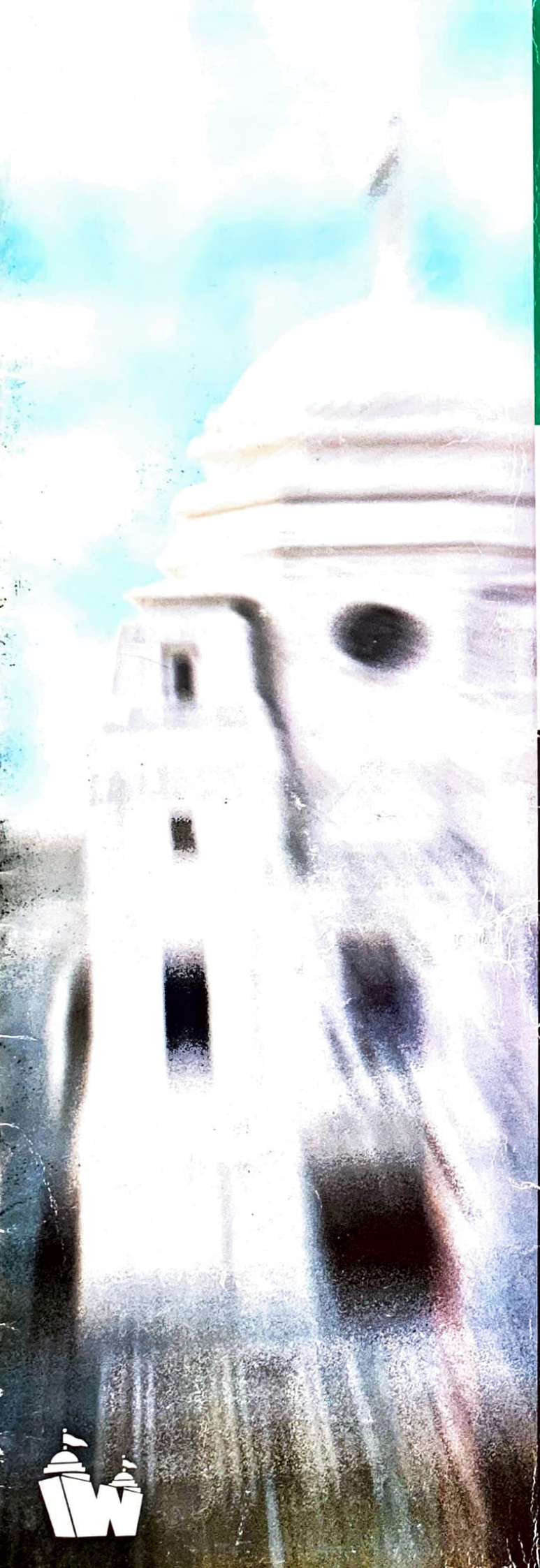


"THE ONLY WAY IS UP"

97

PLAY OFFS

Nationwide

Nationwide

FOOTBALL LEAGUE

THE FOOTBALL LEAGUE

3

Division 3
Play-Off Final

Northampton Town
v
Swansea City

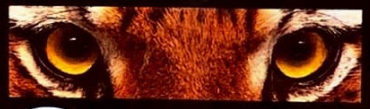
Saturday 24th May 1997

Kick Off 3.00pm

Official Matchday Programme £3.50



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Today's Timetable

"THE ONLY WAY IS UP" 97 PLAY OFFS Nationwide

The Football League Limited, Lytham St. Annes, Lancashire FY8 1JG

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Programme Editor: Peter O'Malley.
Contributors: Kevin Palmer - Frontline Sports, Hayters.
Photography: Action Images.
Design: Mark Fuller, Georgia King.
Programme Advertising:
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THE FOOTBALL LEAGUE



Mr Gordon McKeag - President of The Football League



Mr Stuart Bernau - Retail Operations Director, Nationwide

Nationwide Football League Play-Off Final Division 3 - Northampton Town v Swansea City

11.30am - 1.25pm	Turnstiles open. Selection of music from the Band of the Royal Lancers.
1.25pm - 1.50pm	Nationwide's "Score a goal at Wembley" competition.
1.50pm - 2.15pm	Auto Windscreens Schools Shield Final - Division Three: Carlisle United v Exeter City.
2.15pm - 2.48pm	Nationwide Building Society pre-match activity.
2.48pm	Presentation of the teams and Match Officials to Mr Stuart Bernau (Retail Operations Director, Nationwide) and Mr Gordon McKeag (President, The Football League). NATIONAL ANTHEMS
3.00pm	Kick-off.
3.45pm	Half-time: Marching display by the Band.
4.00pm	Second Half.
4.45pm	End of match: Presentation of Trophy and mementoes to winning team by Mr Stuart Bernau (Retail Operations Director, Nationwide).

EMERGENCY PROCEDURE
Before an announcement a high pitched sound will be made over the public address system.
Spectators are kindly asked not to stand on seats as this prevents people behind seeing the match.

Nationwide News

Last summer Nationwide Building Society signed a £1.75 million per year, three year deal to sponsor The Football League, and the first season of The Nationwide Football League has been eventful and exciting.

The company saw the advantage of being associated with a game that is an important part of many people's lives, and an important part of local communities across the country.

Fans quickly recognised the change in sponsor and in a recent survey 89% of them said that they thought Nationwide were a good sponsor.

As part of the support for the sponsorship in its first season, Nationwide have instigated a number of projects nationally and locally, and are looking forward to developing the sponsorship even further next season.

NATIONWIDE'S NEW CABINET

The winners of today's game will not only reach the promised land of the Nationwide Division Two but will also lift the Nationwide Division Three play-off trophy.

Weighing 5kg, the trophy is certainly substantial reward for the winners achievements over an arduous season. The trophy is expertly crafted — using the skills utilised in the making of the great traditional footballing trophies — in solid sterling silver, with mouldings of players forming an attractive band around its centre, it also features a 22 carat gold plated interior. The design is similar to that of the Division Three Championship trophy. It differs in being slightly smaller and of a marginally simpler design.



The Nationwide Division Three Play-off Champions trophy



The divisional Championship trophies, including 'The Lady' (centre)

All but one of the Nationwide League's trophies — two championship trophies, three runners-up salvers and three trophies for the play-off victors — have been commissioned for the Nationwide League from Regents Silversmiths, official suppliers of trophies to the Nationwide Football League. The only trophy not commissioned by Nationwide is that for the Nationwide League Division One Championship which remains 'The Lady' — the original, pre-Premiership, First Division Championship.



Regents Silversmiths — in every way 'traditional' trophy makers

When designing the new trophies the balance had to be struck between the modern and innovative and the traditional. Nationwide's Sponsorship Executive, Chris Curran explains: "We resisted the temptation to go for something too modern, I don't think that's what the fans want. The Nationwide and The Football League are all about tradition so that's what we went for in the design."

Nationwide's belief is that the divisional and play-off trophies are worthy and elegant pieces that are every bit as impressive as any cup in the trophy cabinets of the Football Association..

DIVISION THREE'S BEST PLAYER — NATIONWIDE

The Nationwide Review's Division Three 'Player of the Season' poll received a great response across the country. The phone-lines — which helped contribute money towards the provision of facilities for the visually impaired at football grounds — were red-hot as fans gave their verdict on which player had made the greatest impact in the division over the season.

The winner, who will receive his award at today's game, is Darren Freeman of Fulham.

Darren started his career at Gillingham but after two fairly uneventful seasons was transferred to Craven Cottage where he has made a real impact. An athletic player, Freeman frightens defences with his pace, he is also appreciated by the fans for his non-stop commitment and energy. His nine goals in 32 starts is a decent record for a player who doesn't play the traditional centre-forward's role. Darren prefers to break into the danger zone from the wings, using his pace and trickery to good affect.



Nationwide News

Fulham officials were surprised to hear of Darren's award, but it raised few eyebrows at the Nationwide Review as Fulham fans have been particularly active in contributing and showing their enthusiasm for the magazine.

Darren Freeman isn't the only winner today. Presenting Darren with his award will be Enid Vlahos of Newport, Gwent. Nationwide Review reader, Enid, is the Division Three winner of a VIP day out at today's game and as such will enjoy an all expenses paid Wembley day-out, including honouring the fans choice of Player of the Season.

Congratulations to Darren and to the two other 'Players of the Season' who were John Spencer of Queens Park Rangers and Luton Town's Tony Thorpe from Division One and Division Two respectively.

A WELCOME RETURN

When, after lengthy negotiations, Nationwide Building Society agreed the sponsorship deal with The Football League, the work for the sponsorship department wasn't over, it had only just begun. Adding the name Nationwide to the league's title gives the company a high profile in the media, but it is the hundreds of other projects, at both local and national level, that make the sponsorship really work.

One of the main aims of the company's sponsorship was to provide real benefits for the fans. So when the idea of producing a magazine that concentrated on the Nationwide League, instead of the Premiership, was suggested, the sponsors quickly saw the advantages.



16 pages of informative and topical text supplied free of charge with your matchday programme is not something that fans are likely to moan about. But the Nationwide Review has proved to be more than just 'something for nothing'.

The more seasoned football fan will remember The Football League Review, which ran for 13 years from 1966. However, the Nationwide Review is very much a contemporary publication. The initial impact of the innovative front covers illustrates the powers of modern technology but, perhaps more important than the space-age stuff, are the modern footballing issues that the magazine has tackled.

