

# THE NON-LEAGUE PAPER®

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THE ORIGINAL AND THE BEST



**INSIDE:**  
**RONNIE HAS**  
**ONE BIG**  
**DREAM LEFT**

AND

**SENIORS**  
**GLORY IN**  
**WORLD CUP**

PLUS

**HUGE COUP**  
**FOR STEP 7**  
**WESTIES**

ON EZE STREET!  
 England's Eberechi  
 Eze prepares for  
 tonight's Euro 24  
 opener with Serbia  
 – and his family are  
 right behind him  
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PICTURE: Alamy

**WE'RE SO**  
**PROUD OF**  
**OUR LIONS**  
**ACE EBERE**



ON BOARD: Matt Le Tissier has a new role at Sholing FC

# LE BEST

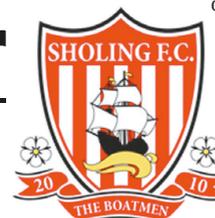
**Prem legend says our pyramid is unrivalled**

By Jon Couch

AS England's elite prepare to open their Euro 24 campaign, former Three Lions international Matt Le Tissier has spoken up for those lower down the ladder.

The Southampton legend, recently appointed associate director of Sholing, believes the Non-League game doesn't get the recognition it deserves.

"One of the greatest strengths of football in this country is the depth we go down to where quality football is still being played and that's a great testament to the Non-League game."



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**EXCLUSIVE: PROTECT OUR CLUBS, URGES HARRY**



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# NAN HAS WON ME A GRAND

**FANTASY LAND:** Mark Rushbury, left, collects his FNL prize from Stourport Swifts player Ben Jevons at Molineux

PICTURE: Garry Griffiths



By Jon Couch

**MARK Rushbury picked up a £1,000 Fantasy League bonus on the strength of a hunch – and it's all thanks to his Nan!**

The Wolverhampton-based manager of Mark's Wolves picked the winner in seven of the eight FNL sections with an ingenious pre-season selection which included National League champions Chesterfield, Chelmsford City and Chatham Town.

But it was the random selection of Tamworth in the National League North division which ultimately saw him home.

The Lambs returned to Step 2 after winning the Southern League Premier Central division last season and took the league by storm as Andy Peaks' men completed back-to-back promotions.

It was a rise to the top that very few could have foreseen – and Rushbury admits picking them was more sentimental than anything else.

"Tamworth was a bit of luck, I must admit," the 65-year-old told *The NLP*. "My Nan is from Tamworth, so I thought 'why not?'"

As it was, the Lambs helped complete a near whitewash of winning selections for Rushbury, who was looking to build on his 15th place last season.

He selected 15 sides who reached the end-of-season play-offs, although only one, Enfield Town, went on to win promotion. Six others, including Enfield's opponents in the Isthmian Premier showdown, Chatham Town, were beaten finalists.

Rushbury also went close to claiming maximum points in the Isuzu FA Trophy but his pick, Solihull Moors, were edged out on penalties in the Wembley final by Gateshead.

The FNL winner was presented with his prize at Molineux – home of his beloved Wolves – this week by Ben Jevons, popular player at his favourite Non-League club Stourport Swifts.

"I'm absolutely delighted to win – I've loved every minute of it," added Rushbury. "It was one of those years when everything just fell into place."

"A few of us started playing Fantasy Non-League on the recommendation of a friend six or seven years ago. Now there's about a dozen of us playing."

"A pal of mine finished fifth last year so it's got quite competitive. We all study hard and look forward to every Saturday night when the results come in on Ian White's FNL website."

"Already, I'm looking forward to playing next year and hopefully doing well again. I love it to bits."

Olivia Grace, managed by Olivia Seal, of Weymouth, Dorset, picked up the £500 prize for second, while Bristol's Peter Flower claimed two prizes; £250 for third place with his team Shoscombe, and £500 for finishing last with The Doom Patrol.

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# WE'RE VICTIMS OF CUP 'CRIME'

## Redknapp: Our clubs need more support

**HARRY REDKNAPP has spoken of his love for Non-League football and says it is a 'crime' that FA Cup replays will be scrapped from the first round onwards from next season.**

The former Tottenham and West Ham boss – whose first job in management in this country was as assistant to England World Cup winner Bobby Moore at Oxford City in the Isthmian League – is a self-confessed supporter of grassroots football.

When he's not watching the team he once managed, Bournemouth, in the Premier League, Redknapp calls in on his local club Poole Town, among others, and finds himself getting lured back time after time.

And Redknapp will have more reason than ever to dip into Non-League when the new campaign gets underway as grandson Harry Jr has just signed for Southern League Premier South side Dorchester Town following his release from Bournemouth.

Expect then to see grandad 'Arry at many a local fixture when the new season begins.

"I follow Non-League closely," the 77-year-old, who started his management career as player-assistant manager of NASL club Seattle Sounders in 1976 under Jimmy Gabriel, told *The NLP*.

"There are a lot of very good clubs outside the Football League currently, teams with great history such as Yeovil, teams coming back up the divisions after being mismanaged like Bury, who are getting very decent crowds at Gigg Lane still. It's not all about the Premier League.

"Last season, I went to Yeovil and watched a couple of games. I like going to the local clubs and I never leave the Bournemouth

**By Matthew Nash**

area on a Saturday. I either go and watch Bournemouth or go Non-League.

"I love seeing young kids wearing their local team's shirt. Poole Town are another one I like – they have been looking for a ground for a long, long time so I hope they get that now. Not everybody has to become a Manchester City supporter."

Redknapp, who has also been in charge of Portsmouth (twice), Southampton, QPR, Birmingham City and the Jordan national team, sympathises with Non-League clubs after it was announced that FA Cup replays are to become a thing of the past from the first round proper onwards.

### Payday

Clubs such as Isthmian League Horsham and Cray Valley PM, who have been promoted from Step 4, would have missed out on much-needed revenue generated by replays in their first-round ties in 2023-24.

Horsham took Barnsley from League One back to West Sussex while Cray earned a home replay against Charlton. Redknapp has some experience of just what that cash does for smaller teams.

"The biggest crime was getting rid of FA Cup replays. Back in the day, they were what kept clubs going," he added.

"At Bournemouth, we drew Manchester United and took them back to Old Trafford in the Cup in 1989. We lost 1-0 but there were 60,000 people there and we earned as much money from that match as we did in the whole rest of the season."

Dorset-based Redknapp recalls with fondness the days before big clubs spent summers

playing their local teams rather than flying to all corners of the world in a bid to grow their brands in new football markets.

It is rare now to see top-flight sides give their neighbours a big payday but Redknapp not only used to take a team to play the likes of Swanage Town & Herston but also loaned them players from his Football League squad.

"I'm fed up of hearing players saying they're playing too much," confides the ex-West Ham and Bournemouth midfielder on the modern-day phenomenon of post and pre-season tours.

### Shoe factory

"As soon as the season finished, Newcastle and Tottenham jetted off to play each other in Australia.

"In my day, we'd go on tour to Devon or up to Scotland. That was it: maybe you'd play Plymouth, Torquay and Exeter – that was your pre-season.

"With Bournemouth, we'd go and play Swanage, Wimborne Town, Bournemouth Poppies and a little village team called Downton, in Wiltshire, who'd

have 1,500 spectators gathered around the pitch.

"I can remember at West Ham we'd always take on a shoe factory team in Essex called Bata United – that was our first game of the summer. Everyone played – Bobby Moore, Geoff Hurst, whoever you were – and the home team gave you a pair of black shoes and a pair of brown shoes and you were delighted!

"Now they'll go and play in China or America and come back and say 'the players are tired'. You should prepare for the season here, play your local sides. But it's all about money and that's the way the game's gone."

That last sentence may be frustratingly close to the truth but you sense that will never be the football Redknapp loves.

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**FRONT LINE:** Stalwart Premier League boss Harry Redknapp is an ardent follower of the Non-League game

PICTURE: Alamy

## FA CUP RECORD UP FOR GRABS!

**By Jon Couch**

THE FIRST goalscorer of the 2024-25 FA Cup will guarantee their place in folklore as the earliest ever marksman in the competition's history.

The current record is held by Jay Malshank-skyj of Bishops Cleeve, who netted at 7.48pm on Friday, August 4, 2023, in a 3-3 draw with Thornbury Town.

But that record will be topped this season after The FA released fixture dates for next season's competition with the FA Cup's extra preliminary round kicking off this year on Friday, August 2.

Once again, there will be three rounds of the FA Cup completed by the end of August with the preliminary round taking place on the weekend of August 17 and the first qualifying round on August 31. The Wembley final is on Saturday, May 17, 2025.

The 2024-25 Isuzu FA Trophy and FA Vase dates have also been released.

Both competitions get underway on August 24 with the Trophy starting with the preliminary round and the Vase with the first qualifying round.

Non-League Finals Day is yet to be confirmed, but will take place at Wembley on either Saturday, May 10 or Sunday, May 11, 2025. Semi-finals retain their two legs in the Vase with games taking place on March 29 and April 6.

## GROUNDTASTIC

THE FOOTBALL GROUNDS MAGAZINE



# YOU'VE MADE US SO PROUD

**HIGH RISER:** Eberechi Eze is ready to play his part in England's Euro 24 campaign, which starts tonight

PICTURE: Alamy



**AVELEY** midfielder Ikechi Eze couldn't be any prouder of brother Eberechi for making England's squad for the Euros.

**By John Lyons**

Crystal Palace No.10 Ebere shone in the Premier League spotlight last term, doing enough to earn a spot in Gareth Southgate's 26-man party for the tournament in Germany.

was in and out of the England squad for a while so we can appreciate it that he's in the 26-man squad.

"He takes things in his stride and has faith in what he can achieve. He doesn't rest on his laurels."

With Ebere being a couple of years younger than Ikechi, he had someone to look up to.

## Challenge

Whether the 25-year-old gets any minutes in Euro 24 remains to be seen - England launch their campaign against Serbia tonight - but bagging a berth against stringent competition has already delighted the whole Eze family. They have witnessed his route to the top-flight via the disappointments of being released by Arsenal and Millwall in his teens.

"We went to training with my friends and he was playing with kids a lot older," Ikechi said. "That definitely helped him and the good thing was that we were playing with kids who were good at football."

"Myself and my family will be going to some of the group stage games and I'm positive and hopeful of England's chances - I'm hoping we can win it."

Eventually Greenwich-born Ebere, whose parents hail from Nigeria, made his name at Championship outfit QPR before moving up to the Premier League Eagles for £20m in 2020.

While Ebere has taken one path, Ikechi has taken another - and he hasn't been afraid to take on a challenge.

Older sibling Ikechi told *The NLP*: "We are extremely proud as a family to see where he has got to from where we grew up in south London. It puts it in perspective - it's a huge achievement."

After turning out for Hampton & Richmond Borough, Fisher Athletic, Horsham, Burgess Hill and Braintree Town, he had a stint in Bulgaria with Rilski Sportist before heading to Scottish football with Stranraer.

"It's been a bit of a journey and we've seen what he's overcome to get to this point. He had injuries and

"What attracted me to Bulgaria was the full-time football and being a pro," explained Ikechi, who has another younger brother Chimaechi, 21, on Palace's books. "I look back on it with

fond memories and there are things I learned which I use now at Aveley. It helped build my character and I learned how to adapt."

## Principles

"In a team that didn't speak a lot of English, you had to learn the way they play football. It is a lot slower and a lot more tactical out of possession. In Scotland it was a lot more fast-paced and physical."

Ikechi, left, returned south of the border with

Aveley in November and helped the Millers beat all odds to reach the play-offs in their first season in National League South.

Earlier this month, he agreed terms to stay for the coming season.

"When I joined the atmosphere was really good and it was a really good environment," he said.

"Some people thought we would struggle in Conference South, but the gaffer (Danny Scopes) believed in us and we believed in what

we were doing. We would have loved to have gone further in the play-offs (the Millers lost 2-1 at Maidstone in the eliminators), but there was a lot to be proud of considering where we have come from."

"The principles the gaffer applies will remain the same and I see no problem in us reaching the same heights or doing a bit more next season. You always have sceptics and critics, but I'm very positive we can have a very good season."



DREAM: Adama Sidibeh

# SIDIBEH STEPS UP TO WORLD STAGE

WHAT a difference a year makes.

Just over 12 months ago, Adama Sidibeh had just completed his first season in the North West Counties League following spells at AFC Blackpool and Cheadle Heath Nomads.

**By Garry Clarke**

Now, the 25-year-old striker has scored for his country in a World Cup qualifier - and has set his sights on playing on the biggest stage.

Sidibeh was on target on his international de-

but for Gambia in a 5-1 Group F victory over Seychelles at the Stade Municipal de Berkane last weekend.

It completed a remarkable rise to the top for Sidibeh, who only moved to the UK two years ago and soon made his mark when

scoring 20 goals in just half a season for Cheadle Heath, earning a move to Northern Premier League side Warrington Rylands.

Sixteen goals in 30 games for Rylands ensured he attracted plenty of interest and Sidibeh was soon back

on the move, joining Scottish Premiership club St Johnstone on the final day of the January transfer window.

He then chipped in with three goals in as many games at the end of last season to preserve Saints' top-flight status.

"It's a dream for every player to play for their country," Sidibeh said after his call-up. "I am really glad to get the opportunity."

"I am really proud and my family are too. They were really happy for me when I told them."

# WE'RE ON TOP OF THE WORLD

## England Seniors fly flag for Lions

By John Lyons

**JAMIE** Coyle played his part in England Veterans retaining the Seniors World Cup – and is hoping Gareth Southgate's Three Lions can follow in their footsteps with Euro glory this summer.

The 41-year-old Whitstable Town manager was a mainstay as the Over-40s triumphed in Bangkok, Thailand, edging out New Zealand 1-0 in the final thanks to former Crewe and Burnley winger Steve Jones' winner.

Coyle was captain in the opening game – a goalless draw against Australia – and the defender went on to play every minute as England took the spoils for the seventh time.

He wasn't the only player with Non-League links as he featured alongside the likes of Stamford's Jon Challinor, 43, and Chatham Town's Matt Bodkin, 40.



**STALWART:** Jamie Coyle, left, led the team against Australia

"It was a huge honour to be asked to lead the team out for the first game," he told *The NLP*. "It's something I will remember for the rest of my life. We had a talented squad with some players who had played in the Premier League so that made it extra special.

### Honour

"The whole thing from captaining the team, to winning the tournament and giving something back to the local community was one of the best experiences of my life. If anyone asks me for an interesting fact about myself

in the future, I can tell them I've won the World Cup twice for my country!"

With five games in six days and temperatures up to 40 degrees, it was a test of endurance for Coyle and his teammates.

"I'm in the younger category so I played every minute," he said. "This year I had had a full season playing and went out there a lot fitter. It made it easier to deal with the heat and humidity – you are losing five or six pounds in sweat a game.

"It's a real privilege and honour to represent your

country and something I'm really proud of. We also went to local deprived schools and did coaching, and we took out football kit from our clubs.

### Challenge

"That's the humbling bit that people don't see, as much as you enjoy winning the World Cup. The kids were so pleased with the coaching and English lessons, and it will stay in the memory forever."

Having been player-assistant manager at Erith & Belvedere before joining Glebe as a player in Novem-

ber, Coyle believes now is the right time to hang up his boots as he prepares to take on his new challenge with Southern Counties East League outfit Whitstable.

"It was my last season playing," he insisted. "I'm going to retire now – and make sure I don't sign any playing forms. I've said it the last three or four seasons and ended up playing 50 games!"

"I need to concentrate on management and coaching now. I was player-manager at Welling and it's a really difficult task, and I've been fortunate to have 24 seasons playing and coaching in this country. My remit now is to try to deliver some success at Whitstable.

"It's just keeping fit now and being ready for next summer if I get the call again."

As for England's chances at the Euros in Germany, Coyle is upbeat.

"In my lifetime it's the most exciting and talented squad I've seen," he added. "I'm hoping they can go and deliver the same success we did.

"They've got the individuals, it's whether collectively they can perform and deliver under pressure. In my lifetime we've fallen just short, but I'm confident with the management team and talent available, and with a bit of luck, we have a huge chance."



**JOY:** Skipper John Price and player-boss Steve Edkins, right

## NIFTY 50s STILL AT SUMMIT IN WALES

By John Lyons

ENGLAND Over-50s showed Gareth Southgate and his Three Lions how to handle pressure by defending their Four Nations crown last weekend.

After launching their campaign in Cardiff with a 2-0 win against Northern Ireland with goals from Ben Lord and former Dagenham & Redbridge forward Paul Cobb, England had to battle hard to earn a 1-1 draw in their second match against Scotland.

Ex-Bognor Regis Town man Daren Pearce popped up with a last-minute leveller for the Three Lions.

It meant England needed to beat hosts Wales to retain their title – and they did it in style with a 3-0 victory courtesy of goals from Ricki Finning (two) and Ian Hollamby.

Defender Steve Ward was chuffed to play his part in England's triumph.

"All the teams have players who have played at decent levels," said the 53-year-old, who featured for the likes of Canvey Island, Maidstone United, Chelmsford City and Grays Athletic in his heyday. "For example, Wales had Andy Legg, who pushed me back.

"Wales don't sit back – they went at it hammer and tongs. They were the team to beat, but we defended really well, especially when you are tired with it being your third game in three days. Once we went ahead, there were a few more gaps to exploit.

"It was brilliant to win. You are representing your country and when you pull that shirt on at any level you feel proud and want to win for England – all the boys say that."

The PE teacher admitted it was a relief to run out victors.

"You are working towards it for a long time," he explained. "You train in February thinking about June and you have to peak at the right time. Now the pressure is off!"

As for the bigger picture of the veterans' game, Ward is convinced it has many benefits.

"It's not recognised by the FA and there's no funding, but veterans' football is amazing," he added. "It keeps you ticking over and mental health-wise it's massive'. It motivates you to keep fit."



**WORLD-BEATERS:** The England Seniors celebrate their World Cup success

# LEGEND LE TISSIER'S BACKING

# STRENGTH IS SHOWN

CAMEO: Matt Le Tissier playing for Guernsey  
PICTURE: Matt Bunn



**M**ATT LE TISSIER was football's quintessential one-club man with his devoted affinity to Southampton – but the Non-League game has always been part of his make-up.

Born and raised in Saint Peter Port, Guernsey, Le Tissier learned his craft as a youth at Vale Recreation FC where he played between the ages of seven and 16.

