

REPORTING FROM WIGAN

By Deon Wakefield

Since our visit to Wigan Athletic's football and rugby stadium, many great things have happened to the football team, the main highlight being the Football Association Carling Cup Final.

At first glance, the 4-0 full-time whistle score line of the Carling Cup Final seems to represent a team that is out of place in top flight football after being crushed by the might of Manchester United in front of a capacity crowd.

Yet, when we arrived at Wigan, a whole new story unfolded before us. This was the story of a team who not only rose from the Second Division to the Premiership in two straight seasons, but also of a team who believed in themselves, no matter what, to create a new found confidence. It is a confidence which has led to a cup final appearance as well as a more than competent start to life in the Premiership.

Matt McGann was our guide on the tour of the towering JJB stadium. First, we went through the inside of the stadium where, on our way, we passed the huge laundry rooms equipped to deal with the mass of team laundry every week.

Next we were shown the changing rooms which unlike many other clubs were substantial in size. Both home and away teams' changing rooms are of equal size because the club feels that making the away team's changing rooms smaller, to create a home advantage, is unprofessional.

We then went up a tiring 90 steps to reach the television and radio gantry. Here, the likes of Sky Sports broadcast live games to the nation. After going back down, we reached the club's trophy room where the cabinet was full of awards representing the club's growing success.

As our group left the JJB stadium, we did not see a crushed Cup Final losing team. Instead we saw a confident, well presented Premiership team who intend to stay right up with the best teams in the country.