout, the striker perfectly suits their style of play and after years of loan spells and disruption, it feels like Luton is the perfect match for Morris, too.

"It's been obvious since coming here that recruitment is something this Club gets spot on," the 27-year-old says. "It's not just about signing good footballers, it's about signing good human beings too.

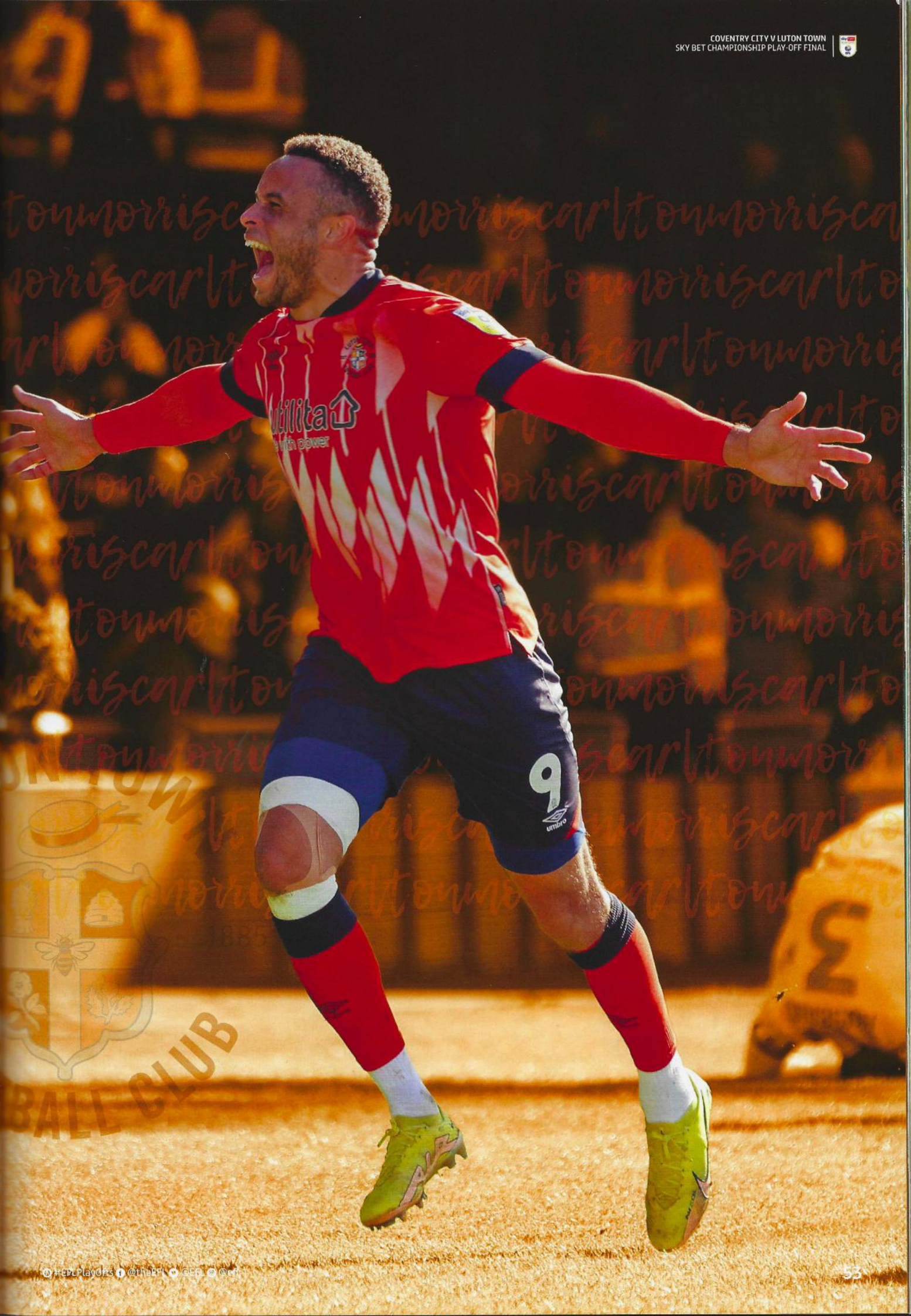
"Once you get that ingredient, the stars align and you end up with a dressing room like ours that is full of pure togetherness. We've got good players and equally good people and we show that on the pitch every week. Everyone works for one another, everyone runs every mile for each other and no-one wants to let their team-mates down."

It's that togetherness that Morris has previously highlighted as one of the reasons for his and the Club's success this season.

"It's a joy to come into this workplace every single day and I think you can tell that out on the pitch," he adds. "The main thing that springs to mind about this group is humility. There is a core group of really good people here, not footballers, not egos, just really good people – from the staff to the players – and that can't be underestimated. I know it's a bit of a cliché, but I have real genuine friends here and they'll be friends for life no matter what happens."

The former England Under-19 international will step out at Wembley Stadium for the third time in his career this afternoon, but it's been a long road to get to where he is now.

Having struggled in various spells with former Clubs, Morris has enjoyed his best and most prolific season to date, making a bright future for himself at Kenilworth Road. It's hard to believe he only arrived last summer.


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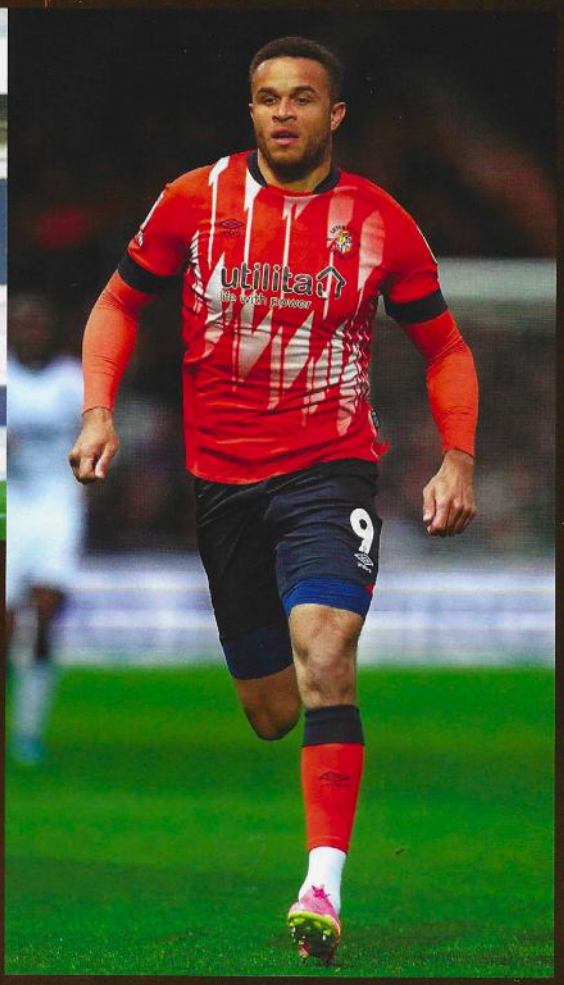
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"It is hard to believe," he continues. "I was lucky, I've been around the block a few times, so I knew a few people here already. If you're joining a new Club, goals always help you settle in, so I'm pleased I could score a few and make some friends!"

Morris' tally of 20 league goals this season is the highest of any Luton player in the second tier since Club legend Brian Stein in the 1981/82 campaign, and having only ever scored 11 in a single campaign previously, it is also a personal best for the striker.

The Play-Off second leg was also his 50th appearance of the season, and while it would appear he's found a home in the Hatters, the journey thus far hasn't been without its challenges.

Morris was part of the Shrewsbury Town side that lost to Lincoln City in the 2018 EFL Trophy Final, before returning to Wembley a few months later in the League One Play-Off Final, only to rupture his ACL on the hour mark as the Shrews suffered defeat again.

"I feel like I've been capable of scoring this many goals any season, but the main thing for me was just staying fit," he admits. "I understand everyone has their own story, but mine started with one of my first proper seasons when I played 50 games or so for Shrewsbury back in 2017/18.

"I did my ACL in the Play-Off Final and after that my career was a bit stop-start. It was hard to find a rhythm and any consistency, but now it feels like I've got myself together, I'm doing the right things off the pitch and it's showing on it."

After a lengthy period on the sidelines, loan spells with Rotherham United and MK Dons followed before Morris signed for Barnsley, where he managed 16 goals in 55 appearances across two seasons.

He explains: "When you have loan spells like I did, I can tell you now it either goes one way or the other. You either take each experience as a learning curve, a lesson and the chance to grow as a footballer and a human being, or you don't.

"It's tough being sent out on loan, especially at a young age. It's tough settling somewhere different each season but it's all about how you deal with it. I'm grateful for every single one of those experiences, no matter how successful the football side of things were, because each one helped me grow as a person and made me stronger in a way that I think is benefitting me today."

There's no doubt that today Morris will be key this afternoon, as he has been all season, and if the Hatters make the step up to the Premier League, it'll be a remarkable rise for both him and the Club.

While it's taken longer than he thought it might, now Morris has the chance to achieve his dream, and it couldn't come at a better time.

"The Premier League is the pinnacle of football isn't it?" he notes. "Everyone wants to get to the top of what they do and it's no different as a footballer.

"Playing in the Premier League has been a dream of mine since I was a young boy, as it is for every footballer. It's an incredible opportunity and I've always had confidence in myself that my time would come – hopefully this is it."

Can the Hatters go all the way? Morris doesn't see why not.

"When I first signed, I said I didn't come to Luton to sit in the middle of the Championship," he reveals. "I saw what this Club was capable of and I'm not surprised we're in this position.

"I'm humble and I'm still getting my head down working hard every day with the team, but I'm not surprised to see us here. Solid foundations, years of hard work and people at the top doing the right things have got us to this point. It's no fluke, it's what we deserve. We're not here to compete, we're here to win and now we just want to finish the job."

Whatever happens today at Wembley, it feels like a matter of when, not if, for Luton – and this is just the latest chapter in their fairytale story.



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100 YEARS YOUNG

LOOKING BACK AT 100 YEARS OF THE WORLD'S MOST ICONIC STADIUM

When you think of places that help define the nation, some instinctively leap to mind: Stonehenge, Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament... and Wembley Stadium.

This year the stadium celebrates its 100th birthday, during which time it has been at the centre of iconic football history, and numerous other events and moments, all etched into our shared heritage.

The stadium was rebuilt and re-opened in 2007, but its position in the national psyche remains unchanged from the day it opened its doors on Saturday April 28th 1923.

HISTORY-MAKING MOMENTS

THE CATHEDRAL OF FOOTBALL

Either side of WW2, Wembley established itself as the home of the England senior men's team, where they remained undefeated for 30 years before Hungary – the 'Mighty Magyars' – inflicted a 6-3 defeat in November 1953.

Earlier in the same year saw the famous 'Matthews Final' where 38-year-old Stanley Matthews finally picked up an FA Cup winners' medal in Blackpool's 4-3 win over Bolton Wanderers.

Of course, the England senior men's team's finest moment was yet to come. 13 years on and Wembley witnessed Bobby Moore lifting the Jules Rimet trophy. England were world champions.

Wembley remains the home of the England men's and women's teams to this day.



Stanley Matthews collects his winner's medal from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II – Wembley Stadium, 1953

HISTORY MADE, UNDER THE ARCH

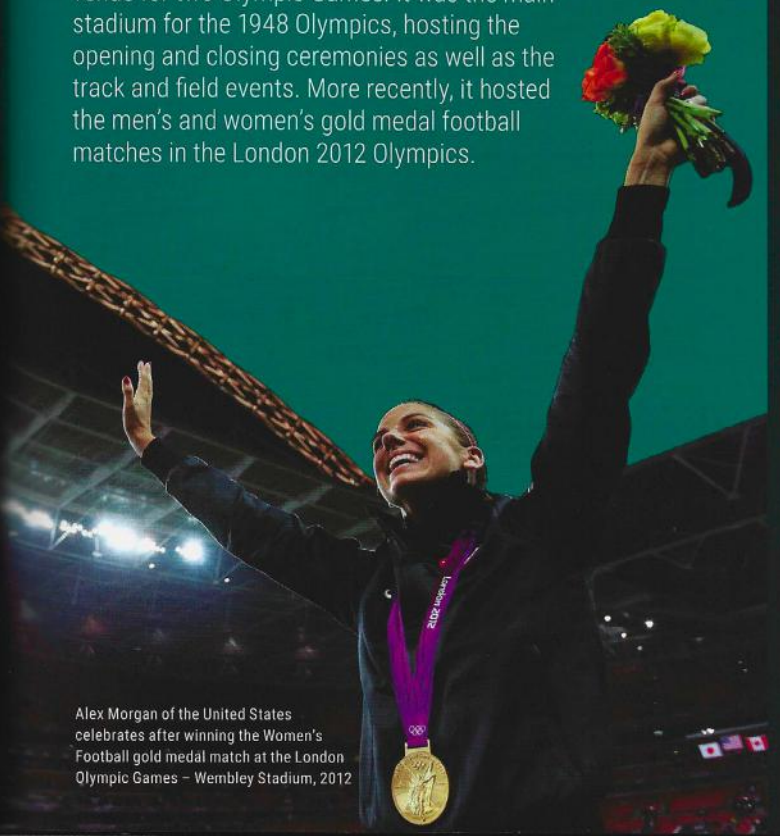
Aside from the 1966 FIFA World Cup, Wembley has been a host venue for two UEFA EURO tournaments – in 1996 and 2021. Last year Wembley saw the England senior women's team – the Lionesses – reach the pinnacle and become European champions. Cue national joy.



Mary Earps, Kiera Walsh, and Leah Williamson with the UEFA Women's Euro trophy – Wembley Stadium, 2022

OLYMPIC GLORY

Away from football, Wembley has been a venue for two Olympic Games. It was the main stadium for the 1948 Olympics, hosting the opening and closing ceremonies as well as the track and field events. More recently, it hosted the men's and women's gold medal football matches in the London 2012 Olympics.

