



COME DINE WITH ME! Debra Rowe opens up Deb's Diner



WARNING SIGNS: Players are banned from climbing the fence to collect balls



KITTING UP: The Long Melford dressing room before kick-off



IN HOT PURSUIT: Thetford's Michael Campbell is chased by Long Melford pair Ben Judge and Callum Hemson



BAGGED UP: The balls are ready for the pre-match warm-up



LUNCH IS SERVED: The view from the boardroom



TEAM NEWS! Pinning up the teamsheet

# THRU' THE LENS WE'VE COME SO FAR

## A LOOK BEHIND THE SCENES OF SUFFOLK CLUB LONG MELFORD

**T**HEY MAY be second in the Eastern Counties League Premier division after an eight-match unbeaten run, but Long Melford manager Jamie Bradbury is refusing to get carried away. "This time last year we were in the middle of a two-month run without actually winning a game, and we got ourselves into a relegation battle because of it," he says. "So we're just trying to enjoy winning football matches as much as possible."

Bradbury is right to remain cautious, after all it is unusual to find a club with a negative goal difference occupying such a lofty position. "Stanway Rovers, who put nine past us have a lot to answer for," he laughs. "They battered us, and we had as good a side as we could have put out that night. It was just one of those

By **DAVID BAUCKHAM**

games when nothing went our way. But they were on fire and cruising. Thankfully we've put it behind us." Up until my visit for the game against Thetford Town last Saturday, Long Melford had not lost a league game since September 21, and have arguably been punching above their weight since winning promotion in 2015. A recent ground assessors' visit identified a few minor issues, but grading would be the least of the problems to be faced if promotion became a possibility. "We'd need to improve, and we just don't have the finances to do it," Bradbury admits. "We're lucky that we've got lads who are all local and last week we averaged 117 appearances across the squad. So we've got a loyal bunch and I'd love to be in a position where we could give them some mon-

ey. But we just don't have it to give unfortunately, and we would need that to step up." One has only to walk through Long Melford, past its Georgian houses and windows of numerous small art galleries and boutiques, to realise that it remains as affluent as it was during the 19th century. The club dates back to at least 1868, and during the 1950s when it dominated the Essex & Suffolk Border League, crowds of sever-



PREPARATIONS: Thetford goalkeeper Jamie Humphrey



HISTORY: Chairman Colin Woodhouse with a photo of the 1953 Suffolk Senior Cup victory parade



TIME TO CHILL: Fans at half-time

al hundred were not unusual. These days the average attendance at Stoneylands struggles to reach three figures. Bradbury is unsure whether he would want a major investor though. "There is no point chucking loads of money in and step-

ping up, because then you need more money and so it goes on," he added. "You've got to know your place in the pecking order. Eventually you reach a plateau and if that money disappears you're scuppered. I'd rather help the club grow organically." In the clubhouse are the three wise men of Melford. Last year, secretary Richard Powell received a long service award from the Suffolk FA. He has only been at the club for a

mere 14 years but was a founder member of Cornard United back in 1964. Around the same time, president Richard Kemp, and chairman Colin Woodhouse were playing alongside one another for Long Melford and have never left. Colin shows me a photograph of a victory parade through the village following the 1953 Suffolk Senior Cup final, with him just visible behind his father. Meanwhile, in the kitchen, Debra Rowe is preparing a post-match curry for the players and opening up 'Deb's Diner' ready for hungry punters later. A school dinner lady during the week,

Deb clearly enjoys her work. Today's visitors Thetford were the side Melford beat on the final day of last season to assure their own survival. They are also on a good run. "We've got momentum but so have they - they won't fear us one bit," Bradbury warned. His team enjoys plenty of possession early on but it is Thetford who take the lead through Michael Campbell, slightly against the

way through the half. After the break, Melford again see a lot of the ball without troubling keeper Jamie Humphrey. At the other end Matt Walker pulls off a fine double save but is beaten by an Elliot Smith header. With less than 15 minutes to go, Jacob Brown pulls one back but as the Villagers press for an equaliser, they leave themselves open at the back. Inevitably, Thetford break away and Tanner Call puts the result beyond doubt a minute from the end, although not before Brown rattles the visitors' crossbar in the dying moments. The official attendance is 95.

Philosophical Bradbury adds: "It was going to have to come to an end at some point but if you'd told me eight weeks ago that we were going to go on an eight-game unbeaten run I would have taken that. So we'll brush ourselves down and see if we can crack on next week. "It's very important now that we don't let it slip."



OPTIMISTIC: Long Melford manager Jamie Bradbury



MULTI-SKILLED: President Richard Kemp, right



CHANGE FROM A TENNER! Staff are friendly on the turnstiles



ON THE BALL: Fans watch in anticipation as Long Melford launch an attack against Thetford



AT A STRETCH: A young Thetford sub watches the game as he warms up