

GOING STRONG SINCE OCTOBER 1985

Wombles Downunder



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DID I SAY THAT?

"WE'RE not safe yet, not by a long stretch - nowhere near it in fact. If we could have won (at Northampton) and also beaten Aldershot like we probably should have looking at their form, we would be looking at the top seven rather than down at the bottom two, but that's how it is." **Terry Brown.**

"HE has good technique, can use both feet, can strike the ball, is good in the air and his hold up play is good. He has not got the same sort of pace as Christian Jolley but Newcastle would have signed him if he had."

Brown on new striker signing Jason Prior.

"I definitely think I can make the step up. I think full-time training will do me the world of good. It was quick when I went on against Aldershot but I didn't find it too bad and, once I acclimatise, hopefully I will start doing well and getting goals." **Prior.**

"JASON has been brilliant in training. He has more than enough going for him to play at this level. Jason reminds me of Kedwell with his physique and the way he plays. He is very similar to Kedwell in that he is strong, powerful, and wins his fair share in the air."

Christian Jolley on Prior.

"EVERYONE in the back four needs a kick up the backside. Our defensive record isn't good enough, so the next three or four weeks is huge in terms of their futures. We have eight defenders but I've still no idea what my best back four is because whatever permutations I've tried haven't worked." **Brown.**

"WHILE we have sometimes been unlucky and played well for no points — Burton, Rotherham— it has to be acknowledged (and statistics don't lie!!) that we are very fragile in defence. It's a problem that doesn't seem to have been fully solved by recent changes in the transfer window." **Ian Cooke.**

"BOTH the lads have been great since they have come in and they work their socks off. They've both got that bit of quality in the final third and it's helped the squad. It's helped to motivate the boys who aren't in the squad. It's keeping everyone on their toes because people know their places aren't safe anymore and it's good to have competition — it's healthy." **Sammy Moore on Billy Knott and George Moncur.**

"THE boys have given everyone a lift since they came in so it's great to be able to extend their deals. Both West Ham and Sunderland were happy for them to stay on as they want to see their young lads out playing games." **Brown on a further month's loan extensions for Knott and Moncur.**

"I think AFC Wimbledon is the real Wimbledon, no matter what anyone thinks. In an ideal world, Milton Keynes would not have the Dons name - this is the real Dons and I think they should want to lose it rather than keep it. I have a lot of love for AFC Wimbledon and I

have been following them since they started. I have a lot of friends here and now they are a league club I want them to push on." **Dean Holdsworth.**

"WHILE some of the more senior fans might point to the likes of Batsford and Guy as the Wimbledon all-time legends, there really is only one man who symbolises the full extent of our rise back in the day to the extraordinary heights we achieved, and that's our Harry Bassett," **Trevor Pearce.**

"WHETHER Terry Brown can progress the club further up the football pyramid is I feel, doubtful. Terry has become the victim of his own success, as by moving the club very close to its natural ceiling he has made it very difficult to achieve further success on the pitch. This is a situation I doubt any other manager within our budget could rectify — we will only be able to make significant progress as a club if we move into a larger stadium and hence increase our income streams." **Windlesham Don.**

"REALISTICALLY, AFC Wimbledon are a League Two side on their gates and possibly could nick into League One and perhaps do a Wycombe, but it's hard to get there because the money becomes so difficult." **Dave Bassett.**

"FOR some of us old-timers, some of the stuff we hear now about what great football we play, can seem odd and even grate; hearing our fans berate the likes of Hampton and Richmond as we go up, for their rudimentary style, poor facilities and low numbers of supporters seems a memory failure to me at least," **Trevor Pearce.**

"LIVING in the UK you get more regular information about Wimbledon than you ever could in Australia; some is good, some is bad and sometimes it is downright ugly," **The Wizard of Oz.**