Racism, rule changes, Bosman to name but three, the magazine has not shied away from important issues and ultimately encouraged comment on them from the fans — and they've responded in their thousands.

The Nationwide Review has endeavoured to provide something for everyone in its format. Comment from celebrity writers is blended with serious editorial, quizzes, funnies and, most importantly, feedback pages. As the Nationwide's football fans realised they were actually being given something worthwhile the terraced/seated masses warmed to the publication and the stream of letters, faxes and E-Mails turned into something of a deluge.

The pilot period for the final nine weeks of the season, was successfully completed, and the first figures from independent research, show that the magazine was very well received. 80% of those questioned said they thought the magazine was good.

Plans for next season's magazine are already well under way, and the views of the supporters will be the most prominent within the pages of what the sponsors are happy to see as the fans own magazine.

JUST THE TICKET

To stand a chance of winning a season-ticket to your Nationwide Football League club, simply select one of the three possible answers to each question and send your answers to us at the following address: *Play-off competition, Chaddesley House, 196 Wolverhampton Street, Dudley, DY1 1DZ.*
Entries to be received no later than June 13.

1) Which of the following current Premiership stars scored both Port Vale's goals in their 2-1 aggregate win over Bristol Rovers in the 1989 Division Three play-off final?
a) Steve Guppy, b) Robbie Earle, c) Robin Van der Laan

2) Which of the following clubs won promotion back into Division Two (now Division One) for the first time in 52 years by winning the 1991 third division play-off final?
a) Grimsby Town, b) Tranmere Rovers, c) Southend United

3) Which of the following clubs let a 2-0 away lead slip in last season's second division play-off semi-final to miss out on a trip to Wembley, a ground where they have made three FA Cup final appearances?
a) Preston North End, b) Burnley, c) Blackpool

4) Which of the following players was the Bolton supersub who came on to score twice as Wanderers defeated Reading 4-3 in the 1995 Division One final?
a) Mark Patterson, b) Fabian De Freitas, c) John McGinlay

5) Mixu Paatelainen also scored in the above match for Bolton, but from which country does he hail?
a) Finland, b) Iceland, c) Denmark

6) Which of the following current Premiership stars scored the goal which clinched the fourth division play-off final for Cambridge United in 1990?
a) Dion Dublin, b) Liam Daish, c) Gary Rowett

7) Which of the following clubs was promoted to the top flight in 1990 despite losing their play-off final against Swindon Town?
a) Middlesbrough, b) Leicester City, c) Sunderland

8) Which of the following Leicester City players netted a penalty in last season's first division play-off final to put the Foxes on level terms with Crystal Palace?
a) Steve Claridge, b) Garry Parker, c) Steve Walsh

9) Which of the following current Premiership bosses led Bristol Rovers to the 1989 third division play-off final?
a) Martin O'Neill, b) Gerry Francis, c) Brian Little

10) Wycombe's rise from non-League obscurity included a trip to Wembley in the 1994 Division Three play-off final. But who did they beat to earn their place in the second division?
a) Preston North End, b) Plymouth Argyle, c) Carlisle United

Nationwide FOOTBALL LEAGUE

Tables & Positions

NATIONWIDE FOOTBALL LEAGUE DIVISION 1

	HOME						AWAY							
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pts	Gls	
Bolton W.	46	18	4	1	60	20	10	10	3	40	39	98	100	
Barnsley	46	14	4	5	43	19	8	10	5	33	36	80	76	
Wolverhampton W.	46	10	5	8	37	24	12	5	6	37	27	76	68	
Ipswich T.	46	13	7	3	44	23	7	7	9	24	27	74	68	
Sheffield Utd.	46	13	5	5	46	23	7	8	8	29	29	73	75	
Crystal Palace	46	10	7	6	39	22	9	7	7	39	28	71	78	
Portsmouth	46	12	4	7	32	24	8	4	11	27	29	68	59	
Port Vale	46	9	9	5	36	28	8	7	8	22	27	67	58	
QPR	46	10	5	8	33	25	8	7	8	31	35	66	84	
Birmingham C.	46	11	7	5	30	18	6	8	9	22	30	66	52	
Tranmere R.	46	10	9	4	42	27	7	5	11	21	29	65	63	
Stoke C.	46	15	3	5	34	22	3	7	13	17	35	64	51	
Norwich C.	46	9	10	4	28	18	8	2	13	35	50	63	63	
Manchester C.	46	12	4	7	34	25	5	6	12	25	35	61	59	
Charlton A.	46	11	8	4	36	28	5	3	15	16	38	59	52	
W.B.A.	46	7	7	9	37	33	7	8	8	31	39	57	68	
Oxford Utd.	46	14	3	6	44	26	2	6	15	20	42	57	64	
Reading	46	13	7	3	37	24	2	5	18	21	43	57	58	
Swindon T.	46	11	6	6	36	27	4	3	16	16	44	54	52	
Huddersfield T.	46	10	7	6	28	20	3	8	12	20	41	54	48	
Bradford C.	46	10	5	8	29	32	2	7	14	18	40	48	47	
Grimsby T.	46	7	7	9	31	34	4	6	13	29	47	46	60	
Oldham A.	46	6	8	9	30	30	4	5	14	21	36	43	51	
Southend Utd.	46	7	9	7	32	32	1	6	16	10	54	39	42	

NATIONWIDE FOOTBALL LEAGUE DIVISION 2

	HOME						AWAY							
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pts	Gls	
Bury	46	18	5	0	39	7	6	7	10	23	31	84	62	
Stockport C.	46	15	5	3	31	14	8	8	7	28	27	83	59	
Luton T.	46	13	7	3	38	14	8	8	7	33	31	78	71	
Brentford	46	8	11	4	26	22	12	3	8	30	21	74	56	
Bristol C.	46	14	4	5	43	18	7	6	10	26	33	73	69	
Crewe A.	46	15	4	4	38	15	7	3	13	18	32	73	56	
Blackpool	46	13	7	3	41	21	5	8	10	19	28	69	60	
Wrexham	46	11	9	3	37	28	6	9	8	17	22	69	54	
Burnley	46	14	3	6	48	27	5	8	10	23	28	68	71	
Chesterfield	46	10	9	4	25	18	8	5	10	17	21	68	42	
Gillingham	46	13	3	7	37	25	6	7	10	23	34	67	60	
Walsall	46	12	8	3	35	21	7	2	14	19	32	67	54	
Watford	46	10	8	5	24	14	6	11	6	21	24	67	45	
Millwall	46	12	4	7	27	22	4	9	10	23	33	61	50	
Preston N. E.	46	14	5	4	33	19	4	2	17	16	36	61	49	
Bournemouth	46	8	9	6	24	20	7	6	10	19	25	60	43	
Bristol R.	46	13	4	6	34	22	2	7	14	13	28	56	47	
Wycombe W.	46	13	4	6	31	14	2	6	15	20	42	55	51	
Plymouth A.	46	17	11	5	19	18	5	7	11	28	40	54	47	
York C.	46	8	6	9	27	31	5	7	11	20	37	52	47	
Peterborough Utd.	46	7	7	9	38	34	4	7	12	17	39	47	55	
Shrewsbury T.	46	8	6	9	27	32	3	7	13	22	42	46	49	
Rotherham Utd.	46	4	7	12	17	29	3	7	13	22	41	35	39	
Notts C.	46	4	9	10	20	25	3	5	15	13	34	35	33	

NATIONWIDE FOOTBALL LEAGUE DIVISION 3

	HOME						AWAY							
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pts	Gls	
Wigan A.	46	17	3	3	53	21	9	6	8	31	30	87	84	
Fulham	46	13	5	5	41	20	12	7	4	31	18	87	72	
Carlisle Utd.	46	16	3	4	41	21	8	9	6	26	23	84	67	
Northampton T.	46	14	4	5	43	17	6	8	9	24	27	72	67	
Swansea C.	46	13	5	5	27	20	8	3	12	25	38	71	62	
Chester C.	46	11	8	4	30	16	7	8	8	25	27	70	55	
Cardiff C.	46	11	4	8	30	23	9	5	9	26	31	69	56	
Colchester Utd.	46	11	9	3	36	23	6	8	9	26	28	68	62	
Lincoln C.	46	10	8	5	35	25	8	4	11	35	44	66	70	
Cambridge Utd.	46	11	5	7	30	27	7	6	10	23	32	65	53	
Mansfield T.	46	9	8	6	21	17	7	8	8	26	28	64	47	
Scarborough	46	9	9	5	36	37	7	6	10	29	37	63	65	
Scunthorpe Utd.	46	11	3	9	36	33	7	6	10	23	29	63	58	
Rochdale	46	10	6	7	34	24	4	10	9	24	34	58	58	
Barnet	46	9	9	5	32	23	5	7	11	14	28	58	46	
Leyton Orient	46	11	6	6	28	20	4	6	13	22	38	57	50	
Hull C.	46	9	8	6	29	26	4	10	9	15	24	57	44	
Darlington	46	11	5	7	37	28	3	5	15	27	50	52	64	
Doncaster R.	46	9	7	7	29	23	5	3	15	23	43	52	52	
Hartlepool Utd.	46	8	6	9	33	32	6	3	14	20	34	51	53	
Torquay Utd.	46	9	4	10	24	24	4	7	12	22	33	50	46	
Exeter C.	46	6	9	8	25	30	6	3	14	23	43	48	48	
Brighton & H. A.*	46	12	6	5	41	27	1	4	18	12	43	47	53	
Hereford Utd.	46	6	8	9	26	25	5	6	12	24	40	47	50	

