

Dream Team Special

Sky One, Tuesday & Thursday

FANTASY FINAL

Will Harchester overcome their team troubles to beat the mighty Red Devils in the FA Cup Final?

If anyone needs proof that no other football team divides the nation's loyalties quite like Manchester United, Rod Brown is happy to provide it. Producer of Football for the soccer soap Dream Team, Brown reveals that even when matches are fictional – as is the case this week when the Red Devils take on Harchester United in the FA Cup Final, the climax to the current series – neutral viewers are thin on the ground.

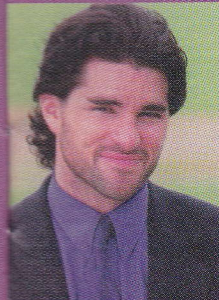
'People have been writing in to the programme asking for Wembley tickets,' says Brown. 'When Harchester play Manchester United, our research shows that extra United fans tune in to watch their side. Also more supporters who follow clubs like Arsenal, Spurs and Liverpool will watch and support Harchester.'

Thus David Beckham and co

are the perfect opponents for Harchester on the biggest day in their history, since their presence guarantees that – as with the real FA Cup Final – around half of those watching will be celebrating when the final whistle sounds.

Which half, Brown will not reveal, of course, but he is happy to explain how the footballing scenes were shot. 'As with all the match action on Dream Team, we've digitally remastered and colourised footage,' he says. 'In this case it's from a previous Wembley appearance by United – Manchester, that is, not Harchester. We colour the opposition's kit to match that of Harchester and use that footage for wide shots of the actual match, then cut in close-ups featuring our own actors.'

'We spent three days in late



Latin temperament: the future is at stake for player-coach Luis Amor Rodriguez (Martin Crewes, left)

March filming all the close-ups and crowd scenes at Wembley. So when you see the Harchester bench, they're

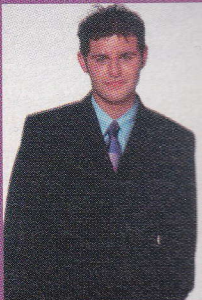
actually sitting exactly where Kevin Keegan had been just a few days earlier for England's match against Poland.'

While the match action looks highly convincing, the same could hardly be said for Harchester's form in the run-up to the final, which has seen such shameful scenes as Sean Hocknell (Daymon Britton, right) and Luis Amor Rodriguez (Martin Crewes) being sent off for fighting with each other during their defeat by Coventry.

Matters have been no more harmonious off the field, with

manager Ian Coates (Francis Johnson) fighting a battle with the bottle, and his replacement caretaker-player-coach, Rodriguez, involved in a bitter personal feud with chairman Jerry Block (Michael Melia). This has cast doubts over the Argentinian's participation at Wembley and long-term future with the club.

Indeed, such is the mood of pessimism about Harchester's chances that bookmakers have stopped taking bets on Man Utd to triumph at Wembley. But at least half of the viewers will be hoping that the bookies have got it wrong.



● Dream Team goes into extra time this week with two 1-hour specials. The omnibus will be screened next Saturday to coincide with the real FA Cup Final

On their way to Wembley: the Harchester United lads are hoping for a resounding win

