

# 'Little old Yeovil' can make it big

The story that was doing the rounds this week about a Yeovil Town supporter being charged £1,500 to take his 'Little old Yeovil...' banner into Wembley would have been hilarious had it not been so ridiculous.

The point the banner – which is not much larger than a couple of duvets – was essentially making was that, despite the odds, Yeovil have thrived; that, despite the vast amounts of money involved in the game, this small club from Somerset can still find themselves on the brink of the Championship.

In many ways, the money-hungry, soulless suits at Wembley with their "computer says no" attitude epitomise the sprawling football landscape against which sides such as Yeovil must compete.

Little old Yeovil, doing things on a shoestring – and achieving thanks to endeavour, graft, togetherness and transfer-market nous.

The reason given for charging £1,250 plus VAT – which no doubt amounts to more than the weekly wage for the average Yeovil player – to bring a small banner into the enormous stadium was that an event organisation company would need to supervise its movement as it passed over supporters' heads.

The £1,500 would cover the contractor's bill, as well as the cost of a parking space for said jobsworth. You really couldn't make it up.

In the end, Stevenage director Paul Weller – who was not in The Jam but who manages Somerset-based darts professional Justin Pipe – stumped up the money, so the banner will be on display this weekend. But the lunacy of the situation is in stark contrast to the way in which Yeovil have gone about their business – all humility and work-rate, rather than the uglier, greedier side of what football has unfortunately become.

Yeovil's story will grab plenty of attention this weekend, regardless of the outcome of the League One play-off final against Brentford, but they have quietly gone about their business this season – unassumingly but effectively getting on with things.

Some reports yesterday were suggesting the club's entire playing budget is a mere £800,000 – and, while the reality is closer to £1 million, that is splitting hairs when it comes to putting the club's

achievements into some kind of context. Bristol City, recently relegated from the Championship, had been spending £18.6m on wages.

Football is strange, though. Some Yeovil supporters have complained that the club has "only" sold around 17,000 tickets for the final; yet the same people no doubt embrace the Glovers' small, against-the-odds success.

Little old Yeovil, still managing to take more than four times their average gate – almost half the population of the town – to Wembley.

With clubs such as Bradford City and Wigan Athletic (the FA Cup version), we have seen this season how adversity can be overcome, even in modern football, with its telephone number salaries, corporate

Wigan chairman Dave Whelan celebrates their FA Cup victory last weekend



nonsense and the desire to supervise the movement of banners as they pass over supporters' heads.

For Yeovil, tomorrow's game is the kind that makes the treks to Carlisle – and before that, to Leek, Leigh RMI, York, Darlington, Rochdale and the rest – all the more worthwhile. Supporting a football team is about memories; it is about adventures and experiences and savouring something that rewards your patience and largely unfounded optimism season after season.

Sure, Wigan supporters will remember the pain of relegation at Arsenal for years to come, but the images of winning the FA Cup will no doubt burn stronger.

Promotion for Yeovil tomorrow would feel very much like a cheesy Hollywood movie – but both they and their manager have been here before.

On Yeovil's previous trip to Wembley, they were subdued and deservedly beaten. On Gary Johnson's previous trip to Wembley, his Bristol City team went down 1-0 against Hull City and missed out on promotion to the Premier League.

Whether or not club and manager are better equipped to succeed on the big stage, we will discover tomorrow. But,



Ed Upson, right, and Sam Foley show their delight as Yeovil Town reach Wembley

PICTURE: ADRIAN HOPPER

while Johnson's impact on Yeovil is rightly gaining him an incredible amount of plaudits, the club's impact on him should not be overlooked.

Johnson was out of the game after an unsuccessful stint at Northampton Town when Yeovil came calling 16 months ago – and, while he has invigorated Yeovil, it could equally be said that a second

stint with the club he took from the Conference to League One has had the same effect on his career. Both are clearly in fine fettle going into this weekend, having achieved beyond all expectations – and conventional wisdom – this season.

And – even if Brentford win tomorrow, even if Yeovil do not do themselves justice at the end of a stunning season –

their achievements will still provide a timely reminder that the little guys can still succeed in the heaving mass of ego trips and corporate speak that is modern football.

Little old Yeovil: doing it their way. If anyone deserves their day in the sun – accompanied by a banner recognising their achievements – it is them.