*Brighton & H. A. 2 points deducted

Division 1

CHAMPIONS:	Bolton Wanderers
PROMOTED:	Barnsley
PLAY-OFFS:	Wolverhampton Wanderers, Ipswich Town
	Sheffield United, Crystal Palace
RELEGATED:	Grimsby Town, Olham Athletic,
	Southend United

Division 2

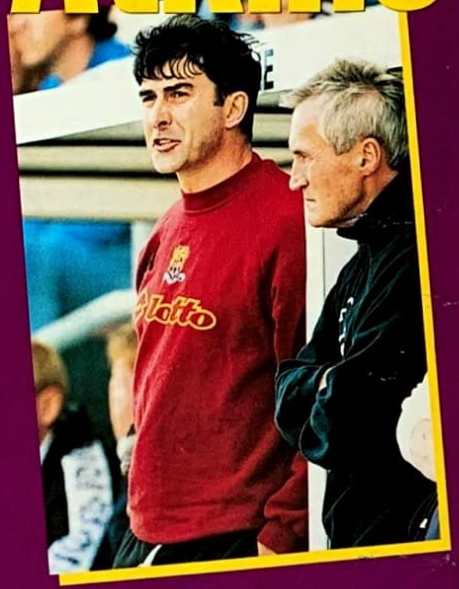
CHAMPIONS:	Bury
PROMOTED:	Stockport County
PLAY-OFFS:	Luton Town, Brentford, Bristol City,
	Crewe Alexandra
RELEGATED:	Peterborough United, Shrewsbury Town,
	Rotherham United, Notts County

Division 3

CHAMPIONS:	Wigan Athletic
PROMOTED:	Fulham & Carlisle United
PLAY-OFFS:	Northampton Town, Swansea City,
	Chester City, Cardiff City
RELEGATED:	Hereford United



Ian Atkins



As Northampton walk out at Wembley today, it is remarkable to think that it is just three seasons since the Cobblers propped up the Football League. Bottom of the Third Division with only fate conspiring to give them another chance in a season when no team gained promotion from the Conference.

It has been a rapid transformation in fortunes and as manager Ian Atkins concedes, not even he could have hoped for such a rapid recovery. "When you sit back and think of the position the club were in just a few years ago, it is amazing really," says Atkins who shys away from accepting credit for the achievements.

"You feel pride in what has happened, but I don't like to take the credit. This is a tribute to the players and they are the ones who should get the plaudits."

Atkins cannot shield himself from praise that easily. Though he likes to hand the glory to those around him at the club, the manager has to take the flak through the hard times and now that the glory days are here, he should be held up as the hero.

Having only been appointed at Sixfields in January 1995, he accepts that victory today against Jan Molby's Swansea would be the highlight of his managerial career. "It would not be hard to better what has gone before," he says with a smile. "I have only ever managed clubs who have been fighting for their lives at the wrong end of the table, so to have a day at Wembley is fantastic for myself and the players.

"But we will not get carried away by it all. The thought of Wembley will not fill my side with fear as many of them have played there before. We are also totally focused in our task and wherever we play that determination to succeed will be there."

Atkins uses the word focus consistently and gives the impression that his single minded plans have not contemplated defeat this afternoon. "The opposition do not concern me," he continues. "Once we had got through our play-off semi-final against Cardiff, I didn't even look at the other result. It didn't bother me whether it was Swansea or Chester in the final, as long as we were there. We will focus on our own performance at Wembley and if that is right, we must have a chance."

At the age of 40, Atkins has seen more than a few upheavals in his career. From Shrewsbury to Everton and Ipswich to Birmingham in his playing days, to spells in charge of Colchester and Doncaster before accepting the post of Cobblers boss in January 1995, he has the experienced plenty of lows in preparation for this day of highs.

And he goes about his job in an unassuming manner. "People were not expecting a great deal from us this season," says Atkins. "Even going into the play-offs there wasn't too much attention given to our efforts. But that is the way we like it to be. The belief is there in my side and we don't need others to tell us how well we are doing."

And the Atkins success story is no quick fix. He predicts a bright future for the club whatever the outcome today. "We have 13 or 14 youngsters who are showing so much potential," he adds enthusiastically. "And the mix between youth and experience has stood us in good stead. The youngsters who were thrown in at the start of the season when we had a few problems have learned from that and will be better for it.

"I'm sure they would do even better in the higher league. Whatever anyone says, you need to show strength in the Third Division, you have to mix it and earn the right to play. In the Second Division there is more space and I have players to shine in those conditions."

Looking ahead to life in the Second Division was unthinkable before Atkins arrived. He might not like to accept the plaudits, but victory today would give him the rewards he deserves.

ATKINS FACTFILE

Born: 16.01.57.
Birthplace: Birmingham.

As a player: 1974-82: Shrewsbury Town (278 appearances, 58 goals).
1982-85: Sunderland (77 appearances, 6 goals).
1984-86: Everton (7 appearances, 1 goal).
1986-88: Ipswich Town (77 appearances, 4 goals).
1988-90: Birmingham (93 appearances, 6 goals).
1990-91: Colchester Utd (41 appearances, 7 goals) - Player/manager.
1991-92: Birmingham (8 appearances) - Assistant manager.
1992-93: Cambridge (2 appearances) - Player/manager.
1993: Sunderland - Assistant manager.
1993-95: Doncaster manager.

Appointed Northampton boss: January 1995.

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10 Years of Play-Offs



Burnley celebrate victory in 1994

1987

Div 1/2: Charlton Athletic 2
Leeds United 1
(replay after 1-1 aggregate over two legs)

Div 2/3: Swindon Town 2
Gillingham 0
(replay after 2-2 aggregate over two legs)

Div 3/4: Aldershot 3
Wolverhampton W. 0
(Aggregate scores are shown from 1987 until the Finals became one-off matches at Wembley from 1990)

Before the advent of the Wembley play-off final and the thrill and sense of occasion that comes with the venue, the play-off finals were played on a home-and-away basis. For the first two years the competition involved sides vying for promotion and one club fighting to avoid relegation. The result was explosive football.

In the battle for First Division status Charlton and Leeds were still level after 270 minutes of football, after which the desire of the Addicks to retain their top-flight status proved too much for Leeds. Two goals from Peter Shirtliff were enough to ensure that Charlton began 1988 in the old First Division.

1988

Div 1/2: Middlesbrough 2
Chelsea 1

Div 2/3: Walsall 4
Bristol City 0
(replay after 3-3 aggregate over two legs)

Div 3/4: Swansea 5
Torquay United 4

This year's FA Cup Final was the First Division play-off of nine years ago, with the wealth of Chelsea pitted against the financially-struggling Middlesbrough. Boro took a two-goal lead to Stamford Bridge, and although the Blues fought hard for their place amongst the elite a Gordon Durie goal was not enough to bridge the gap. Crowd violence marred the game, leaving Chelsea to shuffle in shame from the division.

The fight for a Second Division place needed a replay, but then there was no doubt who the winner was - David Kelly hitting a hat-trick for Walsall.

1989

Div 2: Crystal Palace 4
Blackburn 3

Div 3: Port Vale 2
Bristol Rovers 1

Div 4: Leyton Orient 2
Wrexham 1

On March 1 Leyton Orient were lying in 15th position in the Third Division. A place in the top half of the table seemed almost out of reach, a place in the play-offs seemed like a dream. What happened was nothing short of a football miracle - eight wins and a draw in the last nine home games took them to sixth and two more home wins took them into the Third Division, illustrating the magic of the play-offs.

In the Second Division Blackburn took a 3-1 lead to Crystal Palace, whose saviour had a familar face. The second of Ian Wright's goals came after 117 minutes, a timely intervention to seal the game.

1990

Div 2: Swindon 1
Sunderland 0

Div 3: Notts County 2
Tranmere Rovers 0

Div 4: Cambridge United 1
Chesterfield 0

The play-offs arrived at Wembley and with them came controversy. But the talking points were not on the field - a goal from Alan Mcloughlin sealing the win for Swindon to confirm their status as one of the more stylish clubs in the League. They won promotion at Wembley in front of a crowd of 72,000, but days later had the honour taken away from them because of financial irregularities. Sunderland happily took their place alongside Notts Co. and Cambridge as the first benefactors of the now-famous Bank Holiday week-end.

1991

Div 2: Notts Co. 3
Brighton & H.A. 1

Div 3: Tranmere 1
Bolton Wanderers 0

Div 4: Torquay United 2
Blackpool 2
(Torquay won 5-4 on pens)

Manager Neil Warnock continued his love affair with the play-offs when he led Notts Co. to victory at Wembley for the second successive year. Tommy Johnson scored twice to give them a place in the old First Division in front of a crowd (59,940) which was once again the highest in the League that season. In the Fourth division play-off the game had to be decided the cruel way - penalties. Although Blackpool had finished seven points ahead of Torquay in the league that was forgotten as Torquay won promotion for the first time in 19 years.



Bradford City collect the trophy after last year's victory in the Division 2 Play-Off Final against Notts County

1992

Div 2: Blackburn Rovers 1
Leicester City 0

Div 3: Peterborough United 2
Stockport County 1

Div 4: Blackpool 1
Scunthorpe United 1
(Blackpool won 4-3 on pens)

The new age of Blackburn began at Wembley in May 1992 with the combination of Jack Walker's money and Kenny Dalglish's expertise proving too much for Leicester. A penalty just before half-time, taken by Mike Newell, was enough to give Rovers a place in the newly-formed Premiership. Lower down the divisions Blackpool were not going to be beaten by penalties again and took revenge on Stockport.

