

Ride of pride on bus no one could miss

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The pride and the passion that swept Yeovil's football heroes to a place in the Championship brought the town to a standstill yesterday.

Thousands thronged the Borough and spread out in a tide of green and white along surrounding streets as the open-top bus carrying Yeovil Town manager Gary Johnson, assistant manager Terry Skiverton, coach Darren Way and the team rounded the corner to a roar of approval.

The League One play-off trophy gleamed in the sunshine as players and club officials held it aloft, while high above, banners blowing from office windows proclaimed the Glovers: "The Pride of Yeovil."

Addressing the adoring fans in a voice hoarse after two days of interviews, Johnson said: "Thanks very much for turning up for our team today. We really appreciate it. We feel very humble up here."

"This is the sight that I asked these boys to imagine at the start of the season so thank you for making all their dreams and our thoughts come true by seeing you here today."

And then the heroes, including goalscorers Paddy Madden and Dan Burn, descended to meet the fans, sign autographs and pose for pictures that will be precious mementoes in many homes for years to come.

Among the fans was one who used to be able to watch the team play from her bedroom window. Pearl Trevett, standing with husband, David, said: "When we lived in Queen Street and the ground was at

Huish I used to watch them out of my window every week. We are season ticket holders now."

Helen Luck, aged 38, from Wincanton, went to Wembley. Standing with daughter, Chloe, aged 17, she said: "I've followed Yeovil for years and used to take the children when they were small. My youngest, Holly, who is now 13, could name every member of the squad when she was three. She came to Wembley but had to be at school today. What Gary has done is amazing. I definitely want him to stay for the fore-

Happy underdogs

Yeovil Town chief executive Martyn Starnes believes their underdog tag may help them in the Championship next year



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seeable future. He's a gentleman and the whole team are great. It is such a family-friendly club."

Jack Knight, aged nine, was there with parents Michelle and Danny, hoping to get his hero Paddy Madden's autograph. "I've followed Yeovil for two seasons and I've got my new season ticket already," he said with pride.

Barbie Mitchell, aged 52, from Wincanton, and her

daughters, Hannah and Diane White, are such dedicated supporters that they wrapped themselves in Yeovil Town flags as they stood in the front row in the Borough eager to applaud the heroes they had followed to Wembley.

"The second half was edge-of-the-seat stuff," said Diane. "I think being in the Championship is going to bring a lot more business into the town, and hopefully a lot more supporters for Yeovil. There were 20,000 Yeovil fans at Wembley, and it would be fantastic to see half that number come to the league games."

Michael Rice, who runs delicatessen Sienna, said: "I feel sure it will bring more people into the town, and hopefully they will spend more money."

One new young face at the ground when the new season starts will be Archie Mabey, aged three. He and his mother, Natalie, aunt, Stacey Love-Duffy, and grandmother, Leslie Love, were early arrivals in the Borough.

Rhys Mapletoft, aged eight, reckoned the Glovers' victory was "a good way to celebrate my third time at Wembley." He and his cousin Rio, aged nine, are regular Yeovil Town supporters and both had followed their heroes to London. Even Rio's little sister Katie, aged nine months, sported a green and white playsuit.

Three Dorset friends who have followed the team for 40 years were among the crowd. Jethro Hil and Chris Warren of Stalbridge, and Geoff Jeans of Marnhull, are all co-founders of the local Disability Sports Association. "We always hoped this day would come," said Geoff. "I always had faith that we could do it with Gary Johnson. He has brought tremendous success to Yeovil, and the following to go with it with his vision and drive."

Lewis Cooper, aged 16, a student at the town's Westfield Academy, had painted his face with the legendary date 19/5.

Elliott Goddard, aged 13 weeks, was possibly the youngest there. His mother, Donna, says she will take him to his first game next season.

And who knows how much more Yeovil Town success he will witness as his life unfolds?