WOMBLES DOWNUNDER

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HOW I SEE IT

robert smith

DONS' ACHILLES HEEL

ONE of the confounding aspects of AFC Wimbledon's painful first foray in the Football League is the club's dire record against the bottom-half teams. As Terry Brown's squad grapple to adjust to the demands of the fourth tier after charging out of non-league in just nine seasons, it was expected that the Dons would struggle against the better-resourced teams in League Two. But no, Wimbledon have found it harder going against the lower teams (of which AFC Wimbledon admittedly is one) than against the high flyers. Take this for example: in 15 matches this campaign against the bottom half, the Dons rank 22nd out of 24 with 19 points (averaging 1.27 points per game). Now compare that with matches against the top-half clubs. The Dons are 11th with 17 points from 15 games (1.13 PPG). At Kingsmeadow the Dons are duffers against the bottom-half teams and are last of all 24 teams with just six points from eight home games, but 13th at home against the top-half with 10 points from eight outings. That indicates an inability to get down and mix it with the less skilful teams. We are all too painfully aware of the Dons' brittle defence, but did you know that Wimbledon rank last in League 2 with their defence at home? Thirty-three goals conceded (worse than bottom team Northampton who have the worst home record of the entire Football League!). Terry Brown's men have yet to keep a clean sheet in 16 league games at Kingsmeadow this season and seven times have conceded one goal. They leak on average 2.06 goals a home game, which means the Dons' attack have to score at least twice just to earn a point! But away from Kingsmeadow they rank 14th in terms of defence, 22 goals in 14 trips at a more palatable 1.57 goals per game with three lovely clean sheets!! The Dons' attack (thanks to Jack Midson and Christian Jolley's goals) are comfortably mid-table home and away, so it's plainly obvious what have been Wimbledon's problems this first season in League 2. Should the Dons stay up and they are 12 points clear of the relegation zone as I write then that is something Terry Brown must rectify as a priority for next season. The continual inability to keep out the goals has undermined overall team confidence and had a detrimental effect on last season's WDSA player of the year Seb Brown in goal. As Dons' legend Ian Cooke observes in this issue: "Seb Brown looks a bundle of nerves and must strive to get his confidence back (and also to stop throwing his toys out of the pram as he only makes himself look silly and he upsets his teammates), but playing behind mistake-prone defenders can't be helping." Terry Brown must find an answer for the Dons' Achilles Heel. It can't be allowed to go on and on.

EDGING CLOSER TO SURVIVAL

WIMBLEDON are about 14 points, likely less, from keeping their place in League Two next season. A look back at the last nine L2 seasons reveals that on average 48 points is enough to prevent tumbling through the relegation trap-door into the Conference and non-league football. The Dons are currently on 36 points, 12 points above the relegation zone now occupied by Dagenham & Redbridge and Northampton Town, both on 24 points. After back-to-back defeats to Aldershot Town and Northampton there is once again a little nervousness, as Windlesham Don describes it, "The first scores to be checked (by Dons' fans) have changed from Crawley and Southend to Plymouth and Dagenham." But most would say and expect Wimbledon to get through over the concluding 16 games, barring an injury crisis and rank bad form. Terry Brown took out some insurance with six new players on loan and permanently signed during the transfer window and with several key players about to return from injury spells, he should have enough quality at his disposal to accumulate those much-needed points for L2 safety. But hard lessons are being learnt this season. It has been a campaign largely fraught with difficulties adjusting to the step up. The Dons have lost more than they've won and the defence is only a few goals off the worst in the division. As Windlesham Don put it. "Like it or not, the reality is that nine years of virtually uninterrupted success have come to an end. Despite operating home fixtures at around 95% of ground capacity (a figure that realistically is unlikely to be maintained in forthcoming seasons) we can still only afford a playing budget towards the bottom end of the League. We cannot generate significant extra funds from the fan base, nor from commercial activities. Neither do we have a multi-millionaire chairman, nor 'sugar daddy' to pump in the millions needed to progress our club through the leagues." Just perhaps, AFC Wimbledon has, for now, reached its natural ceiling. That is, until a new and bigger home ground is built. Yet the last decade has taught us one thing. Never underestimate the ability of Wimbledon to conquer each obstacle they encounter. The Dons have already come so far and sure this season has been a thorough examination, but I reckon staying, and hopefully consolidating a place, in the Football League would be some achievement for a club that wasn't even in existence in 2002. Among some terrific reading in this issue, the great Dave Bassett talks to WDSA, Trevor Pearce salutes 'Harry' Bassett's achievements, while our own Wizard of Oz delves into the Good, the Bad and the Ugly of Wimbledon FC. Just to show it's not always sweetness and light.