And even after embarking on a legendary career, which took in 541 appearances in 16 years with the Saints and a rather underwhelming total of eight England caps, Le Tissier bowed out amidst the more subtle surroundings of Eastleigh, and then for one last cameo back home at Guernsey FC, where he remains honorary president.

Le Tissier's passion for the Non-League game has burned throughout his entire career – and now he's landed himself a role in the boardroom after becoming associate director at Southern Premier South side Sholing, who have also drafted in Chelsea and England defender Levi Colwill, 21, as an associate director (see p18-19).

Outspoken yet articulate, having the 55-year-old former Sky Sports pundit on side holds plenty of weight – and it's come at a time when Non-League needs all the love it can get.

The FA's decision to scrap FA Cup replays from the first round onwards next season has left cash-strapped clubs at the heart of the National League System feeling somewhat short-changed.

Le Tissier can feel their pain and believes more can be done to look after these clubs from the powers-that-be, especially given their role in ensuring the structure of English football is unparalleled anywhere in



By JON COUCH

the world. I've always taken an interest in Non-League football and I believe clubs are very much undervalued by the people at the top," said Le Tissier, who still finds time in his hectic lifestyle as club ambassador at Southampton – not to mention amateur golfer with a handicap of 1.4 – to regularly visit his local clubs.

"One of the greatest strengths of football in this country is the depth that we go down to where quality football is still being played and that's a great testament to the Non-League game.

"Everybody looks at the top four divisions and perhaps the National League, but you can go down many divisions below that and still see a very good game of football and I think that's one of the massive strengths of our game.

## Strong

"The amateur game is so strong, there have been many players who have come through the Non-League ranks and have gone on to play international football, and I think that's brilliant.

"It's vital that we have people making representations for them to make sure they are not forgotten about and to remind the people at the top just how important they are to the whole system."

Southampton's rise back to the Premier League will give club legend Le Tissier added responsibility next season, but he is also relishing his new boardroom role across the city at the Imperial Homes Stadium.

Le Tissier has been drafted in by his big mate, former Sutton United and Havant & Waterlooville boss Paul Doswell, who in October replaced long-standing Dave Diaper in the Boatmen hotseat after 25 years with the club.

"I've known Doswell for a very long time," Le Tissier added. "He says this is his final hurrah in Non-League football and he wants

IN HIS POMP: Matt Le Tissier celebrates another goal for Southampton  
PICTURE: Alamy



to give it a good go in lifting Sholing up.

"He's got a few people involved there that I know and he asked if I would come on board as a community ambassador and associate director – just as a bit of support really for those projects, to oversee some training sessions and on matchdays when the Saints aren't playing.

"Sholing are Southampton's second biggest team, so it's always a club that have been on my radar.

"The big draw for me, however, was the community aspect of it all. This week, the club have launched Project 5000 where 5,000 tickets are given out for under 19s free of charge with a season ticket holder, which I think is amazing. It means a family of four can go and watch Sholing play for a tenner – and there's not many places in the country where you can do that.

"The club are doing lots of different things around the community. They've got a mar-



BIG PAL: Sholing boss Paul Doswell

# FOR 'UNDervalUED' LEVELS

# OF OUR GAME BY NON-LEAGUE

## WESTON WORKED A TREAT FOR ACE WATKINS

By John Lyons

ENGLAND striker Ollie Watkins says he will always be grateful to the role Weston-super-Mare played in his journey to the top.

Just before he turned 19, Watkins joined the Somerset club on loan from Exeter City.

He went on to score ten goals in 24 National League South games in the second half of the 2014-15 season and believes it played a big part in his development.

He went on to make his Exeter breakthrough soon after and moves to Brentford and Aston Villa followed, the latter a £28m switch in 2020.

The Torquay-born ace finished the 2023-24 season with 19 Premier League goals as Villa finished fourth to earn qualification for next season's Champions League.

Heading into the Euros, he had also netted



LOAN: Ollie Watkins

three times in 12 games for Gareth Southgate's Three Lions. It's been a meteoric rise since his days on loan at the Seagulls in Non-League.

"That was one of the best things I did - going on loan at Weston-super-Mare and fighting for three points," he told *The High Performance Podcast*.

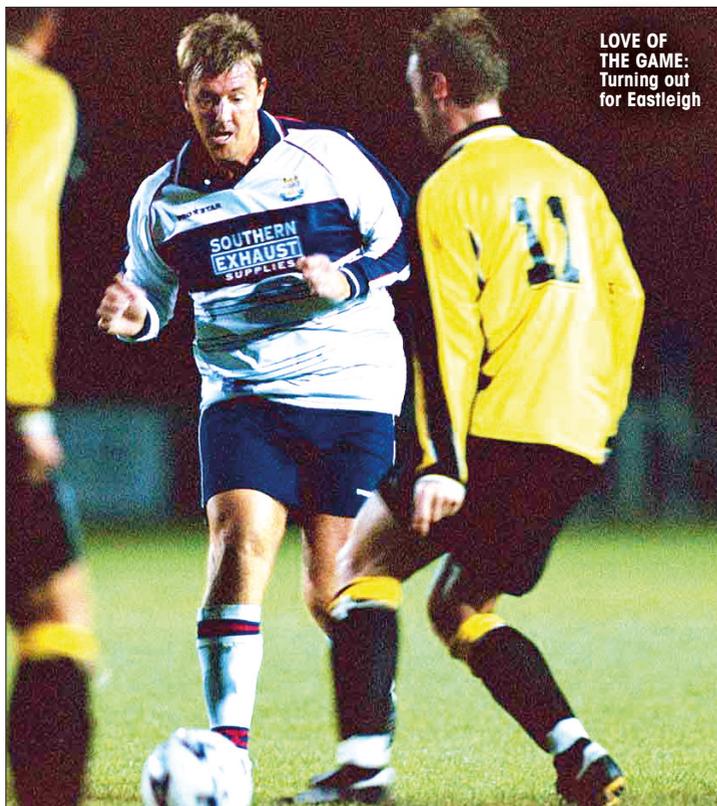
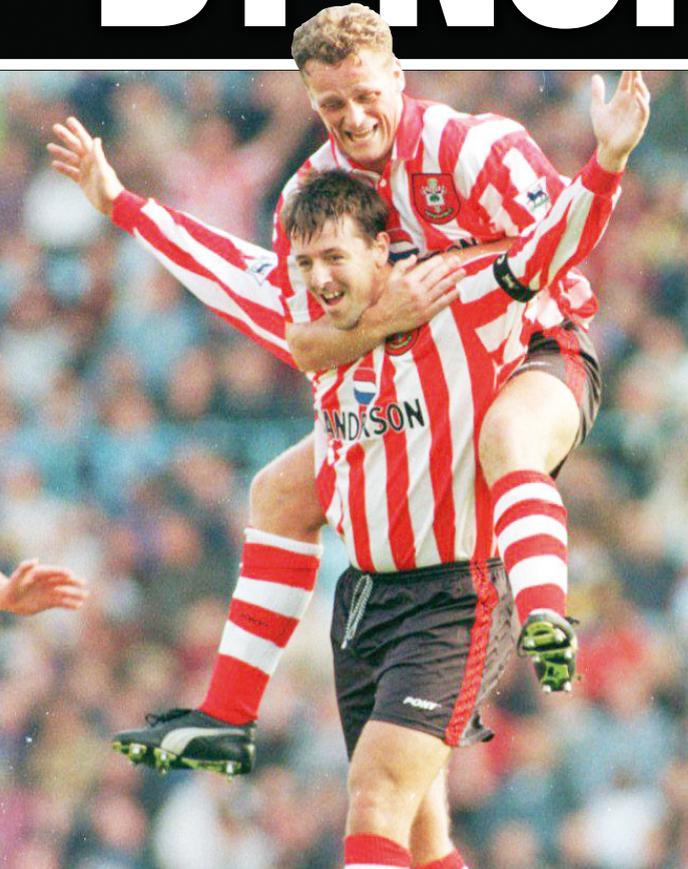
"People had mortgages to pay, bills to pay, kids to feed."

"I still joke about it now with my friends that I've gone from playing against Whitehawk to potentially playing Champions League football. It just seems crazy."

"It wasn't that long ago that I had that experience, but I wouldn't change it for the world. It was a couple of leagues below and I felt I could handle myself in that league."

"I never doubted my ability, but I never thought about the Premier League (at that stage)."

"I was on loan, I was doing quite well and I just wanted to get back to Exeter and play in the first team. I wasn't thinking too far ahead."



LOVE OF THE GAME: Turning out for Eastleigh

queue which they've put up at the ground which will be free to hire to any season ticket holders, and have invested a lot of money in the ground and upgrading the pitch.

"Things are really starting to happen there. Dos wants Sholing to be a big part of that community and help that part of town. I like the idea of what he is trying to do there."

### Fantastic

While Doswell looks to shape up a Sholing side which escaped relegation by a single point last season, Le Tissier admits he will also be keeping a close eye on Non-League's top division where he has plenty of personal interest.

"I always look out for Eastleigh's results," he added. "They had a mid-table finish last season, but hopefully they can have another crack at it next year."

"It was a bit of a walk in the park for Chesterfield but teams like Bromley, who went up in



LIMITED CHANCES: Matt Le Tissier in action for England

the play-offs, Barnet and Altrincham had pretty good seasons too, so there are some really strong teams there.

"And then there's my old Southampton teammate Tommy Widdrington at Aldershot. He only just missed out on the play-offs after a fantastic season when his remit at the start of the season was just to keep them up! Hopefully they can kick on again next season."

After over 200 goals for Southampton and the creator of several iconic Premier League moments, the man they called 'Le God' can look back on his career with immense pride.

But when it comes to England, there's a sense of injustice with Le Tissier denied the opportunity to shine on the biggest stage of them all, limited to just eight caps for the Three Lions.

While he was left out of the squad by Terry Venables for Euro 96, it was Glenn Hoddle disregarding him for the World

Cup in 1998 that hurt him most. In the run-up to the tournament in France, in-form Le Tissier bagged a brilliant hat-trick against Russia in a 4-1 win for the England 'B' team but was still overlooked.

England, of course, have been starved of success ever since, but he believes Gareth Southgate's current crop - the next Golden Generation on the ranks to his era in the mid-90s - can finally break their tournament duck in the Euros in Germany this summer.

"We've got a chance, of course, but there's probably four or five other teams that have got a chance too," Le Tissier said.

"We probably don't have the strongest defence in the competition but I certainly think we've got one of the strongest attacks."

"We have an abundance of talent going forward and if we can play to those strengths then we've got a really good chance."



BACK HOME: John Katz

## KATZ'S RETURN BREAKS CARDS AFFAIR

By Jon Couch

JOHN KATZ admits it was love at first sight when he first stepped foot into Woking's Laithwaite Community Stadium.

The American businessman has revelled in a five-year affair with the National League Cards – the last three in his role as chief executive officer under the new regime at the Surrey club.

Now the Kingfield chief has announced he is to step down from his post to return to his family in the United States.

Katz told of his desire to move back home in March after a prolonged period in which he spent more than 90 per cent of his time in Woking.

He will remain active on the board of directors and will continue his non-matchday duties as football secretary.

Hands-on Katz enjoyed a productive three-year spell with the club, travelling to almost all the team's away games, leading the women's team when they were without a manager, and providing assistance to the football management team.

"I fell in love with this club the first time I came to the Laithwaite Community Stadium in April 2019," Katz said in his farewell speech.

"I took in my first match in September 2019 and my second in January 2020 with my son. This club is my passion, and I will be involved with the club for the future.

"I will truly miss the day-to-day grind of working with the great members of our administrative team, our board and our football management team."

Emanuele Palladino has been named interim CEO and will oversee operations for the next few months as the club restructures its management team.

Long-term general manager Dave Curtis has been promoted to chief operating officer and will continue to lead the club forward alongside Palladino.

# EYRIE'S DIGGING DEEP FOR EAGLES

EYRIE the Eagle has found himself a new job for the summer – helping to lay down Bedford Town's new 3G pitch!

The Eagles' mascot got his talons dirty as diggers moved in to transform the

By Neil Harvey

pitch into an all-weather surface in time for the start of the new season.

And it's become a race against time as the club's involvement in the end-of-season play-offs meant a two-week delay in the work being started.

As a result, Bedford

will not be able to host a home pre-season game this summer and may suffer a disruption to their new Southern Premier Central campaign after winning promotion from Step 4 last month.

This development will run in tandem with several other improvements to the

facilities at the New Eyrrie, including the installation of new LED floodlighting.

"This is great news for the club," said chairman Adrian Brown. "A massive thank you to the owners and investors for making this hugely significant investment into the club.

"Although all those involved in the running and guardianship of the club

thought long and hard about moving away from grass, the implementation of this exceptional quality surface will enhance the development of the club and all those affiliated with it, along with providing access to the club for the local community.

"The certainty a playing surface like this gives on a weekly basis is critical to clubs in the Non-League pyramid."



WHERE EAGLES DARE: Eyrrie the Eagle gets stuck into the big job

PICTURE: Bedford Town

# DONN'S GONNA DO IT ALL AGAIN

**SCOTT Donnelly admits it took time away from football to help him rediscover his love for the game – now he's aiming to make it big once again as a manager.**

Donnelly, 36, enjoyed a glittering 20-year playing career which took him all the way to the Championship with boyhood club QPR and Swansea City, before taking in promotion winning campaigns with Aldershot Town and Wycombe Wanderers, right.

Now, he is looking to make his mark once again, this time from the manager's hotseat after being handed his first boss' job at Southern League new boys Northwood.

But the route in management was no smooth transition for the Hammer-smith-born midfielder, who opted

By Jon Couch

to take 18 months out from the game after a brief spell at Hayes & Yeading before starting his coaching career at then-Step 5 side Rayners Lane last season.

## Ideology

"When I retired, I felt I just needed to take a backward step and recuperate," Donnelly, who also enjoyed a glittering Non-League career with the likes of Farnborough and Havant, told *The NLP*. "Twenty years of playing took its toll.

"So I had a bit of time away from football and didn't really go to watch any games.

"But last year, I decided to go to watch a lot more games and ended up doing a bit of

coaching at Rayners Lane for a short time.

"A few jobs came up that I applied for, but then I got a phone call from (Lane boss) Gary Meakin about Northwood. I spoke to the secretary, had a really good chat with the owner and next thing I know they've offered me the job.

"It all happened really quickly, but I jumped at the chance. Management is something I'd always wanted to do and I think it's something I can be successful at."

As a rookie boss, Donnelly arrives at the Skyline Stadium with a fresh ideology, but has the benefit of a wealth of experienced heads to use wisely.

"I played for plenty of managers, and I'll probably take something from every one of them," Donnelly added.

"Whether it's the coaching element, training sessions, man-management, I have learned a lot from each one, but Gary Waddock, Paul

Hughes at Hayes & Yeading and Gary Meakin were three in particular that really influenced me.

"I want to play a very attacking style first and foremost – but it has to be winning football, of course.

"As a player, I was more technical than I was physical and I'll be looking to implement that in an attacking sense but with that Plan B of knowing that winning is the most important thing, whatever it takes.

## Clean slate

"If I can get the characters and players I'm targeting at the moment then I feel it will give us a good platform to be competitive next season."

Donnelly has inherited a Woods side who finished mid-table in Isthmian South Central last season, but a switch to the Southern League Division One Central has moved the goalposts for the

north-west London club, especially given the departure of manager Ben Bukowski to Harrow Borough, taking his staff and a number of first-team players with him.

For Donnelly, it's a blank canvas and the new boss is relishing the prospect of piecing together a new-look squad.

"My phone hasn't stopped ringing," he added. "But every player still here from last season, I want to come back for pre-season. It's a clean slate for me and a clean slate for them.

"It's going to be a tough few weeks in pre-season, a lot of new faces, but the aim is, come the first week of August, to make sure we have a good core for the long-term.

"The standard is there and the expectation is too. I've just got to go in now and trust the way that I play and my ability to coach players into being better ones, and hopefully see them progress with us."



# Chris DUNLAVY

A FRESH TAKE ON FOOTBALL

## THINGS CAN GET UGG-LY! KEEP SPATS PRIVATE

**I**S IT cowardly for the owner of a football club to shy from the limelight? Or simply a sensible precaution?

Dai Yongge, the Chinese supermarket tycoon who bought Reading in 2017, boasts a £600m fortune and owns a Westminster mansion across the road from Buckingham Palace.

Yet earlier this year, staff at the League One side's Bearwood Park training ground found themselves working in freezing offices because the club couldn't afford to pay heating bills. Several would later lose their jobs.

Yongge kept resolutely schtum, just as he did when wages turned up late, tax bills went unpaid, and points were docked by the EFL.

This juxtaposition of headline hardship and vast personal wealth made Yongge's silence completely unacceptable, and justified the on-pitch protests that marred several of Reading's League One fixtures. He was bang out of order and cowardly to the core.

Equally, though, there are times when transparency is counterproductive. Back in October, Accrington Stanley owner Andy Holt reacted furiously to a radio interview given by the club's assistant manager Jimmy Bell during which he had agitated for a new contract.

Taking to Twitter late on a Saturday evening, Holt lobbed a verbal cluster bomb that cleaned out both Bell and wily manager John Coleman, most of the playing squad, the club's supporters and even himself.

It was heartfelt, passionate and brutally honest, but it also exposed simmering tensions at the core of the club and nobody

was remotely surprised when Accrington's play-off challenge subsequently collapsed.

Engagement is a nuanced affair. Say too little and you risk alienating supporters. Say too much and you risk jeopardising relationships, getting dragged into arguments or making yourself look foolish.

York City owner Matt Uggla certainly falls into the second category. A digital native, the 30-year-old communicates primarily through social media, and taps out plenty of positive stuff. Praise for staff and players, promotion of local businesses, support for charitable causes.

### Trigger happy

But a recent spat with Scarborough Athletic manager Jonathan Greening illustrated the perils of living online.

Uggla announced the signing of Harrison Male from Dorking Wanderers. Greening, a former York player, questioned the new goalkeeper's quality.

The resulting skirmish then got very silly and personal, and several clown emojis later culminated in Uggla refusing to do business with Scarborough ever again. Naturally, the whole thing went viral.

Was Greening's jibe unnecessary? Absolutely. But so was Uggla's response, which served only to sour relations with a neighbouring club and antagonise Greening into claiming that York's players "hate" their owner.

