

# Luton's reluctant hero seeking redemption

Ten years after taking the club into non-League, Mick Harford has the opportunity to earn promotion to the second tier, writes **Gregor Robertson**

More heart-warming tale in English football this season you will struggle to find. Just don't expect Mick Harford, the Luton Town interim manager, to get all misty-eyed about it any time soon.

When Nathan Jones, the former manager, departed abruptly for Stoke City in January, Harford, the fearsome former Luton striker, inherited a team in rude health. However, given the remarkable run of results that has followed, propelling the club to the top of Sky Bet League One and the brink of the Championship, his assertion that he hasn't had to do much no longer rings true.

Luton have lost once, nine days ago, since Harford took the reins — a club-record run stretching all the way back to October. What makes his place in the dugout poetic, however, is that it comes ten years on from the 60-year-old's previous spell in charge at Kenilworth Road, which was perhaps the darkest moment in their history: relegation from the Football League with a controversial 30-point deduction, a responsibility for which, as strange as it may sound, Harford is still burdened by today.

"The club was on a downward spiral, changing chairmen, owners, going into receivership," Harford says. "They asked me to come in; I thought it would be short-term then too. When we got deducted 30 points I was on a LMA Management course at Warwick when I found out. We'd just come out for lunch. None of us could believe it.

"When you're the manager, the one steering the ship, you feel a responsibility. Yeah, the circumstances were very difficult. It was a real hard job. When you kick off at three o'clock on a Saturday afternoon you're not thinking about the 30 points, you just want to win.

"The good thing was we still held our badge and held it in high esteem — even with minus-30 points, we had the name of the football club. But the 30-point tally was too much, too high to overcome, mentally as much as anything. We couldn't get out of it.

"When I'm with the players now I'm ultra positive. When I watch them train and work hard it gives me a real sense of satisfaction. But when I'm away from it, on my own, the demons kick in a bit, the negative thoughts creep into your mind sometimes. I just want things to go smoothly while I'm in the position. We take nothing for granted."

The circumstances this season could hardly have been starker. "Nathan did a good job, the structure he put in place," Harford says. "I was chief scout, head of recruitment, whatever you want to call it. So I worked very closely with Nathan. I knew how he worked, what he was about. He left at a real strange time and he did ask my advice about moving on. He took that choice, that option. As a football club we respect that. I'm certain he'll get it right at Stoke City, absolutely certain he'll turn their fortunes around.

"The place wasn't broken, there was nothing wrong here: the team was performing well, the club was doing well, we were in a good place. I came along and thought, 'I'll just keep things ticking over.' That's exactly what I've done. We haven't changed a lot, if anything."

Speak to those at Le Brache, the club's impressive new training facility, however, and you hear a different story. Players and staff hold Harford in as high regard as the club's fans. Their respect for him is longstanding but it is also well earned, through snippets of advice over breakfast before training during the past three years, or due to his part in bringing many of them to the club. They are desperate to do well for Harford, which has been reflected on the pitch.

"I'm desperate for them to do well," he says. "They're a great bunch. I love them to bits. Where they are now and where they're trying to



Fresh perspective: Harford, above, is a modest manager, which is a far cry from his reputation as an aggressive, hard-edged striker, right. Luton, inset, moved closer to promotion by beating Accrington on Saturday

get to is testament to all the hard work they do. The camaraderie. The spirit they have."

The Sunderland-born Harford is regularly voted Luton's greatest player, having scored nearly 100 goals over two spells as a striker, as well as assisting Joe Kinnear and Mike Newell and two spells in the dugout. Luton did lift the EFL Trophy in front of 40,000 of the club's fans in a cathartic day out at Wembley in 2009. But the following season, after a testing start to life in non-League, Harford became a target of supporters' ire and the heart-wrenching decision to relieve him of his duties was taken in October 2009.

"Luton Town football club is a passion for me," he says. "When I first came here we had a real good team. We won Luton's first-ever major honour, the League Cup in '88, and that culminated in me being selected for England. I settled in the area. I'm a Lutonian really. My son was born in Luton and Dunstable Hospital. I'll never leave the area. I've got a great affinity with the football club. I have a great affection for the fans because they have been fantastic to me. Not just the fans. The people of Luton have been good to me down the years."

A recent knee replacement and a scar above his lip — courtesy of an elbow from Sam Allardyce during a Midlands derby between Coventry City and Birmingham City — are a legacy of a career during which Harford earned