1993

Div 1: Swindon Town 4
Leicester City 3

Div 2: WBA 3
Port Vale 0

Div 3: York City 1
Crewe Alexandra 1
(York won 5-3 on pens)

Swindon seemed to have shrugged off the disappointment of three years earlier when they cruised to a 3-0 lead in front of 73,000 spectators. But they were determined that it would not be that easy, allowing Leicester to draw level. The Foxes looked certain to continue their comeback, but a late penalty from Paul Bodin finally took Swindon into the Premiership. Wins by WBA and York completed a weekend which attracted almost 150,000 to the Twin Towers.

1994

Div 1: Leicester City 2
Derby County 1

Div 2: Burnley 2
Stockport County 1

Div 3: Wycombe W. 4
Preston N.E. 2

The rise and rise of Martin O'Neill's Wycombe continued at Wembley as they won promotion for the second consecutive year to climb from the Vauxhall Conference to the Second Division. The following day Stockport shot themselves in the foot when they were reduced to nine men, Michael Wallace and Chris Beaumont being dismissed for rash reactions. Leicester's day was far more joyous, a late goal from Steve Walsh giving them their first Wembley win in seven visits.

1995

Div 1: Bolton Wanderers 4
Reading 3

Div 2: Huddersfield Town 2
Bristol Rovers 1

Div 3: Chesterfield 2
Bury 0

Opinions on the play-off system vary, but one man who is 100% in favour is Neil Warnock, who was given his third Wembley victory when Chris Billy headed in the winner for Huddersfield. In the Monday event nearly 65,000 spectators saw one of the best games of the season as Reading took a 2-0 lead only for Bolton to produce a scintillating second-half display. A penalty save from Keith Branagan and goals from Owen Coyle and Fabian De Freitas took the game into extra-time. Two more goals put the game out of Reading's reach.

1996

Div 1: Leicester City 2
Crystal Palace 1 *(aet)*

Div 2: Bradford City 2
Notts County 0

Div 3: Plymouth Argyle 1
Darlington 0

Leicester were saved from penalties by two seconds, the two teams being inseparable after 120 minutes of the battle for the biggest target in football - Premiership status, which Leicester had lost the year before. The man who saved the day was Steve Claridge, whose goal gave Palace no time to reply. In the Second Division Bradford enjoyed the biggest occasion since their 1911 FA Cup triumph and in the Third Division Neil Warnock once again tasted victory to make him the undisputed King of the Play-Offs, with his fourth such promotion in seven seasons.

Northampton Review



When Northampton manager Ian Atkins reflects on the club's most successful season of the decade, it seems odd that he selects a defeat as the turning point of a draining campaign.

The 1-0 loss to title leaders Wigan last March may have appeared to be a damaging blow to their play-off hopes at the time, but Atkins insists it was a result that inspired his side to new heights. "We went into that game after a month when we had no luck at all," recalls the Cobblers chief. "Wigan were almost certain of automatic promotion and they came to our place expecting to win.

"But we totally outplayed them from start to finish. If we had won by five or six goals it wouldn't have been unjust. They scored in the last couple of minutes with a lucky goal and we left the field wondering what more we could have done. But the fact that we were a million miles ahead of them on the day gave us a boost and and from that point on we had a great run to end the season. Seven games unbeaten and five wins amongst that."

That final burst secured their play-off berth, but the ground work had already been done long before that. An opening day disappointment against Wigan was cancelled out the following Saturday with a confident 3-0 success over Mansfield. David Rennie and Mark Cooper were amongst the scorers as the Sixfields campaign opened in style.

Though by October, the supporters were preparing for another bitter winter with the threat of relegation looming large. In a season when the Conference sides had spent money on improving their grounds to the satisfactory level, this was a campaign where finishing last in the table would mean the ultimate humiliation, but the Cobblers had endured a difficult start to the campaign.

"We had a lot of problems in the first couple of months," reflects the manager. "It meant a lot of our younger players being thrown into action, but they kept the club in good stead. They picked up points and when the experienced players returned it gave them something to go for."

Slowly the tide began to turn as successive wins against Colchester, Darlington and Hartlepool eased the relegation fears in October. Inconsistency continued to dog the Cobblers and defeat against today's opponents Swansea at the start of November was a hammer blow. Though the festive season brought new belief that this sort of day under the Twin Towers was a realistic target for Northampton.

A series of comprehensive wins over Christmas lifted Atkins' side into a top six place with the 4-0 success over Cardiff on New Years Day particularly impressive. Ray Warburton, Neil Grayson and Cooper were amongst the scorers on a memorable day at Sixfields. The 5-1 demolition of Chester a week later highlighted the confidence flowing through the camp.

"It became fairly clear after the first couple of months that Fulham, Wigan and Carlisle would run away with the three automatic promotion places, but we always felt we could get into the play-offs," says Atkins. "There are three stages in every season. The start when the sun is out and the pitches are nice and fresh, the winter when the mud is up around your ankles and the spring when players are tired and trying to push themselves to the end.

"If a team comes through all that and gets into a play-off final, they deserve their chance at Wembley. Everyone starts a season believing they can win promotion, but this club has struggled in the last few years, so if I'm being honest, to be challenging this time may have come as a bit of a surprise to me. It looked difficult for us in the early stages of the season, but I knew we would turn it around."

That stunning run to end the season and comprehensive defeat of Cardiff in the play-off semi averted the clash of the Welsh giants at Wembley, but also gave Atkins and his side a chance to crack open the champagne. "We had a good celebration when we made it into the play-offs and the same when we beat Cardiff. It will be the biggest party of them all if we win today," adds the Cobblers boss.

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What is the best way to describe being at Wembley?

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Semi-final celebrations



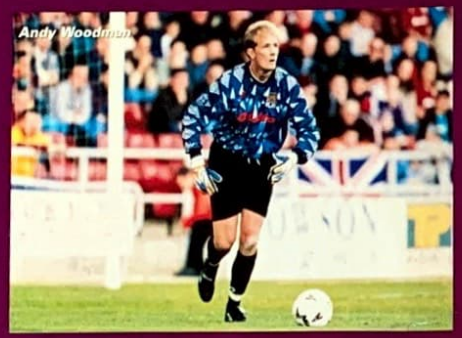
Second leg - Ian Sampson scorer of Northampton's first goal

Ian Atkins celebrates victory



Goalkeeper Andy Woodman congratulated by fans

Northampton Town



Andy Woodman (goalkeeper) Born: 11.08.71 (Camberwell)

A tall stopper formally with Crystal Palace, he spent seven years as understudy to Nigel Martyn. After a brief spell with Exeter City, Andy joined Northampton of a free transfer in March 1995. He missed just one game this season.

Ian Clarkson (defender) Born: 01.12.70 (Solihul)

Ian started his career with Birmingham City and enjoyed an Associate Members Cup triumph in 1991 and also played his part in the Blues promotion winning side that year. He joined Stoke in September 1993 for £40,000 before signing for the Cobblers on a free transfer last summer.

John Frain (defender) Born: 09.10.68 (Birmingham)

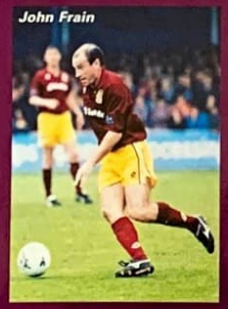
Frain signed for Northampton on a full-time basis just before deadline day after some impressive performances earlier in the season whilst on loan from Birmingham. He spent over ten years at St.Andrews making over 300 appearances that earned him a well deserved testimonial.

Lee Maddison (defender) Born: 05.10.72 (Bristol)

A cultured left-back who progressed through the Bristol Rovers youth policy and was signed in October 1995 for £25,000 after a promising loan spell. Injuries have stunted his career in the past two years.

Ian Sampson (defender) Born: 14.11.68 (Wakefield)

Ian started-out with non-league Goole Town before moving to Sunderland in November 1990. He signed for the Cobblers in a £30,000 deal in August 1994 and he was the only ever present in the side throughout the following season. Sampson was loaned to Tottenham for the much maligned Inter-Toto Cup two summers ago.



Ray Warburton (defender) Born: 07.10.67 (Rotherham)

A commanding centre-back and club captain who joined from York City in a £35,000 deal during the 1994/95 close season. He missed the start of the campaign as a result of an operation last summer.



David Rennie (midfielder) Born: 29.08.64 (Edinburgh)

A former Scottish youth international who started his career with Leicester City after coming through their youth system. Signed by Leeds United in January 1996 for £50,000 and played in over 100 games for the Elland Road outfit before Bristol City paid £175,000 for his services in July 1989. After a spell at Coventry he joined Northampton last summer.

Sean Parrish (midfielder) Born: 14.03.72 (Wrexham)

Hard running player who started his career as a Shrewsbury Town trainee, making only a handful of appearances before leaving Gay Meadow for non-league Telford. Signed by current Cobblers boss Ian Atkins in his days as Doncaster boss, Sean followed Atkins to Northampton in August 1996.

Roy Hunter (midfielder) Born: 29.10.73 (Saltburn)

A crowd favourite with tenacity and will to win. Roy can play in either midfield or at full-back and arrived at Northampton via West Brom. Another who had a spell on the books at Man Utd.

Dean Peer (midfielder) Born: 08.08.69 (Stourbridge)

Hard working midfielder with tremendous stamina who progressed through the ranks at Birmingham City and played over 100 games for the Blues first team. Dean moved to Walsall in 1993 and then on to Northampton in the summer of 1995.