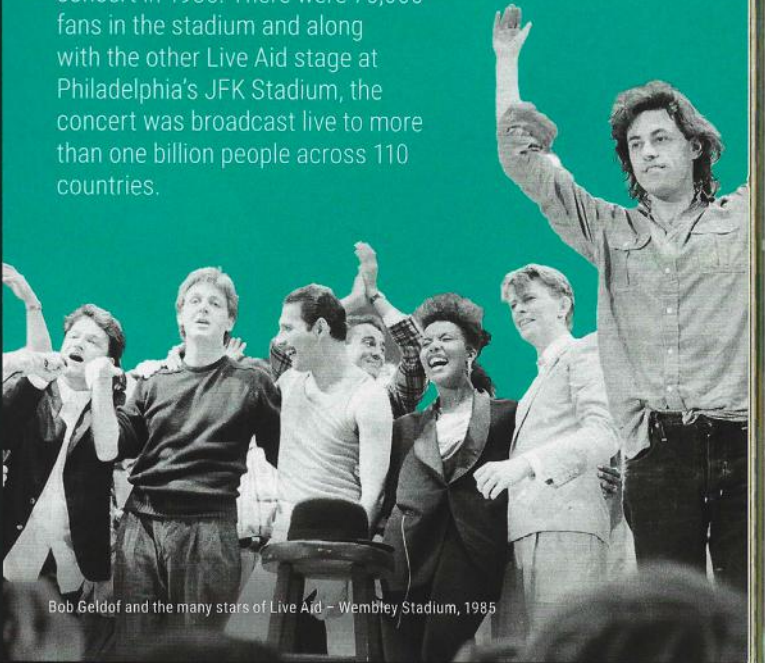


Alex Morgan of the United States celebrates after winning the Women's Football gold medal match at the London Olympic Games – Wembley Stadium, 2012

THE BIGGEST NAMES IN MUSIC

Wembley is also a world-renowned music venue. Since the first stadium gig in July 1969, some of music's greatest stars have performed at the stadium: Madonna, Queen, Beyoncé, Elton John, Bruce Springsteen, Pink Floyd, U2 and in more recent times, Adele, Take That, The Killers, BTS and Harry Styles. There are so many more.

But arguably Wembley's finest musical moment was hosting the never-to-be-forgotten multi-act Live Aid concert in 1985. There were 70,000 fans in the stadium and along with the other Live Aid stage at Philadelphia's JFK Stadium, the concert was broadcast live to more than one billion people across 110 countries.



Bob Geldof and the many stars of Live Aid – Wembley Stadium, 1985

Photo: Simon Dervilller

BATTLE OF THE BANDS

ANDY HOPKINS

The Enemy bassist ANDY HOPKINS is a Coventry City season ticket holder and Sky Blue through and through.



Last year, Andy reunited with frontman Tom Clarke and drummer Liam Watts on a UK tour to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the release of their number one platinum selling album 'We'll Live And Die In These Towns'.

Now, the NME and Q Award winners, who split in 2016, are set to perform at a number of summer festivals, including TRNSMT, Isle of Wight, Tramlines, Kendal Calling and Neighbourhood Weekender.

Firstly, how excited are you for today's Wembley Final?

I'm absolutely buzzing for today! I'm devastated I can't make it as I'm playing the Neighbourhood weekend festival in Warrington. I'll be watching from the dressing room with the lads before we take to the stage. Everyone I know is going down, so fingers crossed for a spectacular day and a massive result for the Sky Blues.

How did you become a Coventry City fan?

It's my hometown Club. My grandad was also a huge fan of Coventry, so it was passed down from him and my uncle.

Who were your Coventry heroes growing up?

Darren Huckerby. He had so much pace to burn. Peter Ndlovu was another as he had an absolute box of tricks.

What are your earliest memories of watching the Club?

My first memories I remember were just being a junior and my dad would take me down to Highfield Road. I saw the stadium and I was hooked almost instantly.

What's your favourite Coventry memory?

When Darren Huckerby scored against Man United to win 3-2 in 1997. It was an unbelievable goal in what was unbelievable times for the Club. Hopefully, we can get back to that.



With your busy schedule, do you get to many games?

As The Enemy had taken a break, I have managed to get to pretty much every home game for the past four or five seasons.

How does this Coventry side compare to teams of the past?

In terms of team cohesion, it's up there with the best despite coming through the lower leagues. What Mark Robins and the Club have achieved is miraculous. There really is a sense of togetherness and community, which is contagious to us fans. Reaching the Play-Off Final is what they have deserved and I would love nothing more than to see them succeed.

What would winning the Play-Off Final mean to you?

It's beyond words to be honest. As well as bringing Premier League football back to Coventry, it would firstly be a huge catalyst for positive change for the whole city.

Do you have a message for Mark Robins and the players ahead of the game?

Messiah Mark, thank you for everything so far, you have made us proud and allowed us to believe again. Good luck lads, you've got the whole city behind you. 'Sky Blue Forever'.

Finally, let's hear your prediction for the Final... can Coventry do it?

I had a dream the other night – we scored three in the first 15 minutes. But I'm going to be realistic and say 2-0 to Coventry. Good luck lads. 'We'll Live And Die In These Towns'.

Listen to The Enemy on the Official EFL Championship Play-Off Final Playlist. Scan the QR code to listen to the playlist on Spotify.

BATTLE OF THE BANDS

SOURDOUGH

Luton-based noise-rock band SOURDOUGH boasts two lifelong Hatters in its ranks.



Frontman Jacob Kyte and drummer Connor Bishop have seen the highs and lows of their Club playing in four different divisions since first attending Kenilworth Road in 2006.

After releasing their debut EP titled 'Outlet' in 2022, Bedfordshire's rebel-rousing trio (Jacob, Connor and Charlie Bennett) are preparing to drop a Rise Bailey Rise remix of their single 'Holocene Ending' on 30 June.

Firstly, how excited are you for today's Wembley Final?

Connor: I'm buzzing. Luton haven't been in the top flight since 1992 and I wasn't born until 1994, so if everything goes to plan, it will be something we've never experienced.

Jacob: I can't wait. There's been a big buzz about Luton all season, but after the Semi-Final win over Sunderland, it's really ramped up.

How did you become a Luton Town fan?

Connor: We played a school football tournament when we were in Year 6 in 2006 and we got free tickets to the Luton v Birmingham game at Kenilworth Road – not because we won it, but because we had the best costumes! I was hooked after that first taste of Kenilworth Road.

Jacob: The Luton tickets might've been a sympathy vote, but it got us where we needed to be and Luton won 3-2.

Who were your Luton heroes growing up?

Connor: I liked Steve Howard because he scored so many goals, but he left for Derby County before I saw him live. It was Rowan Vine after that, but shout-out to Pelly-Ruddock Mpanzu because he's been at the Club for nine years since the non-league days!

Jacob: It has to be Ahmet Brković for me, and Hatters DJ Matt Crawley for playing our tracks on the matchday playlist at Kenilworth Road for the last few seasons!

What are your earliest memories of watching the Club?

Connor: Probably getting a football signed by Enoch Showunmi, which was about the only time he found the target!

Jacob: I used to go with my grandad a lot. I was six or seven, but I was so short I could barely see what was going on. Everyone was always standing up, so I just remember the backs of men's legs and never knowing when to join in with all the clapping.

What's your favourite Luton memory?

Connor: I was at Wembley for the Johnstone's Paint Trophy win in 2009 against Scunthorpe United. Claude Gnakpa scoring the winner in extra-time was incredible. There were 40,000 of us in the Luton end and the place erupted!

Jacob: The last decade has been full of great memories. The back-to-back promotions to get into the Championship were two whole seasons of excitement, but I've got a soft spot for Olly Lee scoring from inside his own half at The Kenny against Cambridge United.

How does this Luton side compare to teams of the past?

Connor: This is the best I've ever had it. Luton were in the Championship when we first watched them, but mid-table was the best that side finished. It's not even a fair comparison with the Luton team of now to those in the non-league and lower leagues.

Jacob: It would still be fun to see what the likes of Brković, Vine and Howard could add to this side!

What would winning the Play-Off Final mean to you?

Connor: We're in uncharted territory here. No team has ever gone from the non-league to the Premier League in nine years. There will be limbs, hugs, songs, smiles and the biggest party ever!

Jacob: It would mean so much for the town too. Luton gets a bad rap but it's the people that make the place. From the music scene to the Football Club, there's unity.

Do you have a message for Rob Edwards and the players ahead of the game?

Connor: They've already made us proud. So just stick it in the goal hole, lads, and let's have a party.

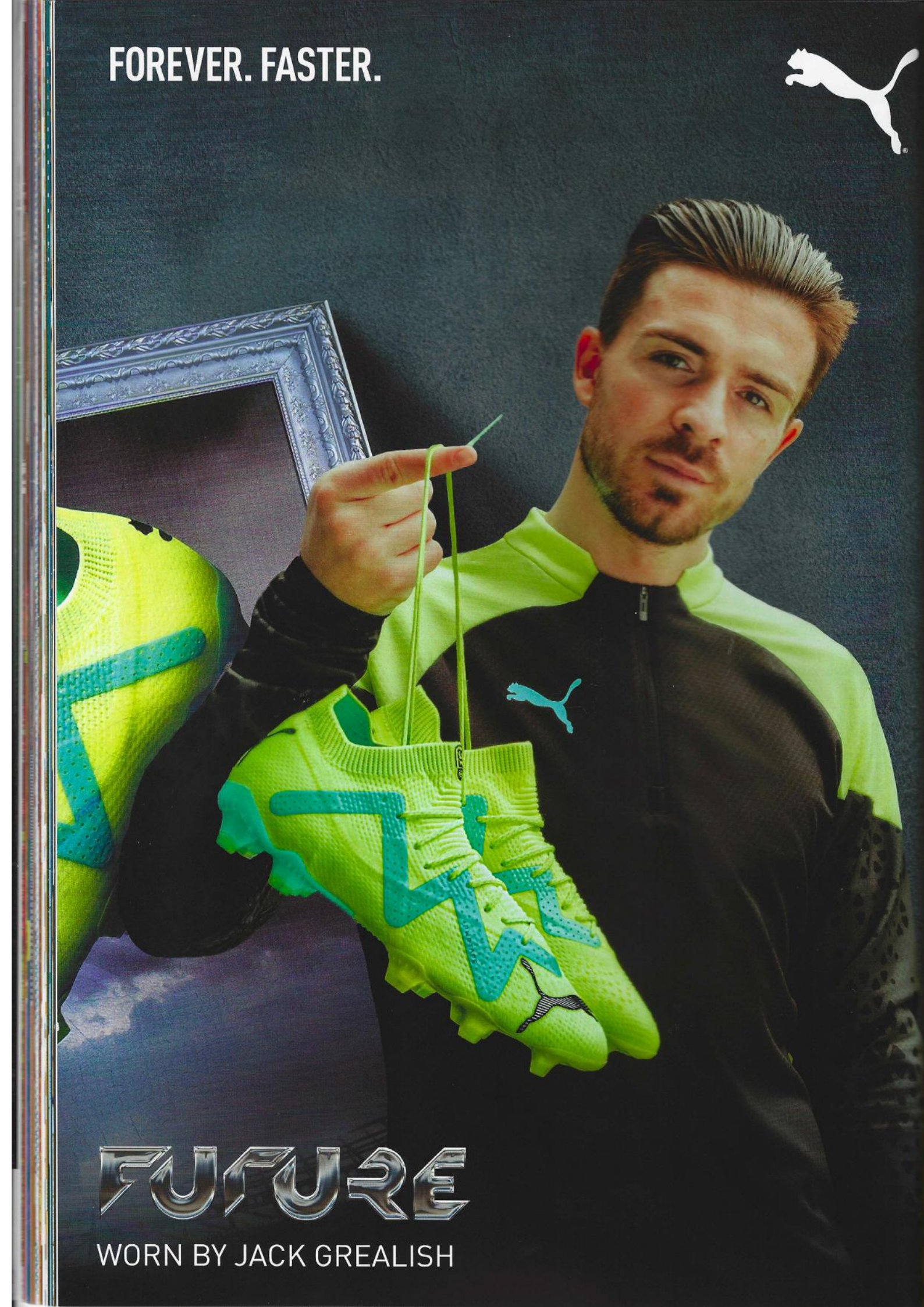
Jacob: Do the business and you'll all be permanently on the guest list for every single SOURDOUGH show!

Finally, let's hear your prediction for the Final... can Luton do it?

Jacob: It's been 3-2 on two occasions at Wembley, so let's make it a hat-trick. Elijah Adebayo with the winner.

Connor: I'm going for 2-0. Tom Lockyer and Pelly-Ruddock Mpanzu to score a banger and for someone to sculpt the statue that legend deserves!

