

Heads we win

Picture: STEVE ADAMS

Ashton reveals how psychologist has helped change City's fortunes

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CHRIS LAKEY

Dean Ashton says a psychologist is helping the Canaries finally shake off their Championship blues.

The club's record signing hit a stunning hat-trick as City beat Southampton to record back-to-back wins for only the second time this season – and said the psychologist played his part.

"I am not putting it all on him, but the psychologist who came in and spoke to me the other day was positive and got me in a positive frame of mind, which can only be a good thing," said Ashton.

"It's down to the team and the great service I had today, but it's always nice to be positive."

Ashton isn't the only one to have had his head turned – and the proof was there on Saturday as the Canaries – despite losing skipper Andy Hughes with a fractured cheekbone just before half-time – produced their best performance of the campaign by quite some distance.

"It hasn't been good enough and there is no harm in bringing in new things to try and change things and I am sure it has had a positive stamp on things," added Ashton who, curiously enough, was the only City player not involved in the huddle just before kick-off.

"He has done one-on-ones with certain players and done squad meetings. It can only be a good thing, we have to take these things on board as well as everything else. I think he is going to be in for a while and as long as the players all take it in, which we want to because it can only be a good thing, you never know.

"The last couple of weeks he has come in and brightened things up. It is just simple things which sometimes you can forget about and there is no harm in thinking positive."

City went behind after just nine minutes but when Ashton scored a deserved equaliser on the half-hour mark, there was no looking back and only a superb display of goalkeeping by Antti Niemi kept the scoreline down.

Two more goals after the break put Ashton in the record books – the last time

a City player scored a hat-trick was the legendary Iwan Roberts, back in February, 2001, in a 4-0 home win over Stockport.

"If I can have as good a career as he has had I will be happy," said Ashton, whose previous treble was for Crewe in a 3-2 win at Wigan in March 2004. "He has scored a lot of goals here and I know the fans hold him in high respect, and so they should, because he was a good player and he gave everything to the club."

Ashton's treble is likely to attract the attention of more Premiership clubs hoping to sign him when the January transfer window opens. Manchester City are said to be leading the chase, but it will take a big bid to prise him out of Carrow Road – and the player himself was giving nothing away on Saturday.

"That's up to the club," he said. "All I can do is concentrate on my football and enjoy my football. If things come around you deal with them. I can only concentrate on playing for Norwich City, I can't think about the future. I am ambitious but we will see what happens."

For now, Ashton is savouring the moment, particularly as his hat-trick – the second of his career – took his league tally for the season to nine and ended a run of 10 games without a goal.

"You have to savour these when they come along. I'm really pleased to get the goals, it's been a while," he said. "I tried not to let it get to me but it is always nice to get goals. It is very strange, a lot of the players were saying that they fancied me to score and even I said before I went out that I had a good feel about today."

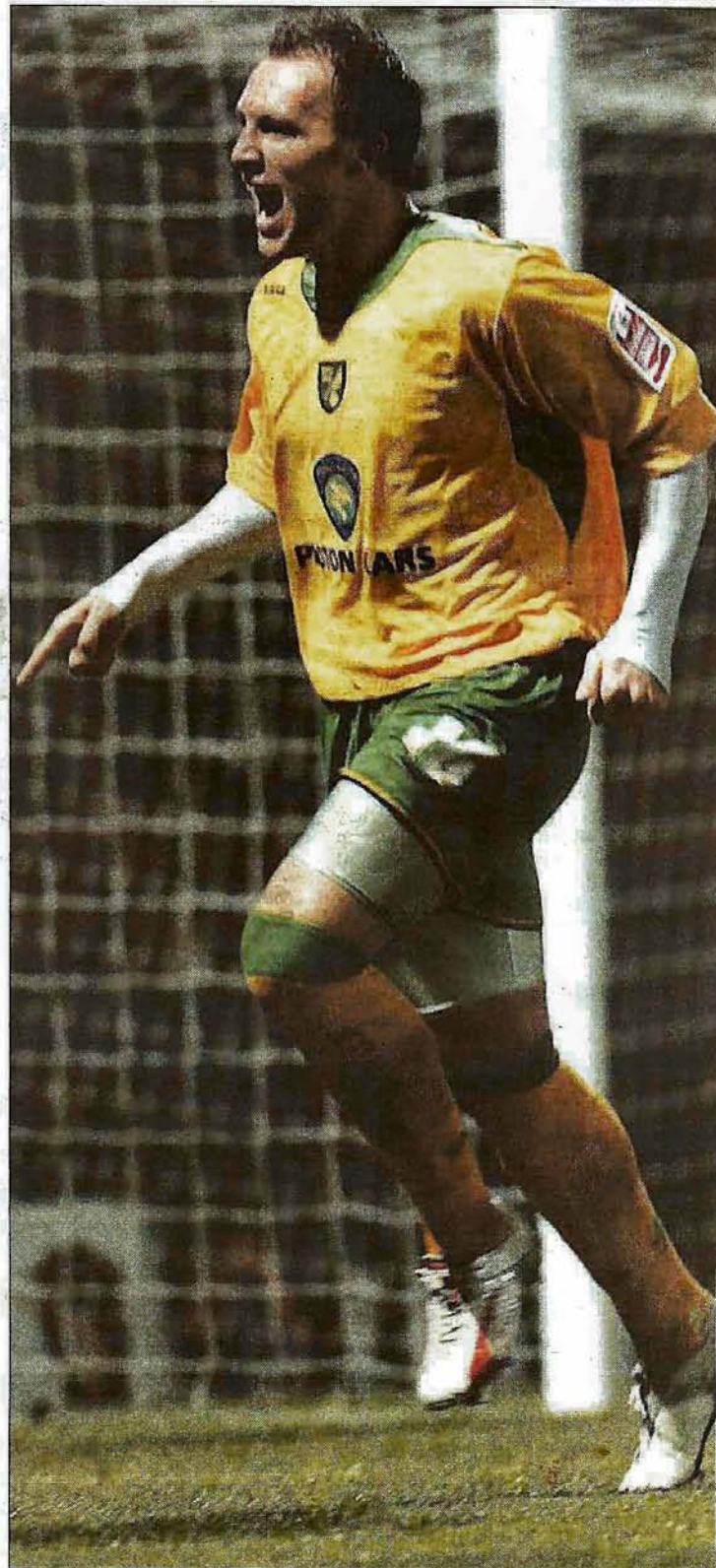
"Luckily it did go my way and I think the main thing is we got another win which hopefully we can build on."

"I have a good feeling about the team at the moment. We are in good spirits and I think we can go to Sheffield United and get a good result. They are up there where we should be and if we can get a result there it will show we're on the right track."



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Dean Ashton



EARLY CHRISTMAS PRESENT: Dean Ashton's hat-trick helped lift City to within six points of the Championship play-off places.