True or not, mud sticks. After a bruising stint at Yeovil Town and an underwhelming first year at York, Uggla

has much to prove and does not need that sort of question mark hovering above his reputation.

Likewise, if you were the owner of a rival football club, an agent, or a sponsor, would you be keen to do business with a trigger happy tweet merchant who might just broadcast his every grievance to the world?

During an extensive interview this week, Uggla spoke sensibly of learning from the mistakes made during a campaign that saw York evade relegation from the National League by the narrowest of margins, and promised a more measured approach to recruitment.

It would be wise to treat social media with the same reserve. The marketing orthodoxy that says one bad review is worth 40 good ones also applies to tweets.

It doesn't take much to shred a reputation and if this is how Uggla reacts to one tongue-in-cheek jibe, then what will happen if – as is entirely possible – York's entire fanbase gets the hump?

Nobody wants an absentee like Yongge, perched silently in a distant ivory tower. But as Holt proved, speaking impulsively can be just as damaging. The best owners are those who think first, speak second, and understand when to maintain a dignified silence.

**THE X FACTOR:** Goalkeeper Harrison Male was the subject of a social media spat between York chief Matt Uggla and Scarborough boss Jonathan Greening

PICTURE: Alamy

## IT'S THE BELIEF WHICH MAKES A WINNER

LIKE snus pouches and holey socks, the word 'process' has become a maddeningly familiar part of the modern game.

Last 8-0? Trust the process. One shot in six months? Trust the process. Lawn mower been nicked? Don't worry, trust the process.

There's nothing wrong with having a strategy, of course. We all remember when England would turn up at a major tournament, thump the ball towards Wayne Rooney and hope for the best. Pep Guardiola won four consecutive Premier League titles using his process, so it would be foolish not to trust that.

But as Andy Drury explains in this week's Good, Bad & Ugly feature (see pages 16-17), football is always about winning.

You don't get marks for showing your workings. You don't get prizes for style. If you don't win matches and you don't collect trophies, your process is worthless.

So many managers have stumbled down this blind alley, numbly jabbering about the process whilst results nosedive, gates crash and supporters jeer, seemingly unable to comprehend that ticking every box in the coaching manual does not guarantee success.

Nothing does, of course. But building a good squad of players with a win-at-all-costs mentality beats any process all ends up. Just look at Real Madrid, the most successful – and at times ramshackle – club team in history. Or the endurance of Neil Warnock.

In ten years' time, we will probably view the current process obsession with the same mirthful contempt reserved for skimpy 80s shirts or that daft smear of Vicks.

But one thing will never change. Those who prioritise winning will prosper. Those who lose sight of that objective will fail.



# BIG INTERVIEW: RONNIE HENRY

# A FATHER & SON THE DREAM END

By **CHRIS DUNLAVY**

**R**IVALDO did it. Henrik Larsson too. Now Ronnie Henry is hoping to join a select group of footballing dads to share a pitch with their kids.

The 40-year-old defender joined Potters Bar Town last week after being inspired by watching his son Louie playing on loan for the Isthmian Premier side last season.

Louie, 16, has now returned to parent club Stevenage but Henry – who works as a full-time development coach at Boro – says talks over a return are already underway.

“If Louie did come back on loan and I got the chance to play with him that would be unbelievable,” said Henry.

“If it happens, it happens. If it doesn’t, it doesn’t. He’s going back to Stevenage and they’ll decide what sort of experience he needs.

“But it’s a realistic possibility and if it does happen then I think it would be unforgettable for both of us. It’s something I never dreamed would happen.”

Louie is actually the third footballing Henry off the production line. Great grandfather Ron, a left-back like Louie, was a member of the famous Tottenham side that won the Double under Bill Nicholson in 1961. He also earned one cap for England and won the European Cup Winners’ Cup in 1963.

Henry himself bounced back from rejection by Spurs to become a legendary figure at Stevenage, where he won the National League title in 2010, promotion to League One a year later and racked up a club-record 502 appearances across two spells.

In 2014, he captained the Luton side that overcame five years of pain



**SERIAL WINNER:** Ronnie Henry lifts the National League trophy with Luton Town, left, and celebrates winning promotion into League One with Stevenage, right



and frustration to regain their place in the EFL under John Still, below.

Ron’s medals and tales of past glories were a huge influence on Henry’s decision to become a footballer and he believes family history has also given Louie a head start in his own burgeoning career.

### Aggressive

“Louie’s doing really well,” says Henry, who joined the staff at Stevenage following his retirement from full-time football in 2019.

“He’s going into his second year at Stevenage. He’s done really well in his first. To go out as a 16-year-old and play at Step 3 is not easy but he’s thrived off it.

“He’s not physically big but he’s quick, he’s strong, he’s aggressive. And being in this family, he’s been around football his whole

life. He just knows what it’s about, doesn’t he?”

“He’s too young to remember my grandad really, but he’s watched me, and the ups and downs that I’ve had over the years. He knows the mentality you need to go out there and perform and he’s got that in abundance, which is why he did well here.”

Henry Snr has been performing for more than two decades, his debut coming on loan at Southend in early 2003, when broadband was still an expensive luxury and smartphones the stuff of sci-fi fantasy.

The last five years have been spent back in part-time football, first with Billericay and most recently at Royston prior to his unexpected switch to the Lantern Stadium.

“Watching Louie played a huge part,” explains Henry. “If he didn’t come here, I wouldn’t be at Potters Bar now. He can’t drive yet, obviously, so I took him along when I wasn’t playing for Royston and ended up watching a couple of games.

“I’d watched them train, got to know some of the players. Obviously we also had the links with (manager) Max

Mitchell through the loan players we’ve sent there, so it all just kind of lined up.”

In a farewell message to Henry, Royston manager Chris Watters urged Henry to enjoy his “last season”, but the ever-green defender isn’t ready to declare quite yet.

“I’m still playing well,” he says. “I still feel fit. At the start of last season I had every intention of retiring, of going elsewhere and doing new things. My wife would certainly like me to give up and spend a few more weekends with her!

“But I got player of the year for Royston, enjoyed myself, and actually got a good few offers at the end of the season. So who knows?”

### Camaraderie

“Playing football’s all I’ve ever done. I still enjoy the buzz of winning. I still enjoy all the ups and downs. Touch wood, I’ve stayed fit and played 35-40 games practically every season of my career. The camaraderie and the banter keeps me young.

“I’ve spoken to many, many

people in football and every single one of them has said ‘Keep going while you can’.

“I’m not stupid. I’ll know when it’s enough. But the last couple of seasons at Royston went really well, and dovetailed perfectly with my Under-18s job at Stevenage. Life’s good – and I can’t wait to get going again.”

Not every player can seamlessly glide down the pyramid. George Boyd, who played alongside Henry at Stevenage as a teenager before becoming a Premier League regular with Burnley, joined League Two Salford in 2021 but retired a year later after growing frustrated at the dip in quality.

How has Henry – who played a full season in League One in 2011-12 – maintained his enthusiasm? “I found it difficult at the start,” he admits. “I retired from full-time football at 35, and I went straight to Billericay.

“No disrespect to the players there, but they aren’t as good. Don’t get me wrong, there are still some talented guys at that level but it’s not their full-time job. It’s not their priority, so the professionalism is very different to a pro club.



**LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON:** Louie Henry signs for Stevenage



# REVEALS HIS FINAL CAREER AIM

# TEAM IS FOR ME



"It took me a long time to understand that and really get to grips with it, but I'm at a stage now where I just think 'You know what? If they turn up and they do the best they can then that's all anyone can ask'.

## Scrutiny

"Listen, I still don't accept any mediocre stuff. I still expect everything to be right and that's probably why I'm still here.

"Once I start accepting second-best and players not doing things properly, that's when it's time to give up.

"That's why Potters Bar took me on, to raise standards and drive people along because that's what I've done all my career."

Naturally, being a former professional in a Step 3 side brings added scrutiny, both in the dressing room and from the stands, but Henry has no worries about dealing with raised expectations.

"Pressure's good," he insists. "I look back at my career and there can't really be any more difficult task than what happened at Luton.

"Getting them promoted

back to the EFL after however many years in the National League – that's pressure.

"I came through that, so Potters Bar is nothing. I'll put pressure on myself because I have high standards, but I'm absolutely confident I'll leave the club in a better place than it is now.

"That's what I promised Royston three years ago. I said I'd work hard, play in as many games as I could and drive everyone on and that's exactly what I did.

"Right now, I'm not looking too far ahead. But one of the reasons I came here was the ambition of Max and the club.

"It's a little bit of a project, they're looking to push the club forward and I'd like to think we'll be fighting at the right end of the table.

"Play-offs are the aim, and promotion would be lovely. But words don't win anything, do they? We've got to do it on the pitch."



**FAMILY AFFAIR:** Ronnie Henry and son Louie after Stevenage won the Conference title in 2009-10

PICTURE: Alamy

# NATIONAL LEAGUE NEWS

## CONN MAN SHOWS HE'S REAL DEAL...

CHRIS Conn-Clarke has added to his burgeoning reputation by being named the National League Player of the Year.

The Altrincham attacking midfielder had already been named the Sportsbeat Young Player of the Year at our National Games Awards last month.

When the National League held their annual Gala Awards Evening at Celtic Manor last weekend, the 22-year-old picked up his new prize.

The highly-rated Northern Irishman bagged 22 goals for the Robins last term as they reached the play-offs.

In National League South, it was no great surprise that Worthing hot-shot Ollie Pearce took the player accolade. He netted 46 goals across all competitions and has since earned a move to top-flight York City.

South Shields' Paul Blackett was rewarded for his 30-goal season with the National League North player award.

The Manager of the Year honours were claimed by the title winners, with Chesterfield's Paul Cook (National League), Yeovil Town's Mark Cooper (National League South) and Tamworth's Andy Peaks (National League North) holding sway.

The winners of the Programme of the Year and Fair Play Award were confirmed at the annual meeting earlier in the day.

Programme winners were Rochdale (National), St Albans City (South) and Boston United (North).

Fair Play awards went to Southend United (National), Bath City (South) and Blyth Spartans (North).

## Marriott in, but Knowles goes

NATIONAL League newcomers Boston United have snapped up experienced striker Adam Marriott from Bromley.

The 33-year-old will officially link up with the Pilgrims on July 1 upon the expiry of his contract with the EFL-bound Ravens.

It will be his third stint with the Pilgrims. He played for the club in 2018 and also had a loan spell last term.

Manager Ian Culverhouse will be hoping that Marriott's arrival can go some way to make up for the loss of last season's top scorer Jimmy Knowles, 22, who has joined Accrington Stanley on a two-year deal. He links up with his former Pilgrims teammate Kelsey Mooney at the Wham Stadium.

## LEADER JOHN JOINS FLEET

EXPERIENCED defender Louis John is relishing the chance to show what he can do at Ebbsfleet United.

The 30-year-old centre-back has joined Danny Searle's Fleet squad from Sutton United, who dropped out of the Football League last term.

He had played well over 200 games for the U's in two permanent spells plus two loans, helping the club climb from National League South to the EFL. He also previously played for Cambridge United.

The former Ebbsfleet loanee told Fleet-TV: "I like to think I'm a leader and can set an example from the back, dominant in the air too, but most of all I like to keep that ball out of the back of the net."

# JIMMY'S JOY AT TARRYN CAPTURE



**ROCHDALE boss Jimmy McNulty says he is delighted to have beaten**

**off tough competition to land highly sought-after winger Tarryn Allarakhia.**

The Tanzanian international joined Dale on a two-year contract on Monday after rejecting "a very competitive new deal" to stay at Wealdstone.

Allarakhia, 26, established himself as a fans' favourite at Grosvenor Vale after making 76 appearances for the Stones in two seasons.

In January, he made his senior international debut for Tanzania, against Egypt – and Mo Salah – in a friendly, before being selected for the Africa Cup of Nations, as the Taifa Stars narrowly missed out on advancing to the knockout stages.

"We are delighted to have secured the signature of Tarryn," McNulty said of the former Leyton Orient trainee, who arrived at Wealdstone via spells at Maldon & Tiptree, Colchester United, Crawley Town and Woking.

"He has been a highly sought-after man this summer who has decided to join

**By Tom Blackett**

us, despite other clubs pursuing him seriously hard, which is a good sign of his commitment and excitement towards what we're striving to build.

"Tarryn is a versatile attacking player who can operate wide or inside. He has displayed many high-quality moments and can be a real difference-maker in games.

### Evidence

"Alongside that, and perhaps most important to me, is the evidence in his last two seasons that he is willing to work hard for his team without the ball, which he displayed in his time playing wing-back for Wealdstone, whilst still bringing those attacking qualities to his performances.

"He's a player who we believe is arriving at a good stage in his career, and we are delighted he has committed to that stage with ourselves."

Wealdstone expressed their disappointment at losing Allarakhia on social media – but new manager Matt Taylor wasted no time in signing a replacement after

capturing Enzo Boldewijn from Eastleigh.

Boldewijn, 31, once cost Notts County a six-figure sum, from Crawley Town, and helped the Magpies win promotion from the National League.

Since then, he has turned out for Sutton United and Eastleigh and has scored more than 40 career goals in 277 league appearances.

The Dutchman joins on a one-year deal, with the option of a further year, and becomes the Stones' second signing of the summer, following on from the capture of defender Deon Woodman.

"I am extremely pleased that we have managed to secure the signature of Enzo Boldewijn," Taylor said.

"I would like to thank the supporters and the board for their help in bringing Enzo to the football club.

"I know our fans will love watching him play, he's a player that has a huge appetite to score goals and we fought off tough competition to get him."

## SORRY STONES GET STRICTER WITH

WEALDSTONE will only allow season ticket holders to buy tickets for derby dates at Barnet after being hit with a £3,000 fine over last season's crowd trouble.

The Stones were also warned as to future conduct and must publish the

**By Andy Mitchell**

verdict "on all of its social media channels" as well as announcing it before the start of the club's next competitive home match.

It follows on from problems at February's derby

clash between the arch rivals at The Hive which saw the referee hit on the shoulder by a lit pyrotechnic and a steward struck as he tried to deal with a pitch invader when Wealdstone grabbed a last-ditch equaliser to draw 1-1.

The actions were swiftly condemned in a club statement and while an FA Regulatory Commission accepted some of the mitigation, it categorised Wealdstone's breach of the rules as "gross negligence" with particular reference to "very serious

deficiencies in planning generally for this match".

It was noted that two people had been charged – one as a result of encroaching onto the pitch, the other for common assault – and that neither person was known to have attended a Weald-





**WINGING IT:** Tarryn Allarakhia has left Wealdstone for Rochdale and, inset, playing for Tanzania, right, against Morocco  
 PICTURE: Alamy



## THEIR AWAY TICKETS

stone home fixture last season.

Referencing “clear lessons” learned, the written reasons state “it is proposed that Wealdstone FC control the sale of tickets to away supporters and away tickets will be sold only to season

ticket holders”. Chairman Rory Fitzgerald confirmed the measure, stating the club “can’t afford to have non-Wealdstone fans attending and damaging the club’s reputation”.

He added: “As a result, those individuals who have

been found guilty are also banned indefinitely from Grosvenor Vale.

“We will also work with the officials at Barnet in the build up to our fixtures next season to minimise the risk of incidents like these happening again.”



**MIDFIELDER** Mark Shelton is determined to take new club Barnet back into the Football League.

The 27-year-old joins the Bees having spent the previous season and a half at fellow National League side Oldham Athletic. He made 35 league appearances for the Latics, scoring twice.

“I’m really happy to get a deal over the line,” said the former Hartlepool United man. “I’ve spoken to the gaffer (Dean Brennan) a few times and his enthusiasm for me joining was a major factor in my decision.”

“Barnet had a brilliant campaign last season and I want to play my part in getting the club back into the Football League.”

## INIHI INSPIRED BY BOSS ANGE



**NEW** Braintree Town forward Inih Effiong says he was inspired to join the National League new-boys by the ambition of manager Angelo Harrop.

The 33-year-old powerhouse enjoyed an impressive campaign at Dagenham & Redbridge last season, scoring 16 times in the league, and freely admits he did not envisage a move to Crossing Road being on the cards.

“Before meeting Ange, I wouldn’t have said I’d end up at Braintree,” said Effiong.

“But I always give people the time of day and listen to what they have to say.

“I met Ange and I was just blown away by his ambition for the club. I wanted to be a part of it.”

## Barrett buzzes with Saddlers



**AFC FYLDE** full-back Connor Barrett has sealed a dream move to the Football League by signing a three-year deal with League Two side Walsall.

The 22-year-old scored seven goals and registered 17 assists in two seasons at Mill Farm and also won the National League North title in 2022-23.

“I’m buzzing to be here,” said Barrett, who will join the Saddlers when his contract expires at the end of the month. “Everything is positive and I just want to kick on.”

Fylde are due compensation as Barrett is under 24.

A statement on the Walsall website said the two clubs remain “in dialogue”.

## AARON’S JUST ACE FOR TOWN



**YEOVIL** Town are celebrating after fighting off stiff competition to sign striker Aaron Jarvis from Torquay.

League Two side Cheltenham were reportedly on the tail of the 26-year-old striker, who spent time in the EFL with Luton and Scunthorpe and also played for Falkirk in the Scottish Championship.

Jarvis joined Torquay in 2022 and scored 15 National League goals as the Gulls were relegated under Gary Johnson.

Injuries restricted him to just 19 appearances in National League South last term but he has now returned to the top-flight after signing a two-year deal at Huish Park.

## Paul goes from Don to Dagger



**PAUL** Kalambayi has joined Dagenham & Redbridge following his release by League Two side AFC Wimbledon.

The 24-year-old defender came through the ranks at Plough Lane and made his debut as an 18-year-old in the 2017-18 season.

Serious ankle and knee injuries hampered his progress thereafter but he left the Dons having made a total of 88 EFL appearances, scoring once.

Central defender Kalambayi is manager Ben Strevens’ seventh signing of a busy summer, following in the footsteps of Dylan Stephenson, Dion Pereira, Trent Rendall, Oscar Rutherford, Josh Umerah and Reece Grego-Cox.

# NATIONAL LEAGUE - STEP 2 NEWS



SIDELINED: Martin Smith

## HORROR INJURY FORCES SHIELDS ACE OUT

By Mark Carruthers

SOUTH Shields have revealed that fans' favourite Martin Smith will be out of action for "a number of months" after suffering a fractured skull during an accident in hospital.