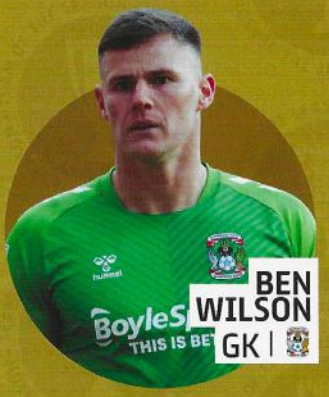
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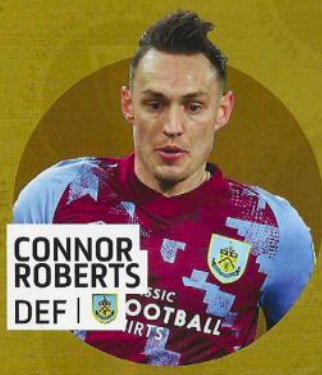
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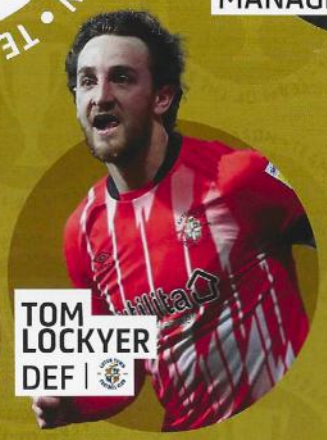
VINCENT KOMPANY
MANAGER



BEN WILSON
GK



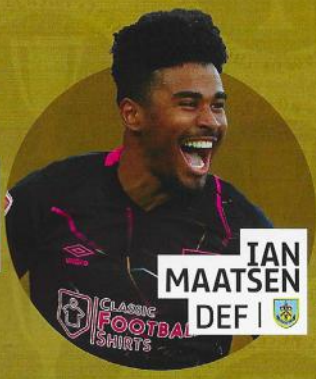
CONNOR ROBERTS
DEF



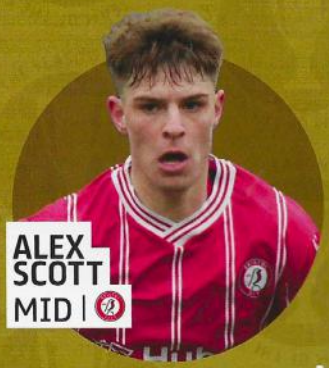
TOM LOCKYER
DEF



ANEL AHMEDHODŽIĆ
DEF



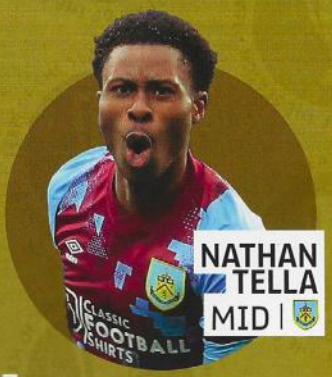
IAN MAATSEN
DEF



ALEX SCOTT
MID

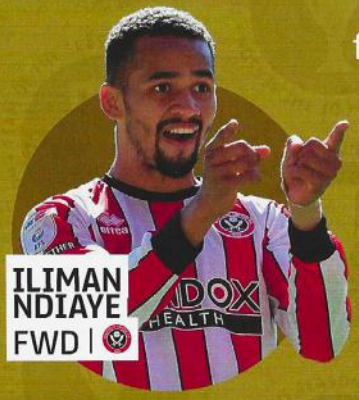


JOSH BROWNHILL
MID



NATHAN TELLA
MID

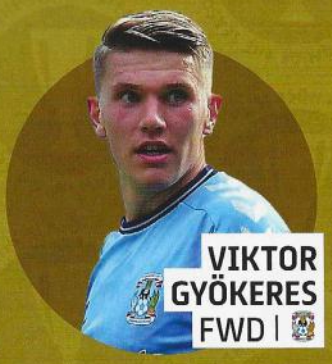
As announced at the EFL Awards 2023, here is the Sky Bet Championship Team of the Season, which includes 11 players and a manager, selected for making a significant contribution for their team on the field of play.



ILIMAN NDIAYE
FWD



CHUBA AKPOM
FWD



VIKTOR GYÖKERES
FWD

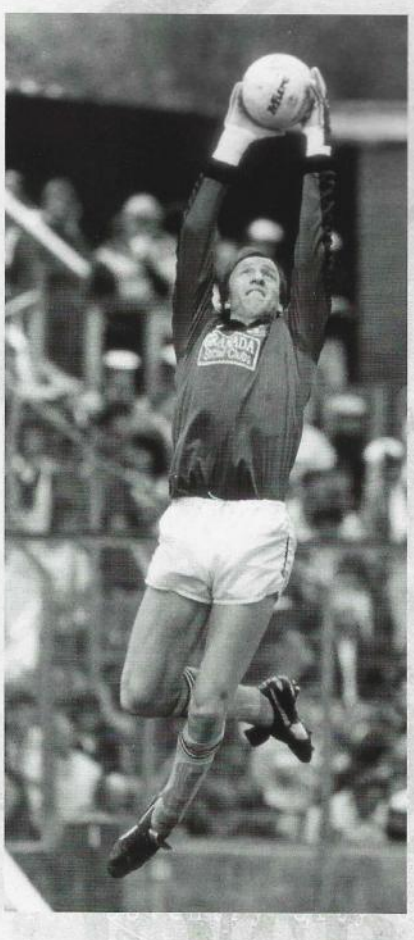
FLASHBACK

Sky Blues Royalty

Coventry City legend Steve Ogrizovic will forever be associated with the Sky Blues, having amassed over 500 appearances during a 16-year playing career, before spending almost two decades on the coaching staff.

As a player, he was part of the side that defeated Tottenham Hotspur to claim FA Cup glory in 1987, while he was the Club's goalkeeping coach when their journey back up the EFL began with the League Two Play-Off Final success over Exeter City in 2018.

WORDS: **JACK WYLIE**



What does Coventry City mean to you?

It means everything really. I joined in 1984 and retired in 2019, so I spent 35 years at the Club – 16 years as a player and the rest as a coach. It's been the bulk of my working life.

How does it feel to see the Club reach the Championship Play-Off Final?

It's a brilliant feeling. It was a Premier League Club while I was a player and it'd been there for such a long time before getting relegated. There had been some dismal times after that, but thankfully, the Club has managed to resurrect itself and it's an unbelievable feeling to think we're on the verge of the Premier League once again.

There seems to be a real togetherness again between the Club and the supporters...

Mark Robins has always been able to remain really calm and tried to keep the off-field activities separate from the playing activities. His mantra has very much been, 'what will be, will be' and he's quietly got on with assembling a really good squad of players. There's an identity to the Club and it's clear where it wants to go.

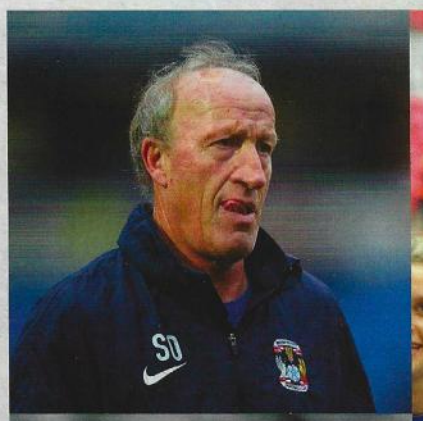
The fans have stuck by the Club through thick and thin and they're getting their just rewards. There's a definite connect between the players and the fans and you see that with the way they celebrate together after games. I know for a fact that every single ticket that Coventry fans can get their hands on will be snapped up.

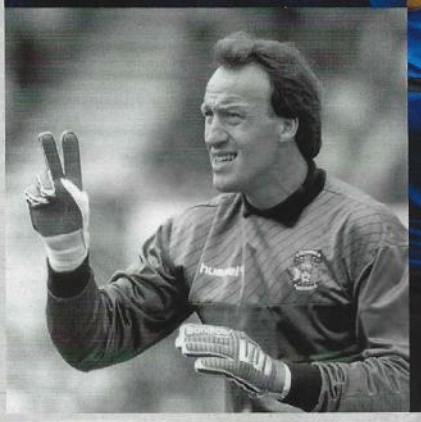
Having taken the Club from League Two to the cusp of the Premier League, how impressive of an achievement has that been from Mark Robins?

When you consider all the problems and adversity that he's had to contend with, it's an absolutely incredible achievement. This season, to be bottom of the league at the start of October and then to be where they are now, it's nothing short of remarkable.

In goal, Ben Wilson claimed the Golden Glove and was named in the Championship Team of the Season. What have you made of his performances this year?

Ben's a great story. He started off as an understudy and he's a very good team player – he's got a really infectious personality. When he got the opportunity to step up to the first team earlier in the season, he's taken it with open arms and he's been a revelation. Some of his performances have been outstanding. It's a team







effort, of course, but keepers are often measured on clean sheets and he's hit a Club-record number this season.

He even managed to get a goal – the first Coventry keeper since yourself to bag one. It's an exclusive Club!

That just adds to the unbelievable story. When you look at the context as well, if they hadn't have got that equaliser, Blackburn would've been two points better off and they would've gone to the Play-Offs instead. So, it wasn't just a goal, it was a goal of massive importance.

It's quite a rise, isn't it, to suddenly have a breakthrough season at the age of 30!

It's very unusual, but he's a confident performer and he's a big reason they are where they are. People talk about Viktor Gyökeres with his goals and Gus Hamer in midfield – they've been the standout performers in the team – but Ben Wilson is certainly in that category as well. He's been outstanding when called upon and it's been like he's a player with 500 appearances under his belt.

You were part of the coaching staff for the 2018 League Two Play-Off Final, which was the start of the journey. Talk about your memories from that day.

The memories date back to a year earlier when we got to the EFL Trophy Final against Oxford United. My biggest recollection from that was the overriding sense of how much the Club was still loved by the community, even though we were getting relegated in the league. I think that day put smiles on people's faces and it reminded everyone how important the Football Club is to the fans.

They were out in force once again a year later when we got promoted via the Play-Offs against Exeter and the Club hasn't really looked back since. For any young fan that's just started supporting the Club, they must think it's like this all the time! I can assure them it isn't, but it's been a fantastic five or six years!

Do you feel the Premier League is where the Club belongs?

I played all my football with the Club in the Premier League and that's where the experiences I've got are, from a playing point of view. Nobody's got a divine right to be there and Coventry has suffered some dark times, so it'd be great to get back there.

What are some of your standout memories as a player?

The standout would be the 1987 FA Cup victory at the Old Wembley when we beat Spurs. But every year, competing against the top teams and the best players in the country was a wonderful experience.

What message would you give to the players on an occasion like this?

Players handle pressure so well these days. My advice would just be to not let the day pass you by. Make sure you



thoroughly enjoy the experience and have no regrets. In my mind, they're winners no matter what happens today, but we all want the right result and to get back to the Premier League.

What do you make of Coventry's chances against Luton?

I admire what Luton have done and they've obviously gained more points than Coventry this season. They've got two impressive strikers and they're a well-drilled side. Either Club are worthy of a place in the top flight and I think it'll be a terrific game. It's a difficult one to call, but with a Sky Blue hat on, I'm hoping for a Coventry win.

FLASHBACK

A Brilliant Day!

Luton Town 3-2 Scunthorpe United (AET)

SUNDAY 5 APRIL 2009 | EFL TROPHY FINAL | WEMBLEY STADIUM

Relegated to League Two at the end of the 2007/08 season, Luton Town were unable to avoid dropping out of the Football League the following year, but the campaign still holds fond memories for the Kenilworth Road faithful, as their side claimed the EFL Trophy that season.

WORDS: **ANDY GREEVES**

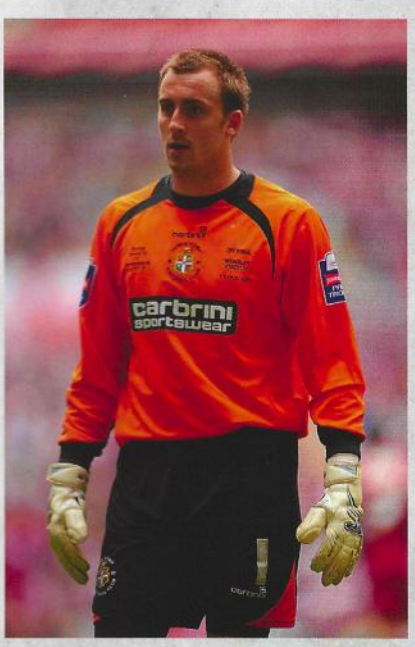
After victories over Brentford, Walsall and Colchester United, Luton's class of 2008/09 progressed to a two-legged Southern Section Final against Brighton & Hove Albion.

After a goalless draw at the Withdean Stadium and a 1-1 draw after extra-time in the second leg at Kenilworth Road on 17 February 2009, a penalty shoot-out was required. On loan goalkeeper Lewis Price was the hero for the Hatters as he saved spot-kicks from Chris Birchall and Jason Jarrett to ensure the Bedfordshire Club's first trip to Wembley since they had won the League Cup back in 1988.

"I was on the bench for that Brighton game," recalls Dean Brill – who made 109 appearances in two spells with his hometown Club Luton, having risen through the youth ranks to make his first-team debut in September 2003 at the age of 17.

"I just remember the scenes of celebration after that win. It brought with it relief, excitement... it gave people hope and joy during a really difficult time. And we won on penalties, which made it even more exciting!"

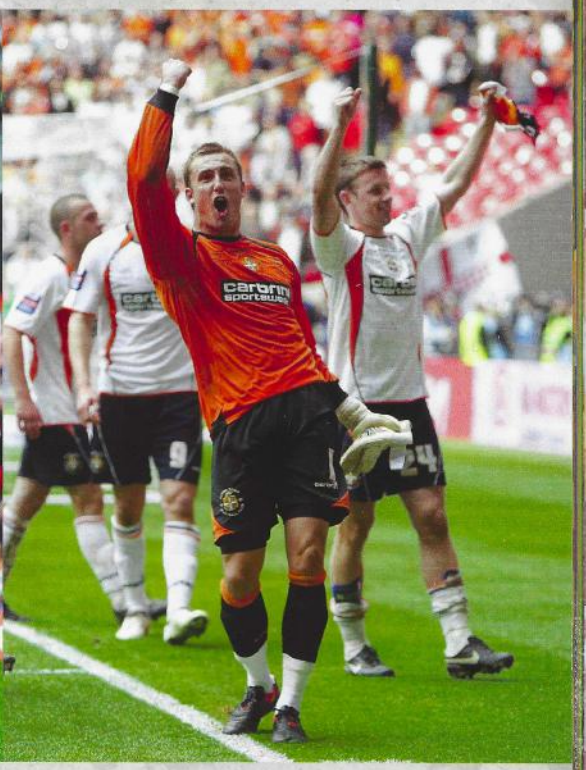
None of Luton's starting XI for their EFL Trophy Final against Scunthorpe United in April 2009 had played at Wembley before and for Hatters goalkeeper Brill, it was his first visit to the 'Home of Football' entirely.