Neil Grayson (striker) Born: 01.11.64 (York)

A industrious player who always gives 100 per-cent in whatever position he is asked to fill. Played for non-league Rowntree Mackintosh before joining Doncaster in 1990. After another spell out of league football, he joined the Cobblers in 1994. He scored the third hat-trick of his career in the victory over Hartlepool last January.



John Gayle (striker) Born: 30.07.64 (Bromsgrove)

A powerful front-man who joined from Stoke for £25,000 last February and promptly scored on his debut. A former member of the Wimbledon 'Crazy Gang', he has also had spells with Birmingham, Coventry and Burnley.





Jason White (striker) Born: 19.10.70 (Meridian)

Awkward striker who causes problems with his pace. Jason started his career with Derby County as a trainee. He didn't make an appearance for the Rams before joining Scunthorpe on a free in September 1991. The Cobblers paid £35,000 to capture him in the summer of 1995 and he finished as top scorer with 16 goals.

Mark Cooper (striker) Born: 05.04.67 (Watford)

The big centre-forward started his career at Cambridge and scored 20 goals for the club before joining Tottenham in April 1987. Without ever appearing for the north London giants, he left in a £105,000 deal with Gillingham and played for Leyton Orient and Barnet en route to Sixfields.

Alistair Gibb (striker) Born: 17.02.76 (Salisbury)

A promising youngster who was purchased from Norwich City for £30,000 in February 1996 after an impressive loan spell. An important member of the squad this season.

Christian Lee (striker) Born: 08.10.76 (Aylesbury)

Highly rated hit-man who signed for the Cobblers despite interest from several top clubs. Another former Doncaster man, he was the subject of a £30,000 inquiry from Leeds in his days at Belle Vue.

HEAD 2 HEAD

David Rennie



Kwame Ampadu



In a Northampton side crammed full of youthful exuberance, the calming influence of performers such as David Rennie will be crucial on a day like this.

A former Scottish youth international, the hard working midfielder progressed through the ranks at Leicester City, but it was during his spells at Leeds, Bristol City and Birmingham that Rennie really began to make his impact. With well over 400 league appearances behind him, a return to the big stage he has missed since his move to Northampton last summer is a challenge he is relishing.

"David found it hard to adjust to the Third Division when he first joined us," reflects Cobblers boss Ian Atkins. "When you have been at the top for so long, it can be difficult. I've done it myself and the challenges in the Third Division are very different from those in the top flight. But since he has settled down, David has had a massive influence on the team."

There is always a danger that the sheer size and splendour of Wembley can overcome a player who has never been here before. But Atkins is convinced stars like Rennie can calm any nerves. "David has seen it all in the game," he says. "And though I am confident my team will cope with everything, having players like him out there is reassuring.

"When you have that much experience, you can read the game so well and David has been a key man in our excellent finish to the campaign. He has put in a lot of hard work this season and deserves this day."

The expectations on Arsenal's youngsters are always so high. When a club's youth system has produced the likes of England internationals Tony Adams and Paul Merson, every Highbury youngster has been set a mammoth precedent to emulate.

And the expectations were just too high for Swansea's Kwame Ampadu as he set out on a professional career in the game with the North London giants. Born in Bradford, the young striker signed professionally with the Gunners in November 1988, yet only made two brief substitute appearances during his three seasons at the club.

The same frustrations are still being felt by the Highbury youngsters to this day and as young Gunner Adrian Clarke admits, Ampadu's scenario is all too familiar. "You look at the Arsenal team sheet every week and just wonder how you will ever get in," says Clarke who featured on several occasions for the first team last season. "There can be no better place to learn the game, but you know your chances are going to be limited. And so many don't quite make it."

Kwame's chances were too few for him to show what he could do under manager George Graham and it was no surprise when the highly rated youngster joined West Brom in a £50,000 deal in 1991. Rejection like that he suffered at Highbury can be enough to irreparably damage a player's confidence, but Ampadu is no quitter.

Though he was never given the run in the side he craved at the Hawthorns, when handed his rare opportunities the potential was there for all to see.

Swansea have at last allowed him to unleash his talents on a regular basis and his appearance on the hallowed turf this afternoon will give him the chance to prove a few of his doubters wrong. At the age of 26, this is one young man with a point to prove.

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Northampton Town



Manager:
Ian Atkins

Colours:
Shirts – Claret
Shorts – White with Claret Trim
Socks – White with Claret Trim

- Stuart Brock
- Ian Clarkson
- Lee Colkin
- Mark Cooper
- John Frain
- John Gayle
- Alistair Gibb
- Neil Grayson
- Roy Hunter
- Christian Lee
- Lee Madison
- Danny O'Shea
- Sean Parrish
- Dean Peer
- David Rennie
- Ian Sampson
- Dean Tallentire
- Garry Thompson
- Billy Turley
- Ray Warburton
- Michael Warner
- Jason White
- Andy Woodman

TODAY'S OFFICIALS

Referee:
Terry Heilbrow – Newton Aycliffe, Co. Durham

Assistant Referees:
Mike Joy – Bristol
Mike Stobbart – Guildford, Surrey

Fourth Official:
Roy Pearson – Peterlee, Co. Durham

Swansea

- Roger Freestone
- Joao Moreira
- Keith Walker
- Christian Edwards
- Mark Clode
- Richard Appleby
- David Penney
- Kwame Ampadu
- Shaun Chapple
- Lee Jenkins
- Jonathan Coates
- Carl Heggs
- Stephen Torpey
- Linton Brown
- David Thomas



Manager:
Jan Molby

Colours:
Shirts – White
Shorts – Black
Socks – Black



Today's ballboys are courtesy of Northampton and Swansea Schools FA.

Ballboys tracksuits are supplied by Umbro.

All matchday footballs courtesy of Mitre.

Note: If the scores are level at the end of 90 minutes play, an extra half hour will be played. If the scores are still level at the end of extra time, the winners will be determined by a Penalty Competition played in accordance with the Laws of the Game.

Nationwide support Italian Job success





Left: Martin Bullock takes on Emanuel Broschi

Below: Carl Serrant collects his Man of the Match Award from European Aviation's Terry Fox

If any further evidence was required to illustrate the extent of top quality young talent that exists outside the English top flight, the Nationwide backed Under-21 Inter-League match between The Italian League Serie B and The Football League proved that beyond all doubt in February.

Played at Serie A Sampdoria's wonderful Luigi Ferraris Stadium in Genoa, The Football League starlets matched their Italian counterparts stride for stride and were more than good value for the 1-1 draw which they earned.

The result enabled The Football League to preserve their unbeaten record in the three representative fixtures which have been played against The Italian League on a 21 and under basis – coming on the back of a 3-2 victory in Andria in February 1995 and a 1-1 draw at Huddersfield nine months later.

The Football Association were represented by England's Under 21 manager Peter Taylor and Technical Consultant Jimmy Armfield who submitted a full report of the match to national coach Glenn Hoddle. The success of the trip would indicate a bright future for the 16 players who made up the squad and for the full international side in years to come.

Former England full-back Jimmy Armfield, now an influential figure in the FA as a technical consultant, commented: "When the fixture became a regular meeting of the two leagues at Under 21 level, we put it into the development programme of the England team."

The best young players in the country are not necessarily with Premiership clubs, and that's been proved with some excellent performances over the three games against the Serie B team."

"We deservedly won the first one and although we have had to settle for draws in the last two games, I felt we were the better side on both occasions. Practically half the Italian players were from Serie A clubs in this last match, which made it a sterner test, but I certainly didn't mind that."

"Our lads acquitted themselves well and did the Nationwide League proud and my report to Glenn Hoddle reflects that Peter Taylor, who runs the full England Under 21 team and was on the trip with me, was also impressed."

"Peter noted the names of several players whose progress he will be monitoring closely. I even had an Italian scout come up to me and ask about one of our lads, which was quite a compliment to the player in question."

"Italy are undoubtedly one of the strongest footballing nations in Europe, so with the Nationwide team drawing over there and the England Under 21's beating Italy at home last month, I firmly believe the signs are good for our national team's future."

The Football League side were enjoying their most productive spell of the first half and were well in command when the Italians took the lead after 35 minutes. Against the run of play Cremonese's Alessio Pirri picked up a wayward pass midway inside the English half, took the ball forward and struck from just inside the penalty area.

Deservedly, The Football League drew level in the 62nd minute when Bruce Dyer fed a neat ball to Shaun Newton of Charlton Athletic who fired home under Gianello from ten yards out. Although the English had a host of opportunities towards the end to seal a victory, the quality of The Football League's performance ensured a thoroughly productive occasion.



Above: The Football League squad arrive in Genoa

Below: The Squad line-up before departure to Italy



THE TEAM LINE UPS

THE ITALIAN LEAGUE

Gianello (Chievo), Broschi (Venezia), Baccin (Cesena), Mezzano (Torino), Lanna (Chievo), Zanchetta (Foggia), Rutzittu (Genoa), C Zanetti (Cesena), Tedesco (Palermo), Pirri (Salernitana), Campolonghi (Brescia).

Subs: Chianese (Foggia) for Pirri 61, Mercuri (Torino) for Lanna 70, Amoroso (Empoli) for Tedesco 75, Rocati (Ravenna), Sommese (Torino), G. Zanetti (Cesena), Di Michele (Foggia).