The former Sunderland and Hartlepool United midfielder underwent a successful hernia operation at a hospital in Middlesbrough last week but sustained a skull injury and a bleed on the brain following a fall.

The National League North Mariners have confirmed Smith has now been discharged from hospital and expect him to make a full recovery.

A club statement read: "South Shields Football Club would like to issue an update on Martin Smith following an accident last week. Smith had a planned hernia operation at Nuffield Health in Middlesbrough.

"The surgery was a success, however whilst in hospital, he had a serious fall and was transferred to James Cook Hospital.

"Sadly, he had suffered a fractured skull and a bleed of the brain. Martin has since spent a number of days in hospital and thankfully has now been discharged.

"Given the circumstances, the midfielder will be ruled out for a number of months but will make a full recovery. "The club will issue further updates appropriately."

Several of Smith's Mariners teammates showed their support for the midfielder on social media as club captain Robert Briggs posted 'Rest up my mate' and top goalscorer Paul Blackett said 'One of the best, get well soon my mate'.

Former South Shields striker Ntumba Massanka also posted: "Speedy recovery Smudge, awful news."

## PREECE HAS A KOLE-DEN BOY



ANDY Preece reckons he has found the perfect fit for his Chorley side in the shape of new signing Kole Hall.

Bermudan international Hall has linked up with the Magpies following his release by Chester.

The 25-year-old had spells with City of Liverpool, Radcliffe, AFC Telford United, Altrincham and Nantwich Town before joining the Seals in the summer of 2022.

"Kole is a player I've come up against a number of times and was someone I wanted to work with," Preece said.

"He has all the attributes to be a top striker, we just need to help him put it all together. He's a hungry lad who fits our profile."

## Campbell can be a perfect Pic



RUSHALL Olympic boss Adam Stevens reckons Hayden Campbell has all the attributes to be a hit at Dales Lane.

Midfielder Campbell became Stevens' fourth summer signing after arriving from Curzon Ashton.

Campbell featured 25 times for the Nash last season, scoring twice and featuring in their play-off semi-final defeat to Chorley.

"I'm delighted that Hayden has agreed to join us," Stevens said of the former Port Vale, Salford City and Marine ace. "He is a talented footballer who fits the profile of young and hungry with good experience at our level.

"We're excited to get this deal over the line; I am looking forward to working with him."

## HIT CARVER IS BACK AT PORT



TOP marksman Marcus Carver has turned down a number of offers to make a popular return to Southport.

Carver, 30, arrives for a **FOURTH** spell at Haig Avenue having first joined Port from Chorley in 2020.

He then rejoined on a season-long loan from Scunthorpe United in September 2022 and then returned again last season.

In total, Carver has 35 goals for the Port and is now looking to add to that tally having joined Jim Bentley's men on a permanent deal.

Carver tweeted: "(I'm) delighted to be back somewhere where I am appreciated and loved - can't wait to get going."

## Mariners reel in top Irish pair



NEWLY promoted Marine have strengthened their squad for their first ever Step 2 campaign with a double Irish swoop.

Mariners boss Neil Young snapped up midfielder Leigh Whelan following his departure from Guiseley - and then followed that up with the capture of his Lions teammate Kallan Murphy.

Whelan started his youth career in England with Chesterfield after making the trip across the Irish sea alongside Murphy.

"Marine are a club on the up and we want to try help it stay that way," Whelan said. "I'm really looking forward to meeting all the lads and getting going in pre-season. I think it's a good fit."

# SCOTT HAS NEW GEMS



TOP TALENT: David Kamara has completed a big move to Peterborough United, at just 18

PICTURE: Peterborough United FC

## KAM'S MAKING NOISE!



YOUNG gun David Kamara only had one thing on his mind after landing a dream professional contract with Peterborough United - apologising to the neighbours!

The 18-year-old starlet landed a two-year deal with League One Posh after enjoying an impressive breakthrough season with National League South club Welling United.

Kamara came through a successful trial at London Road and will initially join up with Posh's Under-21 set-up - a notorious hotbed for Non-League talent.

And the Wings scholar joked that the celebrations of the Kamara family almost forced him to take grovelling action.

"It was great to be at the training ground with my family,

they have really helped me," the teenage striker told Posh TV.

"When I told my Mum that I had been offered a deal, she just started screaming. I was like 'Mum, the neighbours!' She was obviously very happy for me.

"The minute I walked in the door, I felt comfortable. The rest of the players made me feel welcome and the coaches have been great with me.

"I think it can be a bit of a cliché, but the hard work starts now for me. The coaches at Welling said that and it is true, making your debut or scoring your first goal is obviously a great moment, but it is what comes next.

"I am looking forward to coming back for pre-season and trying to impress.

"I had some great times at Welling, scoring my first goal was

something I will never forget, it didn't feel real."

Kamara's memorable breakthrough season in senior football for the Wings saw him score against National League title winners Chesterfield in the FA Trophy, as well as goals against Havant & Waterlooville and Hemel Hempstead Town in the league.

Peterborough's academy manager Dan Robinson said: "David had been watched numerous times playing for Welling United. "He was rated as one of the best prospects in Non-League football.

"As a club, we are always looking for talent at that level so we brought him on trial, he did well with us and, off the back of that, we have offered him a contract and he will go into our Under-21s programme as a future prospect."

# BROUGHT TO REBELS

## Davies looking to next batch

By Matthew Nash

**SLOUGH** Town boss Scott Davies reckons competing in National League South becomes tougher each season but believes he is uncovering more 'hidden gems' to replace the old guard.

The Rebels have lost five key players this summer following their tenth-place finish at Step 2, including winger Johnny Goddard who has joined full-time, newly-relegated Boreham Wood.

However, he has landed the likes of former Hanwell Town striker Sam Evans and ex-Walton & Hershaw attacker John Gilbert, underlining his desire to progress by shopping at lower levels without breaking the bank.

The Arbour Park player-manager said: "I want to find the hidden gems in the three levels below us. You just have to find the right ones and it is only a big step if you don't have the right squad around you."

"I don't know whether some lads are playing below themselves lower down or maybe even some at Step 1 are playing above themselves."

"We're now in exactly the same situation we



**HIDDEN GEMS:** Slough Town manager Scott Davies has been hard at work

were in a year ago with a lot of unknowns coming into the group. A year ago, after one win in our first seven games, I was alarmed but we found our rhythm by Christmas.

"We're not seen as the big boys and we don't have big-name players but guys will come here for the squad and the set-up and the great facilities we can offer. We will never throw money at it."

### Lease

Davies, the ex-Aldershot Town and Crawley Town midfielder, admits that while he expected to lose some of the players who had propelled his men to go close to a play-off place, he feels he has been able to recruit successfully in return.

Slough's future plans, meanwhile, have been boosted by the announcement of a 50-year lease on their home ground, securing their long-term future.

"I thought we'd have a bit of interest and I knew these guys wouldn't leave

for an extra £150 a week somewhere - they have gone for significant increases and three have doubled their money," he added.

"I suppose it's better to lose five players to bigger clubs than to have to release five because they're not good enough. We have signed players we wouldn't have got in unless those five had gone on to bigger and better things."

### Landscape

"I wanted John Gilbert, he's someone I have liked for a long time, and when Johnny Goddard was about to leave to go full-time, I wanted to get him in from Walton & Hershaw."

Davies, whose side return on June 29 for pre-season training, paints a picture of a transfer landscape inflated by the cash being spent by teams lower down the pyramid.

Isthmian Premier Division champions Hornchurch are expected to raise the bar again having

landed goalkeeper Mason Terry on loan from West Ham, Angelo Balanta from Boreham Wood, Jazz Barnum-Bobb from Chelmsford City, and Ebbsfleet winger Darren McQueen this week.

"There is a real battle between Step 2 and Step 3 and the clubs in that division who are paying out more money now," says the 35-year-old. "Money talks but do you want to go somewhere for that or for the level?"

"It's a recurring conversation I'm having with other managers at Step 2 and the money around for players lower down definitely makes our job more difficult."

"This is the best National League South I've known and I have been in it for ten years. It's getting harder by the year, just look at the signings Hornchurch have made."

"Look at the size of the clubs and the attendances they are getting. I now think that Step 2 is the first proper level of semi-pro football in this country."

## BEAVERS BAG ACE ROBERTS



HAMPTON & Richmond Borough boss Alan Julian has continued his summer recruitment drive by bringing in talented winger James Roberts.

The 27-year-old arrives after three years at Havant & Waterlooville and spent a brief loan spell at the Beveree back in 2021-22.

Roberts started his career at Oxford United and has since turned out for the likes of Halesowen Town, Hereford, Spennymoor Town and Oxford City.

Roberts said: "I'm delighted to be here and I can't wait to get started. I was very excited to get the call from Alan and to hear the kind of team he is building."

## URCHINS PARADE A QUARTET



HORNCHURCH boss Daryl McMahon has made a huge statement of intent by completing an impressive quartet of signings.

The former Dagenham & Redbridge boss is leading the Urchins' charge at Step 2 next season following their Isthmian Premier Division title success last season.

And he's already raised eyebrows this week by snapping up his former Dagenham front men Angelo Balanta and Darren McQueen, while defender Jazz Barnum-Bobb and goalkeeper Mason Terry have also signed.

McQueen, a former England C winger, arrives from another of McMahon's former clubs, Ebbsfleet United, via Sutton United and Dartford, while former QPR wide man Balanta has been drafted in from Boreham Wood, via spells at Wycombe Wanderers, MK Dons and Yeovil Town.

Full-back Barnum-Bobb helped Chelmsford City to finish second in National League South last year, while goalkeeper Terry arrives on a season-long loan from West Ham United.

## Brookes swaps City for Stones



LYNCHPIN Ben Brookes has turned down a new deal at Chelmsford City to go full-time with promotion hopefuls Maidstone United.

The 23-year-old, who can play in defence or midfield, arrives at the Gallagher after 18 months with the Clarets.

Brookes played 50 games as the Clarets finished second in the division last season, only to lose out to eventual promotion-winners Braintree Town in the play-off semi-finals.

Chelmsford, meanwhile, have snapped up highly-rated goalkeeper Ted Collins.

The 21-year-old has played for Colchester United's first team and has also picked up experience on loan at the likes of Holland FC, Potters Bar Town and Maldon & Tiptree.

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## SMART BUSINESS FOR BORO



FARNBOROUGH boss Spencer Day has gone Smart in landing his latest summer recruit.

The Boro chief has sealed the signing of 25-year-old winger Sam Smart after just having won promotion from National League North with Boston United last season.

Hampshire boy Smart made his name at Basingstoke Town,

where he was picked up by Eastleigh.

Further top-flight experience came at FC Halifax Town and Dagenham & Redbridge, before he spent time in the North with Brackley Town, Buxton and Boston United.

Smart said: "The gaffer (Day) has wanted me for a while now. Every time it's sort of not happened and I'm happy to be here."

"I just want to get back to enjoying football and I feel like I can definitely do that here."

Boro boss Day said: "It's been a long time coming. I've long been an admirer of Sam who's always been a thorn in my teams, so I'm delighted after many years trying to get him into a Boro shirt!"

"Despite only being 25, he has many years experience in the National Leagues."

# THE GOOD, THE BAD AND



By CHRIS DUNLAVY

**W**HEN Andy Drury left Stevenage just a month after winning the National League title in 2010, he thought his chance to play in the EFL had gone.

Yet within a year, a series of inspirational performances for Luton had earned the winger a fairytale £150,000 switch to Championship side Ipswich.

"It may not be a signing that gets the fans off their seats," admitted then Ipswich boss Paul Jewell. "But you can't dismiss the level of talent in Non-League."

Drury instantly proved him right, consigning the likes of Jimmy Bullard and Lee Bowyer to the bench and racking up 62 appearances in two seasons at Portman Road.

After spells at Crawley and Luton, the 40-year-old returned to his Non-League roots with Eastleigh in 2015 and is now the player-manager of Isthmian Premier Division side Folkestone Invicta.

Here, Drury remembers the intimidating figures he encountered on his arrival at Ipswich, explains the importance of his grounding at Sittingbourne and reveals which Premier League cult hero is the most skilful player he's ever met...

**FIRST CLUB**

**Sittingbourne.** Everyone's been through an academy these days, but it was different then. I just went up through the youth teams and made my debut at about 17.

It was a great grounding. You're playing with people who are fighting to win because winning is what pays the mortgage. If you don't do the same, you won't survive. It toughens you up, and instils the importance of playing to win.

There isn't enough of that now. You go to academies and there's nowhere near enough emphasis on winning.

You hear talk about people still being youngsters at 23, 24 and that's not really the case. If you're any good, you should be playing men's football by 20 or 21, and your focus should be on winning matches, not just improving your game. I learned that lesson very young, and it was the basis for my entire career.

**BEST MANAGER**

**Mick McCarthy** at Ipswich. He was a really nice bloke actually. He never lost his temper, but he didn't need to – he had an aura about him that kept everyone on their toes.

He was really, really honest. He was demanding, but not unreasonable. Nobody ever wanted to let Mick down, not because you were afraid of him but because you didn't want to



# TOWN'S PROUD JEWELL IN THE CROWN



disappoint him. Again, that was just the aura of the man.

He used to take some stick for his style of play but his results speak for themselves. Ipswich didn't have a big budget for the Championship but Mick made the play-offs one year and always kept them around mid-table. As soon as he left, they went down, which I think tells you everything about how much he overachieved.

**BEST TEAMMATE**

I've played with some big names. People like Jimmy Bullard and Lee Bowyer. But the one that stands out is Georgi Kinkladze, the old Manchester City forward.

I was on trial at Derby and I played a couple of games for the reserves. Kinkladze had been frozen out for some reason, so he played with us.

He was just unbelievable. The ball would get fired into him and he'd stop it dead, turn and dribble past people like they weren't there.

It was strange to watch. He wasn't big, or strong or quick. But he'd start dribbling and before you knew what had happened he was past you and gone. It was a bit like Messi in that sense – not as good, obviously, but a very similar style of play. He'd be a lot more highly-rated in this day and age.



'UNBELIEVABLE': Georgi Kinkladze, centre, was 'Messi like'

**FIRST PROMOTION**

With Lewes, under Steve King in 2008. I was about 22 or 23, I think. I'd gone from Sittingbourne to Gravesend & Northfleet, then dropped down to Conference South with Lewes.

We had a really good team, to be fair. Kingy had basically built a new squad the previous season.

We'd finished eighth, he added two or three – people like Jay Conroy and Anthony Barness – and we won the title pretty comfortably.

It was one of the most enjoyable seasons of my whole career. You're young, you're having fun, we had a close-knit

# THE UGLY: ANDY DRURY

**GOLDEN BOY:** Andy Drury wheels away after scoring for Stevenage in the 2010 FA Trophy final against Barrow at Wembley

PICTURE: Alamy



**Funniest player – Jimmy Bullard**



**Biggest Achievement – Ipswich Town days**



difficult. It was a month after Roy Keane left and you had some big characters in that dressing room. Damien Delaney, Grant Leadbitter, Gareth McAuley, Lee Bowyer – top-flight players and internationals.

The standard of training was much, much higher. You had to be on it for every passing drill. You couldn't muck up a session. But I earned my shirt.

**LOWEST MOMENT**

Probably being sacked in my first real management job at Margate a couple of years ago. The fans didn't like the board, there was a lot of stuff going on and I took the brunt of it. The budget wasn't very good, maybe bottom six. So to be sacked when we weren't in any danger was a bit unrealistic. It doesn't affect me now but it did for a few weeks.

**TOUGHEST PLACE TO GO**

Probably Portsmouth or Crystal Palace. I've played at a lot of grounds and for me those two have got the best atmospheres in the country.

**TOUGHEST OPPONENT**

I always remember playing as a holding midfielder for Ipswich when we lost 5-0 to Crystal Palace at Selhurst Park.

Wilfried Zaha was supposed to be playing wide, but he kept cutting in all the time and coming over to me. I think he won about three penalties that night and the guy was just on a completely different level.

The pace, the way he moved the ball – he was untouchable. I know it didn't work out for him at Manchester United but he probably should have played regularly for a top-four club his whole career.

**ANDY DRURY FACTFILE**

**Born:** Sittingbourne, 1983 (Age 40)

**PLAYING CAREER**

Years	Team	Apps	Goals
2001-03	Sittingbourne	98	26
2003-06	Gravesend & Northfleet	101	19
2006-08	Lewes	72	16
2008-10	Stevenage Borough	57	7
2010-11	Luton Town	23	6
2011-13	Ipswich Town	62	2
2011	Crawley Town (loan)	13	3
2013-14	Crawley Town	41	5
2014-15	Luton Town	35	2
2015-16	Eastleigh	53	12
2016-19	Ebbfleet United	99	13
2019-20	Havant & Waterlooville	27	3
2020-21	Sittingbourne	0	0
2021	Cray Wanderers	8	1
2022	Folkestone Invicta	12	0
2023	Chatham Town	12	1
2023-	Folkestone Invicta	12	0

**MANAGEMENT CAREER**

2022	Whitstable Town
2022	Margate
2023-	Folkestone Invicta

**FAVOURITE PLACE TO GO**

Any old-school ground. Leeds, Nottingham Forest. Palace and Portsmouth. They were a lot more enjoyable to play in than these new ones.

You go to places like Southampton and Leicester and it could be anywhere – they're all basically the same. All that being said, I played at Wembley in two FA Trophy finals for Stevenage so that probably tops any of them.

**AMBITION**

Just to take Folkestone as far as I can. I'm not really worried about anything else. I've got a really supportive chairman, the club is in good shape. A lot of work has gone into the club over the last six months and the ambition is there for everyone to see.

I was planning for management from about 33 or 34, getting out and watching games just to make sure I was ready. This is where I see my future.

squad. And it doesn't matter what level you're at – if you're winning games every week, football is so much more rewarding.

**FUNNIEST PLAYER**

Either Jimmy Bullard or Jason Scotland. We had the pair of them in the same changing room at Ipswich and it was brilliant – absolute carnage every day.

Jimmy's Jimmy, isn't he? What you see is what you get. He was absolutely mental, off playing practical jokes and winding people up pretty much all of the time.

Jason was just loud, always shouting stuff and making peo-

ple laugh. I could have watched the two of them all day.

**FUNNIEST INCIDENT**

I was in a changing room – I won't say where – and the manager had called a meeting. He was going on and on and on but it wasn't really about anything. You could see everyone kind of looking round thinking 'What is going on here?'