"I remember the coach journey to the stadium and seeing it for the first time," comments Brill, who also played for Gillingham, Oldham Athletic, Barnet, Inverness Caledonian Thistle, Motherwell, Colchester United and Leyton Orient during his 17-year-long playing career.

"When we arrived, we got a realisation of just how big an event it was. The scenes were incredible. The amount of white and orange shirts, the flags, the scarves and everything.





"We were big underdogs, with Scunthorpe gunning for promotion to the Championship at the time, while we were looking to stay in the Football League. They had some really good players, not least the frontline of Gary Hooper and Paul Hayes. That was a really strong forward line for Scunthorpe in the division.

"Our fanbase dwarfed theirs on the day, though. I remember in the second half, when we switched ends, seeing we had three tiers full, whereas they just had one tier and a bit."

Sixth in League One at the time, Scunthorpe took a 14th-minute lead in the showpiece Final, when Hooper beat Brill with a shot from the edge of the penalty area after a flick-on from Hayes.

"There wasn't that feeling of 'oh no' when they scored," says Brill. "We still felt confident. Chris Martin scored a really good equaliser for us, finishing off a nice move. We went ahead in the second half through a lovely half-volley from Tom Craddock.

"It was incredible being at the other end seeing Tom scoring in front of our fans and a sea of people celebrating. I think you get the feeling in football sometimes that 'this is our day', that it's written in the stars. I had that feeling that day when Tom scored."

With just two minutes of the 90 remaining, Grant McCann levelled with a curling effort into the top corner of the Luton goal. "We knew he (McCann) was capable of something like that... it really was a pearler of a shot," admits Brill.

Despite conceding such a late equaliser, Luton's number one says heads never dropped in the Hatters' ranks.

"It was a sucker-punch, but again, I don't remember feeling that jolted from it," he adds. "We were a young team and whether it was a case of being a bit naïve, whether it was because of the support we had, I don't know. But we never felt in trouble at any moment in the game."

Luton boss Mick Harford made two substitutes on the day – the first of which saw him replace forward Craddock with French defender Claude Gnakpa on 85 minutes.

Finding himself in an unusual forward position five minutes into extra-time, Gnakpa raced onto a flighted ball from Keith Keane and got to it before the onrushing Scunthorpe goalkeeper, Joe Murphy, to put the Hatters back in front.

"The goal to win it is an iconic moment in the history of Luton Town," smiles Brill. "It's funny... I didn't see that goal coming. I thought the match would peter out in extra-time and it would end up going to penalties. Both teams were starting to get tired and there had been a lot of emotion from us. I thought the game would drift. But I was obviously very pleasantly surprised when Gnakpa scored!

"After the goal, I remember the last few minutes of extra-time. We really dug in. We were determined not to allow them back in the game as we had done in the 90 minutes. I can remember our players putting bodies on the line and my goal wasn't really troubled."

Brill, who is Head of Academy Goalkeeping at Tottenham Hotspur these days, fondly remembers the moment the full-time whistle sounded at the end of the match and "everyone going crazy".

"I remember after we'd lifted the trophy, turning round and seeing a sea of white and orange," he reminisces. "On the way up to collect the trophy and our medals, I saw a young boy and his dad, Richard. This boy had been at every Luton game that season and sat in the Kenilworth Road Stand.

"On the way up the steps, I gave him my gloves. Three or four years later, Richard messaged me to say they'd framed the gloves. That was a nice story from an incredible day in my career. One I'll never forget." ◘





LIFEBUOY SOAPER HEROES

EFL Partner Lifebuoy have worked with the EFL, EFL Trust and Club Community Organisations to develop their children's hand hygiene campaign, Soaper Heroes for Football Clubs.

The EFL teamed up with Lifebuoy to develop the initiative, which primarily existed as a schools programme.

Since early 2022, the material has been adapted to enhance the programme, using experience from the EFL and the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) as well as advice from UK public health experts and schoolteachers.

Lifebuoy's cartoon mascots, Bish, Bash and Bosh, guide children through fun experiments and use catchy songs designed to embed good handwashing practices into their everyday lives.

Together, Lifebuoy and the EFL have developed warm-up and clean-up activities that can be incorporated into regular football sessions with the dual aim of being engaging but also educating about hygiene.

The EFL has further supported the programme by recruiting its own ambassadors, Clinton Morrison and Bela Shah.

Lifebuoy and Soaper Heroes ambassador Shah has made special appearances at Football Festivals throughout the year, while Morrison became a Soaper Hero more recently, helping to lead a training session at Woodford CE Primary School.

Together, Lifebuoy and the EFL have already recruited 95,577 Soaper Heroes through their sport partnerships and are looking forward to seeing what the partnership will achieve for the remainder of the season.

Schools and Clubs can still sign up and become Soaper Heroes!

Visit: **www.lifebuoy.co.uk/soaper-heroes-for-schools.html**



95.5K+

Soaper Heroes recruited.

130+

grassroots Football Clubs have signed up and have been using the Soaper Hero activities in their regular training sessions.

19,310

children engaged with the Soaper Hero programme at Utilita Football Festivals, ran by Club Community Organisations.

21,500

children additionally received Soaper Hero packs through existing Club Community Organisations' programmes.

EFL | Lifebuoy

OFFICIAL HYGIENE PARTNER

CHAMPIONSHIP

GAMES & PUZZLES

S	N	E	C	C	L	E	S	E	W	U	V	V	L	G
A	Y	E	L	B	M	E	W	Y	L	J	E	O	N	M
T	D	V	Z	J	E	K	P	P	H	O	R	F	W	C
M	K	L	K	T	S	H	L	Y	K	I	G	S	Z	F
N	K	S	K	U	N	A	E	C	Y	H	F	L	N	A
K	N	A	M	D	Y	L	L	A	N	C	M	W	A	D
U	D	A	A	O	R	C	R	K	J	L	R	S	M	Z
B	F	L	F	E	Y	U	O	O	V	V	T	T	E	E
X	A	F	Y	D	S	G	F	Z	B	Z	Y	Y	E	A
C	H	A	M	P	I	O	N	S	H	I	P	I	R	N
S	D	R	A	W	D	E	R	T	A	K	N	J	F	J
Q	S	T	I	X	D	K	P	L	H	P	O	S	X	A
F	Q	U	I	R	T	R	E	P	R	O	H	T	K	E
W	N	N	A	K	A	M	B	A	K	I	P	D	C	G
E	A	Y	C	O	O	B	A	J	M	X	X	T	T	E

Answers on page 98

Shirt Number Sums

Complete the sums to identify the players...









Word Search

Can you find all of the words on the list in the word search?

Robins
Rose
McFadzean
McNally
Eccles
Edwards
Thorpe
Freeman
Muskwe
Nakamba
Wembley
Championship
Play Off



Face Mash

Can you name the two players (one from each Club) we've mashed together above?



PLAY-OFF FI

DEAN WINDASS

HULL CITY
BEAT BRISTOL CITY 1-0
CHAMPIONSHIP 2008

BOBBY ZAMORA

QUEENS PARK RANGERS
BEAT DERBY COUNTY 1-0
CHAMPIONSHIP 2014

NICK POWELL

CREWE ALEXANDRA
BEAT CHELTENHAM TOWN 2-0
LEAGUE TWO 2012

NEIL WARNOCK

HUDDERSFIELD TOWN
BEAT BRISTOL ROVERS 2-0
LEAGUE ONE 1995

CHARLIE ADAM

BLACKPOOL
BEAT CARDIFF CITY 3-2
CHAMPIONSHIP 2010



NAL HEROES

ALEX REVELL

ROTHERHAM UNITED
BEAT LEYTON ORIENT 2-2P
LEAGUE ONE 2014

CLIVE MENDONCA

CHARLTON ATHLETIC
BEAT SUNDERLAND 4-4P
CHAMPIONSHIP 1998

NICKY WEAVER

MANCHESTER CITY
BEAT GILLINGHAM 2-2P
LEAGUE ONE 1999

ADAM HAMMILL

BARNSLEY
BEAT MILLWALL 3-1
LEAGUE ONE 2016

JERMAINE BECKFORD

PRESTON NORTH END
BEAT SWINDON TOWN 4-0
LEAGUE ONE 2015

Team Talk

GUSTAVO HAMER

Two-time Coventry City Player of the Year Gustavo Hamer has been a fan favourite ever since his arrival from Eredivisie outfit PEC Zwolle in July 2020, endearing himself to the supporters with his quality on the ball and work rate off it.

He was the man who scored the goal that took the Sky Blues to today's Wembley showpiece, but now the Brazilian-born midfielder has another challenge, as he reveals all about his team-mates in **Team Talk**!

Who is the star man?
For me, it's got to be **Kyle McFadzean**.

Who is the unsung hero?
Liam Kelly. He hasn't always played this season but he just trains hard and keeps the team focused. He's been unreal the last few games he's started.

Who is your best friend?
Fankaty Dabo.

Who has the best dress sense?
Jonathan Panzo.

Who is the joker in the dressing room?
Ben Wilson.

Who is the best singer?
No one sings really, it's more dancing. I can't sing, I just shout when no-one hears me!

Who is the best at FIFA?
I don't play it, but I would say **Josh Wilson-Esbrand**.

Who is the most intelligent?
Ben Sheaf.

Who is the most superstitious?
Me, I think. I put my left shin pad on first, then my right one. My GPS vest goes on last. When I have a rub down, it has to be my left hamstring, left calf, right hamstring, right calf.

Who is the best dancer?
Jonathan Panzo!

Who is the dressing room DJ?
Jake Bidwell or **Fankaty Dabo**.

Who speaks the most languages?
Viktor Gyökeres speaks two, I speak two, Ben Wilson speaks two if you include his Geordie. I think two is the most.

Who is the most likely to have their own TV show?
Ben Wilson or **Viktor Gyökeres**.

Who practices their celebration the most?
Viktor because he scores the most!

Who would win a 100m sprint race?
Fábio Tavares or **Brooke Norton-Cuffy**.

Who is the most likely to become a manager?
Ben Sheaf or **Kyle McFadzean**.

Who is the most skilful?
Josh Wilson-Esbrand.

Who is the best in the kitchen?
Jamie Allen.

If you could take one attribute from a team-mate and add it to your game, what would it be?
I'd like **Kyle McFadzean's** ability to talk, or how **Liam Kelly** talks as well.

Who is the manager's favourite?
I don't think there is one!

Who has the strangest hobby/interest?

Jamie Allen. He goes hiking. That's weird.

Who has the best nickname?

Callum O'Hare – C'010.

Who spends the most time in the gym?

Jake Bidwell.

You're hosting a team dinner party for four... who gets an invite?

Everyone has to come. We are one team. That's rude to just have four. I'll have multiple dinners, so everyone can come on a different day!

Name your five-a-side team from the players in the squad.



BoyleSport
THIS IS BETTING.

Team Talk

ALFIE DOUGHTY

Summer signing Alfie Doughty linked up with Luton Town at the beginning of the campaign and has played a pivotal part in the Hatters' promotion push.

Since his arrival from Stoke City, the 23-year-old has made 34 appearances in all competitions and has got to know his team-mates well along the way.

Here, the midfielder gives us the lowdown on the squad.

Who is the star man?
I'd have to say **Eli** (Elijah Adebayo), **Carlton** (Morris) or **Locks** (Tom Lockyer). All three of them – I can't pick one.

Who is the unsung hero?
Marvelous Nakamba.

Who is your best friend?
Either **Pottsy** (Dan Potts) or **Burkey** (Reece Burke).

Who has the best dress sense?
I'm going to go with myself or **Reece Burke**.

Who is the manager's favourite?
Tom Lockyer.

Who is the joker in the dressing room?
Dan Potts.

Who is the best singer?
Pelly Ruddock.

Who is the best at FIFA?
I'll go with **Elijah Adebayo**.

Who is the most intelligent?
Carlton Morris, I think.

Who is the dressing room DJ?
That's **Pelly Ruddock**.

Who is the most superstitious?
Tom Lockyer.

Who speaks the most languages?
Marvelous Nakamba.

Who is the most likely to have their own TV show?
Pelly Ruddock.

Who would win a 100m sprint race?
Fred (Onyedinma).

Who practices their celebration the most?
Pelly.

Who is the best dancer?
Pelly again!

Who has the strangest hobby/interest?
I don't really know about anyone's hobbies apart from golf!

Who is the most likely to become a manager?
Amari'i Bell.

Who is the most skilful?
Eli.

Who is the best in the kitchen?
Me.

Who has the best nickname?
Marv (Marvelous Nakamba).



Who spends the most time in the gym?

Allan Campbell.

If you could take one attribute from a team-mate and add it to your game, what would it be?

Clicker's (Jordan Clark) dribbling.

You're hosting a team dinner party for four... who gets an invite?

Pelly because he's funny; Locks because he's weird; Marv because of his stories, and we'll go with Eli.

Name your five-a-side team from the players in the squad.







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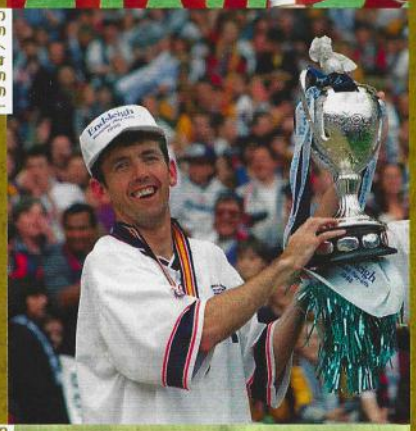
At eBay we're proud to champion the small businesses in the communities of the teams we love. That's why every match day we're donating our advertising spaces around EFL grounds up and down the country to local businesses.