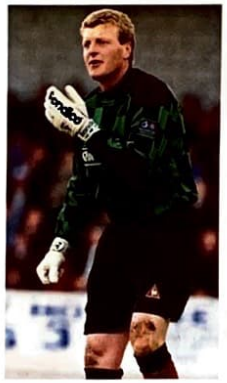
THE FOOTBALL LEAGUE

Marshall (Norwich City), Moses (Barnsley), Mills (Norwich City), Serrant (Oldham Athletic), Hamilton (Bradford City – now Newcastle United), Hughes (Wrexham – now Birmingham City), Holland (Birmingham City), Bullock (Barnsley), Rogers (Tranmere Rovers), Bradbury (Portsmouth), Dyer (Crystal Palace).

Subs: Newton (Charlton) for Rogers 60, Taylor (Bolton Wanderers) for Bradbury 60, Davis (Luton Town), Purse (Oxford United), Lawson (Huddersfield Town).

Referee: Claude Colombo – France

Swansea City



Roger Freestone (goalkeeper)
Born: 19.08.68 (Newport)

Transferred from Chelsea for a fee of £50,000 in September 1991, Roger has scored three goals in his colourful career at the Vetch. An outstandingly consistent goalkeeper on the fringes of the Welsh side.

Joao Moreira (defender)
Born: 30.06.70 (Angola)

Joao signed last summer and has enjoyed several first team starts this season. His previous clubs include Portuguese outfits Anadia and Benfica and he has shown encouraging form in his full-back berth.

Keith Walker (defender)
Born: 17.04.66 (Edinburgh)

Keith joined from St. Mirren in December 1989 and proved a highly popular player with the Swansea supporters. A solid and dependable centre-back no strike-force enjoys facing.



Christian Edwards (defender)
Born: 23.11.75 (Caerphilly)

A youngster who emerged through the ranks at the Vetch and has enjoyed a consistent run in the side for the past two seasons. The outstanding performer in the play-off semi first leg against Chester.

Mark Clode (defender)
Born: 23.02.73 (Plymouth)

A member of Swansea's Autoglass Trophy winning side of 1994 here at Wembley, Mark joined the club in 1993 on a free transfer from Plymouth where he had failed to make a first team appearance.

Jan Molby (defender/midfielder)
Born: 04.07.63 (Denmark)

A key member of the Liverpool side that dominated the English game throughout the 1980s. His range of passing and close control has been crucial in the Swans rise up the table and he has transformed the club since taking over as manager in February of last year. This is his first managerial position.



Richard Appleby (midfielder)
Born: 18.09.75 (Middlesbrough)

Signed for Swansea in July 1996 after previously being on the books at Ipswich Town. Richard spent six years at Newcastle United before moving to Portman Road in 1995.

David Penney (midfielder)
Born: 17.04.64 (Wakefield)

An experienced midfielder who has played a key role on



the Swans path to Wembley. He was transferred for the paltry sum of £1,500 when he left Pontefract to join Derby in 1985 and he had a spell at Oxford before joining Swansea in 1991. A regular goalscorer.

Kwame Ampadu (midfielder)
Born: 20.12.70 (Bradford)

Bought from West Bromwich Albion in February 1994 for £15,000, he represented the Swans on their last appearance at Wembley in the Autoglass Trophy. A talented team player who began his career at Arsenal where first team chances were limited for him.

Shaun Chapple (midfielder)
Born: 14.02.73 (Swansea)

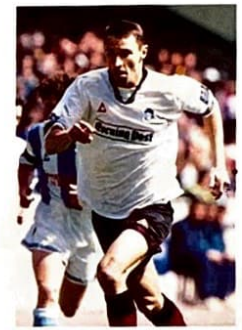
Shaun signed professional forms with the Swans in July 1991 and has spent much of the current campaign as a substitute.

Jonathan Coates (striker)
Born: 27.06.75 (Swansea)

Another product of the Vetch Y.T.S. system who has established himself in the side this season. Still learning the game, but his hard work and commitment to the Swans has seen him produce a consistent campaign.

Carl Heggs (striker)
Born: 11.10.70 (Leicester)

Heggs began his career at Leicester City, but without ever playing a game for the Filbert Street outfit, he moved on to West Brom in 1991. A £60,000 move to the Vetch was completed in June 1995 and he was on the score-sheet in the 3-0 play-off semi-final win against Chester.



Stephen Torpey (striker)
Born: 08.12.70 (London)

Signed from Bradford for a tribunal fee fixed at £80,000 in August 1993. He has had another consistent season in front of goal and added to his tally in the semi-final against Chester at the Vetch.

Linton Brown (striker)
Born: 12.04.70 (Driffield)

Linton joined the Swans on a free transfer in March 1996 after a three year stint at Hull City. He enjoyed a brief spell at Halifax Town in his formative years.

David Thomas (striker)
Born: 26.09.75 (Caerphilly)

A youngster who signed professional forms with Swansea in 1994 and who has been a regular in the side this season. Another scorer in the play-off semi-final second leg against Cardiff.

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KEN REEDS

CLIFFORD CHANCE

Semi-final
1st leg action



Steve Torpey

Christian Edwards on the move

Rod McDonald keeps Steve Jones at bay

Swansea Review

The mood of anticipation felt by fans up and down the country last August was reciprocated in Wales where Swansea were setting out on a mission to secure a quick return to Division Two after relegation the season before.

The well publicised financial problems that have dogged the club in recent years were always going to be an obstacle manager Jan Molby would have to overcome if he was to succeed in his first managerial post, but he has known nothing but victory throughout his career and was determined to succeed in his greatest challenge yet.

The opening day victory over Rochdale began to banish the memory of the desperate season that was still fresh in the mind for so may Swans fans. A first goal for David Penney in that 2-1 win signalled his intentions in what was to be a productive scoring season for the 32-year-old.


David Penney

Yet within a month all that early optimism was swept away as the likes of Darlington, Chester and Lincoln inflicted a string of crushing defeats on Jan Molby's team. As early promotion chasers Carlisle sent four goals crashing past Swans keeper Roger Freestone on a sickening day in mid-September, Molby's team sank to a lowly 21st position in the table.

There was some discontent among fans who were demanding instant success in the Third Division. Yet they remained loyal and were rewarded with a comprehensive 4-0 defeat of Hereford a few days after that Carlisle setback.

David Thomas was the amongst the goalscorers on what appeared to be an important night of confidence building at the Vetch.

But again hopes that the turning point had arrived were quickly dashed. As they progressed through the month of October without the boost of a victories until the final days, the slide back down the table saw them slip to just one off the bottom spot which was already occupied by the unfortunate Brighton.

But November proved a better month for Molby who was certainly learning the managerial game the hard way. While some of his former Liverpool team-mates have gone straight from the Anfield boot-room and into the top jobs, Molby took the tougher option at Swansea and deserves praise for what has to be seen as a brave decision.

When the pressure is on, courage is an important quality and Molby showed plenty of fighting spirit as he started to turn the season around. Successive victories over Torquay, Cardiff, Exeter and Hereford as the season moved into its fourth month lifted the threat of a relegation fight and propelled the side into a far more prominent position at the right end of the table.

In fact, as Swans fans made the pilgrimage to the Vetch on Boxing Day, the side were sitting fifth in the table and showing all the signs that they were capable of catching the likes of Fulham, Carlisle and Wigan who had so far proved themselves to be the cream of the division.

But in the end, those three were always just far enough out of reach to leave the Swans in a battle for a play-off berth which they always seemed capable of holding on to. And their February 8th win over Northampton may prove more significant than they imagined when they left Sixfields with the points. Again Penney found the net when it mattered most to secure a league double over their Wembley rivals after December's 1-0 defeat of the Cobblers.

Those results should give the Swans a psychological edge, but they are facing an in-form Northampton outfit who are playing with far more confidence than they were three months ago.

From late January through to the end of the campaign, Swansea remained in fourth place as the locals got behind their team in a bid to push them over the winning line to promotion. A 2-2 home draw against Hartlepool on the last day of the season allowed Northampton to steal that fourth place, but there can be no doubt that the top two in the play-off pool will provide an intriguing encounter this afternoon.

Psychological edge? Jan Molby will know only too well that at Wembley anything can happen. After all, he was part of the Liverpool team who lost to Wimbledon in the 1988 F.A. Cup Final.

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Jan Molby



Swansea boss Jan Molby would be the first to admit that it has been no easy ride since he took the helm at the Vetch Field in February 1996. In fact, as his side slipped into the bottom three in the opening months of the season, some fans voiced their disapproval of their charismatic boss who, though hailing from Denmark, speaks more like a Liverpudlian than any of the Beatles.

But he has ridden the difficult period to book a return to a stadium he became more than a little familiar with during his eleven glorious years as a Liverpool player. F.A. Cup Finals and numerous Charity Shield matches littered his Anfield career and made him a Wembley hero in the red shirt on more than one occasion. Those experiences can only help his young squad that have excelled in booking the day at the home of football.

Molby was a gifted individual on the field. A player who was always accused of carrying too much weight, though his poise, balance and exquisite range of passing made up for all his over publicised deficiencies. It was a sign of his class that he always seemed to have more time on the ball than anyone else on the field.

"Jan was the sort of player who could turn a game with one pass," says his former Anfield team-mate Mark Lawrenson. "He could disappear for long periods and then pop up with that moment of inspiration. With a player like Ian Rush in the side, you only need one chance to score a goal. More often than not, Jan was our man to unlock a defence. He was an inspired signing for Liverpool."