Soon enough you had a couple of people sniggering under their jumpers. It was like in school when laughter is contagious – nobody could hold it in.

Eventually someone just burst out laughing right in the manager's face and the whole place just went off.



**WE'RE GOING UP:** Lewes celebrate promotion – Drury's first

What was so surreal was that the manager kept going. He tried to carry on the meeting despite everybody laughing their heads off. In the end he cracked a joke, everybody played along and he kind of styled it out. Bizarre.

**BIGGEST ACHIEVEMENT**

Playing in the Championship with Ipswich. I'd got to 26 or 27 and I thought my chance to play in the Football League had probably gone, but I turned it round with a bit of hard work and started doing really well at Luton.

I ended up going straight from the Conference to the Championship, which was dif-

## TIGERS' JACK LURED AWAY



WORKSOP Town boss Craig Parry says the decision to sell popular defender Jack Broadhead to Step 4 Belper Town came following an offer the club "couldn't turn down".

Broadhead made 119 appearances for the Tigers, scoring 17 goals.

His departure to a lower-ranked club left many fans bemused but explaining the decision, Parry said: "It's a shame Jack is leaving, but an offer has come in that we just couldn't turn down."

"It's a great opportunity for Jack and for all parties."

"Jack is a player I hold in high regard and he's a fantastic player so it's sad to lose him."

## Nobby's at the double for Blyth



NOBBY Solano has continued his summer spending as Blyth Spartans boss by bringing in Michael Woods following the expiration of his contract at South Shields.

The 34-year-old midfielder spent the last two seasons at Mariners Park after helping York City achieve promotion to the National League in 2022. He has also turned out for Harrogate Town, Hartlepool United and Dover Athletic.

Solano has also brought young defender Ben Milburn back to the NPL Premier newboys from Consett. Milburn, who started his career as an 18-year-old at Spartans, said: "Since the last time I was here, I have progressed massively as a player."

## CHATS LAND WHITES PAIR



CHATHAM Town have completed a double raid on Kent rivals Dover Athletic as Kevin Hake's men look to redeem themselves after last season's play-off final defeat.

The Isthmian Premier side have landed left-back Bailey Akehurst, 20, who came through the youth ranks at Gillingham before spells with Tonbridge Angels among others. He joined Dover for the second-half of the season and made 16 appearances as the Whites were relegated from National League South.

Arriving at the Chats with Akehurst is 23-year-old central defender Charlie Naylor, who made 42 appearances at Step 3 last season after a spell playing out in America with Wesleyan.

## Hamlet happy to have Dillon



DULWICH Hamlet have completed the signing of former Fulham youth-team goalkeeper Dillon Barnes.

The 28-year-old former Jamaican international makes the move to south London from north London having spent last season with Haringey Borough.

Barnes had previously turned out for the likes of Hibernian, Colchester United, Burton Albion, Yeovil Town and Aldershot Town.

"It's a massive club with massive aspirations and I'm delighted to have signed here," Barnes told the Isthmian Premier club's website. "It wasn't the best of ends to my time at Haringey but they got me to love the game again and I thank them for that."

# LEVI'S ABOARD WITH BOATMEN

### SOUTHERN LEAGUE

By Jon Couch

CHELSEA and England star Levi Colwill is to give something back to the club which helped launch his promising career – by joining the board of directors.

The 21-year-old defender has followed another ex-England international in Matt Le Tissier by becoming an associate director and community ambassador of Southern Premier South club Sholing.

Southampton-born Colwill has a close association with the south-coast club having been involved from a very early age, watching his uncles, Byron, Dan and Barry Mason, play for the Boatmen.

He was also a mascot for the club in its famous FA Vase final win against West Auckland Town at Wembley in 2014.

The Levi Colwill Project will financially support Project 5000 – a scheme where 5,000 tickets are distributed out

in helping the club grow and it's unbelievable to see the changes that have already happened over the summer.

"The new stand for 500 supporters, the new Directors stand, parking for over 100 cars, the new marquee for Fan Zones on a match day, free marquee hire for all Project 5000 season ticket holders and the pitch looking the best it's ever been."

Sholing CEO Paul Knott said: "This is incredible news for the club and the local community. We would like to thank Levi, Byron, Dan, Levi's Dad, Levi Senior and Levi's Mum, Debra for choosing our club to launch The Levi Colwill Project.

"The aim is to encourage as many children as possible to enjoy free football and Levi will be announcing many exciting opportunities in the coming weeks which we are all thrilled to be part of."

"I want to play my part



# BLAKE KNOWS SHORE THING



POTENTIAL: Bognor Regis Town are keen to improve on last season's efforts

ROBBIE Blake has backed Bognor Regis Town's young bucks to challenge for the Isthmian Premier play-offs next season.

Though only good enough for a tenth-placed finish, last season's 62-point haul was the highest the Rocks have recorded since Blake took charge in the aftermath of relegation from National League South six years ago.

And having retained the bulk of his youthful team, the former Burnley and Leeds forward is optimistic that Bognor can gatecrash the top five.

"I look back at last season and, in my opinion, we should have finished a little bit higher," the 48-year-old told *The NLP*.

"Just after Christmas, we'd put ourselves in a re-

### ISTHMIAN LEAGUE

By Chris Dunlavy

ally good position to latch onto the coattails of the play-off teams. But then two or three key players go down injured and we just haven't got the resources to fill those gaps.

### Trajectory

"We suffered during that period and finished the season quite strong again, so there was that feeling of 'What if?'"

"Now, with the players we've kept, we look at the squad we've got and we feel confident. I don't mean confident in the sense that we're going to win the league or anything like that. This is such a competitive league and everybody

**PREMIER CLASS:** Levi Colwill in Premier League action with Chelsea and, insets, as a Wembley mascot, top, and with uncles at Sholing FC, below  
PICTURE: Alamy and Sholing FC



## PENN ADDS COACH SOLLY

**RUSS PENN** has added goalkeeper coach Lewis Solly to his coaching staff at Southern Premier Central Halesowen Town.

Solly is a veteran of over 400 appearances for Stourbridge and arrives at the Yeltz with a wealth of experience.

"I'm delighted to bring in a goalkeeper coach of such experience to the level," the former Kidderminster Harriers boss commented. "He is a great addition to the club in more ways than one."

Solly added: "It was an opportunity I couldn't turn down. After speaking to the gaffer it was an easy decision to make."

"I'm confident we will be challenging at the top end of the league come the end of the season."

## Ethan a smash with Glassboys

**STRIKER** Ethan Freemantle will return to Stourbridge on a permanent basis following his release from Kidderminster Harriers.

Freemantle, 24, netted six goals in 10 games for the Southern Premier Central Glassboys during a productive loan spell last season.

The former Walsall scholar linked up with the Harriers' U23 side and played nearly 100 games for them since signing professional terms back in 2019.

Freemantle, who also turned out for Gloucester City and Hereford on loan, said: "I'm over the moon to get the deal done. I really enjoyed my time here last year, the fans and club were great with me and I just can't wait to get going again!"

## NIGEL'S BACK WITH HAWKS

**MIDFIELD** ace Nigel Atangana has returned to Havant & Waterlooville – 11 years after he left Westleigh Park.

The 34-year-old Frenchman is back with the Southern Premier South newcomers, under manager Shaun North, after a two-year spell in the National League with Hampshire rivals Eastleigh.

Atangana first joined the Hawks in 2013 and finished the season with 43 appearances and five goals, while being named Player of the Year.

That earned him a two-year contract with then-League Two side Portsmouth, where he spent two years before later moving on to the likes of Leyton Orient, Cheltenham Town and Exeter City.

# HE'S ONTO A WITH ROCKS

will be adding quality.

"But I think we can compete with the majority of teams and if the lads continue the trajectory they were on last season then we should be a better team right across the board. If we can get an extra ten or 15 per cent out of them, and add a couple of new faces, then you never know."

Goalkeeper Ryan Hall and attacker Jasper Mather are amongst several existing players to sign new deals at the MKM Arena, whilst playmaker Doug Tuck and utility man Tommy Block – who left the Rocks to join Hibernian in 2019 – have both returned to the club.

"We had an overhaul last summer and during the season as well," adds Blake, right. "We didn't want to do that again, so

it's really pleasing that we've retained so many. It's rare at this level.

"There's a lot of poaching going on, there are teams with more money.

"In the London and Kent area, especially they tend to spend a lot. We're not a club who can compete with that and we don't try to pretend we are.

"Geographically, it's not ideal for recruitment either so we've got to be shrewd and try to turn a younger crop into good players.

"Year one, they're learning their trade. Year two, they've got a lot more confidence and experience. That's

why keeping them is so important."

Perhaps the most important signing was completed back in April, when 21-goal top scorer Dan Gifford agreed a one-year extension.

### Work ethic

"Giffs scores goals, and everybody's crying out for that, aren't they?" says Blake, who signed the former Portsmouth

trainee from Farnborough last summer following an initial loan spell at the MKM. "So yeah, we were delighted to tie him down.

"He's only just turned 20, so he's still relatively young. He's got a lot to learn, but the

thing about Giffs is that he's eager to listen and that always helps your cause.

"How high can he go? You never know in football. There are certain individuals where you go 'No, I don't think there's a player there'.

"But something clicks, they work hard and they end up making a career for themselves.

"On the other side, a player might have all the talent in the world but they haven't got all those extra bits and pieces that you need to be a professional footballer.

"Consistency. Mentality. Intelligence. To reach the elite levels, it's not just talent and it's certainly not luck. You need a bit of everything.

"What Giffs does have

is a work ethic and a willingness to learn and if you have those two attributes then you might not reach the EFL but you will reach the limits of your potential. That's all anyone can ask."

As for suggestions the division is more open following the promotion of last year's runaway leaders Hornchurch, Blake isn't so sure.

"On the one hand you're glad to see the back of teams like Hornchurch," he says.

"But then you've got Dartford and Dover coming into the league, so it doesn't get any easier.

"We'll just keep our heads down and try to stay under the radar because if you look too far ahead then that's when you tend to land on your face."





# STEP 4 NEWS

## UNITED IS THE WRIGHT MOVE

**ISTHMIAN** North Felixstowe & Walton United have snapped up former Ipswich Town youth team goalkeeper Harry Wright. The 25-year-old, son of former Ipswich, Manchester City and England goalkeeper Richard Wright, came through the ranks at Ipswich, playing Under-18 and Under-21 football for the Tractor Boys. He also had loan spells at East Thurrock United and Chelmsford City before enjoying a stint in Sweden. Upon his return to the UK, Wright moved on to Fleetwood Town, from where he had a loan spell at Farsley Celtic. He left the Cod Army in the summer of 2022 and has since turned out for Witton Albion and Bury.

## Wily Ant gets a job at Jammers

**FORMER** Colchester, Ipswich Town and AFC Wimbledon midfielder Anthony Wordsworth has signed for Maldon & Tiptree as player-coach. The 35-year-old joins the Jammers following the expiry of his contract at National League South side Chelmsford City. He now links up with Jammers' new boss Dave Huzzey as they look to improve on last season's mid-table finish in Isthmian North. The Jammers have also signed livewire winger Norman Wabo from National League South side Weymouth.

Wabo, 26, a former Southend United academy product, has turned out for a number of clubs including Dartford, Billericay Town and Eastbourne Borough.

## GONZALES TO LEAVE BLUES

**TALISMAN** Sefton Gonzales has requested the termination of his contract at Clitheroe. The hugely popular striker, 32, scored 98 goals in 203 appearances for the Blues and helped them to a seventh place finish in NPL West last season, just missing out on a play-off place. Clitheroe triggered a one-year extension to Gonzales's contract, but the former Stockport County, Altrincham, FC United and South Shields front man has requested its termination to pursue opportunities elsewhere. A club statement read: "Sefton felt a new beginning and opportunity is his preferred option as he looks to continue his career to pastures new."

## Pitmen pick up a coup in Elliott

**HEDNESFORD** Town have pulled off a major coup with the signing of experienced defender Elliott Johnson from Dagenham & Redbridge. Johnson, 29, started his career at Barnet and amassed 235 appearances for the Bees, of which 105 were in League Two. He then joined Dagenham in 2020 where he has been a mainstay in the side playing his trade either at left-back or centre-back. He appeared 114 times for the Daggers. New boss Steve King said: "Elliott was someone I was extremely keen to bring to Keys Park. His pedigree and experience is second to none and it is something of a coup for the (NPL West) club to have him on board."

# ACE JOE GIVES TONY BOOST

## New Rams boss keeps star striker on board



**ISTHMIAN LEAGUE**  
**TONY RUSSELL** insists promotion hasn't even been mentioned after he took over at ambitious Ramsgate - and revealed keeping the club's all-time record goalscorer Joe Taylor for next season had been one of his priorities.

Russell left Lewes after three years in charge at the Dripping Pan last month and took the reins at Isthmian South East runners-up the Rams last weekend following the exit of previous manager Ben Smith.

The Kent side have finished second in the Step 4 division in the past two seasons, failing to go up through the play-offs, and will be among the favourites for promotion to the Premier in 2024-25.

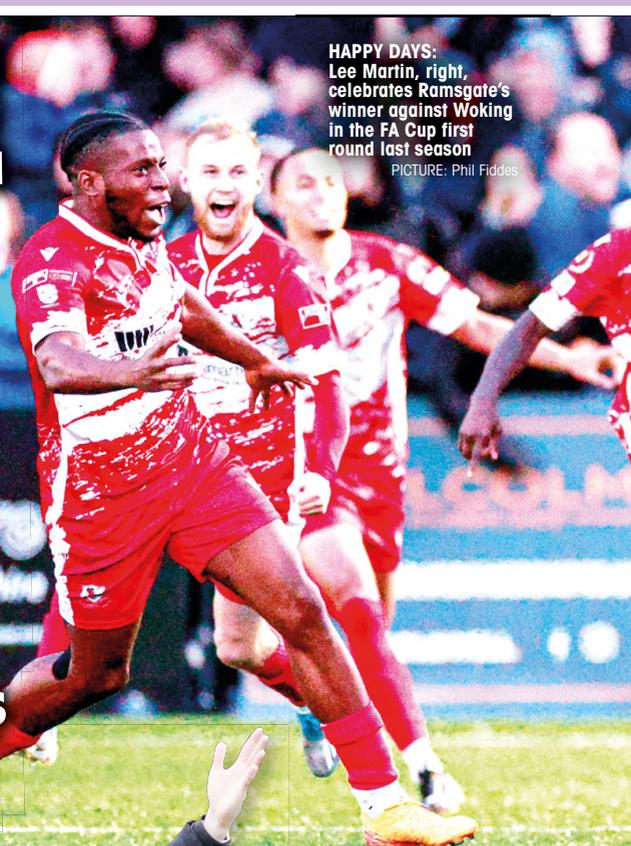
Russell hopes they can make it third time lucky

after agreeing to take over at the WW Martin Community Stadium, although he claims his discussions with chairman James Lawson did not even feature the "P" word amid speculation about having a budget available that will allow him to try to win the title.

"A few of my older players were waiting for me to decide what I was going to do and I told them I probably wouldn't be in football... a couple of days later I got the call from James," said the former Cray Valley Paper Mills chief.

"It happened so quickly, it's been a bit of a whirlwind.

"I'm not football-mad and if it wasn't right



**HAPPY DAYS:** Lee Martin, right, celebrates Ramsgate's winner against Woking in the FA Cup first round last season

PICTURE: Phil Fiddes

for me after leaving Lewes, I wouldn't do it. "James is a very passionate guy about the club and the community, and I felt this was a chance for me and my assistant Joe Vines, as young-ish managers, to be somewhere for a long time.



**ON THE MOVE:** Tony Russell, left, has left Isthmian Premier division side Lewes after three years at the helm



**ON-SONG:** The musical team salute at Sheffield FC

## SHEFFIELD HIT HIGH NOTES

**SHEFFIELD FC** are hoping they've played their part in a smash hit to coincide with Euro 24! New song 'Around the World' has been released as part of a special collaboration between the arts charity Stand & Be Counted and the oldest club in the world. Children in the char-

**By John Lyons**  
ity's Youth Theatre of Sanctuary devised the song concept, lyrics and recorded it with the help of musicians. The group then filmed a tongue-in-cheek music video at Sheffield FC's Home of Football stadium in Dronfield.

The track was released on Friday to coincide with the launch of Euro 2024 in Germany and is free to download. Stand & Be Counted works with refugees, new migrants and asylum seekers - anyone, of any age, who is seeking sanctuary. Musician Ed Waring



# FALLON HAS GOT FAITH IN TROOPS

By Andy Simpson

**AFTER** Wythenshawe Town had been battered by Bury at Gigg Lane in October, their manager Rory Fallon apologised to supporters.

A sobering 4-0 defeat left them trailing a dozen points adrift of top spot, occupied after the final whistle by the Shakers, in the North West Counties League's top flight.

"It was a turning point," Fallon told *The NLP*. "And we never looked back."

The Greater Manchester outfit did not lose again in the league until February, adding 41 points to their tally during a 17-match unbeaten run that propelled them to the summit.

They eventually missed out on the title only on goal difference, presenting to neighbours Wythenshawe the initiative following a narrow loss at Chadderton in April.

However, a historic promotion to the Northern Premier League was secured by play-offs wins against Padiham and Bury – the latter after a dramatic penalty shoot-out at Wythy's Ericstan Park home.

"I'd put it at the top of a list of my achievements in football," said Fallon, who savoured promotion as a gifted attacking midfielder with Trafford and FC United of Manchester.

"As a manager, it's all on your shoulders. We had proper highs, and some lows too – particularly after letting the title slip from our hands.

"To recover from that, and regroup the way we did, was a real show of strength."

It's evidence too of Fallon's emerging talent in the dugout. The 34-year-old

## Ability to regroup sets Wythenshawe up for fresh tests

called time on his playing career after sustaining a knee injury while playing for Glossop against Trafford on New Year's Day in 2022 – a game he scored in.

Back then, he combined playing for the Hillmen on a Saturday with coaching their under-21s side the following afternoon.

It went well – they were promoted with the most potent attack and meanest defence.

"I got the bug for it," admitted Fallon. "That will surprise lads that I played with because as a teammate I was quiet and kept myself to myself. To them, I'd probably have seemed an unlikely candidate to be manager!"

His tenure at Cheadle Heath Nomads soon altered that perception.

There, he inherited a team that had won one of 16 matches at the start of the 2022-23 campaign in the North West Counties League's second tier.

