

RECIPE FOR DISASTER

EVEN before the kick-off of Monday night's violence-marred FA Cup clash against Taunton, an experienced Yeovil Town steward warned: "This is a recipe for disaster."

Yeovil Town manager Graham Roberts has accused Taunton Football Club of being incapable of handling big crowds after hooliganism engulfed Monday's replay.

Report by Phil Clark

Scuffles between around 20 rival fans after Yeovil's victory at Wordsworth Drive left Paul West, Taunton's reserve manager, lying unconscious on the pitch.

"The Taunton club just isn't up to handling crowds of more than 2,000. Players have to walk through the fans to the dressing rooms which are away from the pitch and we had beer cans and coins thrown at us," said Mr Roberts.

"I saw only one policeman all night. I refused to let my players come out of the dressing room until we were guaranteed a police escort to our coach. It wasn't safe. The problem at the whistle was that one of their players butted Dean Birkby, who had come on to join in the celebrations."

Taunton FC secretary Tom Harris responded to Mr Roberts' accusations by saying: "I'm disappointed by his comments. He's out of order saying that."

Mr Roberts also faced claims from Taunton fans that he incited the trouble by making V-signs at them after Yeovil's 5-3 victory.

"Accusations that I stirred up trouble were rubbish. Our fans were great and I took the lads down to salute them at the end," he said.

The incident, which led to Mr West spending the night at Musgrove Park Hospital, was played down by Mr Harris, who said: "We're disappointed that one or two thugs had a punch up but the trouble was minimal."

"The problem occurred when both sets of fans decided to leave by one exit at the same time. It didn't appear necessary to stop them. We've never had any trouble like this before."

Insp Simon House of Taunton police was quick to dismiss the trouble, saying: "This was a minor disruption that has been blown out of all proportion. The incident after the match was a blip and we wouldn't call it a serious one."

Responding to criticism of policing and stewarding at the match he said: "There was a police presence at the match, especially outside the ground, so to speak of only a handful of officers being present is simply not the case."

A Yeovil fan at the match said: "Do the police and Taunton FC think a man lying unconscious on the pitch is not seri-

play it down. They screwed up.

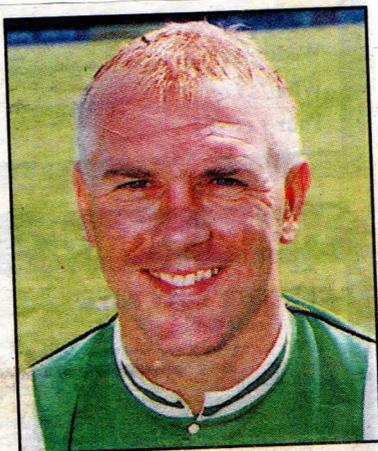
"The police and stewards made a concerted effort not to get among the troublemakers. By the time they tried to sort it out it was too late."

Yeovil Town chairman John Fry said: "I don't know what happened. All I do know is that our stewards turned up and did an excellent job."

● WITHIN minutes of the 0-0 draw at Huish on Saturday sources were warning the Western Gazette that there would be trouble at the replay.

But a spokesman for Yeovil police said: "We were given no prior information about trouble at Taunton from either Taunton police or Yeovil Town Football Club."

One man, from Taunton, was arrested after the trouble and has been released on bail..



● SAFETY FEARS: Yeovil Town manager Graham Roberts feared for his players.