

Wurzels not mangled, just left to drink up their cider

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FACUP



Sarah Edworthy
AT HULLH PARK

IT IS half an hour before kick-off between Yeovil and Liverpool at a mist-shrouded Hullh Park. The scene in front of the glorious madness of FA Cup football, it is Gerard Houllier's squad of expensive foreign imports warming up — complete with coloured markers and professional drill sergeant — in the raucous backdrop of your thick West Country accent:

*I am a cider drinker
I drink it all of the day
I am a cider drinker
It soothes all our troubles away
Och aah och aah ay
Och aah och aah ay.*

In the background, locals dressed in green jacket hats with bells and green-tinted wigs wander in over the misty team. One fan carries a green blow-up alien doll decked out in red and green and white hooped shirt. Another walks, as if in a trance, up and down past the main office, holding up a board decked with the plan: "Wanted. One ticket. Will Pay!" You can bet this prospect of what only Arsenal would let an English Premiership player in not to the job description that Houllier waves on his signing campaigns across France and Africa.

On paper, this was a fixture that had Houllier reaching for the ferryway to soothe all his troubles away. Hoistfully described now as beleaguered and under pressure, it was the match he dared not lose.

The Yeovil Town defender Paul Terry — *pre*er whored out at this time of the year, being the former Dagenham and Redbridge playing brother of Chelsea's John — went so far as to say: "If we beat Liverpool, Gerard Houllier will get the sack."

The problem for Yeovil Town was that the script was steeply too good to be performed live-perfect, too ripe an anticipated scenario to provide a genuine *brasserie* of surprise: Yeovil Town with their distinguished giant-slaying heritage against the Frenchman's erratic, inconsistent side, who just happen to be the most decorated club in English football history.

For Yeovil are not some Hackney outfit but a professional club with a good, modern ground (no sloping pitch, no awkwardly positioned dressing rooms for the pampered Premiership stars), League status and a manager who, by the by, helped lay the foundation for Latvia to qualify for this year's European Championship finals.

"It is a good time to be having them!" Gary Johnson kept being asked before hand. "It's good if you are Arsenal or Chelsea, but not if you are a Third Division side," came the second reply. Johnson admitted he spent most of Saturday getting stuck among tactics. His ambitious young men



Mist opportunity: Liverpool's Sami Hyypia consoles Kevin Goll, the Yeovil striker, in the gloom of Hullh Park

did not plan to camp out for 90 minutes in their penalty area. Relishing newly acquired League status, they were not going to be moved. The contrast was only one of woe, not of approach.

However, with the concession that Liverpool were not "on song", the supporters of the home side set out to be emphatically in song. "I hope you've learnt the words," said the lady in the club shop, thrusting into every customer's hands a photocopy of the Yeovil Town FA Cup wilsons. "The Wurzel ones? Yes, yes," came many a reply.

Minutes after kick-off, the anthem went up. So, in the intervals of accurately reflecting the atmosphere, here is (quote) the first verse in full.

*I was born on a Yeovil
farmstead,
I was perished' down with
cows.
My name said 'what a big head,
I ain't do in that again',
Well my dad ended in
and here is the thing.
He gave me some great advice.
He said, 'some fifteen legs, it ain't
all jigs,
but remember this all your life,*

CHORUS
*In my heart I am always Yeovil,
I belong to the Yeovil Town.
I fell true, though and
through,
Whether we're up or down,
'Tis the sign of a true supporter,
In the colour of their heart.
Day or night, I'm green as
wheat,
We are Yeovil Town, och aah, och aah.*

Twenty minutes into the first half and a Yeovil Town fan turned to another: "Tell you what, the shock result will be Liverpool winning!"

Well organised on the pitch, Yeovil were equally well drilled in the stands as, for the full 90 minutes, Hullh Park resounded to a full melody of we're-on-the-belly songs from the home support.

As the mist rolled in more heavily towards half-time, and the score remained 0-0, you had to think it was a victory for rossettes over cynics. All those clafoutis growing in their it was 11 men against 11, any-thing was possible. Hullh Park took on a mystical air. What was that about a mysterious line in the ticket office? What spell was it? Hullh Thoud under to have

turned into the pantomime villain? Move those green and white hoops, so reminiscent of Celtic, bringing spectres of Martin O'Neill before Houllier's eyes?

Just as you were thinking the BBC must be chosen to have gone with a live David and Goliath game that turned out to be a fighting game, Ericl Hecley scored in the 70th minute. Five minutes later Danny Murphy rattled neatly proper with a penalty.

As a relaxed Houllier said after the game: "They should be proud of their performance. They gave us a very hard game. Fortunately I utilised the way we anticipated. There was a lot of energy at the start of the game that we had to withstand, and we enjoyed a bit of luck."