They prevailed in 13 of the next 22, losing just three, and ended up eighth.

A huge 95-point haul last term with Wythenshawe,



SUCCESS: Rory Fallon

who conceded the fewest goals in the division and amassed 20 clean sheets, has only enhanced his reputation.

And should he feel the need, the nephew of legendary former Leicester, Celtic and Aston Villa boss Martin O'Neill has one or two useful numbers in his phone to dial for advice.

As a student at Loughborough University, Fallon was coached by Kieran McKenna, who will manage in the Premier League next season after guiding Ipswich to back-to-back promotions.

He said: "Kieran stood out a mile even then; his reading of the game, the detail in his analysis, and how he communicates with players – I loved all of it."

"I was also lucky to play for guys like Gary Vaughan (at Trafford) and Karl Marginson (at FC United) and as a new manager you remember the good bits – and the bad, too – from dressing rooms you've been in."

The next challenge, making Wythenshawe competitive at the highest level the club has operated at, will be his hardest.

However, the example set by neighbours Avro, who finished in the West Division's top half on debut last time out, is reason to be optimistic.

"Our team shares traits with theirs – we're fit, powerful, and have a tremendous team spirit," said Fallon. "I reckon we'll surprise a few people."

## BRICKS ENJOY FOREIGN TRIP

**HADLEY** SOUTHERN League Division One Central outfit Hadley enjoyed a dream European debut last weekend – beating San Marino opposition 9-1!

The trip to face AC Juvenes Dogana was organised by committee member Chris Nash, who almost 20 years ago set out on a challenge to watch a match in each of UEFA's member nations. San Marino was the last of 55 on his list.

On a memorable day, he conducted the ceremonial kick-off, but also came on as a 55th minute substitute and provided the assist for Hadley's seventh goal.

Bricks chairman Steve Gray said: "Our players, management and supporters had a fantastic time."

## Driscoll ready for the challenge

**CINDERFORD** Town boss Matthew Driscoll is relishing the chance to pit his wits against Southern League Division One South opposition in the coming campaign.

Town won promotion back to the Southern League at the first attempt last term via the Hellenic Premier Division play-offs.

Now the challenge is to see if they can cope better with the demands of Step 4.

"There is no escaping the fact of how tough it's going to be competing alongside the 'big spenders', but our aim, first and foremost, is to stay in this league and hopefully surprise a few along the way," he said. We are fortunate to have a lot of players who have played at Step 4 and know what it's all about."

## ROW REVAMP GATHERS PACE

**JOHN** Cook and Jamie Daltrey are pulling out all the stops to put their Hartley Wintney squad together for the coming Isthmian South Central campaign.

The duo took charge last month and will be determined to improve on last term's tenth-place finish at Step 4 following relegation from Southern Premier South the previous season.

Midfielder Lamar Koroma has joined from Farnham Town, who won Combined Counties Premier Division South last term, while goalkeeper Henry Poole has made the switch from Bedfont Sports.

The Row co-bosses have also made a double raid on Burnham to capture mid-fielders Jack Penton and Leo Decabo.

## Dockerty glee for boss Craig

**CLEETHORPES** Town boss Craig Rouse couldn't hide his delight at capturing striker Brad Dockerty.

The 27-year-old was most recently at Bradford Park Avenue and will give the Owls extra firepower for the coming NPL East campaign.

Rouse said: "Players of his calibre don't come available often and we feel his style will complement the rest of the attacking players perfectly. He's someone who's quick and direct and likes to stretch the game at every opportunity."

"He's another player that has an all-action, committed style and his approach to games will be something that gets the supporters on the edge of their seats."

## FOR THE EUROS

helped the group to record their song. The track refers to superstar footballers Messi and Ronaldo, as well as the young people chasing their dreams and 'all being welcome' to join their team.

The video features the ground, kit and fans of the NPL East

club, founded in 1857. Chairman Richard Tims said: "At Sheffield FC we know how football has the power to transcend barriers and unite people from around the world."

"We hope the whole of Sheffield gets behind this song to score the goal of it being number one for Euro 2024."

## STEP 5 &amp; 6 NEWS

# WOMEN'S U-TURN ON THE CARDS

## NORTHERN LEAGUE

By Mark Carruthers

**THORNABY** are set to re-instate their entire women's football section after a week of controversy at the Ebac Northern League Division Two club.

Last Sunday brought confirmation the Teesdale Park outfit's board had voted to remove six female teams ranging from under-7s to first-team from their setup, leaving over 100 players without a club.

The decision was met with widespread criticism from around the country with England Lionesses Beth Mead and Bethany England and 11-time Paralympic gold medal winner Baroness Tanni-Grey Thompson all taking to social media to give their strong views on the matter.

Arsenal forward Mead, who was part of the England Euro 2022-winning squad, said: "Disgusted to see this decision, the women's game is on the up but we still have committees making these horrible decisions. It's not good enough, these young girls deserve better. I'd love to send the team a signed England shirt to keep them inspired."

## Under-fire Blues bow to pressure after controversy

"If I can help with anything do reach out, us women need to stick together. @ThornabyFC. Women #football4all."

And Spurs forward England added: "Saddened and disgusted to be reading this. The fight for women to keep their place at the table is a never ending battle."

### Continuity

"This should not be happening, these women and girls deserve better! My thoughts go out to everyone involved at the club, players, staff and volunteers."

Ongoing criticism increased as over the following days now-former chief executive Trevor Wing spoke out over the vote, explaining he had always championed the women's game and urging the local community to continue backing the Blues.

He said: "Given the men's team has been an

established part of Thornaby FC since 2000, the difficult decision was made to prioritise its continuity.

"Throughout my career, I have actively promoted women's football, serving as a coach, secretary for Middlesbrough Ladies, and as a representative on the FA's Women's Committee."

"I remain dedicated to supporting and promoting women's football and hope that the community will continue to support Thornaby FC through these challenging times."

### Aftermath

Wing was one of six board members to step down from their position in the aftermath of the vote - but plans for a new look committee headed by current chairman Gary Morris, who voted against the scrapping of the women's football section, and prospective chief executive Alison McGee pro-

gressed quickly over the following days.

McGee and Morris will be joined in the new hierarchy by Philip Genery, Rachel Stonehouse and John McGee - although all appointments remain subject to financial due-diligence checks.

However, there has been confirmation the new board will look to immediately re-instate its entire women's football section from first-team to juniors in a move that has been met with praise from the local community.

Speaking to *BBC Radio Tees*, prospective CEO McGee, who is a director of club sponsor Durata, said: "We have been around this fantastic club for the last couple of years and this next chapter is an exciting prospect to be part of."

"There is so much potential for men and women together, girls and boys, one club."

Thornaby FC Women's co-managers Abbey Lyle and Claire Streater added: "We want to shine a positive light and we are proud of the football community for standing by us on this."

"We are excited about what is to come and we want to look ahead. We would love for the club to hit new levels and look to the future."



## CHURCH TEAM UP WITH MAGPIES

## WESSEX LEAGUE

By Robin Jones

WESSEX League side Christchurch have entered into a partnership with Southern Premier South new-boys Wimborne Town.

After Fawzi Saadi left his position as Church boss to become head of coaching at the Magpies' academy, in turn last season's reserve management duo at Wimborne, Christer Warren and Wayne Crutcher, will take the reins of the Christchurch first team.

Current Christchurch coach Sean Leadbetter will remain as part of the Hurn Bridge backroom team.

A joint statement issued by both clubs said: "This agree-

ment allows both clubs the opportunity to combine the existing Christchurch FC and Wimborne Town Reserves squads, creating an opportunity to develop young players in a very competitive league.

"This is with the aim of producing a flow of talent for the Wimborne Town Southern Premier League team."

Wimborne general manager Jimmy Glass said: "We have always had a great relationship with Christchurch FC and every year play a pre-season

friendly, competing for the Gerdy Page cup.

"This agreement gives us the chance to work together to provide a unique pathway for young players whilst keeping our own clear identities, which is important for two old clubs with so much history."

"Wimborne Town Reserves will still enter the Dorset Premier League next season and play their games at the New Cuthbury. This team will be primarily made up of 16-18-year-old academy players."

A Christchurch statement said: "With our own under-18s and under-23s squads, it provides Christchurch FC with

multiple pools of talent for our first team coaches to choose from as well.

"Christchurch's under-18 squad will continue to play in the Dorset Under-18 League and the under-23 squad will continue to play in the Hampshire Combination and Development League. Both squads will continue to play their home games at the MA Hart Stadium."

Church went through three managers last season with Ollie Cherrett and Nathan Brown departing before former Bournemouth Poppies and Blackfield & Langley boss Saadi returned to the Priory.

## Sad Saints forced into Peninsula exit

## SW PENINSULA

By Robin Jones

ST DENNIS have quit the South West Peninsula League Premier Division West.

The decision came after manager Jack Barbery resigned due to personal reasons and work commitments.

His assistant, former Dobwalls joint manager Simon Westlake, has also left the Boscawen Park outfit to join Mount Gould FC, whose Devon League side folded but have now reformed in the South Devon League for the coming season.

Peninsula League secretary Philip Hiscox was informed of the resignation of St Dennis,

who were formed in 1902, on Thursday.

He said that the Saints have been struggling to raise the necessary finance to bring their ground up to FA accreditation standard. However, they may continue with their reserve side in the St Piran League becoming their first team next season.

Last season, St Dennis finished second from bottom with just six wins from 32 games. Their resignation leaves the division with 16 clubs.

**BACK IN BUSINESS:**  
Record goalscorer  
Scott McGowan is  
back for a third spell  
at 1874 Northwich



## HERBERT REVERTS TO 1874 LEGEND

MIDLAND LEAGUE

By Garry Clarke

CLUB record scorer Scott McGowan is back for a third spell at relegated 1874 Northwich.

McGowan has scored 139 goals in previous spells for the green and blacks and manager Chris Herbert is looking to the 36-year-old striker to spearhead his new-look side on their return to Step 5 in the Midland League.

“Scotty guarantees goals and with the way we want to play, we need a Scotty McGowan,” Herbert said.

“His love for the club was big in getting him back to 1874 Northwich – he is a fans’ favourite.

“Scotty was always a thorn in my side when I’ve had teams that have played against him; I’ve even tried to sign him a few times.

“But now we get chance to work together and he will get goals and put defences on the back foot.”

Since suffering relegation from NPL West last season, Herbert has set about rebuilding his squad with a number of high-profile arrivals. Midfielder Jack McKean joins from Morecambe, while talented Tom Morris has signed from Stockport Town

And Northern Ireland youth international Jason Coppack, who spent time in the academies of both Everton and Burnley, is back from playing in America where he attended Stony Brook University in New York.

Herbert added: “We are going to be a tight-knit squad this season with a tough, togetherness mentality.

“We were very small last season and sometimes we could not cope with the physicality, which we cannot have at this club so these players add that height and strength with and without the ball.”

## A NEW GUY IN AT GARSTANG



GARSTANG have appointed former Blackpool, Barrow, Fleetwood Town and Lancaster City player Guy Heffernan as their new manager.

Heffernan, who previously managed Holker Old Boys, Nelson and Maine Road, has filled the vacancy left by Darrell Slater-Smith who left the North West Counties Division One North club by mutual consent last month after they finished third from bottom.

Chairman Adrian Wilding said: “We are very happy that Guy is joining us as first team manager.

“Guy’s excellent coaching credentials and proven managerial experience at this level will help drive the club forward.”

## Cirens make a call to James



HELLENIC Premier newcomers Cirencester Town have promoted James Mortimer-Jones to manager.

Mortimer-Jones had been assistant to John Brough, who resigned following the Centurions’ voluntary relegation from the Southern League Division One Central at the end of last season despite finishing sixth.

A member of the Shrewsbury Town youth team before joining Carterton Town, North Leigh and Didcot Town, Mortimer-Jones had been at the Corinium Stadium for 14 years as a player, coach and assistant manager.

Former Bishop’s Clevee, Cinderford Town and North Leigh boss Brough had been in charge for four-and-a-half seasons, taking them to the play-offs in 2021-22.

## ALL CHANGE FOR WELFARE



NOSTELL Miners Welfare have appointed both a new manager and chairman.

Matt Wright, previously with Shelley, takes over the Northern Counties East Division One outfit, following the resignation of Ian Walker.

Wright has been joined by his long-time assistant Mark Wright, while Mark Maspero becomes first team coach and Chris Clay joins as sports therapist.

Taking over as chairman is Liam Willingham, who has replaced long-serving Kevin Allsop.

He said: “There’s a lot of hard work to do, but everyone at the club is excited for the future after a very difficult few months.”

## Jack Bridges the boss’ void



JACK Griffiths has been named as the new manager of Midland League club AFC Bridgnorth.

Griffiths will combine his new role at the helm of the Division One side with that of continuing to run the Under-18s team who play in the Midland Floodlit League.

His backroom team at Crown Meadow will include assistant Darren Bracknell and coach Ash Grainger from the under-18s and senior players Charlie Swingwood and Brett Taylor.

The club finished bottom of the Division One table last season, which had seen Griffiths take over on an interim basis after former Queen’s Park, Stirling Albion, Dundee and Leyton Orient player Steve McCormick quit after only four games in charge.

## LEAGUE NETS NEW DEAL

S. COUNTIES EAST

By Robin Jones

THE Southern Counties East Football League has become the latest to announce a new sponsor and name change for the next two seasons.

The competition will be called the Presence & Co. Southern Counties East League after being backed by the Tunbridge Wells property management firm.

League chairman Denise Richmond said: “We are very excited to be working with Presence & Co. as our new league sponsors – their support and investment is most welcome.

“We are planning that the

support of all of our clubs will help Presence & Co. to build their brand to ensure we have a successful partnership for years to come.

“In addition, the support from Presence & Co. will allow us to continue to develop the League and help with the development of our clubs. This in turn will ensure we attract and grow not only our membership but will also allow our clubs to improve their matchday experiences. With the quality

football played every weekend, this will ensure the clubs get the coverage and support they deserve.”

Presence & Co chief operating officer Michael Puszyk said: “We are thrilled to support the SCEFL over the next two seasons.

“Football is at the heart of our communities, and we are proud to contribute to the growth and development of the sport at a local level. Our partnership with the SCEFL aligns with our values of community engagement and our commitment to fostering young talent and opportunity.”

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# BEVERLEY TOWN



GROUP EFFORT: Players and supporters celebrate winning promotion after a nerve-jangling play-off final victory, under manager Dave Ricardo, inset

PICTURES: Adamson Images

# A PROUD HUB OF THE COMMUNITY!

**'NEVER did I ever think I would see a pitch invasion at Beverley Town,' chuckles chairman Mark Smith.**

Saturday, May 11, 2024 is a day that has gone down in club folklore. A record crowd of 1,525 packed into Norwood Park to see the Beavers take on Shirebrook Town in the Northern Counties East League Division One play-off final.

They were treated to a nerve-jangling encounter that finished 1-1 before Beverley swept the majority of the crowd into ecstasy with a 4-2 penalty shoot-out success.

Now more than a month on from that landmark day, the memories are still as fresh as ever for Smith, who has spent the last decade as chairman.

"I'm Beverley Town through and through and I've never seen anything like it," the 54-year-old told *The NLP*.

By John Lyons

"We had a queue to get in, the bar and burger van had record takings.

"The town has really got behind us – and the talk of the town was the play-off final. The weather was perfect and all the stars aligned. It was a really good game and capped with a penalty shoot-out – what a way to win it.

### Incredible

"Old and young raced onto the pitch and players were on the shoulders of fans. It was incredible."

Although formed in 1902 and enjoying periods of success in the East Riding County League, it's only been in more recent times that the club have really started to make waves.

A couple of Humber Premier League titles a decade ago under boss Dave Ricardo gave a glimpse of what the Beavers could do, but the

ground wasn't at the required standard for the NCEL.

Following another title in 2021 and a runners-up spot in 2022, the Beavers were finally able to make the leap – and that man Ricardo returned to take the reins for the inaugural season in NCEL Division One.

If an 11th place finish in their maiden campaign was a satisfactory achievement, then the past season has well and truly topped it. Incredibly, a tally of 103 points was only good enough for second place – Parkgate took the crown with 107 – but Beverley came through the play-off challenge.

A 2-1 win against Retford United paved the way for the final against Shirebrook, who also reached a century of points in finishing third.

"It was a really good effort to get 103 points and sometimes you had to take stock and remember how well we had done," Ricardo told *The*

*NLP*. "A lot of the supporters that are new to the club – we never had 1,500 in the Humber Premier League! – probably think this is an everyday occurrence, but I was saying 'enjoy this, soak this in'. You don't get 103 points very often.

"The final was a fantastic event not just for the club but for Beverley as a whole. I was willing ourselves on for the community.

"I hate penalties and watched them from near the corner flag at the opposite end. Fortunately, we did train for penalties in the last two or three training sessions before the semi-final and final.

"The players didn't like it but I made them walk from halfway. I believe you miss your pen in the walk – it's mind over matter. I don't know how I would have picked myself and the players up if we had lost. It was more relief when we won."

Of course, football doesn't

allow you much time to rest on your laurels. Ricardo is already making plans for Town's assault on the NCEL Premier Division next term.

"It is a step up," said the 45-year-old, who has also managed Hall Road Rangers, Barton Town and Selby Town. "We have played a few Premier Division sides in cup games in the last couple of years and had some success, but it's the intensity of week in, week out that you need to get used to. The consistency required and fitness is a step up.

### Family orientated

"It's going to be difficult, but we are going to enjoy every moment of it. Our aim is the play-offs and we will give it a good go."

Just as important for Ricardo is that the club keeps developing in the right way.

"The club do it properly, it's an organic growth," he explained. "It's not false or

fake by throwing a lot of money at it.

"Beverley is quite an affluent area and it's been crying out for a successful semi-pro club, and we've filled that void. It's a family orientated club and the supporters just want the team to do well. We averaged 300 last year and I would like to think that would go up by 40 or 50."

Chairman Smith is also revelling in the good times and grateful for the support the club are getting.

"The fans have been amazing – I never thought I would see replica shirts in the town," added Smith, who hailed the efforts of club president Stu Akester, secretary Gary Proud, treasurer Olly Grantham and development officer Rich Jagger.

"We've got 35 junior teams and we need more grass. We are having to leave Beverley to find somewhere for some of our teams to play. We're a real up and coming club."

