

Tough decisions ahead after full-timers clinch a return to the big League on goal difference



NICK TOWNSEND reports on the reality of life at Layer Road

Promotion will not be a picnic for Colchester

JULIUS CAESAR punched the air with manic fervour, the Prince Charles lookalike looked cautiously optimistic, while the character dressed as a condom just shivered.

Anxiety about premature exhilaration, no doubt. Turn up in fancy dress at the promotion carnival, the Layer Road faithful had been invited. It had all created a triumphant atmosphere before the game... and we all know what that can prelude.

A victory, any victory, would suffice if Colchester's full-timers were to return to the Fourth Division from whence they were discharged two seasons ago. In the event, it didn't require too much industry or enterprise from the ebullient troops of the Garrison town to see off the already-doomed Barrow boys and clinch the Vauxhall Conference league title on goal difference from Wycombe.

Yet, as the celebrations following the 5-0 win ensued, it was the view of a teddy bear collecting cash around the perimeter which suggests that

Colchester's ascendancy to former heights is not going to be any picnic.

First season player-manager Roy McDonough said: 'The pressure's now on the chairman and directors. If we can keep this mob together we can cause a few surprises next season.'

Predictable enough sentiments in the heat of triumph, but within them is a tacit acceptance that decisions are due which will not be immediately palatable to the 7,193 present.

A Back to the League Appeal among supporters, a ground that appears that it might have been constructed when the Romans first set foot in the town and dire warnings from chairman James Bowdidge that the commercial value of at least one quality player —

probably Mark Kinsella or Steve McGavin — might have to be realised if they are to survive, illustrate just why the Football League would have been better served had the part-timers from Buckinghamshire prevailed.

Not least, it appears implausible that a club with limited support — crowds rarely exceeded 2,500 earlier in the season — can continue to function viably with full-time staff.

His club narrowly averting closure last year, Bowdidge concedes that 'we are continuing to spend more money than we are earning'. Tradition and heritage are but worthless commodities when penury beckons.

Amid the commotion it was a quiet American, Mike Masters, who

venomously struck the first of a hat-trick, then glanced another with his head inside the first quarter hour.

When the visitors' forward Phil Power left Jason Cook prone in an off-the-ball incident to take an early bath, Barrow — and Wycombe — were floundering. Then along came McDonough with his 29th goal of the season gleefully to plunge both their heads under the surface.

Roy of the United may not quite have the same ring to it as that fellow from the Rovers, but this urbane, moustachioed character, who might be Des Lynam's younger brother, is a local hero of similar proportions.

The 33-year-old gypsy of the lower leagues, whose seven previous clubs have included Southend, Birmingham, Walsall, Exeter, predicts he'll increase his goal total to 30 in Sunday's FA Trophy final at Wembley.

The irony of Masters' contribution — to this observer's eye his assured touch and vision eclipsed the majority of his team-mates — is that it effectively makes him redundant.

The 25-year-old from New York will require a work permit if he is to play in the League and normally that is only granted to international players.

He said: 'On my day, I feel I'm as good as anyone in the USA squad. With the World Cup coming up I feel they should be looking at as many players as they can.'

COLCHESTER: Masters (3min, 15, 77), Smith (47), McDonough (65).