

MILLS HAD A PERFECT PLATFORM

By Hugo Varley

PETERBOROUGH United boss Darren Ferguson believes Wembley wonder Harley Mills' spell in Non-League provided the perfect springboard for his magic moment.

The 19-year-old left-back fired home a stunning free-kick to set Posh on their way to a surprise EFL Trophy triumph over Birmingham City under the arch.

The former Aston Villa youngster then played a crucial role in the build-up to Peterborough's second in a 2-0 win – a cameo which earned him a deserved man-of-the-match award.

Mills spent the opening months of the season on loan at National League South side Enfield Town and Posh boss Ferguson reckons his spell in Non-League provided a platform for his development in the pro game.

"Harley is such a talented boy," Ferguson said. "He's had to wait patiently but when he's been called upon, he's shown really great temperament."

"It's interesting how different players develop in different ways. We felt like a move to Non-League would be good for Harley and his time there really helped him become a man."

"When you are in Non-League, you are playing week in, week out in a physical and demanding environment. It's such a great learning curve for young players and helps them develop in so many ways."

Mills spent two months with the Towners at the start of their inaugural season at Step 2, playing his part in important wins over Bath City and Weymouth before being recalled by his parent club in November.

WEMBLEY PRIDE: Peterborough's Harley Mills spent two months on loan at Enfield Town at the start of the season
PICTURE: Alamy



Francis DUKU SCREENING IS CRUCIAL TO KEEPING US ALL SAFE

THERE are more than 30,000 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests in the UK every year. The survival rate is less than one in ten.

This is my first of a new regular column for *The Non-League Paper* and I'm not sure any other will open with such a startling fact.

Early CPR and defibrillation can significantly improve survival chances. It's a hot issue in football at the moment with a big drive for awareness on the back of Luton's Tom Lockyer, also a National League play-off winner at Bristol Rovers, surviving a cardiac arrest on the pitch for his club.

If something happened near you at a game or just in the street, would you know what to do?

Giving people the skills and confidence to give CPR to someone when they need it most,

I played under Justin Edinburgh when I was at Fisher, and against him when he was at Billericay Town. It was a fantastic time. His son Charlie would be at pretty much every game – and training session! He must have been about 12 or 13 at the time so we've known each other a long time.

As everyone will know, Justin had a sudden cardiac arrest when he was at a health club. They didn't have a defibrillator on site.

Through the JE3 Foundation – set-up in his name – Justin's legacy shines brightly.

Charlie is determined to achieve Justin's Law, which is aiming for it to be mandatory for all sports facilities to have a defibrillator on site. Secondly, day-to-day he is going around different venues and teaching people CPR.

People don't necessarily understand what a big difference that can make. How can we help more people upskill and be more confident to apply potentially life-saving CPR intervention? Can we upskill more people to be confident if it comes to using an on-site defibrillator?

At The Sports Circle – proud sponsors at this

year's National Game Awards – we've teamed up with Charlie and The JE3 Foundation because that's exactly the message we're trying to help amplify into the Non-League world.

With my Non-League Day hat on, I've seen the power of football. We haven't had the final figure but I know this year's annual celebration raised a fantastic amount for Prostate Cancer UK. That just goes to show the results we can get.

We see it on a near-weekly basis where a game is delayed – or even abandoned – because of a medical emergency in the stands. It can affect people of all ages. Including footballers.

I know what it was like when I was in the 18-30 bracket. You feel invincible and that you will live for ever. You're fit, running around and having a good time. But you don't know what might be underlying in your body.

As I've got older and been able to learn and understand more about this area, I've got a greater appreciation for how vital it can be.

One crucial learning has been that every week in the UK, 12 apparently fit and healthy young people die from an undiagnosed cardiac issue. There is a heightened risk for athletes because of the extra stress exercise puts on their heart, so athletes who do have an undiagnosed issue may trigger this in the course of their usual sports participation.

A screening strategy, applied in Italy since 1982, has led to an 89 per cent reduction in sudden cardiac death amongst athletes, and with that in mind we have partnered with M.I.A.L. Healthcare to enhance the sports medicine pathway we have created with FIFA Medical Centre of Excellence Isokinetic, London to facilitate better access to heart screenings for Non-League clubs.

This enables them to benefit from the model proven to have worked so well in Italy so we can create a stat for the UK we'd all be proud to read about in the years to come.

OWLS WISE TO A BIG STEP UP

By Matthew Nash

CRAIG ROUSE hailed Cleethorpes Town's 'phenomenal' season after the Lincolnshire seaside club's first ever promotion to the top flight of the Northern Premier League.

The Owls will rub shoulders with the big guns of Step 3 after sealing the NPL East title with a 3-0 win at Carlton Town last weekend – and with three rounds of matches remaining.

The club only entered the NPL 13 years ago, as champions of the Lincolnshire League, but will now play at their highest level ever after boss Rouse made an immediate impact in his first season at the helm.

The former Pontefract Collieries manager only took over last May but went into the Easter weekend 13 points clear of nearest challengers Dunston.

Rouse told *The NLP*: "It has been a phenomenal season. We set out with the intention of winning the league, certainly within

Boss Rouse will be prepared for Town's first foray at Step 3

the changing room we felt it was something that was possible.

"We were always quietly confident we could go well and had hard work and togetherness in the squad from the first moment we came in for pre-season.

Ambition

"We didn't want to chop and change the team too much and only made three signings throughout the season, keeping the core of the players from the first game to the last.

"I was really chuffed the club have backed us on recruitment and players' contracts, tying them to the club. The biggest ap-

peal when I came in last summer was the ambition there."

The Owls gaffer is already preparing for the new challenge of playing in the Premier Division and believes there are examples of clubs who have prospered after elevation from the lower divisions.

"Worksop and Stockton have set the bar in that respect," added Rouse. "We're under no illusions about how hard it will be. Clubs will have the resources to come and watch us rather than rely on clips on social media.

"Everyone here will understand what we are going to be up against. We won't relax – you

can't do that in football. We will have our finger on the pulse and will aim to get our recruitment right.

"The club have had their eyes on being in this position for a while and certainly have plans in place for next season."

Rouse himself is keen to test himself at the higher level and can enjoy his Easter weekend given the title is already done and dusted.

The pressure was off for yesterday's game with Belper Town, tomorrow's clash with North Ferriby and Saturday's finale against Liversedge.

"It's an alien situation to be in because usually there is something like this on the line right up until the final day," he said. "It's not often you get to enjoy your Bank Holiday weekend as a manager!

"I've had a couple of play-off finishes and now promotion, we've gone the long road a little bit. But we will go into next season confident and also hopeful we can acquit ourselves well."