## LEAGUE ONE'S FINAL GAMES

- |   |                         |
|---|-------------------------|
| <b>1. Luton</b> .....   | <b>played 43, 90pts</b> |
| <b>Tomorrow</b> Wimbledon (h) <b>Saturday</b> Burton (a) <b>May 4</b> Oxford (h)                                      |                         |
| <b>2. Barnsley</b> .....  | <b>p43, 85pts</b>       |
| <b>Today</b> Plymouth (a) <b>Saturday</b> Blackpool (h) <b>May 4</b> Bristol Rovers (a)                               |                         |
| <b>3. Sunderland</b> .....  | <b>p42, 83pts</b>       |
| <b>Today</b> Peterborough (a) <b>Saturday</b> Portsmouth (h) <b>April 30</b> Fleetwood (a) <b>May 4</b> Southend (a)  |                         |
| <b>4. Portsmouth</b> .....  | <b>p42, 83pts</b>       |
| <b>Today</b> Coventry (h) <b>Saturday</b> Sunderland (a) <b>April 30</b> Peterborough (h) <b>May 4</b> Accrington (h) |                         |
| <b>5. Charlton</b> .....  | <b>p43, 79pts</b>       |
| <b>Today</b> Scunthorpe (h) <b>Saturday</b> Gillingham (a) <b>May 4</b> Rochdale (h)                                  |                         |

a fearsome reputation for his willingness to put his body where it hurt. "I wouldn't say I was tough," Harford says. "There's always someone out there bigger and better to stick one on you. But if there was a 50/50, if there was a ball to go for, if there was something to go after then it wouldn't bother me going in for it.

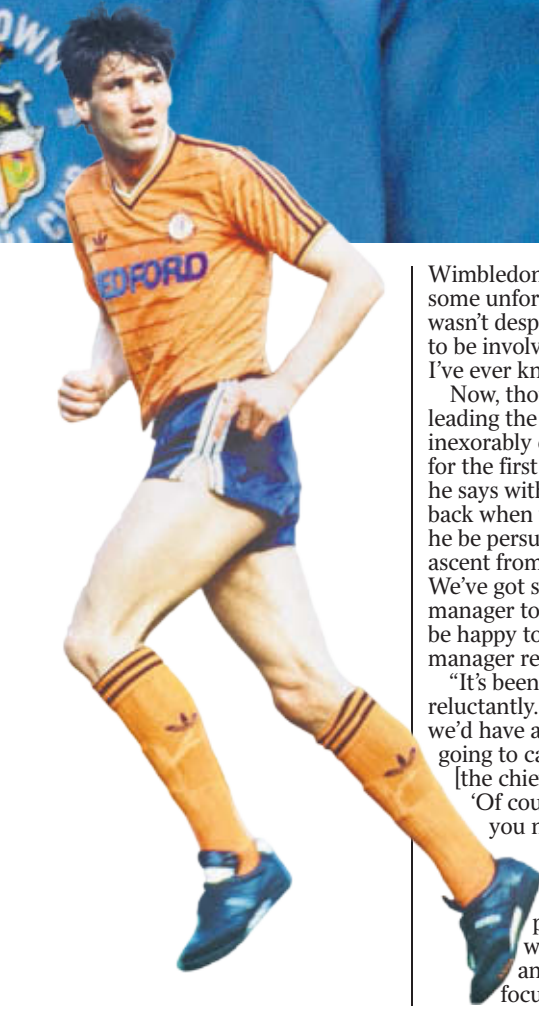
"I was brave. I was pretty fearless. But I

wouldn't say I was the toughest player. I'll let others decide that ..."

Since hanging up his boots, though, Harford perhaps has grounds to feel that luck has been against him in his managerial career. Having worked for Harford at Nottingham Forest and Rotherham United, where he was handed his first permanent managerial role, I can attest to the fact that he is a fine coach and someone for whom players enjoy playing.

Financial insolvency also reared its head during his time at Millmoor in 2006 and Harford was dismissed before a ten-point deduction was handed down to Rotherham. "I believe the toughest jobs in football go to the least experienced people," he says. "If you're an experienced manager you don't want a club that's in turmoil, or a downward spiral. Those jobs get handed to the less-experienced managers. It's a strange scenario. I was in that position when I was trying to get on the ladder. I had a couple of spells in caretaker charge of Queens Park Rangers and Nottingham Forest. I really enjoyed the experience — maybe more because I knew it wasn't full-time.

"Before that I'd been at Forest with Joe [Kinnear], who's a great friend of mine. I love him dearly and he's passed a lot of experience on to me down the years. I thank him for my coaching and scouting career because he was the one who gave me an opportunity at



Wimbledon to coach the under-23s. I've had some unfortunate jobs but at great clubs. I wasn't desperate to be a manager. I just wanted to be involved in football. I love football. It's all I've ever known."

Now, though, Harford is on the verge of leading the club to which he has become inextricably entwined back to the Championship for the first time in 12 years. "You can say that," he says with an unerring grin. "Not us. Come back when we're promoted." And then? Could he be persuaded to continue plotting Luton's ascent from the dugout? "I won't be staying, no. We've got something in process, for a new manager to come in at the end of the season. I'll be happy to go back to my old job, help the manager recruit some good players.

"It's been an honour to do it — even if it was reluctantly. I thought within a couple of weeks we'd have a new manager. I didn't realise it was going to carry on this long. When Gary Sweet [the chief executive] asked me to do it I said, 'Of course, if you need help or assistance, if you need me, I'll do it for you.' And it's gone well. But it could quite easily have gone the other way.

"Winning promotion would be perfect. It would be perfect for me if we could achieve that. But don't take anything for granted. We're totally focused on getting over the line."

