

Telford inspired by man of letters

ROLAND LEON

Russell Kempson on
a postman delivered
into the second round
of the FA Cup in
the teeth of adversity

At the end of last season, Tim Langford joined the debris from professional football's annual culling. He was released by Wycombe Wanderers and began the onerous process of hawking his wares around the Endsleigh Insurance League. Although he received ten replies from 14 letters, an unexpected response, none could offer terms of employment.

Langford, 30, had hoped for more from Notts County, the second-division club. He had once had a trial at Lincoln City, but, after three matches in the reserves, Colin Murphy, then the Lincoln manager, suddenly departed. Murphy was now in charge at County; surely he would remember the promising Halesowen striker he had wanted a look at?

"I was told they had a full complement of playing staff



and that was it," Langford recalled. "It was pretty much the same everywhere else — thanks but no thanks." It left little option. He rejoined Telford United, after two years at Adams Park, and reclaimed his job as a postal worker in Dudley.

Tomorrow, in one of the strange-but-true stories that the FA Cup inevitably produces, Telford play Notts County in a second-round tie at Bucks Head. It is an opportunity for Langford to show Murphy the error of his ways for not giving him a second chance, and for Telford temporarily to forget their Vauxhall Conference struggles and secure a twelfth FA Cup victory over Football League opposition.

At least, that is how some match previews might read — and the Sunday reports certainly will if Langford adds to his tally of five goals, from Telford's five cup matches, and perhaps earns a Saturday night guest slot on *Match of the Day*.

Yet the settling of old scores is farthest from his mind, and has been, since he experienced a more significant setback than anything Wycombe could muster. In August last year, he and his wife, Julie, heard that their son, Adam, now four, had been diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia. "It puts everything else in perspective," Langford



Langford, whose leukaemia sufferer son, Adam, will be a mascot at Telford tomorrow

said. "For about 12 months, all I could think of was hospital and treatment and Adam. It was such a shock, but we've gradually come to terms with it. You learn to accept it, you have to, and the doctors are pleased with how Adam is getting along."

When he was still with Wycombe, and his son's treatment was at its most intensive, he clocked up mile upon mile driving between his home in Kingswinford, near Dudley, the Birmingham Children's Hospital and Adams Park.

An appeal fund has raised £37,500, split between the Children's Hospital and leukaemia research charities, and Adam is making encouraging progress. He still has fortnightly checks and will be monitored closely for another

year. "The way he bounces around, you wouldn't know there's a problem," Langford, who now has another son, ten-week-old Scott, said. "And he loves his football, especially Alan Shearer." On Saturday, Adam will be one of the mascots.

Telford have a rich FA Cup history. In the 1984-85 season, they beat Lincoln, Preston North End, Bradford City and Darlington before bowing out 3-0 to Everton at Goodison Park in the fifth round.

Now, Wayne Clarke, the former Shrewsbury Town striker, combines running a car dealership in nearby Willenhall with playing and, for the first time, managing. Not too successfully. Though

the Shropshire club has never been relegated from the Conference, they lie third from bottom this season. Notts County, second in the second division, present a rather tougher challenge than Shifnal, Raunds Town, Halesowen, Southport and Witton Albion — Telford's earlier victims.

Yet work comes first, in the finest cup tradition, for Langford. Although he has been spared a 4.30am start on Saturday — the time he usually wakes when performing his postal duties in and around Dudley — he still has to go in for an office shift, from 5.45 to 11am, before contemplating delivering a knockout for County. "It'll be nice for a change," he said. "I can have a lie-in."