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Start championing local businesses.
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PLAY-OFF FINAL CLASSICS

WORDS: **DANNY LEWIS**

Today's Sky Bet Championship Play-Off Final between Coventry City and Luton Town will be the 100th single-match Play-Off Final, taking place in Wembley Stadium's centenary year.

The previous 99 showdowns – hosted at Wembley, the Millennium Stadium or Old Trafford – across all three divisions have been fraught with tension, drama and excitement.

Here, we look back on some of the classic EFL Play-Off Final encounters.

1992/93

SWINDON TOWN 4 LEICESTER CITY 3

Player-manager Glenn Hoddle led the way for Swindon Town with a cool finish, which Craig Maskell followed up by firing in an effort off the post before a brave header from Shaun Taylor gave the Robins a commanding lead. Leicester City didn't give up, though, with Julian Joachim, Steve Walsh and Steve Thompson all scoring in the space of 12 second-half minutes to drag the Foxes back level. But there was still no stopping Swindon from reaching the top tier for the first time in their 73-year League history, as Steve White was brought down by Kevin Poole and Paul Bodin buried the ensuing penalty.

1994/95

BOLTON WANDERERS 4 READING 3

Reading will have been dreaming of their own first appearance in the top flight when Lee Nogan jinked his way into the box and struck past Keith Branagan, before their lead was doubled by Ady Williams just 12 minutes in. However, that lead fell apart in the final quarter of an hour due to goals from Owen Coyle and Fabian de Freitas, with the Trotters' momentum continuing into extra-time as Mixu Paatelainen and De Freitas struck. Jimmy Quinn got a goal back, but couldn't stop Bolton from reaching the top division for the first time since 1980.

1995/96

LEICESTER CITY 2 CRYSTAL PALACE 1

Another magnificent turnaround was required for Leicester City to earn an immediate return to the Premier League, after Andy Roberts opened the scoring for Crystal Palace with a strike from outside the box. Their route back into the match came when Muzzy Izzet was brought down by Marc Edworthy and Garry Parker smashed his spot-kick out of Nigel Martyn's reach. The game seemed destined to be decided by more penalties, with Foxes boss Martin O'Neill even switching goalkeeper Kevin Poole out for Zeljko Kalac in the 119th minute, but it was Steve Claridge who provided the game-changing heroics by sending his last-minute effort into the top corner.

1997/98

CHARLTON ATHLETIC 4 SUNDERLAND AFC 4

(Charlton won 7-6 on penalties)

This will always go down as one of the most iconic Play-Off Finals in any division. Clive Mendonca opened the scoring with a cool finish before Niall Quinn and Kevin Phillips showed their clinical instincts to turn the game in Sunderland's favour. In the constant tussle for supremacy, Mendonca struck back before Quinn beat Saša Ilić to re-establish the Black Cats' lead just two minutes later. However, Richard Rufus headed home to maintain Charlton hopes and take the game into extra-time, in which Nicky Summerbee scored with a brilliant strike before Mendonca once again clawed the Addicks back into the game with a superb touch and finish for his hat-trick. That took the game to penalties, and after 13 consecutive scorers, Michael Gray was the unfortunate player to have his penalty saved.

1999/2000

BARNSLEY 2 IPSWICH TOWN 4

Having reached the Play-Offs in three consecutive seasons but falling at the Semi-Final stage, Ipswich Town made the most of their appearance in the main showpiece – the last Play-Off Final at the old Wembley. That was despite an unfortunate start, in which Craig Hignett's strike went off the crossbar, onto Richard Wright and into the net. Undeterred, Tony Mowbray, Richard Naylor and Marcus Stewart all scored to give George Burley's side a commanding lead. After Hignett once again gave Barnsley hope, this time from the penalty spot, Martijn Reuser raced in behind the Tykes defence to put the result beyond doubt with a confident finish in the 90th minute.

1999/2000



2001/02



2001/02

NORWICH CITY 1 BIRMINGHAM CITY 1

(Birmingham won 4-2 on penalties)

The Play-Offs can throw up some peculiar situations, and this was one of those occasions. After an entirely goalless 90 minutes, it didn't even take 40 seconds for Iwan Roberts to open the scoring in extra-time for Norwich City, as he headed home from fellow substitute Alex Notman's cross. Geoff Horsfield came back with a header of his own, though, to take the match to penalties. Birmingham City had previously been knocked out in the Semi-Finals three years in a row, twice in shoot-outs, but were victorious with four perfect spot-kicks, while Nico Vaesen denied Philip Mulryne and Daryl Sutch slid his attempt wide.

2009/10

BLACKPOOL 3 CARDIFF CITY 2

Ian Holloway had lost the 2003 Second Division Play-Off Final against Cardiff City with Queens Park Rangers, but he was the victorious manager on this occasion. All of the goals came in a blistering first half, with Michael Chopra opening the scoring before Charlie Adam struck back with an audaciously magnificent free-kick. Joe Ledley put the Welsh side ahead once again, but instinctive goals from Gary Taylor-Fletcher and Brett Ormerod completed the sensational job of getting Blackpool to the top tier for the first time since 1971.

2011/12



2011/12

BLACKPOOL 1 WEST HAM UNITED 2

After Blackpool had suffered relegation, there was more heartbreak to come in the Play-Offs, as it was West Ham United who earned an immediate return to the Premier League. Carlton Cole broke the deadlock just after the half-hour mark, controlling Matthew Taylor's ball through and calmly finishing past Matt Gilks. Tom Ince struck back early in the second period to level the tie, although the Hammers were the ones celebrating at the end. Cole was involved again, getting on the end of Kevin Nolan's cross and poking the ball across for Ricardo Vaz Tê to send the claret and blue side of Wembley into rapture.

2013/14

DERBY COUNTY 0 QUEENS PARK RANGERS 1

Bobby Zamora had already scored a winner in a Play-Off Final when West Ham United beat Preston North End in 2005, but this one was even more dramatic. In the 90th minute, the striker took full advantage when Derby County captain Richard Keogh failed to convincingly clear Junior Hoilett's cross, providing a cool finish to spark the wildest of celebrations as QPR returned to the Premier League at the first time of asking. In a contrast that shows the extreme highs and lows of the Play-Offs, Rams manager Steve McClaren described it as "the cruellest game ever".

2013/14



PLAY-OFF FINAL CLASSICS

WORDS: **DANNY LEWIS**

1991/92

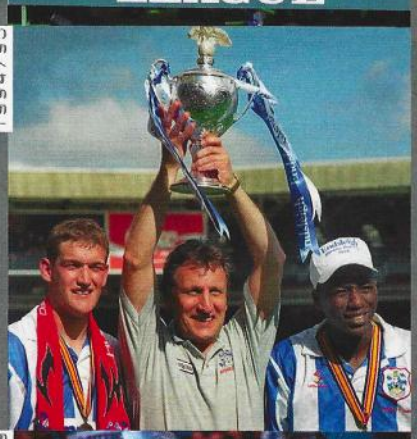


1991/92

PETERBOROUGH UNITED 2 STOCKPORT COUNTY 1

Both teams had booked their place in the Final with a late winner, so it should be no surprise that the action continued until the very end at Wembley. Peterborough United's Ken Charlery opened the scoring in the 52nd minute with a towering header that hit the crossbar and was adjudged to have crossed the line by the finest of margins. Kevin Francis then seemed destined to take the match to extra-time when he nodded home after Andy Preece's shot was spilled with three minutes remaining. However, there was still time for Charlery to score again and earn Posh back-to-back promotions in their first-ever Play-Off campaign.

1994/95



1994/95

HUDDERSFIELD TOWN 2 BRISTOL ROVERS 1

Neil Warnock masterminded Huddersfield Town's mission to stay in the second tier this season, but in 1994/95 he was focusing on getting the Terriers up there. Shortly before half-time, three consecutive Huddersfield headers culminated in Andy Booth guiding his into the top corner, although Rovers equalised almost immediately through an instinctive finish from Marcus Stewart. In the 81st minute, Chris Billy scored another header to establish a lead the Pirates couldn't cancel out as Warnock steered Town to promotion in their first successful Play-Off campaign before leaving to join Plymouth Argyle a mere eight days later.

1998/99



1998/99

GILLINGHAM 2 MANCHESTER CITY 2

(Man City won 3-1 on penalties)

In 1999, Manchester City may not have been the powerhouses they are today, but they were still the favourites against a Gillingham side making their first appearance at Wembley Stadium. There wasn't a single goal in the first 80 minutes, with absolute mania playing out after that. Goals from Carl Asaba and Robert Taylor had the Gills dreaming of a place in the second tier for the first time in their history, but Kevin Horlock renewed City hopes before Paul Dickov fired in a miraculous equaliser in the 95th minute. City stopper Nicky Weaver was the hero of the shoot-out, with Gillingham only scoring once from 12 yards as Joe Royle's side went on to secure victory.

1999/2000

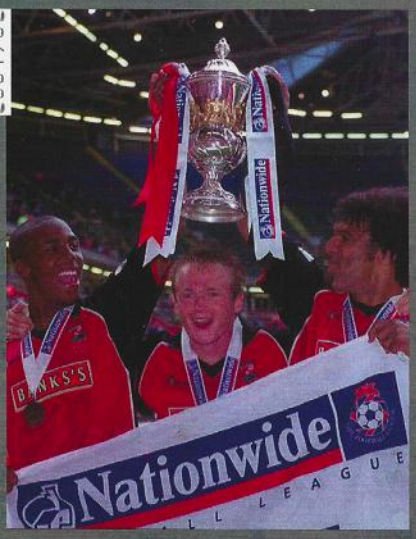


1999/2000

WIGAN ATHLETIC 2 GILLINGHAM 3

The Gills came back from that defeat to win promotion the following season, doing so in one of the last competitive matches to be played at the original Wembley Stadium. Gillingham were gifted the opener as Pat McGibbon scored an own goal, but Simon Haworth equalised with an outrageous looped finish as the game went into extra-time, despite Kevin Sharp being sent off for a second bookable offence. Wigan even went ahead when Stuart Barlow smashed in from the penalty spot, although Gillingham came back defiantly with headers from substitutes Steve Butler and Andy Thomson, earning an unforgettable victory that proved to be Peter Taylor's parting gift before taking over the managerial reins at Leicester City two weeks later.

2001/02



2000/01

WALSALL 3 READING 2

The first third-tier Play-Off Final to be played at the Millennium Stadium provided the usual level of drama between Walsall and Reading. Striker Jamie Cureton opened the scoring for the Royals when his effort crept past Jimmy Walker, but Don Goodman got Walsall back on level terms shortly after the break. With the scores tied after 90 minutes, Reading restored their advantage less than 60 seconds into extra-time when Martin Butler headed home, but it was his former Club that went on to win. Following a bizarre Tony Rougier own goal, Darren Byfield scored to earn the Saddlers an immediate return to the First Division.

2004/05

HARTLEPOOL UNITED 2 SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY 4

Sheffield Wednesday's first-ever Play-Off outing definitely provided a Final to remember. Paul Sturrock's side went ahead just before half-time as Jon-Paul McGovern converted from Craig Rocastle's low cross, but Eifion Williams prodded home an equaliser within two minutes of the restart. Jon Daly headed Hartlepool United ahead, before the game was turned back in Wednesday's favour when Chris Westwood was shown a red card and conceded a penalty that Steven MacLean smashed through Dimitrios Konstantopoulos' clutches. The Owls made the most of their man advantage in extra-time, as Glenn Whelan danced his way through and fired them ahead, before Drew Talbot rounded the goalkeeper and slid the ball into the gaping net. Hartlepool's heartbreak continued with relegation the following season.

2005/06

BARNSLEY 2 SWANSEA CITY 2

(Barnsley won 4-3 on penalties)

These teams were separated by a solitary point in the league campaign, and they traded blows at the Millennium Stadium. Barnsley forward Paul Hayes' volley opened the scoring, but Rory Fallon conjured a spectacular bicycle kick to equalise just nine minutes later. The Swans then found themselves ahead when Andy Robinson's strike slipped through Nick Colgan's grasp, before Daniel Nardiello's free-kick got the game back on level terms – how it would stay until a penalty shootout. Adebayo Akinfenwa missed the target completely with his spot kick, before Colgan redeemed himself by saving Alan Tate's effort to earn Barnsley's first Play-Off final win.

2008/09

MILLWALL 2 SCUNTHORPE UNITED 3

Scunthorpe United had clearly got used to tight encounters in the Play-Offs, having beaten MK Dons on penalties to reach the Wembley showpiece. Matt Sparrow, the Iron's longest-serving player, opened the scoring just six minutes in to give them the perfect start. However, Gary Alexander scored with a sensational strike and then conjured a header that crept past Joe Murphy moments later. Not to be outdone, Sparrow showed brilliant composure for his second of the match, setting the scene for Martyn Woolford to fire in the winner with just five minutes left on the clock, earning Scunthorpe an immediate return to the Championship.

2008/09



2013/14



2013/14

LEYTON ORIENT 2 ROTHERHAM UNITED 2

(Rotherham won 4-3 on penalties)

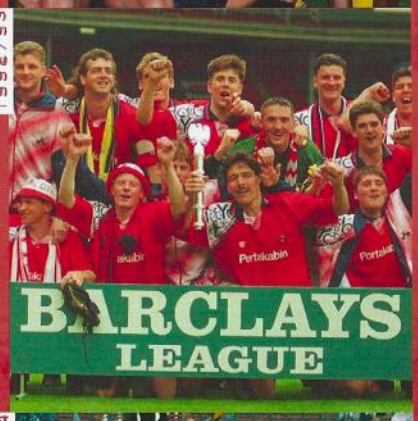
These sides had finished the regular season level on points, and it once again proved near impossible to separate them at Wembley. Moses Odubajo took centre stage in the first half, beating Adam Collin with a special strike, then playing a pinpoint pass to tee up Dean Cox to double Leyton Orient's lead. The second half was all about Alex Revell, though, as the striker poked the ball into a gaping net, then followed that up by equalising with one of the greatest goals ever scored in a Play-Off Final. "Revell... ambitious, but brilliant!" Those were the iconic words of Sky Sports commentator Daniel Mann after the Rotherham United number nine's dipping volley from 30 yards out arched over Orient keeper Jamie Jones. The match went all the way to penalties, and it was Collin who prevailed as the hero, saving consecutive efforts from Mathieu Baudry and Chris Dagnall to seal the Millers' first-ever Play-Off Final success.

