

The unspeakable truth

BY ALEX WALKER

At the time of writing, another crushing and frustrating defeat on our travels means our tortuous away form is showing no signs of relenting. Our failure to win at Huddersfield (or anywhere else since August) has once again wiped out the burgeoning hope of us breaking into the play-off places that had built up in recent weeks and planted us firmly in mid-table.

The reasons for our poor away form are debatable, with some blaming a lack of commitment from the players (Barnsley, Yeovil) and others pointing to poor refereeing going against us (Walsall, Huddersfield). But whether it is lustre or luck we are lacking, the portents are that – unless it improves – we are going nowhere and must face up to the prospect of another year in this intolerable division.

The last few drops of pre-season optimism are ebbing away and the notion that our short-term destiny lies in League One is becoming hard to ignore.

Gary Megson was quite right in his post-Huddersfield comments when he said, “It has got to stop or we will finish mid-table”, but saying “we will finish mid-table” is not really telling the whole story.

Mid-table this season does not simply mean a disappointing performance. It will have consequences that will last for years, if not decades, for this club.

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ignoring relegation last summer, maintaining the same transfer budget and continuing to chase players from a higher divisions. But they were always banking on us bouncing straight back up in order to account for this bravado.

There is no way Forest will be able to continue spending at Championship levels if their income does not equate. We made the same mistake when we came down from the Premiership and are suffering the consequences of that foolishness now, so it seems unlikely that Doughty and his cohorts would make the same error again.

Not only would we have to stop spending, we’d also see – as Forest fans have become begrudgingly accustomed – significant departures. One season in the third tier is all very well for the likes of Wes Morgan, Kris Commons, Paul Gerrard and maybe even our latest young recruit Nathan Tyson, but they will not want to stick around for two when they know their talents deserve better. And, if we’re struggling with these superb players in the side, how on earth would we cope without them?

There are two models for our situation: Manchester City and Sheffield Wednesday. Until recently, we’ve been able to cling onto the hope that we were following City’s example and were going

to be able to make a quick return via the play-offs, maybe even picking up the upward momentum to eventually join Stuart Pearce’s club in the Premiership.

Sheffield Wednesday provide hope that, even if we don’t go up this year, we have a chance of being successful at the second attempt. But at the same time there is a very real chance that we’ll set our own

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model of how far a former footballing giant can fall by spending three or more seasons in this league.

It’s a frightening and very depressing outlook, but unless Forest pick up their away form to claw themselves into the play-offs it could be realised. There is no reason why we can’t achieve this, but it should be by no means taken for granted.

And, of course, even if we do finish in the top six, we’ll still have the cruel lottery of the play-offs themselves to go through.

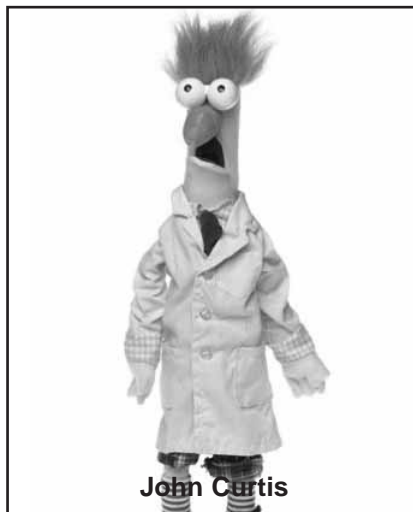
It doesn’t do well to dwell on a future as bleak as that predicted here, but without a notable step up from the team, we will certainly have to face up to the unspeakable truth that – just as it took us 10 years to adjust our expectations from European football to scrapping for promotion to the Premiership – we may have to start thinking of Nottingham Forest as a League One club and not merely celebrity guests.

Please send comments to alex@l1f.co.uk

FOREST LOOKALIKES



Beaker



John Curtis

As suggested by Neil

Send any uncanny resemblances you have spotted to alex@l1f.co.uk

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