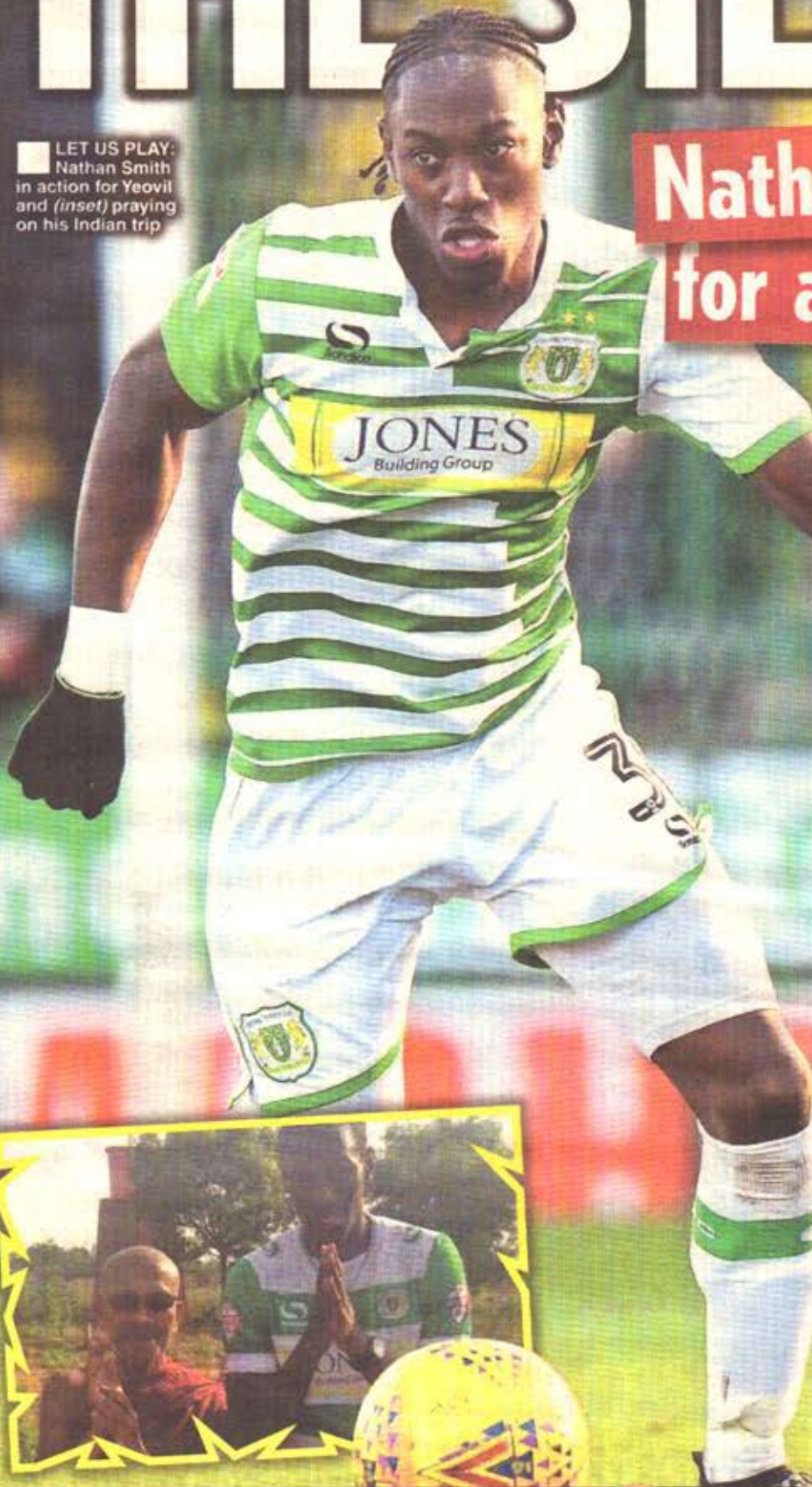


THE SILENT

LET US PLAY:
Nathan Smith
in action for Yeovil
and (inset) praying
on his Indian trip



Nathan's praying for a huge upset

EXCLUSIVE

by ALEX CROOK

NATHAN SMITH will prepare for his battle with Alexis Sanchez by meditating.

The Yeovil defender became hooked on the ancient relaxation technique at a 10-day retreat in India, during which he took a vow of silence.

But the 31-year-old hopes it will be him and not Manchester United new-boy Sanchez making all the noise at Huish Park in the FA Cup tonight.

Smith said: "Two summers ago I went on a retreat to India. One of my friends mentioned it to me and after researching it, I wanted to do it to find out more about myself.

"It was intense - 14 hours a day meditating from 4.30am until nine o'clock at night. It only hit me when I stepped off the plane and thought, 'Wow, I'm really here'.

"I had to wash my own clothes, couldn't read or write, or even speak. It was a massive mind game and some people left after three days.

"I didn't want to pull out early because that would have been embarrassing. It was good to put myself to the test.

"It was a very different experience but it was wicked. I feel like it is something I take into everyday life and still do it most days, and before I go to bed.

"There is something very calming about sitting completely still in silence. It helps me to relax.

"I wouldn't say playing against Sanchez is easy compared to that India trip but it certainly doesn't faze me.

"From watching Sanchez, he is a good player and will pose a threat but we have been working on how to stop him. I won't be afraid to mix it if I have to."

Pinch

Smith is not your average footballer and spent last summer volunteering at a health food store after becoming a vegan.

The centre-back was working for an IT company 10 years ago when playing against boyhood heroes United was just a pipedream.

"I take every game with a pinch of salt and it is probably only when you retire you reflect on what you have achieved," he said.

"But my cousin flagged it up the other day and said games like this do not come along very often, especially from where we are from.

"I wouldn't say I had a poor upbringing because that would be disrespectful to my mum, but it was humble.

"We lived in Wood Green in north London and it was proper 'jumpers for goal posts' stuff. As kids we used to use car park gates as goals or the wall outside the front of houses.

"I remember once kicking a ball at our wall, missing and breaking a window. My mum was not best pleased and I didn't want to go in the house after that.

"Facing her after that was scarier than playing against United will be."

Yeovil are 21st in League Two and battling just to stay in the Football League.

What United pay Sanchez a month could virtually fund the cash-strapped Glovers' wage bill for an entire season.

But despite the chasm between the two clubs, Smith is upbeat about the Somerset minnows' chances of causing a fourth-round upset.

He said: "The boys have worked hard for the opportunity and we are all ready to go. We want to win the game.

"It is going to be something big. We are the underdogs and are not supposed to win but anything can happen in football."

Darren's got bottle

by SCOTT COLEMAN

YEovil boss Darren Way plans to toast an FA Cup shock against Jose Mourinho tonight - with a bottle of cider.

Bristol City manager Lee Johnson splashed out £450 on red wine to share with the Manchester United boss after knocking them out of the Carabao Cup in December.

But Way (right) hopes Mourinho will opt for the cheaper, local tippie instead.

He said: "I want to make sure that we can offer him a

good Somerset cider - Thatchers - because he's coming to Somerset, so it's important he is privy to what we drink here.

"I'm going to probably go one step further and give him both options, so I'll try and find a nice bottle of wine.

"To beat one of the best teams in the world, or take them back to Old Trafford, would be a fantastic moment."