2018/19

CHARLTON ATHLETIC 2 SUNDERLAND AFC 1

Charlton Athletic had won a breath-taking First Division Play-Off Final against Sunderland on penalties in 1998, and they got the job done against the same opposition in memorable fashion over two decades later. That is despite the Addicks getting off to the worst possible start, as Naby Sarr's nonchalant back pass trickled past Dillon Phillips and into the net. Ben Purrington equalised in the 35th minute when he converted from Lyle Taylor's low cross. When it seemed as though the match was destined for extra-time, Patrick Bauer rose highest to head Josh Cullen's cross and was quickest to react after Tom Flanagan blocked his initial attempt, prodding the ball home to inflict Sunderland's second defeat at Wembley that season.









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PLAY-OFF FINAL CLASSICS

WORDS: **DANNY LEWIS**

1990/91

BLACKPOOL 2 TORQUAY UNITED 2

(Torquay won 5-4 on penalties)

Torquay United had been playing in the fourth tier for just shy of two decades by the time the Club made their second-ever appearance at Wembley to face Blackpool, who had been relegated the season before. Paul Groves' opener in the seventh minute had the Tangerines dreaming of an immediate promotion, but a Wes Saunders header and Dean Edwards penalty before half-time put Torquay in the ascendency, before Chris Curran's own goal levelled the scores. Blackpool's Dave Bamber had endured a match to forget, conceding the penalty before having a goal disallowed in extra-time, and it got even worse during the first-ever Play-Off final penalty shoot-out, as he missed the target with the decisive spot-kick.

1992/93

YORK CITY 1 CREWE ALEXANDRA 1

(York won 5-3 on penalties)

A Play-Off Final can spark into life at any time, and this edition proved just that. After a goalless affair in normal time, Gary Swann ran onto Paul Barnes' pass and clinically finished to finally open the scoring with what seemed destined to be the winner in York City's first-ever Final. However, Crewe Alexandra were awarded a penalty moments before the final whistle, which Dave McKearny duly converted. The defender also scored in the shoot-out but still suffered defeat as goalkeeper Dean Kiely was equal to Gareth Whalley's attempt. Crewe only had to wait one more year to get promoted, though, going up automatically after finishing third the following season.

1993/94

WYCOMBE WANDERERS 4 PRESTON NORTH END 2

Wycombe Wanderers entered the season as Conference champions and Martin O'Neill's side had adapted to the Football League brilliantly, finishing three points behind the third automatic promotion spot. At Wembley, the Chairboys showed their resolve by recovering from falling behind twice in a five-minute period. After Ian Bryson acrobatically opened the scoring, Steve Thompson responded by coolly equalising, only to see Paul Raynor head Preston North End back in front. A superb touch and finish from Simon Garner levelled the score again shortly after half-time, perfectly setting the scene for Dave Carroll to win the game. The midfielder's first goal was a simple finish, but the second saw him embark on a mazy run before firing his effort in off the inside of the post.

2000/01

BLACKPOOL 4 LEYTON ORIENT 2

This was the first season in which the Play-Off Finals were played at the Millennium Stadium during the redevelopment of Wembley. There was still theatre from the off in Cardiff, as a slip from Blackpool goalkeeper Phil Barnes allowed Chris Tate to open the scoring inside the opening minute. Ian Hughes then headed in the equaliser, but Scott Houghton's strike from range beat Barnes to provide a swift Orient response. Brian Reid instinctively equalised on the stroke of half-time and things became more comfortable for the Tangerines in the second period, as Paul Simpson and Brett Ormerod finished off blistering moves to earn Blackpool an immediate return to the third tier.

#EFLPlayOffs @theEFL @EFL @efl

2002/03



2002/03

AFC BOURNEMOUTH 5 LINCOLN CITY 2

Neither team had previously played in the Play-Offs, but they still provided its usual drama. AFC Bournemouth hero Steve Fletcher clinically opened the scoring before the half-hour mark, before Ben Futcher swiftly responded for Lincoln City by heading home the equaliser. Carl Fletcher then glanced in a header of his own to re-establish the Cherries' lead before the break, with quickfire goals from Stephen Purches and Gareth O'Connor adding breathing space in the second period. Mark Bailey briefly reduced the deficit, but another Carl Fletcher header extinguished any remaining glimmer of hope for the Imps as Bournemouth bounced back from suffering relegation the previous campaign.

2007/08

STOCKPORT COUNTY 3 ROCHDALE AFC 2

Stockport County hadn't earned promotion through the Play-Offs in any of their first four attempts, but the fifth time proved the charm. It didn't look like that would be the case when Rory McArdle headed in the opener, although an own goal from Nathan Stanton levelled the scores 10 minutes later. Anthony Pilkington then fronted Stockport's push for victory, heading in the goal that put them ahead before setting up Liam Dickinson to smash home to give his side some breathing space. Even though Adam Rundle's spectacular volley caught the eye, Rochdale's efforts to get back in the game proved futile as Jim Gannon's Hatters secured victory.

2009/10

DAGENHAM & REDBRIDGE 3 ROTHERHAM UNITED 2

Dagenham & Redbridge had never played in the EFL Play-Offs before, although there was a sense of familiarity when their top goalscorer Paul Benson hit the opener, even if their lead lasted under a minute due to a header from Ryan Taylor. Danny Green put the Daggers back in front, although that was once again cancelled out quickly by Taylor. With 20 minutes left on the clock, Jon Nurse re-established the Essex Club's lead with a deflected shot. Having managed to stay ahead, Dagenham went into League One for what is still the only season they have spent in the third tier in their history.

2014/15

WYCOMBE WANDERERS 1 SOUTHEND UNITED 1

(Southend won 7-6 on penalties)

Both teams had finished a solitary point behind the automatic promotion places before a Play-Off Final that was also decided by the finest of margins. After a goalless opening 90 minutes, Daniel Bentley was the unfortunate player credited with an own goal after Joe Jacobson's free-kick hit the crossbar before bouncing off the Southend stopper and diverting into the net during extra-time. Not to be defeated, the Shrimpers struck back through Joe Pigott's pinpoint finish in the 122nd minute. And Bentley emphatically recovered from his earlier disappointment, denying both Matt Bloomfield and Sam Wood as Southend won the penalty shoot-out.

2014/15



2015/16



2015/16

AFC WIMBLEDON 2 PLYMOUTH ARGYLE 0

On an unforgettable day at Wembley, AFC Wimbledon earned their sixth promotion since taking up their current guise in 2002, reaching League One for the first time. They had to wait 78 minutes for the opener, with an instinctive finish from Lyle Taylor sending the fans in blue into rapturous celebrations. In the 10th minute of added time, Adebayo Akinfenwa was offered the opportunity to double his team's lead after Ade Azeez had been brought down in the area. The striker sent Luke McCormick the wrong way and coolly converted for what proved to be a parting gift, as Akinfenwa announced during a memorable post-match interview that he was "technically unemployed" and would be looking for a new Club, inviting Managers to "hit me up on WhatsApp and get me a job".

2018/19

NEWPORT COUNTY 0 TRANMERE ROVERS 1

Tranmere Rovers certainly knew how to navigate a Play-Off, having taken that route to promotion from the National League the previous campaign. Patience was required this time around, as goalkeepers Joe Day and Scott Davies both pulled off big saves to ensure the game remained goalless in the original 90 minutes. Micky Mellon's team still had an advantage, as Newport captain Mark O'Brien was shown a second yellow for bringing down James Norwood towards the end of normal time. That man advantage eventually told in the final moments, when Jake Caprice delivered a superb cross that Connor Jennings headed past Day to earn Tranmere back-to-back promotions.

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OFFICIAL SUPPORTER



THIS IS WHAT IT MEANS...

Kyle MacFadzean

I don't think I've got the right words to explain it properly, but I'm absolutely over the moon to be representing Coventry City in the Championship Play-Off Final.

The Football Club means everything to me. Every time you put the shirt on, you have got to die for it – that's what it feels like.

I don't really get nervous for games, but I definitely was for the Semi-Finals. I think that explains why I got cramp! It's a massive achievement for the Club to reach the Final and the fans especially deserve it.

On a personal level, it has been an unbelievable season. I was disappointed to be out injured for a time and we've had some sticky patches here and there, but I always knew from the start that we had enough in the squad to get where we are, although we've not done anything yet, we need to win at Wembley!

It would be huge to secure promotion to the Premier League. For us as players, but more importantly for the fans and the city.

This Club means so much to the supporters; you could see that at the end of the Semi-Final against Middlesbrough, when they were singing all the players' songs. They have been second to none all season and no doubt that will be the same this afternoon.

The bond between the players and the fans is special. I got on the bus with some fans after a game a couple of weeks ago and that just shows you the relationship we have with them. The fans are the best thing about this Club and it's an honour to play for them.

We do a lot as players for the community and I think giving that extra little bit helps a lot. The supporters have been through enough over the years and it's time for us to give them some memories to cherish.

We're together on the field and we're together off the field. We're all determined to bring success to this Club. It's a first Play-Off Final for me, so I'm really looking forward to it and hopefully we can make today one of the best in our lives.

We know how much this Club means to the supporters and we know they'll be at their best in the stands today. We're focused on doing our bit and being at our best on the pitch and hopefully it'll be a special occasion for us all.

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SCAN ME
CLUB WEMBLEY

THIS IS WHAT IT MEANS...

Pelly-Ruddock Mpanzu

The Championship Play-Off Final is one of the biggest games in English football.

Some people would say this Club doesn't belong in an occasion like this because of its size, but we're here today to prove all the doubters wrong.

Losing the previous manager, Nathan Jones, back in November was a big loss, but Rob Edwards came in and said we can do something special. Now, we're one game away from changing our lives and making Luton Town a Premier League Club.

It's great for the fans, great for the players, great for the Club and great for the town. It's been a long time coming since Luton played in such a big game and we're desperate to finish the job and achieve something special.

A win today would be the peak of my career. You can't really beat winning the Championship Play-Off Final and gaining a place in the Premier League. Coventry City are a tough team but, God willing, hopefully we can do it.

I've spent the majority of my career here and it's been an emotional rollercoaster. There have been a lot of blood, sweat and tears shed at this Club. I've had more ups than downs, but we've been burned in the Play-Offs in the past and we were determined not to have that same feeling again. To get over the line against Sunderland and reach the Final felt so sweet.

We had confidence in both games, even when Sunderland went ahead. We knew we were going to dominate at Kenilworth Road and that's what we did. In those last 15 minutes, everyone was running on empty, but we grinded it out with a clean sheet and a 2-0 win. The feeling at full-time was incredible.

The players and the staff believe that we've earned the right to be in this position and now we're fully focused on achieving the ultimate goal of securing promotion.

It's such a proud feeling to represent this Club and I'm grateful for the belief that's been shown in me over the years. The fans are always so supportive to us all. They spur us on and I hope we're making them proud, because they deserve it for all they do for us.

Luton's not a big town, but there are all sorts of cultures within the community and this Football Club brings all that together. Getting to the Premier League will help this town boom and that's something we all want for the local area.

Togetherness and work rate. That sums up this squad. Hard work beats talent and we continue to show that. These moments don't come often, so we have to enjoy it, but we're also only coming here to win and we'll fight to the end for that.

Everyone wants to write Luton off and thinks we're not big enough to get to the top, but we are and we're ready to prove it at Wembley this afternoon.

COME ON YOU HATTERS!





THE SKY BLUES THE LIMIT

Only five years ago, Coventry City appeared to be a Club on the decline before the return of Mark Robins – who is just one game from becoming only the eighth manager to lead a team from the fourth tier to the top flight – saw the Sky Blues turn their fortunes around.

A Wembley trip and a league title later, things are very much looking up for the former FA Cup winners, who return to the National Stadium this afternoon.

Take a look at how they reshaped their future to reach today's Sky Bet Championship Play-Off Final.

WORDS: **HOLLY HUNT**

Wembley Winners – 2017/18

Coventry's five-year stay in League One came to an end in 2016/17 as they suffered relegation to League Two, facing the prospect of playing in the fourth tier of English football for the first time in 59 years.

It was largely a season to forget for the Sky Blues, who finished second bottom of the League One standings, relegated alongside Port Vale, Swindon Town and Chesterfield. A 1-1 draw with Charlton Athletic wasn't enough to delay the inevitable.

Mark Robins – reappointed for a second spell in the hotseat in March 2017 – knew he had to stop the rot and the City boss set to work building a team to get the Sky Blues back where they belonged. After getting off to a slow start to the season, the newly relegated side got into the swing of things.

Come May, Robins' men secured a sixth-place finish – abnormally, their lowest in the Club's history – and their Play-Off Semi-Final opponents were confirmed as Notts County. Over a two-legged Semi-Final, Coventry comfortably saw off the Magpies.

A 1-1 draw on home soil and a 4-1 victory away from home saw City progress to the Final 5-2 on aggregate, booking a second trip to Wembley in as many seasons in what was hailed as the most important game in the Club's history since the 1987 FA Cup Final.