**Step 7 side pull off incredible double coup**

**PREMIER PAIR ARE NO PR STUNTS!**

**THAT'S MAGIC!**  
Bournemouth favourite Charlie Daniels and, Inset, Westfield part-owner Steve Cook

PICTURE: Alamy



**By Matthew Nash**

**WESTFIELD'S audacious coup in signing former Premier League stars Charlie Daniels and Dan Gosling is 'no PR stunt', chairman Jack Stapley has insisted.**

The Mid Sussex League Premier Division club – part-owned by QPR defender Steve Cook, an old team-mate of both Daniels and Gosling – announced the sensational swoop for the ex-Bournemouth pair on Thursday.

Left-back Daniels, 37, is best known for an eight-year spell with the Cherries between 2012 and 2020, where he made over 250 appearances for the club. He retired from the professional game in January 2022 following a spell at Colchester.

Midfielder Gosling, 34, made almost 200 appearances at the Vitality Stadium between 2014 and 2021 and was most recently with League Two Notts County, leaving when his contract expired in January. He also turned out for Everton and Newcastle United.

Both are coaches at Watford and neither have any prior link to the Westies, unlike 33-year-old



**BIG STAGER:** Dan Gosling in action for Bournemouth

Cook, also a former Bournemouth favourite, who grew up in the Hastings area and took over the club in June 2022.

The move is sure to send shockwaves through the Step 7 division but ambitious Westfield chief Stapley, who still plays for the first team himself, claims the signings are no hollow gesture.

**Media frenzy**

"I won't say they will play every match but we'll see a reasonable amount of them," he said when asked about the duo's availability.

"We'll see them a couple of times in pre-season and it's the early stages right now but I believe we will see enough of

them. It is certainly not a PR stunt. I'm sure our players will want to learn from them and soak up all that knowledge they have of playing Premier League football."

Stapley shone a light on the media frenzy that has engulfed the Knight and Davey Community Stadium this week since the announcement and highlighted how key the experienced Cook's contacts book has been.

He added: "I've had messages from Sky Sports News and Soccer AM – it has blown up more than I expected."

"I really didn't see this happening as quickly as it has. We know about Steve's contacts and that there might be days like

this ahead. It's nice, though, we're getting messages from parents who would like their kids to be mascots next season and there is a real excitement around the place, it's buzzing."

The Westies are looking further ahead and hope to return to senior football and games against the likes of Bexhill United and Little Common before too long after moving into their new stadium last term.

"We have set a goal of being in senior football within the next couple of years and challenging to get into Step 5 the year after that," Stapley said. "Beyond that, we really are a small village club at the end of the day but of course we'd love to get onto a par with some of the local sides."

"There are plans for a 3G pitch at some point, our stand will be delivered in the first week of August and planning permission is in for floodlights so hopefully we will be eligible for promotion soon."



**SCARBOROUGH SORROW AS HISTORIC LEAGUE FOLDS**

AFTER more than a century, the Scarborough & District Football Saturday League has folded at an emergency meeting.

The league was formed in 1898 and its demise leaves

**By Tom Blackett**

the Scarborough area without a senior football league.

The seven remaining teams have been accepted into the Right Car East Riding County Football League

for the 2024-25 season, ensuring that adult 11-a-side male football teams from the Scarborough area will carry on playing competitive football.

There were only ten

teams in the Saturday League last season, and with Edgehill Reserves, Westover and West Pier Reserves set to fold, it was decided at the meeting that, with no new teams coming

forward, the league could not continue in its current format. The league had shrunk from having four divisions in the 1990s.

League secretary John Orrah told *The Scarborough*

*News*: "I am gutted that we have had to fold the league after 126 years. The proud history that will not be built on is also a devastating blow for the league and the area."

# THE NLP'S 2023-24 REVIEW:

## AUGUST

RECORD signing Luke Duffy scored his first Macclesfield goal as the much-fancied Silkmen opened their NPL Premier account with a 2-0 win over Bradford Park Avenue.

But it was Radcliffe, managed by Anthony Johnson and Bernard Morley, who stole the show in August with six wins out of six and a stackful of goals to boot. Their 5-0 Bank Holiday win over FC United took their tally to 24 for the month, opening up a six-point lead at the top of the table and setting a soaring pace for others to follow. Warrington Rylands, despite going down 4-0 at home to Radcliffe on the opening day, were their nearest challengers.

Back-to-back defeats by Lancaster City (3-0) and FC United (2-1) steadied Macclesfield's charge before they announced a marquee signing in former National League Player of the Year, John Rooney, from Oldham Athletic.

## SEPTEMBER

GARY Hayward became the first NPL Premier managerial casualty of the season after he left Ilkeston Town by mutual consent despite winning three of his six matches in charge of the Robins.

Former Buxton boss Hayward only took charge of the club at the start of August following the departure of Jamie Ward just days before the season's start. Ian Deakin came in to replace him.

High-profile summer signing Jonny Margetts hit a hat-trick as Matlock Town progressed in the FA Cup at the expense of Gainsborough Trinity.

Guisley parted company with Paul Phillips after a difficult start to the season, while Russ Wilcox was appointed Gainsborough Trinity boss following the departure of Neal Bishop. James Jepson went in at Basford United in place of Steve Kittrick.

Radcliffe's 100 per cent record came to an end with a midweek 3-2 defeat at Marine in their ninth game, while Basford won their first game of the season, at the 10th time of asking, 3-0 against Gainsborough.

## OCTOBER

FORMER Bury boss Andy Welsh arrived at Guisley to replace Paul Phillips, while Jordan Butterworth left Bamber Bridge to pursue other opportunities after a steady start to the season.

But the big managerial departure was at Macclesfield where Mark Duffy paid the price for four defeats out of five, which left the big-spending Silkmen out of the play-off places and trailing in the wake of leaders Radcliffe, who had raced to 12 wins from their opening 13 matches.

Within days, former Hull City and Ipswich defender

Alex Bruce was named new Silkmen boss – his first managerial appointment – alongside ex-Premier League ace Phil Bardsley and Manchester United academy chief Paul McGuinness.

Whitby Town booked their place in the FA Cup first round for the first time since 2003-04 after beating Chelmsford City in a replay, joining Worksoop Town, who toppled Boston United, and Marine, who knocked out National League FC Halifax Town away.

Veteran Workington defender Dan Wordsworth announced his retirement at the age of 33 after 12 years with the Reds.

## NOVEMBER

TRIO Marine (5-1), Whitby Town (7-2) and Worksoop Town

(5-1) suffered heavy FA Cup first round defeats, to Harrogate Town, Bristol Rovers and Stockport respectively.

Mark Bower's second spell in charge of Bradford Park Avenue came to an end after a run of just one win from 13 matches, while Mark Fell left Lancaster City after six years with the Dolly Blues.

Bamber Bridge suffered a blow after midfielder Harry Benns suffered a horrific double leg break in a 2-2 draw with Ashton United, while former AFC Fylde and Chesterfield striker Danny Rowe left Macclesfield due to an "underlying health condition". He was

replaced by former Everton striker Oumar Niasse, who cost the Toffees £13.5m in 2016.

Former Nantwich Town boss Dave Cooke was unveiled as the new manager of Stafford Rangers, replacing Matty Hill, who left by mutual consent.

A 3-2 win over Bamber

Bridge took rampant Radcliffe nine points clear at the top of the table.

## DECEMBER

RADCLIFFE were the NPL's Christmas No.1, but their lead at the top had been cut to just two points with Warrington Rylands hot on their heels.

In-form Rylands recorded a revenge 3-2 win at Boro and also inflicted a 7-2 thrashing on Stafford Rangers.

Craig Parry's Worksoop Town were closing in too after a run of just two defeats from 11.

The Northern Premier League announced they were monitoring Marske United's financial plight and proposed change of ownership

with the Seasiders given the green light to resume fixtures.

Former Macclesfield boss Danny Whitaker was unveiled as the new manager of Bradford Park Avenue, replacing Mark Bower.

Prolific former FC United goal-getter Tunde Owolabi provided the perfect Christmas present for Macclesfield fans after completing a move to Moss Rose.

## JANUARY

THERE was sad news to start the year as financially stricken Marske United were forced to resign from the Northern Premier League.

The Seasiders had revealed they needed to raise £120,000 to complete the season, but their fundraising efforts came up short. Boss Graeme Lee



# A PAIR OF PACES TRUMP 'EM ALL!



AVENUE CALL: Danny Whitaker

# NORTHERN PREMIER LEAGUE

**WE'RE GOING UP!**  
Champions Radcliffe celebrate winning promotion under Anthony Johnson and Bernard Morley, left, similarly Marine, below, after their play-off success

PICTURE: Barkley Costello and Alun Roberts



was an opportunity that I could not turn down," he said.

At Matlock, former Premier League title-winner and ex-Gladiators boss Mark Atkins took interim charge until the end of the season alongside Adam Yates.

## APRIL

THE inevitable finally came to pass as long-time leaders Radcliffe wrapped up the title with a 2-1 victory at Whitby Town, courtesy of top scorer Jordan Hulme's winner.

Jubilant joint-boss Anthony Johnson, who led the side to glory alongside Bernard Morley, said: "After the second game of the season, we've been top of the league and not been moved. It takes some doing."

The play-off spots were claimed by Macclesfield, Marine, Warrington Rylands and Worksop Town. In the semis, Macc beat Worksop 3-1, while Marine edged out Rylands 1-0.

It was doom and gloom for Atheron Collieries, Stafford Rangers and Bradford Park Avenue as they all suffered relegation.

Andy Welsh was axed by Guiseley, while Danny Grainger bowed out at Workington. David Norris, 43, signed off his remarkable career with a hat-trick for Lancaster City, but they lost 4-3 at FC United, who secured their place in the last four of the Fenix Trophy by beating French side Vinsky.

Macclesfield's Wembley dreams were dashed in the FA Trophy as they lost 2-1 at Gateshead in the semi-finals.

## MAY

IT WAS play-off delight for Marine as they clinched a place in National League North with a 2-1 victory at Macclesfield.

A bumper crowd of over 5,000 saw Fin Sinclair-Smith (pen) and Jack Bainbridge give the Mariners a two-goal lead before Kane Drummond pulled one back.

Ecstatic boss Neil Young, celebrating his seventh promotion as a manager, said: "My lads will run through brick walls and they never took a backward step. I love them because everything I ask them to do, they do."

There was some consolation for Drummond as the 23-year-old forward landed a move to EFL new-boys Chesterfield.

FC United enjoyed success on the international stage as they won the Fenix Trophy for the second time in three years. The Red Rebels thumped Czech side Prague Raptors 4-0 in the final in Italy, helped by a virtuoso display from attacking midfielder Aaron Bennett.

Delighted boss Neil Reynolds said of the 20-year-old: "He was unplayable. They couldn't get near him and he deservedly won player of the tournament."

quickly resurfaced at National League North club Spennymoor Town.

A couple of notable hat-tricks saw John Rooney notch a treble for Macclesfield in a five-goal thriller at Warrington Rylands and Jordan Hulme hit three in Radcliffe's 3-2 win at Macclesfield.

Midfielder Luke Joyce brought the curtain down on his career in Radcliffe's 3-1 win against Workington, while prolific marksman Jonny Margetts left Matlock Town to join National League North outfit King's Lynn Town.

Experienced boss Chris Willcock took the reins at Lancaster City and FC United manager Neil Reynolds extended his contract until April 2026.

Bobby Grant hit a hat-trick as high-flying Marine romped to a 7-1 win at Bamber Bridge, but Radcliffe were continuing to steam on at the top.

Macclesfield hammered National League Dorling Wanderers 5-0 in the FA Trophy.

## FEBRUARY

A MAJOR development saw Michael Clegg leave Warrington Rylands to take up the vacancy at promotion rivals Macclesfield.

Macc were in the hunt for a new boss after Alex Bruce's decision to join the coaching staff at League Two Salford City.

"I am at a stage of my life, my career, where I need to go for

the next challenge," explained Clegg.

Earlier, Clegg had lost highly-rated Rylands frontman Adama Sidibeh, 25, to Scottish top-flight St Johnstone.

Towards the end of the month, runaway leaders Radcliffe had opened up a 16-point lead at the top of the

table. Boro didn't have it all their own way, going down 4-3 at home against ten-man Guiseley. Rylands had been unable to capitalise on that slip, slumping to a surprise 3-2 home loss against relegation-haunted Bradford Park Avenue.

Macclesfield continued their fine run in the FA Trophy with a 2-0 win at National League South side Hampton & Richmond Borough.

## MARCH

MAGICAL Macclesfield moved to within 90 minutes of Wembley in the FA Trophy with a 3-0 home victory against Coalville Town.

An early Eliot Putman own-goal set the Silkmen on their way before second-half efforts from John Rooney and Kane Drummond rubber-stamped their passage to the last four.

"After around 20 minutes, we started to dominate the game," said upbeat boss Michael Clegg.

Radcliffe were still miles clear at the top despite the odd slip-up now and again.

Gabriel Johnson bagged an injury-time winner as Guiseley did the double over them with a 1-0 success, while Ashton United pulled off a stunning 5-2 triumph at Boro.

Martin Carruthers couldn't resist the chance to return to the Basford United hotseat, shortly after his departure from Matlock Town. "This



# STAT ATTACK: AVERAGE ATTENDANCES

# LAMBS' SUCCESS FANS GET BEHIND

**H**OW do get more fans in through the gate? Well, winning football certainly helps.

It's no great surprise that average attendances in 2023-24 compared to the previous season have tended to rise the most for successful teams. For example, Tamworth, who won National League North, saw an 85 per cent increase (767 to 1,418). The likes of Congleton Town (111 per cent), Wythenshawe (107), Newmarket Town (89), Radcliffe (72) and Salisbury (71) also had bumper rises.

One team bucking the trend were Oxford City, who had a 115 per cent upturn despite being relegated from the National League.

The lists, as shown here, are compiled by Non-League Data, who specialise in providing interactive graphics on everything Non-League, as well as data analysis for clubs to use on their social media pages, matchday programmes or even in matchday tactics.

If any clubs are interested, contact Non-League Data via their X handle (@UKFDfC) or Instagram DM (nonleaguedata).

National League	2022-23	2023-24	%CHANGE
AFC Fylde	1054	1407	33
Aldershot Town	2052	2684	31
Altrincham	2115	2340	11
Barnet	1977	1855	-6
Boston United	1547	1693	9
Braintree Town	631	801	27
Dagenham & Redbridge	1752	1681	-4
Eastleigh	2372	2201	-7
Ebbsfleet United	1496	1693	13
FC Halifax Town	2192	1946	-11
Forest Green Rovers	3179	2473	-22
Gateshead	1218	1207	-1
Hartlepool	4672	4145	-11
Maidenhead United	1505	1452	-4
Oldham Athletic	6660	6924	4
Rochdale	3029	2727	-10
Solihull Moors	1693	1426	-16
Southend United	6057	6493	7
Sutton United	3265	3286	1
Tamworth	767	1418	85
Wealdstone	1564	1532	-2
Woking	2734	2717	-1
Yeovil Town	2730	3916	43
York City	4827	4854	1

National League North	2022-23	2023-24	%CHANGE
Alfreton Town	520	566	9
Brackley Town	692	783	13
Buxton	717	739	3
Chester	2287	2198	-4
Chorley	1051	1080	3
Curzon Ashton	384	400	4
Darlington	1548	1475	-5
Farsley Celtic	449	655	46
Hereford	1864	2600	39
Kidderminster Harriers	2280	2856	25
King's Lynn Town	1219	952	-22
Leamington	631	561	-11

Marine	1243	1224	-2
Needham Market	242	355	47
Oxford City	438	943	115
Peterborough Sports	361	404	12
Radcliffe	730	1253	72
Rushall Olympic	335	522	56
Scarborough Athletic	1688	1588	-6
Scunthorpe United	3259	4013	23
South Shields	2146	2221	3
Southport	1007	1067	6
Spennymoor Town	1323	1254	-5
Warrington Town	773	1183	53

National League South	2022-23	2023-24	%CHANGE
Aveley	402	523	30
Bath City	1122	1495	33
Boreham Wood	1185	1216	3
Chelmsford City	868	913	5
Chesham United	426	718	69
Chippenham Town	616	691	12
Dorking Wanderers	1962	1954	0
Eastbourne Borough	1053	1381	31
Enfield Town	495	637	29
Farnborough	602	893	48
Hampton & Richmond B	624	973	56
Hemel Hempstead Town	524	685	31
Hornchurch	574	733	28
Maidstone United	2142	2131	-1
Salisbury	488	834	71
Slough Town	665	892	34
St Albans City	1403	1690	20
Tonbridge Angels	1047	1145	9
Torquay United	2422	2444	1
Truro City	189	236	25
Welling United	792	722	-9
Weston-Super-Mare	878	1090	24
Weymouth	835	997	19
Worthing	1174	1432	22

Northern Premier League	2022-23	2023-24	%CHANGE
Ashton United	334	384	15
Bamber Bridge	476	466	-2
Basford United	314	387	23
Blyth Spartans	783	893	14
FC United of Manchester	1731	1681	-3
Gainsborough Trinity	714	597	-16
Guiseley	624	654	5
Hebburn Town	305	366	20
Hyde United	698	660	-5
Ilkeston Town	735	729	-1
Lancaster City	388	454	17
Leek Town	612	610	0
Macclesfield Town	3674	3211	-13
Matlock Town	765	777	2
Mickleover	302	402	33
Morpeth Town	508	391	-23
Prescot Cables	667	762	14
Rylands	520	524	1
Stockton Town	638	652	2
Whitby Town	505	558	10

Workington	738	742	1
Worksop Town	628	767	22

Southern Premier Central	2022-23	2023-24	%CHANGE
AFC Sudbury	401	335	-16
AFC Telford United	1177	1139	-3
Alvechurch	297	315	6
Banbury United	877	617	-30
Barwell	322	313	-3
Bedford Town	486	480	-1
Biggleswade Town	147	154	5
Bishop's Stortford	485	491	1
Bromsgrove Sporting	633	717	13
Halesowen	1087	1138	5
Harborough Town	291	331	14
Hitchin Town	493	617	25
Kettering Town	696	691	-1
Leiston	228	186	-18
Lowestoft Town	499	513	3
Redditch United	438	611	39
Royston Town	361	367	2
Spalding United	280	464	66
St. Ives Town	257	304	18
Stamford	486	465	-4
Stourbridge	574	653	14
Stratford Town	527	706	34

