

Torquay cling to hopes of survival

Torquay United 0
Barnet 1

By Keith Pike

THE rope by which Torquay United are suspended over the third division trap-door lost a few more strands last night as Barnet took a razor to their survival hopes with the victory that re-established the length of the division between the sides.

On the night that Wycombe Wanderers all but confirmed that they will follow the path trodden by Barnet themselves two seasons ago, by holding Slough Town to a draw to make virtually certain of the GM Vauxhall Conference title, Torquay were left to contemplate the increasing likelihood of passing them on the way.

Torquay have escaped once by the skin of their teeth. This time, they might not be so lucky. One of the two games they had in hand on Halifax Town, above them by virtue of goals scored and who look the other club in imminent danger, has gone. Only five games remain for Neil Warnock to rally his troops.

The 4,000 supporters who gave Plainmoor its best crowd of the season filed into the Devon mist wondering if they will have a club to go back to next season. They should not despair. Lincoln City, Darlington and Colchester United have already proved that the loss of Football League status does not necessarily mean the end of existence itself, even if Newport County proved that it can be.

Had it not been for a last-minute goal on the last day of the 1986-7 season, which kept Torquay up and sent Lincoln down in the first year of automatic promotion and relegation, Torquay might already have discovered that where there is a feeder league, there is hope.

Beaten only once in their previous six games, and on a pitch that appeared to be an extension of the seafront at low tide, Torquay went into this match with reasonable hope.

The conditions certainly favoured their more direct style but that confidence ebbed when Phillips produced an outstanding save to deny Hodges before half-time and vanished altogether when the Barnet goalkeeper kept out Sale's header in the last seconds.

Barnet just about deserved the victory that, as well as taking them back above Cardiff City and York City, also guarantees them at least a play-off place. With a cute sense of irony, their goal came in the 56th minute from Tony Sorrell, who lost his job when Maidstone United, another of the non-League pathfinders, folded.

TORQUAY UNITED: K Blackwell; L Barrow (sub: D Darby), K Hodges, D O'Riordan, D Moore, T Kelly, P Trollope (sub: J Muir), C Curran, M Sale, C Myers, R Hancox.

BARNET: G Phillips; D Howell (sub: K Lowe), D Naylor, M Bodley, D Barnett, A Sorrell, D Payne, B Stein (sub: M Carter), G Bull, P Wilson, P Showler.

Referee: K Cooper (Swindon).