Molby moved to Anfield from Ajax in 1984 in a £575,000 deal. It proved to be money well spent for a number ten who became a cult hero amongst the Scouse faithful.

They say combining a continued career on the field with management is a tough task, but when Molby does turn out for the Swans, he still shines in a league packed with battling players. Also, after playing alongside the class of Dalglish, Rush and Hansen throughout his career, it must have been difficult to adjust to life in the Third Division.

But it has been a season when the stars of yesteryear have excelled in management seats throughout the Third Division. From former Everton Wembley winner Kevin Ratcliffe at Chester to Carlisle boss and former Leeds keeper Mervyn Day, it has been a story of success. Though Day accepts time is needed when dropping down the leagues. "It is difficult when you have played all your life with the top players and then drop to a lesser level, but that is part of the challenge," he states.

Molby seems ready to accept the battle that is life in the lower leagues. "My players have become hardened to the physical side of the game this season," says the Swans boss. "We played Chester in the play-off semi-finals and they have adopted the physical approach all season. But that is what it is all about down here. You have to earn the right to play and we have managed to do that more often than not this season."

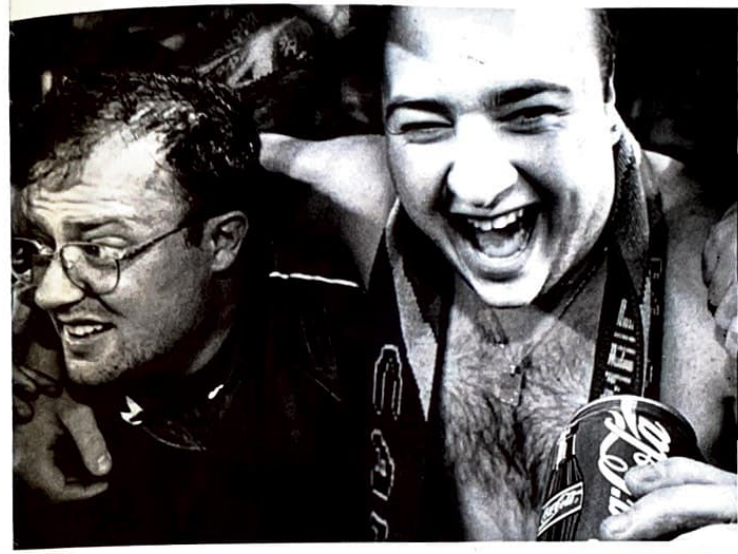
This afternoon, his challenge is to put Swansea back on the path to the big-time. It seems an age since John Toshack took the club into the top flight when glory days such as this were common place. The gap between rich and poor is now so great that such a comeback from Swansea would be hard to envisage in the modern game. With the club already deep in financial trouble, Molby looks set to continue working on a shoestring budget whatever happens under the Twin Towers today.

Molby's Wembley return that will bring an air of the romantic into the famous old stadium. A week to the day since the F.A. Cup Final and all the drama that produced, this encounter will provide a different sort of drama. Molby has described this day as the most important in his illustrious career. After all he has achieved that is saying something.

MOLBY FACTFILE

Born: 04.07.63.
Birthplace: Kolding, Denmark.
Signed for Liverpool in a £575,000 deal: 24.08.84
218 appearances for Liverpool (44 goals).
Honours: Division One Championship: 1986, 88, 90.
F.A. Cup: 1986, 92
After loan spells at Barnsley and Norwich he was appointed Swansea boss: 22.02.95.

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Auto Windscreens Schools Shield

The Auto Windscreens Schools Shield is a six-a-side football competition for school teams in the under-13 age group (Year 8). The competition is organised by The Football League, in conjunction with the English Schools' Football Association and the national Football in the Community scheme.

A total of 713 schools have taken part in this season's competition. Local heats have been held at Football League clubs throughout the country and the winning schools have gone on to represent their local League club in matches against other clubs from the same division of the Nationwide League.

Eight teams in each division made it through to the Area Finals, which were staged in the North at Manchester City FC and in the South at Bisham Abbey National Sports Centre.

In the Area Final, four teams in each division play-off for the chance to play here at Wembley.

Through the financial support of Auto Windscreens and Sportsmatch, the Government's Business Sponsorship Incentive Scheme for Sport, each of the 713 schools taking part in the competition will receive five Mitre footballs.

Northern Area Finals

Held at Manchester City FC, Maine Road on Tuesday 6th, May 1997



The winners of Division Three, Northern Area – North Cumbria Technology College, Carlisle United

Doncaster Rovers	2 v 1	Hull City
Carlisle United	3 v 0	Chester City
Doncaster Rovers	1 v 2	Carlisle United
Hull City	1 v 2	Chester City
Doncaster Rovers	2 v 0	Chester City
Hull City	2 v 3	Carlisle United

Results of the Division Three Finals, Northern Area

Schools Shield

SPORTS £ £ MATCH

Southern Area Finals

Held at Bisham Abbey National Sports Centre on Thursday 8th, May 1997



The winners of Division Three, Southern Area – Exmouth Community College, Exeter City

Exeter City	3 v 1	Fulham
Hereford United	2 v 4	Leyton Orient
Exeter City	2 v 0	Hereford United
Fulham	3 v 1	Leyton Orient
Exeter City	3 v 0	Leyton Orient
Fulham	1 v 0	Hereford United

Results of the Division Three Finals, Southern Area

DIVISION THREE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Northern Area							
Carlisle United	3	3	0	0	8	3	9
Doncaster Rovers	3	2	0	1	5	3	6
Chester City	3	1	0	2	2	6	3
Hull City	3	0	0	3	4	7	0
Southern Area							
Exeter City	3	3	0	0	8	1	9
Fulham	3	2	0	1	5	4	6
Leyton Orient	3	1	0	2	5	8	3
Hereford United	3	0	0	3	2	7	0

Nationwide's Review of Division Three

Nationwide's first season of sponsorship proved to be a fascinating one in Division Three.



Duane Darby — hat-trick hero as Hull opened the season with a win.



Kerry Dixon — found life at Doncaster to be worlds apart from his highly successful days at Chelsea.

AUGUST

The bright summer sunshine was out to welcome in the new third division season and a pleasant summer afternoon was had by each of the four newly relegated clubs as Brighton won 2-1 at home to Chester, Swansea won by exactly the same score at home to Rochdale, Carlisle picked up maximum points at Doncaster and Hull came out on top in a five-goal thriller against Darlington. However, by the end of the month the foursome had their eyes well and truly opened to what life would be like in the robust, harsh world of Division Three. Hull flew the flag in third position with two wins and two draws from their first four games and Carlisle weighed in with an eighth place, but for Brighton and Swansea in particular it was a decidedly difficult welcome.

SEPTEMBER

Big spending Wigan went into the month as league leaders. The Latics, boosted by the cash of millionaire, Dave Whelan, were looking to put the disappointments of last season behind them when they failed on a dramatic last day to make the play-offs. However, Londoners Fulham 'Capital'ised on a few dropped points to take over the leadership going into the end of the month, along with Carlisle, who also made use of their greater-than-most resources, to form the basis of a challenge at the summit. The top three places had already begun to have a familiar look about them as the rest of the pack showed their distinct inconsistencies. At the bottom, Doncaster were the early 'pacesetters' so to speak. The Yorkshire outfit dramatically dispensed with the services of manager, Sammy Chung only hours before the season kicked off and his replacement, former Chelsea star, Kerry Dixon was finding the terrain pretty tough on his first managerial mission.

OCTOBER

Cambridge United's team of young stars, with the odd experienced head thrown in for good measure, were causing something of a surprise as they emerged as a side likely to go a long way in the division. After a disappointing previous campaign, Tommy Taylor's men were keen give their supporters something to cheer about and with eight victories in their first 15 games they did just that. Though they still trailed both Fulham — who had striker, Mike Conroy in good form with 13 goals from 15 games — and Wigan who ended the month holding the top two spots. The start of October saw Brighton settle down in bottom spot, but with their many off-the-field problems the Seagulls' fans had plenty of other things to worry about. Another low flying bird were the Swans of Swansea, who flew just one place above Brighton after getting a tough baptism to third division life, but it's a marathon not a sprint and their time would come.....



Jody Craddock — much sought after defender and key figure behind Cambridge's fine start to the season.



Andy Ritchie — now back in the familiar colours of Oldham, but the veteran strikers goals proved vital in Scarborough's early season rise.

NOVEMBER

Scarborough and Torquay, two clubs more used to scrapping it out at the bottom were enjoying the first couple of months of the season. The pair, who occupied the bottom two places the previous season, were in nosebleed positions going into November. Scarborough, under the shrewd guidance of Mick Wadsworth, lay in fourth place after the first week of the month, with veteran Andy Ritchie revelling in an otherwise young squad. Ritchie's 10 goals put him in amongst the division's top goalscorers. Torquay meanwhile had overcome a pre-season court case against Stevenage to hold on to their Football League status, after the Vauxhall Conference champions appealed against the league's decision not to promote them in place of the Gulls, and realising how lucky they were to still be a league club, hit sixth place before falling away towards the end of the month. Fulham meanwhile started to put some daylight between themselves and second-placed Carlisle after enjoying a good month.