In front of a crowd of over 50,000-strong under the arch, Coventry overcame third-placed Exeter City. Jordan Willis, Jordan Shipley and Jack Grimmer all chipped in with goals in a 3-1 win as the Club bounced back at the first time of asking.

Robins' first promotion as a manager intertwined with Coventry's first in 51 years as they followed Accrington Stanley, today's opponents, Luton Town, and Wycombe Wanderers into League One.







A Season like no other – 2019/20

In a season like no other, Coventry ascended from League One as champions on a points-per-game basis after the 2019/20 campaign was curtailed as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Sky Blues missed out on a top six finish in their first year back in the division in 2018/19, finishing in eighth behind Doncaster Rovers, who took the final Play-Off spot. And they were ready to go again after consolidating their position ahead of the new campaign following the announcement that the Club would be playing their home games at St Andrew's as part of a groundshare with Birmingham City.

Despite their exile, Robins' men had their eye on the prize and it was around December that Coventry began to climb. The Sky Blues, who suffered just three defeats across the course of the campaign, were enjoying an unbeaten streak of 14 games before the season was put on hold due to the pandemic, putting them in pole position for the title.

Just two days after City beat Ipswich Town 1-0 at Portman Road, with Robins' side gearing up for the visit of Shrewsbury Town, the campaign was paused and later in June, Coventry were handed the title as they finally made their return to the Championship.

Three years on, steady progress has seen them finish 16th and 12th before sneaking into the Play-Offs this term. Now, they're just one game from a return to the Premier League.







RAPID RESURGENCE

From non-league to the brink of the Premier League, Luton Town's recent promotion record is something that rival teams can only sit back and admire.

The Hatters spent a decade in the top tier between 1982 and 1992 and the Club's rise from obscurity has looked to pave their way back.

This is the story of how they did it.

WORDS: **HOLLY HUNT**

Long Road Back – 2013/14

Five long years in the National League were about to come to an end for Luton when they made their long-awaited EFL return nine years ago, led by then-manager John Still to put their non-league woes behind them.

After finishing in seventh place in 2012/13, little did the Hatters know that a record-breaking season was in store the following year. In the end, Luton were crowned the Conference champions, finishing 19 points clear of their closest promotion rivals, Cambridge United, in second.

Town broke the 100-point barrier, keeping 23 clean sheets in the process – both of which went down in the Club's history – while also equalling a Club record for the fewest goals conceded in a single campaign.

Having the division's Golden Boot winner on their side went a long way to helping the Club win promotion, too. Former Premier League striker Andre Gray finished the season on 30 goals as the league's leading marksman.

But perhaps Still's most astute addition came in November when the Bedfordshire team signed Pelly-Ruddock Mpanzu on a short-term loan from West Ham United. Now 29 and the only surviving member of that promotion-winning squad, he has remained with the Club through their journey from non-league to the Championship.

Luton's promotion was confirmed when Cambridge slipped to defeat against Kidderminster Harriers and the Hatters were in a party mood when they lifted the trophy in the wake of a 4-1 victory over Forest Green Rovers the following week.







New Beginnings – 2017/18

The arrival of Nathan Jones in January 2016 ushered in a new era at Kenilworth Road and after the Welshman helped to navigate Luton away from the drop zone, he laid out his plans to help the Hatters achieve a second promotion in five years.

Luton had lost out to Blackpool in the Play-Off Semi-Finals in Jones' first full season in charge. They'd also come close to reaching Wembley in the EFL Trophy, falling to defeat in the final four against Oxford United, but they were determined to get the job done this season.

Between September and December, Jones' men suffered just one defeat in 18 league outings, catapulting them up the League Two standings and putting them in good stead for a top three finish.

By Christmas, the Hatters were the highest scoring team in the country with 63 goals – just one more than Manchester City, eventually finishing the campaign as the second-highest scorers behind the top-flight giants.

A 1-1 draw with Carlisle United clinched promotion with two games to spare as Luton finished runners-up to Accrington Stanley, ending the Hatters' 10-year absence from the third tier.

Full Steam Ahead – 2018/19

The Hatters were about to go one better when the 2018/19 campaign got underway, with consecutive promotions and a title on the cards.

However, in January, Luton were dealt what could have been a significant blow to their promotion hopes. Boss Jones departed for pastures new, with the 49-year-old being appointed as the new Stoke City manager. At the time, the Hatters sat second in the league, trailing table toppers Portsmouth by just five points and registering 10 wins in their last 13 league fixtures.

But they weren't prepared to let a managerial switch derail them as former player and head of recruitment Mick Hartford stepped in as caretaker until the end of the term. By February, Luton set a new Club record of 20 games unbeaten with a 2-1 win over Fleetwood Town, extending the impressive streak to 27 games before it eventually came to an end against Charlton Athletic.

At the beginning of May, results elsewhere dictated that both the Hatters and Barnsley would be going up to the Championship after Portsmouth and Sunderland fell to defeat in midweek.

Town were favourites to be crowned champions heading into the final day, and a 3-1 triumph over Oxford United was enough to wrap up the title, with goals from George Moncur and Elliott Lee on the day.





WORDS: **CHRIS OSBORNE**

INSIDE A REFEREE TRAINING CAMP

It's an unseasonably cold, March day at St. George's Park.

Flurries of white snow are blended with the fluorescent yellow training tops of Sky Bet Championship officials, who are dotted around one of the 14 elite pitches at the home of England's national teams.

The occasion is a referee training camp, run every two weeks at St. George's Park or in Loughborough by PGMOL, the organisation that develops and manages all officials for EFL, Premier League and FA competitions.

Here today are over 50 officials from Select Group 2, the cohort of referees and assistant referees who officiate predominantly Championship matches, plus some fixtures in Sky Bet League One and Sky Bet League Two.

The purpose? To bring officials together at regular intervals to develop their skills, increase their awareness of issues and trends, and to make sure they're keeping in top physical shape.

"It's about learning, developing and training," says Kevin Friend, PGMOL's Select Group 2 Manager, who officiated nearly 300 Premier League matches.

"It's about making sure that we upskill them ready for matchdays and giving them as much as we can to support that, to encourage that when they go out at 3pm, they're best prepared.

"Meeting every couple of weeks is vitally important."

The sessions are a mix of classroom-based activities and exercises out on the grass, with video analysis used to add clarity to decision-making processes and real-game scenarios addressed through small games.

A local team has arrived for the day, to play the role of Championship footballers. One of the areas of conversation before this week's session has been around how to deal with heavy tackles.

"We've got team analysts that we sit with and go through different clips, different montages to see if there's trends and then we'll look at any clips from a referee's perspective," says Friend.

"There's been a few decisions where robust tackles have gone in and potential red cards that have been raised.

"I think it's important that while we're not recalibrating where we're at as a group, it's actually just looking and delving into more about the process of the mindset of the referee.

"It's very easy to analyse and look back later on, but it's all about that real-time on field judgment. And what's the rationale in the referee's mind, the position in the movement and what sort of thought process they go through?"

After some initial classroom sessions, the referees are out on the pitch, not only battling the frosty elements, but also contending with the physical exertions demanded by their coaching team and sports scientists.

In-game decisions are made while delivering short, sharp sprints, and each official watches their performance back on a monitor. Was the communication spot on? How was the positioning? Did you consider all the correct factors?

Vicky Smith, Senior Sports Scientist for PGMOL, is one of the team putting the officials through their paces.

"We're looking specifically at movement and positioning today. So when the teams are in different stages of play, how are officials moving in reaction and are they getting into the best positions to make the best decisions?" she explains.

"And we will give some live feedback while that's going on and then we'll have a full review tomorrow, where the individuals can see not only their physical capabilities on the pitch, but thinking about what movements they've made and why they've made them."

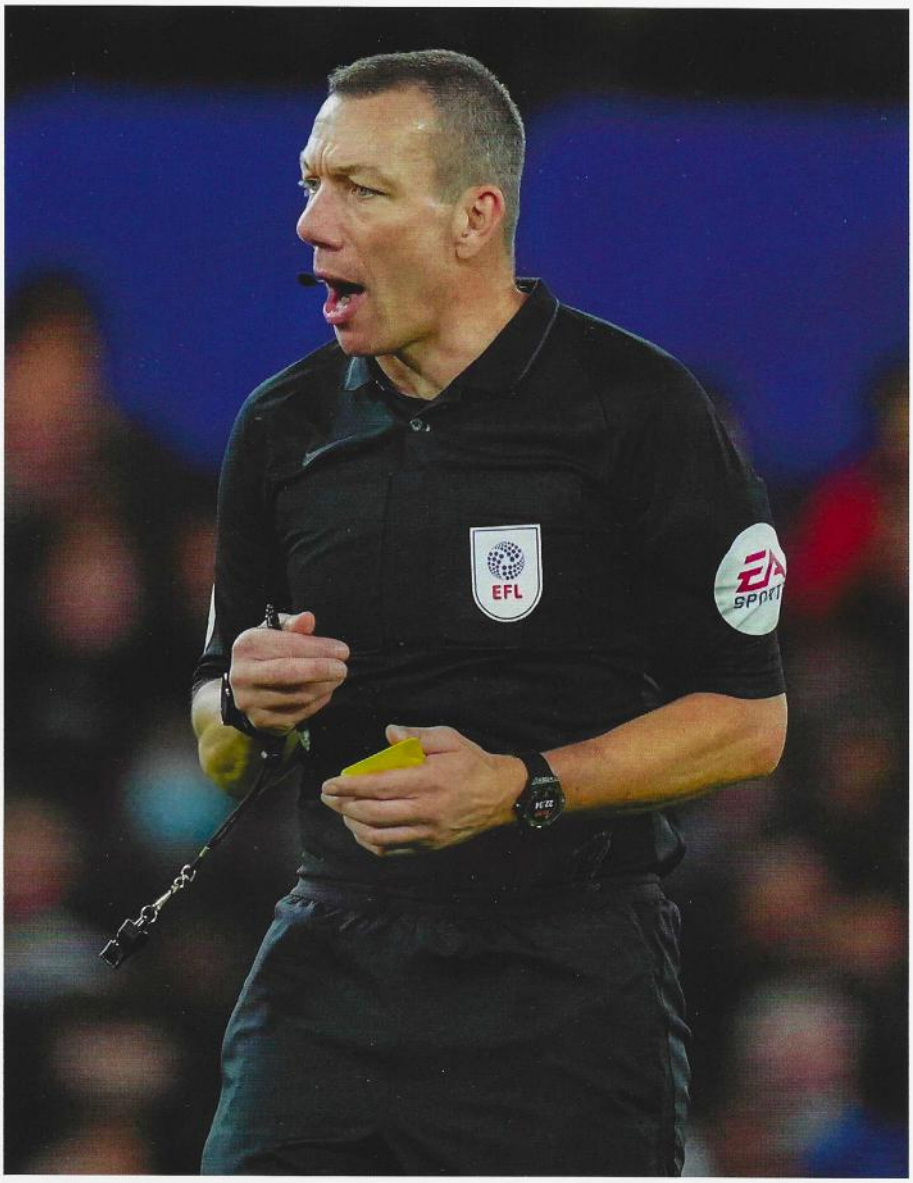
And then there's the physical demands, with officials expected to meet fitness requirements throughout the season.

"Decision-making alongside fatigue is huge," says Smith.

"We're constantly pushing to ensure we keep up with the rate of improvement that the players are going through with how quickly the game is developing in terms of speed and to release the mental capacity to make the best decisions at the end of it.

"We've got what we call an intensive high intensity session. So, a lot of short, sharp, high intensity runs with a lot of change of directions – a load of acceleration, deceleration, a fair physical load on the body.

"Can they keep that concentration, seeing something live once, with no replay, then coming together, sharing that information and essentially coming to the best decision at the end of it?"





The talk of training sessions, video analysis, sports scientists and fitness expectations might evoke thoughts of a Club mentality. And that's a culture Friend wants to lean in to.

"It's the same as a Football Club. They'll always analyse the team that they're going to play, always look at things post-match as well," he says.

"With the support staff that we've got around, not just the coaches – we've got the sports scientists, the psychologists, the analysts as well – we go through and delve really deeply into the performances of the referees, to not just look at how the performance is, but how we can actually improve that moving forward to make it even better.

"My role as the Select Group 2 Manager is to enhance performances on the field of play to make sure we can get the best out of the referees. And even if a performance from a referee is of the highest level, it's actually pushing them even further.

"Just as a player might score three or four goals in a game, but will actually want to do better, it's just like that for referees.

"So, my job and my responsibility is to make sure I improve the referees I've got within Select Group 2, and for the Championship to be even better week in, week out."

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FIRST + LAST

Ben Sheaf

Having initially been expected to miss the remainder of the campaign after picking up a calf injury midway through April, Ben Sheaf made a miraculous return to the line-up for the Semi-Final Second Leg success against Middlesbrough 10 days ago.

The energetic midfielder managed 70 minutes on his comeback, playing a key role in the Sky Blues' dogged display at the Riverside that saw them secure a Wembley outing this afternoon.

Here, he answers a range of First and Last questions...

First football memory?

Playing in the garden with my little brother.

Last player you swapped shirts with?

Cohen Bramall at Rotherham United.

First car?

BMW I series.

Last time you forgot something important?

I left my phone in the car at training before the second leg at Middlesbrough.

First footballing hero?

Either Steven Gerrard or Andrés Iniesta.

Last thing you did for the first time?

I tried some Wasabi!

First pair of boots?

Adidas Predators.

Last meal you cooked?

Salmon, sweet potatoes and vegetables.

First time someone asked you for an autograph?

It was a family friend when I was quite young, I think. Before I was playing professionally.

Last concert you went to?

Micky Flanagan, but in terms of music, Post Malone about three years ago.

First celebrity crush?

I've got to be careful with this one... Megan Fox in Transformers.

Last time you did something out of your comfort zone?

This interview. I'm not good at these!

First thing you check on your phone in a morning?

I turn my alarm off.