# Revealed: how England got referee help in '66

New study suggests Fifa president was accused of assisting his country, **Martyn Ziegler** writes

It was not just a debatable linesman's call that raised eyebrows over England's World Cup final win in 1966. Newly discovered documents show that senior figures in football claimed at the time that "England got a helping hand in winning the World Cup" from the English president of Fifa, Sir Stanley Rous.

Within weeks of Bobby Moore having lifted the Jules Rimet trophy, the vice-president of the Confederation of African Football (CAF), Ydnekatchew Tessema from Ethiopia, had written to Uefa questioning the refereeing appointments throughout the tournament.

Tessema implied that Fifa had appointed referees who could favour European teams, and the hosts England particularly. Pelé's Brazil, who went into the tournament as World Cup holders and the greatest threat to home success, were given English referees for the two group games they lost, with English linesmen for their other match.

The Ethiopian, who became the president of CAF for 15 years, questioned why England played all their matches at Wembley, and why Alf Ramsey's side and their fellow finalists West Germany were given European referees for their quarter-finals against tough South American opposition. Rudolf Kreitlein, the German referee who was in charge of the England-Argentina match that became infamous for Ramsey referring to the opponents as "animals", sent off Antonio Rattin for shouting at him. For Germany's quarter-final against Uruguay, the English referee Jim Finney was in charge.

In September 1966, six weeks after the final, Tessema wrote to Uefa: "In playing all of England's matches at Wembley; in designating seven British referees for Brazil's three games; in appointing as referees for the games England-Argentina and Germany-Uruguay a German and an English referee respectively; in ignoring almost totally referees from other continents (above all after the quarter-finals); in not designating the referee for the final at the start, Fifa has committed a pile of blunders.

"It has not sought to place itself beyond suspicion ... so provoking, above all among its critics, the feeling that England got a helping hand in winning the World Cup."

Tessema's criticisms have been uncovered by Alan Tomlinson,

of the University of Brighton, and Simon Rofe, from SOAS University of London, who have published their findings in the *International History Review*. They write that "implicitly Tessema was challenging Rous as the Uefa audience knew full well that the president of Fifa was a former international referee. By pointing out that Fifa was not 'beyond suspicion' he was directly challenging Rous's diplomacy."

The paper details how Rous's "sacred belief" that sport and politics should be separate led to a boycott of the 1966 World Cup by African nations in protest at Fifa's position on apartheid South Africa.

Much of the new material has been found in Rous's private papers, which have been made available to researchers by his former PA. Tomlinson has been given access to Uefa's archive of documents.

The seeds of the African boycott were sown in 1963 when, after a visit by Rous to South Africa, he secured the country's reinstatement by Fifa despite the fact that segregation was practised in the sport — South Africa had suggested sending an all-white team to the 1966 World Cup and an all-black one four years later.

A few weeks later Rous appeared at the annual assembly of the CAF in Cairo and in a speech said he was "sure that the African delegates would accept the decision" on South Africa and that he had seen "no discrimination" associated with the South African FA. "Politics must not interfere with our activities," he said.

Rous's approach was already out of step with the times, however, and the African nations stood their ground. The following year, CAF announced a boycott of the 1966 World Cup in protest both at Fifa's handling of South Africa and its refusal to give an automatic place to an African nation in the finals.

Rous attempted to fine the African nations 5,000 Swiss francs each, only for Tessema to refuse and accuse Fifa of "methods of intimidation and repression".

Tomlinson, whose book on Rous is due to be published next year, describes him as a "benign imperialist", who from modest beginnings — he achieved the rank of corporal in the First World War — rose to become a PE teacher, international referee, secretary of the FA and finally, in 1961, the most powerful man in world football.

If Rous's appeasement of apartheid South Africa is a stain on his record, Tomlinson and Rofe have revealed that he did play a successful part in securing North Korea's participation in the 1966 tournament.

The Foreign Office raised concerns about North Korea's participation — it was the height of the Cold War and Britain did not recognise North Korea as a country. Rous was warned that the British government would not accept the flying of the North Korea flags in the stadiums, the playing of the country's national anthem or it being referred to as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Rous came up with an idea that anthems would be played only at the opening match and the final, where it was almost certain that North Korea would not be playing. He secured agreement from the Foreign Office that the flags of all competing nations would be flown at the stadiums instead of only the two teams involved in the match.

A secret memo from Edwin Bolland at the Foreign Office confirmed that Rous persuaded the North Koreans to accept the terms of engagement when he hosted a visit of their football officials to England.

"Sir Stanley explained our position about not playing national anthems except at the first and last matches," Bolland wrote. "The Koreans accepted this quite calmly."

If Rous's diplomatic skills succeeded then, they failed completely over South Africa.

When in 1974, he was challenged for the presidency by Brazil's João Havelange, Rous's position was still viewed as "bombproof" by the FA. They reckoned without Tessema: it was a payback time. He swung Africa's weight against Rous and Havelange triumphed.



Rous rose from humble beginnings to be Fifa president for 13 years