



FA CUP FIRST ROUND: Competition ever-presents face a hoedown against Plymouth while fellow minnows swim against tide of history

Buzaglio buzzing again as Marlow shake spears



FROM TIME to time the FA Cup throws up a hitherto unsung journeyman footballer who seizes the nation's imagination for a short while and then disappears back into obscurity. Leatherhead's Chris Kelly, Ronnie Radford of Hereford United, Wimbledon's Dickie Guy and Matt Hanlan of Sutton United — all enjoyed their moments in the media spotlight.

Tim Buzaglio is one such player. He achieved his fix of fame by scoring a hat-trick when Woking, then of the Diadora League, won 4-2 in the third round of the Cup at West Bromwich Albion three seasons ago.

In the next round, the Surrey side were unlucky to succumb to a 1-0 defeat at Everton — and that was the last time Buzaglio played a match in the FA Cup proper. Today the long wait for a return to centre stage comes to an end, when the 32-year-old driver for a video company turns out at the Alfred Davis Memorial Ground for Marlow in a first-round tie against Plymouth Argyle.

Soon after his day out at Goodison, Buzaglio suffered a knee ligament injury similar to the one that interrupted Paul Gascoigne's career. He did not play for 18 months, a comeback with Woking did not work out, and last year he moved on to Marlow.

"We were taking a chance," Michael Eapleton, the Buckinghamshire club's chairman, said. "We could see he wasn't fit when he arrived, but we think he's back to his best now."

Plymouth, managed by Peter Shilton (who will be on the substitutes' bench), survived a similarly tricky tie at Dorking, another Diadora League club, this time last year, but if Buzaglio and his speedy striking partner, Garfield Blackman, are given space today, an upset could be on the cards. However, Buzaglio will be happy if someone else steals the limelight.

"I don't want to go through that again," he said, looking back at his

RUPERT METCALF

heyday at The Hawthorns. "The press and all the attention after that match, and up to the Everton game, took an awful lot out of me. I don't know if I could handle that again."

"I'll just be glad on Saturday if we win but someone else gets the goal. This Marlow team are nowhere near as good as Woking were at their peak — but we can score goals."

Marlow, the only club to have played in every FA Cup since it started in 1871, reached the third round last year — before Buzaglio joined them — when they played well in a 5-1 defeat at Tottenham.

This is their third successive appearance in the first-round proper, after a gap of 99 years.

All three Football League clubs from Devon face nervous journeys up the M5 and M4 to the Home Counties. Just down the road from Marlow, Slough Town, now managed by the former Millwall battler, Les Briley, entertain Torquay United, beaten in the last two years by Farnborough and Yeovil. Exeter City — defeated 13 times by non-League clubs in the FA Cup — travel to Farnborough Town, who took West Ham to two games two seasons ago.

Three non-League sides are making their debut appearance in the

first-round proper: Knowsley United, who face Carlisle at Goodison, Molesey, at home to Bath City in suburban Surrey, and Yeading, a Middlesex club who have borrowed the home of their neighbours, Hayes, for their tie against Gillingham.

Unlike their Third Division opponents, Yeading have been to Wembley — they won the FA Vase in 1990. That was the second trip to the Twin Towers for their manager, Gordon Bartlett, whose Southall side at the 1986 Vase final included one of his discoveries: Les Ferdinand.

For the second time in three years, the first round features cross-border riders from Scotland: Gretna, who lost to Rochdale two

years ago. The Dumfriesshire club presently play in an English League (the Northern Premier) but they have applied for one of next season's two vacancies in the Scottish League, so this could be their last adventure in the FA Cup.

Gretna will face Bolton today — 107 years to the day since Wanderers last met Scottish opponents in the Cup: a 3-2 win over Third Lanark. Although they had been drawn at home, Gretna have switched the tie to Burnden Park on local authority advice. That, at least, will lessen the workload for Mike McCartney, the former Southampton full-back who is Gretna's player-manager — he is also the club groundsman.