Last holiday destination you visited?

Dubai.

First football shirt?

A Liverpool shirt. I never got a name on the back of any of them.

Last thing you do in the dressing room before a match?

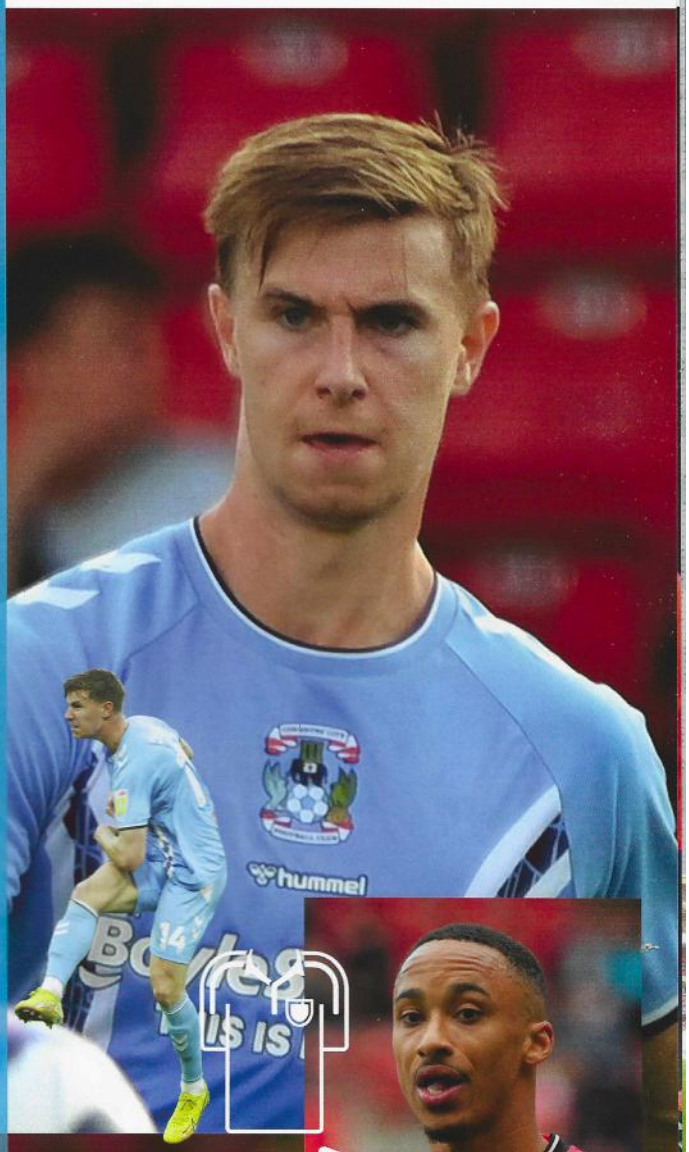
I put a bib on.

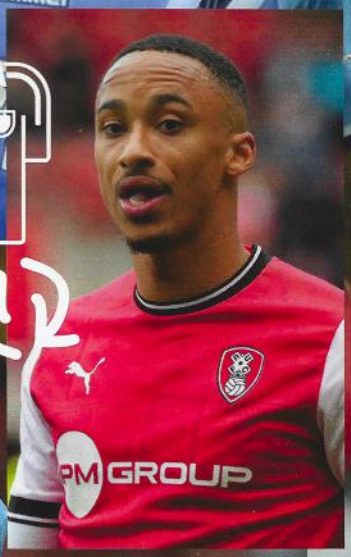
First mobile phone?

Some sort of touchscreen Nokia. Slow as anything!

Last thing you did that made you proud?

The Play-Off Semi-Final at Boro. I spoke to my mum and dad straight after and I was really emotional.








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FIRST + LAST

Amari'i Bell

Amari'i Bell has established himself as an influential member of Luton Town's team since making the switch from Sky Bet Championship rivals Blackburn Rovers in the summer of 2021.

The Jamaica international has featured in 46 of the Hatters' 48 league games this term, and contributed to the clean sheet in the second leg against Sunderland AFC that helped to book their place in today's showpiece occasion.

Preparing for his first Play-Off Final after two previous Semi-Final exits, Bell tackles the EFL's First and Last...

First football memory?

Aston Villa vs Liverpool, I think it ended 1-1 and Nobby Solano and Steven Gerrard scored.

Last player you swapped shirts with?

Tariqe Fosu.

First car?

A black Vauxhall Astra.

Last time you forgot something important?

I can't remember!

First footballing hero?

Ronaldinho.

Last thing you did for the first time?

I have no idea, I do the same things all the time. I'm very routine driven.

First pair of boots?

All white Nike Tiempos with the red tick.

Last meal you cooked?

Spaghetti Bolognese.

First time someone asked you for an autograph?

I think when I was a young lad at Birmingham City.

Last concert you went to?

Drake in Manchester.

First celebrity crush?

Meagan Good.

Last time you did something out of your comfort zone?

I haven't done it yet, but my friend gets married in a few days. I've got to give a speech and I really don't like public speaking!

First thing you check on your phone in a morning?

Instagram.

Last holiday destination you visited?

Atlanta.

First football shirt?

A Rangers shirt.

Last thing you do in the dressing room before a match?

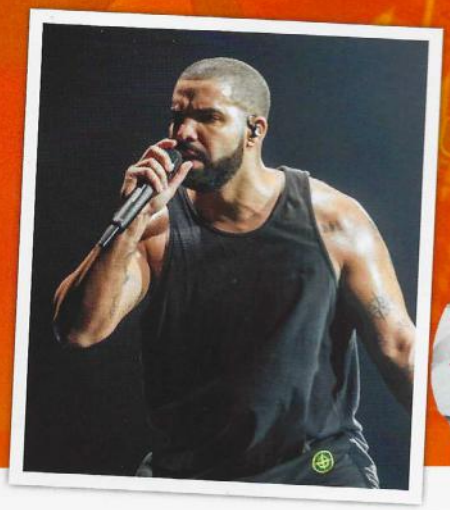
I put cream on.

First mobile phone?

Samsung flip phone.

Last thing you did that made you proud?

Getting to Wembley!





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CEFA Awards 2023

For the second year running, Wembley is playing host to this season's Community & Education Football Alliance (CEFA) Awards across the EFL Play-Off weekend.

As a reward for their hard work and participation, players, managers and coaches that have competed in the CEFA League will get to visit the home of football to watch one of the highly anticipated Finals.

Coaches and managers from the winning teams will also be invited pitchside for a special presentation at half-time.

During the ceremonies, taking place ahead of the Sky Bet Championship and Sky Bet League One showpiece events, trophies will be awarded to Regional winners and Cup winners that have competed in the 2022/23 CEFA League – a football competition for young men and women studying a post-16 education course with their Club Community Organisation (CCO) across the Premier League and EFL.

This season alone, the CEFA League has provided competitive playing opportunities to almost 4,000 young people with a passion for football, regardless of their ability.









Players are given the chance to represent their local Football Club with competing teams given Club names, official kits and associated Club support.

This season saw a record number of entries, with 171 teams participating across both the men's and women's competition.

For more information about CEFA, please contact cefa@efl.com.

CEFA Winners 2023

North West 1
Manchester City 'C'

North West 2
Everton 'B'

North West 3
Everton 'D'

North West 4
Everton 'E'

North Central 1
Stoke City 'A'

North Central 2
Scunthorpe United 'B'

North East Central 1
Scunthorpe United 'A'

Central 1
Derby County 'A'

Central 2
Wolverhampton Wanderers 'A'

Central 3
Wolverhampton Wanderers 'B'

North Central Women's
Derby County Women's 'A'

South East 1
Chelsea 'A'

South East 2
Colchester United 'A'

South East 3
Peterborough United

South West 1
Plymouth Argyle 'A'

South West 2
AFC Bournemouth 'B'

South West 3
Plymouth Argyle 'C'

South Division Women's
Derby County Women's 'B'

Small Sided Women's
Peterborough United Women's

Men's Cup
Plymouth Argyle 'A'

Women's Cup
Peterborough United Women's

#EFLPlayOffs

Saturday 27 May | Wembley Stadium | Kick-Off 4:45pm

COVENTRY CITY FOOTBALL CLUB

MANAGER:
MARK ROBINS

1	Simon Moore	GK
2	Jonathan Panzo	
3	Callum Doyle	
4	Michael Rose	
5	Kyle McFadzean	
6	Liam Kelly	C
7	Brooke Norton-Cuffy	
8	Jamie Allen	
10	Callum O'Hare	
11	Josh Wilson-Esbrand	
13	Ben Wilson	GK
14	Ben Sheaf	
16	Luke McNally	
17	Viktor Gyökeres	
18	Sean Maguire	
19	Tyler Walker	
22	Josh Reid	
23	Fankaty Dabo	
24	Matty Godden	
27	Jake Bidwell	
28	Josh Eccles	
30	Fábio Tavares	
32	Jack Burroughs	
36	Ryan Howley	
38	Gustavo Hamer	
44	Cian Tyler	GK
45	Kasey Palmer	

LUTON TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB

EST 1885

MANAGER:
ROB EDWARDS

1	James Shea	GK
2	Cody Drameh	
3	Dan Potts	
4	Tom Lockyer	
5	Sonny Bradley	C
8	Luke Berry	
9	Carlton Morris	
10	Cauley Woodrow	
11	Elijah Adebayo	
12	Henri Lansbury	
13	Marvelous Nakamba	
15	Admiral Muskwe	
16	Reece Burke	
17	Pelly-Ruddock Mpanzu	
18	Jordan Clark	
20	Louie Watson	
22	Allan Campbell	
23	Fred Onyedinma	
24	Jack Walton	GK
25	Joe Taylor	
27	Aribim Pepple	
28	Elliot Thorpe	
29	Amari'i Bell	
30	Luke Freeman	
32	Gabe Osho	
34	Ethan Horvath	GK
45	Alfie Doughty	
48	Joe Johnson	

Answers: Shirt Numbers Sums: 8+22 = 30 - Tavares 18 - 10 = 8 - Berry, 30/2 = 16 - Burke, 16+3 = 19 - Walker. Face Mash - Jack Burroughs and Dan Potts

MATCH OFFICIALS

Referee
Michael Oliver

Assistant Referees
Stuart Burt
Lee Betts

Fourth Official
Graham Scott

Reserve Assistant Referee
Mark Scholes

VAR

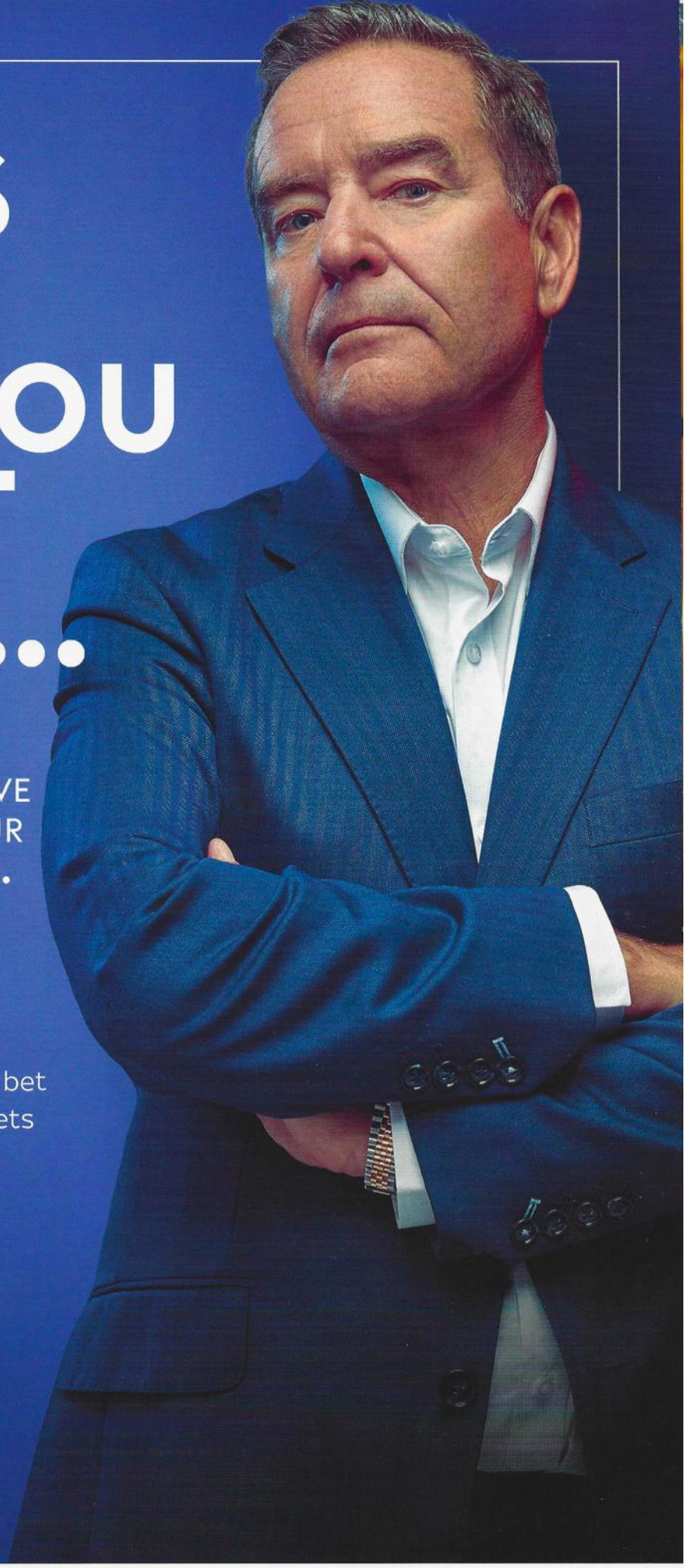
VAR
Andre Marriner

VAR

AVAR
Richard West

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