Southern Premier South	2022-23	2023-24	%CHANGE
AFC Totton	1107	1245	12
Basingstoke Town	632	780	23
Bracknell Town	300	367	22
Chertsey Town	420	636	51
Dorchester Town	498	577	16
Frome Town	411	513	25
Gloucester City	945	918	-3
Gosport Borough	684	827	21
Hanwell Town	290	327	13
Havant & Waterlooville	988	941	-5
Hungerford Town	428	415	-3
Marlow	201	220	9
Merthyr Town	613	829	35
Plymouth Parkway	517	374	-28
Poole Town	451	516	14
Sholing	205	292	42
Swindon Supermarine	280	298	6
Taunton Town	785	941	20
Tiverton Town	280	283	1
Walton & Hersham	477	583	22
Wimborne Town	563	761	35
Winchester City	281	309	10

Isthmian Premier	2022-23	2023-24	%CHANGE
Billerica Town	791	891	13
Bognor Regis Town	557	784	41
Bowers & Pitsea	247	293	19
Canvey Island	489	395	-19
Carshalton Athletic	423	540	28
Chatham Town	931	1541	66
Cheshunt	475	468	-1
Chichester City	179	245	37



Cray Valley PM	171	191	12
Cray Wanderers	262	264	1
Dartford	1178	1042	-12
Dover Athletic	683	679	-1
Dulwich Hamlet	2464	2604	6
Folkestone Invicta	732	686	-6
Hashtag United	333	294	-12
Hastings United	908	1311	44
Hendon	258	268	4
Horsham	923	1064	15
Lewes	803	944	18
Potters Bar Town	230	231	0
Whitehawk	399	405	2
Wingate & Finchley	151	203	34

NPL East	2022-23	2023-24	%CHANGE
Ashington	527	652	24
Belper Town	527	498	-6
Bishop Auckland	369	421	14
Bradford Park Avenue	566	504	-11
Bridlington Town	277	254	-8
Brierley Town	254	239	-6
Carlton Town	173	187	8
Cleethorpes Town	412	347	-16
Consett	419	339	-19
Dunston UTS	232	219	-6
Emley	353	414	17
Garforth Town	232	291	25
Grimsby Borough	198	184	-7

# AND ALL THE TRENDS FOR 2023-24

# HIGHLIGHTS HOW WINNING TEAMS!



**FAN POWER:** Crowds swarmed as the Lambs of Tamworth were crowned National League North champions  
PICTURE: Garry Griffiths

Heaton Stannington	369	404	9
Liversedge	420	217	-48
Newton Aycliffe	202	191	-5
North Ferriby	532	503	-5
Ossett United	435	319	-27
Pontefract Collieries	323	294	-9
Sheffield	357	373	4
Sherwood Colliery	98	120	22
Stocksbridge Park Steels	186	200	8

Widnes	257	255	-1
Witton Albion	462	499	8
Wythenshawe	200	414	107
Wythenshawe Town	256	298	16

NPL Midlands			
	2022-23	2023-24	%CHANGE
Anstey Nomads	205	263	28
Bedworth United	206	210	2
Boldmere St. Michaels	196	160	-18
Coleshill Town	175	177	1
Corby Town	589	562	-5
Coventry Sphinx	105	114	9
Darlaston Town	178	165	-7
Grantham Town	279	313	12
Hinckley LRFC	145	150	3
Long Eaton United	277	236	-15
Loughborough Students	155	159	3
Lye Town	108	124	15
Quorn	145	208	43
Racing Club Warwick	252	233	-8
Rugby Town	294	285	-3
Rushden & Diamonds	343	413	20
Shepshed Dynamo	218	213	-2
Sporting Khalsa	185	186	1
Sutton Coldfield	236	221	-6
Walsall Wood	131	171	31
Wellingborough Town	124	193	56
Worcester City	394	611	55

NPL West			
	2022-23	2023-24	%CHANGE
Atherton Collieries	338	334	-1
Avro	257	298	16
Bootle	498	497	0
Chasetown	437	543	24
City of Liverpool	359	356	-1
Clitheroe	664	773	16
Congleton Town	296	624	111
Hanley Town	234	199	-15
Hednesford Town	452	762	69
Kidsgrove Athletic	275	252	-8
Mossley	492	537	9
Nantwich Town	427	436	2
Newcastle Town	255	259	2
Runcorn Linnets	640	649	1
Stafford Rangers	738	637	-14
Stalybridge Celtic	554	659	19
Trafford	410	434	6
Vauxhall Motors	186	218	17

Southern Div 1 Central			
	2022-23	2023-24	%CHANGE
AFC Dunstable	144	179	24
Aylesbury United	139	178	28
Barton Rovers	114	170	49
Beaconsfield Town	150	204	36
Berkhamsted	251	272	8
Biggleswade FC	147	154	5
Enfield	156	167	7
Flackwell Heath	208	249	20
Hadley	158	166	5
Hertford Town	249	292	17
Kidlington	95	108	14
King's Langley	205	196	-4
Leighton Town	357	384	8
Leverstock Green	70	69	-1
North Leigh	157	119	-24
Northwood	181	142	-22
Real Bedford	173	269	55
Stotfold	200	241	21
Thame United	110	116	5
Ware	186	235	26
Welwyn Garden City	141	132	-6

Ipswich Wanderers	163	192	18
Maldon & Tiptree	277	230	-17
Mildenhall Town	174	159	-9
Newmarket Town	140	265	89
Redbridge	48	85	77
Sporting Bengal United	N/A	45	N/A
Tilbury	198	263	33
Waltham Abbey	174	180	3
Walthamstow	290	316	9
Witham Town	212	219	3
Wroxham	223	216	-3

Southern Div 1 South			
	2022-23	2023-24	%CHANGE
Bashley	378	334	-12
Bemerton Heath Harlequins/N/A		144	
Bideford	204	229	12
Bishop's Cleeve	109	143	31
Bristol Manor Farm	193	284	47
Cinderford Town	126	147	17
Cribbs	115	164	43
Didcot Town	234	320	37
Evesham United	246	280	14
Exmouth Town	313	294	-6
Falmouth Town	376	464	23
Helston Athletic	187	207	11
Larkhall Athletic	165	192	16
Malvern Town	297	312	5
Melksham Town	433	442	2
Mousehole	217	204	-6
Shaftesbury	N/A	N/A	N/A
Tavistock	157	172	10
Thatcham Town	164	134	-18
Westbury United	275	230	-16
Willand Rovers	159	184	16
Yate Town	256	317	24

Isthmian South Central			
	2022-23	2023-24	%CHANGE
Ascot United	132	209	58
Ashford Town (Middlesex)	140	122	-13
Badshot Lea	154	129	-16
Binfield	136	125	-8
Farnham Town	366	476	30
Guernsey	627	613	-2
Hanworth Villa	147	163	11
Harrow Borough	199	221	11
Hartley Wintney	311	299	-4
Hayes & Yeading	208	247	19
Horndean	N/A	150	
Kingstonian	243	221	-9
Leatherhead	359	422	18
Metropolitan Police	134	120	-10
Moneyfields	N/A	N/A	N/A
Rayners Lane	55	94	71
Raynes Park Vale	151	248	64
South Park	133	119	-11
Southall	85	121	42
Sutton Common Rovers	87	94	8
Uxbridge	121	150	24
Westfield	138	154	12

Isthmian North			
	2022-23	2023-24	%CHANGE
Basildon United	133	96	-28
Brentwood Town	219	244	11
Brightlinsea Regent	234	234	0
Bury Town	549	651	19
Cambridge City	217	179	-18
Concord Rangers	309	235	-24
Felixstowe & Walton Utd	410	384	-6
Gorleston	149	143	-4
Grays Athletic	276	239	-13
Haringey Borough	432	502	16
Heybridge Swifts	333	292	-12

Isthmian South East			
	2022-23	2023-24	%CHANGE
AFC Croydon	69	114	65
Ashford United	333	328	-2
Beckenham Town	225	253	12
Broadbridge Heath	N/A	140	N/A
Burgess Hill Town	443	421	-5
Deal Town	462	623	35
East Grinstead Town	192	144	-25
Eastbourne Town	N/A	249	N/A
Erith Town	115	139	21
Herne Bay	437	504	15
Hythe Town	229	228	0
Lancing	230	305	33
Littlehampton Town	269	240	-11
Margate	448	451	1
Merstham	237	289	22
Phoenix Sport	118	118	0
Ramsgate	744	1075	44
Sevenoaks Town	173	156	-10
Sheppey United	409	553	35
Sittingbourne	222	289	30
Steyning Town Comm.	N/A	212	N/A
Three Bridges	125	140	12

# Gregor ROBERTSON

FOOTBALLER TURNED JOURNALIST

**S**TEVE Baines was something of a pioneer. The first former professional footballer of note to become a referee. The Newark-born centre-half made almost 450 League appearances for Nottingham Forest, Huddersfield Town, Bradford City, Walsall, Bury, Scunthorpe United and Chesterfield. Then one morning, soon after his retirement in 1987, he opened up his paper and came across an article that piqued his interest.

The former Liverpool defender, Tommy Smith, and the former Chelsea defender, Ron 'Chopper' Harris, were talking about how they thought ex-pros would make good referees. Not a bad idea that, Baines thought. And so he signed up for a course at his local FA, and took up the challenge.

Seven years later, he was officiating in the Football League. Historically – and until very recently – climbing the ranks to that level had taken refs a decade or more. But Baines reckoned his playing experience gave him an edge. "It's about knowledge, recognition. You understand what's going off, what's coming next," Baines, who refereed in the Football League for eight years, told me last year. "I'd done all the things the players had done. I'd been in their boots."

Thirty years later, Baines, who turns 70 this month, remains the only fully-fledged professional footballer to have become a referee. Maybe though, with the standard of officiating under scrutiny like never before, that could soon be about to change. More than 120 PFA members have issued an interest in a new "Player to Referee" course being piloted by the players' union and Professional Game Match Officials Limited (PGMOL). In the coming weeks, that number will be whittled down to a chosen 12.

And here's the deal: £40,000 a year for two days' training per week, regular referees' meetings and matches, and two days of study for an additional qualification at the PFA Business School. It's a good offer. And who knows, perhaps at the end of their three-year scholarship a few of the lucky dozen will have been good enough to be fast-tracked to the upper echelons of the English pyramid.

That's certainly the hope. Among the applicants are present and former players, ranging from those nearing

# LET'S SEE IF YOU CAN DO BETTER!

**GROUND-BREAKERS:**  
Player-turned-referee  
Sam Allison and,  
Inset, Steve Baines

PICTURE: Alamy



the end of their career to some who have been retired for up to a decade. Most plied their trade in the Football League and National League, so we aren't talking about millionaires here and a clear pathway to a new career will be a major appeal.

## Subtleties

There's no doubt that former footballers could be an untapped reservoir of insight and experience to a profession that is under immense strain. But there's no

guarantees. Most players, in my experience, barely even know the laws of the game, never mind how to interpret them correctly during fast-paced, complex match situations.

Still, barely a week goes by without hearing that footballers could do a much better job. Refs, the theory goes, never played the game, so they don't have the same understanding or feel for its subtleties or tricks of the trade.

The same accusation –

never played the game, never truly know – is still sometimes levelled at aspiring coaches without a playing career of note on their CV. Journalists, too. In truth, there aren't many jobs in football an ex-pro doesn't think an ex-pro could do better. And I say that as, erm, an ex-pro.

But it's not as simple as that. Refereeing, like any post-playing career, requires a different set of skills. And there are referees who have played to a good level, but do

you think that protects them from criticism when they make a decision we disagree with?

Take Sam Allison, for example, who in December also became the first black referee to take charge of a Premier League game since Uriah Rennie. Allison, 43, played for Swindon Town, Bristol City, Bournemouth and Exeter City as a youngster. He even made a handful of appearances for England schoolboys.

In the end, he didn't quite

make the grade, became a firefighter and played for Bath City, Chippenham Town and Salisbury City. Soon after he turned 30, he was encouraged to take up refereeing, and was quickly hooked.

Allison thinks he started with an advantage, too. "It's inevitable that having played at a decent standard you can use that football intelligence to identify foul challenges, people's intent, movement, anticipate play, look at people's body movement and shape and understand phases of play," he said. "It just gives you that head start, I believe."

The thing is, until now, nothing much about becoming a referee has been that appealing. First, there's the abuse, which is there on the touchlines every single weekend. Then there's the glacial pace it has taken to climb the ranks. Howard Webb, PGMOL's chief refereeing officer, spent 12 years making his way to the top whilst working for South Yorkshire Police.

## Ladder

Finally, there's the money: about £120 per game, plus expenses, in the National League North and South, rising to £180 in the National League – a level at which some players now earn £4,000 or £5,000 per week. The rewards on offer at the top are growing. But unless, like Baines, who ran a successful insurance company, you could afford to climb the ladder in your spare time, finding a new career quickly when you hang up your boots has always been a necessity.

If we are to see ex-pros with whistles in hand any time soon, though, there's one rule that will almost certainly have to be consigned to the dustbin: the one that says you can't referee any game involving one of your old teams, or even your old team's rivals.

One player who previously considered becoming a referee was Chris Iwelumo, veteran of 18 clubs from the Premier League down to the National League, but he quickly realised he was wasting his time. If we want footballers to be refs, we're going to have to trust them.

Finally, though, the circumstances are in place to see if footballers really can do a better job. Good luck to them.



# WE WERE LEFT ON THE BRINK



**DESPERATE TIMES:** Thatcham Town considered voluntary relegation after failing in their FA appeal against a switch to the Southern League  
 PICTURE: Gary Learmonth

**CHAIRMAN Paul Ayres revealed Thatcham Town briefly discussed the prospect of a second voluntary relegation in ten years having been shunted into the Southern League.**

**By Andy Mitchell**

An emergency meeting was held with the club opting to redouble its efforts, including the launch of a 12th man fund to help cover the extra travel expenses, but Ayres explained that all options had been on the table at first.

### Options

The Kingfishers this week lost an appeal over the FA's decision to laterally move them from the Isthmian South Central to the Southern League South, a division in which the average annual mileage for clubs more than doubles.

Round trips will see Thatcham cover more than 4,300 miles next season, 1,800 more than the highest (Moneyfields, 2,512 miles) in the division they have just vacated.

Addressing the prospect of voluntary relegation, Ayres told *The NLP*: "It was mentioned. We had to look at everything. "We thought about what our options were but even before we lost the appeal, while we knew it would be tough, we didn't feel that would be the case. Taking voluntary relegation after

working so hard to get promoted was not something we wanted to do.

"The club did that in the past before I was involved and it took us a long time to get back up so we felt the best option was to get on with it while working harder than ever to try to bridge that revenue gap."

Figures published in *The NLP* a fortnight ago, courtesy of Non-League Data, show that some Step 4 leagues involve three times the travelling compared with more localised counterparts with Ayres advocating a more flexible approach to the National League System.

"With our location, we could quite easily fit into three different leagues

depending on what is around us," he added.

"We never thought we would end up in this division as it is predominantly the south-west and we are the most easterly team. We didn't see that they would spread the league so far across.

### Flexibility

"I don't think it is the fairest system. Finances are a big worry but another thing we spoke about in our appeal was that the decision seemed to be based on the league needing 22 teams, not that we fell into that league. It was numbers first, then geography, and I don't think that is fair for lots of different clubs.

"I appreciate you want

equal leagues in an ideal world but geography doesn't always give you that. If the FA has 18, 19, 20 clubs in an area, that should be the league rather than dragging in clubs to make up the 22. Maybe other leagues would then have 23 or 24 clubs to balance that.

"It seems that clubs at our level – and lower – are not thought about. Most of the clubs in our Step 4 league will be travelling more than most Step 3 clubs next season. That just didn't sit right with us.

"It will be tough for us but for others it can lead to relegation or completely folding altogether. That happens, so a bit of flexibility from the FA would be perfect."

# PROMOTION A MUST FOR MINTCAKES

KENDAL Town have reluctantly accepted there is only one route to a swift return to the club's heartland – promotion.

The Mintcakes this week lost an appeal over being moved from the North West Counties League Premier Division to the Northern League for the new season, despite the panel expressing "enormous sympathy and empathy" over their circumstances.

With 14 teams in the North West Counties League's top flight, the Cumbrians now face a season of crossing the

**By Andy Mitchell**

Pennines every other week, something the club argued would place an unreasonable strain on players, staff and volunteers, as well as an estimated £10,000 extra on travel bills.

However, the appeal was dismissed as it was not deemed to have been an irrational decision based on the options available to the FA Leagues Committee.

"This has come as something of a shock," read Kendal's statement.

"We believed we had put forward a strong case and

felt the appeal went well with a number of key points being acknowledged and accepted by the panel.

"It would seem numbers in the respective leagues have been the driving force and not what is best or appropriate for clubs.

"We now face at least one season in the Northern League, and in order to get back to our natural geography we need to be promoted."

It was one of seven unsuccessful appeals in relation to league allocations at Steps 5 and 6, while University of Exeter's appeal

against not being promoted into Step 6 in the South West Peninsula League was also thrown out based on the club's acknowledgement that it had not met ground grading criteria.

At Step 5, Petersfield Town's move from the Wessex League to the Southern Combination was upheld, while at the tier below, the allocations of Middlezoy Rovers to the South West Peninsula League, Clapton Community to the Southern Counties East League and Retford United to the United Counties League were rubber

stamped despite each club's protestations.

The other two appeals were over refused requests to switch leagues with Whittlesey Athletic denied a move from the Eastern Counties League Division One to its Spartan South Midlands League counterpart and Pinchbeck United placed in the Eastern Counties League as opposed to the United Counties League Division One following relegation from Step 5.

At Step 4, Carlton Town were refused a switch from NPL East to the Midlands division.

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# AT THE MATCH

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AT THE MATCH is a landmark photobook published by When Saturday Comes, the independent football magazine, to celebrate two decades of images captured by its team of photographers Simon Gill, Colin McPherson and Paul Thompson.

The photography documents the matchday experience across the UK and Ireland, capturing the jubilation and despair of the game but more importantly the ritual of going to football, whether it's in the Premier League or at grassroots level.

With an introduction by author Daniel Gray, the

images reveal the game as it is experienced by those who participate in it, with a focus on the connection between clubs and their supporters. This approach is what makes the collection unrivalled and the book unique, with the images telling stories of how and where we enjoy our football.

Originally backed by nearly 400 supporters on Kickstarter during October 2023, the AT THE MATCH project was led by designer Doug Cheeseman.

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