DECEMBER

Going into the busy festive month, the FA Cup failed to provide a welcome relief for the majority of Division Three clubs with Cambridge United's embarrassing exit at home to Woking, Hull's 5-1 home thrashing by Crewe and Leyton Orient's home defeat by Stevenage being the pick of a bad bunch of results. Back to the bread and butter of league action and Fulham were still sitting pretty as the year came to a close. Carlisle, Cambridge and Wigan had all kept up their challenge to Micky Adams' side and were now joined by Swansea who had flown in gracefully from the wrong end of the table to make their presence felt at the right end. There was a distinct lack of festive cheer down at Brighton as a desperate situation was made worse by the loss of not only their dignity but two points for crowd disturbances, meaning that the once proud Seagulls had a miserly 16 points from 26 games at the year's end — seven points adrift of their nearest rivals. Peter Shilton created a special moment for the division when he played his 1,000th league game for Leyton Orient — nice one, Shilts!



Peter Shilton — chalked up his memorable 1,000th league game whilst playing in Division Three for Leyton Orient.

JANUARY

The new year came in with some poor weather which had it's effect on the league programme in the early weeks, but once normal service was resumed things stayed pretty much as they were with regards to the top and bottom of the table. Outside of the top three — namely, Fulham, Wigan and Carlisle — things were much of a muchness and any team capable of stringing a decent run of results together could lay sensible claim to a play-off spot, with Colchester a case in point as they rose quietly from

Nationwide's Review of Division Three



Despite a happy ending, the 1996/97 season showed the fans of Brighton exactly how cruel a game football can be.

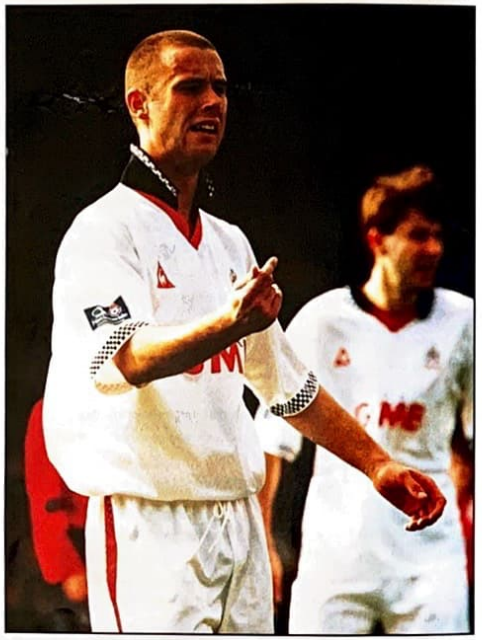
mid-table to the play-off zone over the course of the month. Brighton ended the month in a fashion typical to their season so far as they looked convincing in beating Rochdale 3-0 only to find that their nearest rivals, Hereford had chalked up a fine win at high-flying Cambridge to keep the seven point gap — so much for lucky seven, eh Brighton fans!!

FEBRUARY

Fulham finally lost their grip on the top of the tree, however their fall wasn't too dramatic and they still remained on a fairly high branch, but it was both Carlisle and Wigan who started to pick up speed, with the Cumbrians taking the initiative. Although, the trio had started to break away from the spluttering chasing pack and a battle was developing between them as to who would lift the championship. Wigan seemed to hold the trump card with the Lancashire hot-shot, Graeme Jones who ended the month holding the enviable honour of being the country's top goalscorer. His 26 league goals in 34 league games put him easily out in front. Fulham too had their own hot-shot in Mike Conroy — 19 league goals in 35 league games — whereas Carlisle did not rely upon just one man finding the net regularly. At the bottom, Brighton could at last see some daylight both on and off the field and their 'Fans United Day' was one of the highlights of the third division season.



Graeme Jones — the Lancashire hot-shot's goals were vital as Wigan challenged for the title.



Danny Culip — part of the Fulham side pushing hard in the three-way tie with Wigan and Carlisle for the championship.

MARCH

With the end of the season fast approaching, the race was hotting up at both the top and bottom of the table. Wigan ended the month in pole position but it was mighty close with our old friends Carlisle and Fulham breathing hard down their necks. With Graeme Jones on board, Wigan were clearly in front if it was to come down to goals scored. They had netted 77 in 40 games, with Carlisle on 59 in 39 and Fulham on 66 in 39. Down in the depths, Kerry Dixon's Doncaster were edging carefully away from danger with a good run of results, despite off the field problems, which reared their ugly heads at a large number of clubs over the course of the season, but a cloud remained over Hartlepool, Hereford and Brighton — the three most likely contenders for the dreaded drop. But with Steve Gritt working wonders at Brighton and rumours of an imminent take-over bid, the other two had much more cause than usual to nervously look over their shoulders as they entered the final straight.



David Thomas — played his part in Swansea's flight up the table after a shaky start.

APRIL

With the transfer deadline slowly disappearing over the horizon it was down to each clubs current playing staff to do the business in the season's final countdown. After the first week of the month the top trio had built up a seemingly unassailable ten point gap between themselves and Swansea, who were maintaining their decent form after an early season hiccup or two, in fourth place — and sure enough, by the second week of the month all three clubs were heading for Division Two. The battle to make the play-offs was developing very nicely with a whole host of clubs still capable of making it into the end-of-season lottery. A battle of nerve and wits was now very much on. Perhaps the most nervy of all battles though was going on at the foot of the table, where the price of failure was immeasurable. As the month came to a close Brighton picked an excellent time to finally vacate their bottom of the table berth, which had been a home to them for so long. All of a sudden the onus was on Hereford, and boy were they sweating!

MAY

The month of May brings its fair share of important fixtures, but perhaps the most important of the lot was happening in Division Three, where just over 8,500 people were present to witness the ultimate relegation battle as the bottom two — Brighton and Hereford — took each other on in a classic winner-takes-all game. As it turned out neither side actually won the game and neither side lost, but for Hereford — just 25 years as a Football League club — that spelled a tearful drop into the Vauxhall Conference and immediately put their whole future into doubt. What other fixture could possibly have consequences like that for the losers?

Meanwhile, Wigan took the title, thanks largely to Graeme Jones' haul of 31 league goals. The play-offs saw the Welsh sides, Swansea and Cardiff avoid each other as Jan Molby's men overcame Chester to get here today, but their Welsh rivals Cardiff were not so lucky as The Cobblers of Northampton realised their dream of at last making it to Wembley. Let's hope both sides enjoy their day out and, as the cliché goes, may the best team win!

ANDREW POOLE



Graham Turner — distraught as 25 years of league football came to an end at Hereford who plummeted into the Vauxhall Conference.

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On the Jubilee line, services from Charing Cross and Baker Street Stations.

Wembley Central Station (10 minutes walk) on the Bakerloo line, services from Elephant and Castle, Charing Cross, Baker Street and Marylebone Stations.

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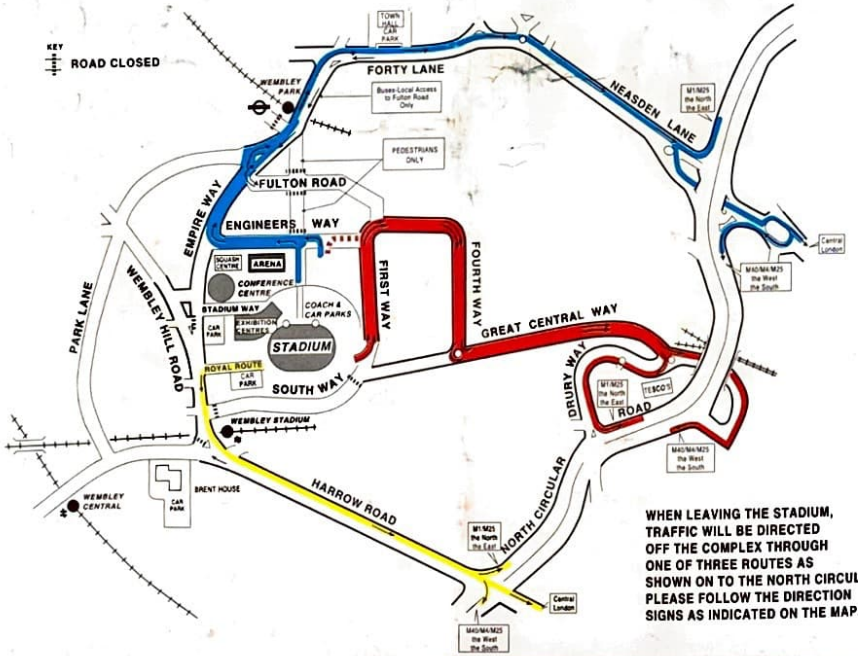
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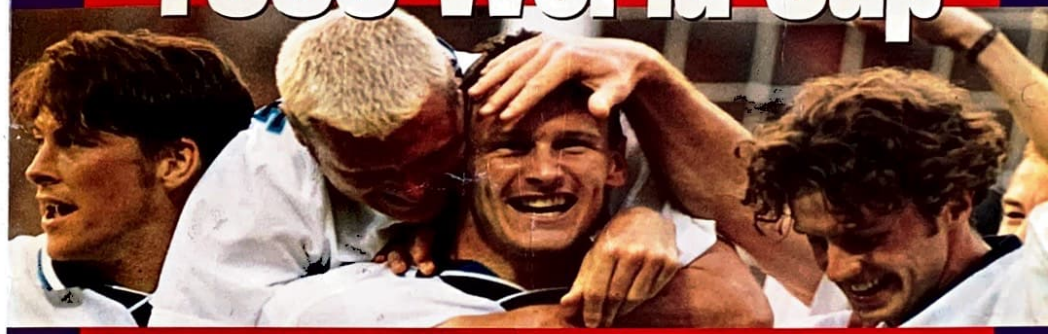
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