

The mystery man behind City's revival



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Eastern Daily Press

TODAY'S PULL-OUTS: TV & RADIO GUIDE

Tuesday, December 20, 2005 45p

Ensuring City are right in the head



Picture: COLIN FINCH

INJURY SCARE: Leon McKenzie receives treatment to an ankle injury sustained midway through the first half of last night's reserve clash with Charlton. McKenzie played on after the knock as the Canaries went down 3-0 to Alan Curbishley's second string. Full story – see page 49.

CANARIES: Carrow Road is lifted by sports psychologist's positive thinking

Mr Motivator

By CHRIS WISE

Norwich City are playing mind games at their Colney training ground – and the benefits are there for all to see.

Nigel Worthington's decision to employ a sports psychologist to work with his under-performing squad has paid immediate dividends, with the Canaries winning both their games since he arrived on the scene.

City's mini revival got under way when they travelled to Crewe and came away with a priceless 2-1

victory and continued on Saturday when they produced their best performance of the season so far to beat Southampton 3-1 thanks to a hat-trick from Dean Ashton.

On each occasion City showed their mental strength by recovering from the shock of conceding an early goal to come away with all three points and Worthington is convinced that the well chosen words of the unnamed psychologist have been a significant factor in the sudden upturn in fortunes.

"We are very pleased with how the

sessions have gone so far and I think you can see the results out there on the pitch," said the City boss, who decided to bring in some outside help after a run of just two wins in 11 games had left his side too close to the Coca-Cola Championship relegation zone for comfort.

"It's only part of the story. If it goes all right from now on it won't be all down to these sessions – it will be a combination of that and working hard on the training ground to get the right results. But, yes, it has been very useful."

Consultations have been going on at Colney for several weeks now, but they only came to light at the weekend when Ashton let the cat out of the bag after bouncing back from a 10-game lean spell by scoring his first hat-trick for the Canaries.

The £3m frontman said the sessions had done him a world of good, and had also been appreciated by many of his colleagues – and Worthington is glad they have had such a positive effect on a dressing room that appeared to be short on confidence

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"It's part of the game now and it works in different ways for different people," he said. "Everybody gets something different from it and Dean obviously rates it very highly indeed."

"He works with all the players. Everybody is involved and it is an ongoing thing. He speaks to players rather than them speaking to him. He talks to people on a one-on-one basis and also does group sessions as well if he thinks that is the best option. "The mental side of the game is very important and you have got to look at every avenue."

"It's something that we looked at a few weeks ago and decided to put into practice. It's all good stuff and we really believe in it."

"It's another way you can make things happen, get players to believe they can go out there and get the right result. On a number of occasions recently we have played well enough without having anything to show for it. It's a case of getting those belief patterns right in the head and hopefully you have seen the benefit of that in recent games."

City's latest 12th man obviously deserves a big pat on the back – but fans will find it difficult to say thank-you in person, because the individual in question is quite happy to stay in the background.

"He just wants to stay anonymous and get on with his job – which is working with the players quietly and effectively," explained Worthington. "That's also the way I want it."

The City boss is now confident his players will be in the right shape, both mentally and physically, when they take on second-placed Sheffield United at Bramall Lane on Boxing Day.

When the Canaries last won two games on the trot by beating Hull and Brighton in the space of four days back in late September and early October, they failed to follow up the good work and soon slipped back into bad habits. Worthington is hoping that hard work both on and off the training pitch will ensure there is no repeat of that slump over the festive period.

"It was good to see supporters in a happy frame of mind, with smiles on their faces, after Saturday's game – but we can't rest on our laurels," he said. "We have won two games back to back and now we have got to look to maintain that sort of form. "We're pleased with the way things have gone in the last two games, but we are not getting carried away. There is a lot of work to be done yet and, as ever, the proof of the pudding will be in the eating."