PAGE SPONSOR: DOMINIC, GABRIEL & PAUL; Leura, NSW

IT'S A QUESTION OF TRUST

RAY ARMFIELD says it's not all doom and gloom amid the deep freeze with the Dons rejuvenated by some astute shopping by Terry Brown, and with long overdue movement on the club's new Communications Executive.



So as you WDSA types crack open a cold one or throw another shrimp on the barbie, those of us in the UK are shivering away through another cold snap that has already produced two postponements in AFC Wimbledon's fixture list following the postponements of the Cheltenham Town and Bradford City games to the deep freeze.

But it's not all doom and gloom (and cold) in the land of the Dons however. Since the last issue, AFC Wimbledon's fortunes have taken a turn for the decidedly better with three straight wins (two of which coming in tricky-looking away fixtures) together with some quality reinforcements which have notably refreshed the appetites of the fan base.

It was clear that for some of Terry Brown's squad, the jump from non-league football to League Two was proving difficult and tough decisions were made to shuffle the pack with five players being informed their services were no longer required and their replacements looking to be of a higher calibre.

The club's transfer record was broken to capture Byron Harrison from Stevenage. A skilful central striker with a style not dissimilar to Dimitar Berbatov, he will share the load currently falling squarely on the shoulders of Jack Midson.

Whilst Harrison – on TB's radar for a while now – has an enviable hit rate, don't be surprised to see him more in a provider's role.

Also boosting the ranks of the strikers is Jason Prior. Described as "an old-fashioned centre-forward" he has been plucked from the lower echelons of the Ryman League where he was prolific for Bognor Regis Town and even had a trial for Premiership giants Newcastle United. Even with a brief cameo role as substitute against Aldershot, I can see the potential in this boy. He's raw – and no youngster at 24 – but there are signs he can be an uncut diamond waiting to be polished.

Behind them, come two fresh-faced quality loanees. George Moncur comes from West Ham and is a busy midfielder like his Dad John. But the lad who has instantly captured the imagination of the Tempest End

is Sunderland's Billy Knott. An all-action midfielder reminiscent of a young Michael Hughes (and that's high praise in my book) he had the fans singing his name before the end of his debut at Port Vale to the extent that his Mum was reduced to tears by the warm welcome he received.

Add in a spectacular long range goal on his debut and the sheer delight on his face – and let's face it, League Two must be preferable to an Academy game on a windswept training ground in front of one man and his dog – and you'd hope that the arrangement between former Wycombe team mates Stuart Cash and Martin O'Neill, will see him stick around for a while yet.

And, of course, there is the return of the prodigal son as Jason Euell finally rolls back the years to go full circle in a Wimbledon shirt once more. Even if the signing on loan from Charlton had as much sentimentality and practicality, it has lifted everyone's spirits no end. Welcome home Jason.

Off the field, we await the unveiling of the club's new Communications Executive. Advertised as "a new role which will involve producing and editing a wide range of communications content within the football club and Dons Trust, including general communications (such as for the club's web site); recording and uploading interviews with football management and staff; general marketing materials, and newsletters. The job is challenging but is likely to be suited to someone taking their first role in communications" some of the functions covered are long overdue for an overhaul.

His or her identity has yet to be formally announced, but the indications are that it is someone from within our support and therefore you'd hope that they will be given some autonomy in the role and not simply be a subordinate data processor of the party line.

As I write, (February 10) marks the tenth anniversary of the launch of the Dons Trust. And what a momentous journey this last decade has been for us all.

For those of you not familiar with the formation, there is a four-page programme article due to have appeared on the club website by the time you read this, with some reflective thoughts from the movers and shakers involved at the outset and I hope it will be an informative and enjoyable read and thank you to everyone past and present, near and far, who has shared the incredible journey over the last decade with me (DT member #0103 badge being proudly worn today!) — **Ray Armfield.**

[Ed: Subsequent to Ray's article it is understood that the new Comms man is Chris Slavin. More on him in future issues.]



PAGE SPONSOR: PAUL, DYLAN & SAM RUSSELL; Adelaide

NEW BOYS GIVE WHOLE JOINT A MASSIVE LIFT

A touch of youthful swagger, seasoned know-how and it certainly looks a whole lot brighter (the football that is, not the British weather!) since the grim days in December-January, writes BUSH WOMBLE.



DESPITE defeat in our last home game against Aldershot, and subsequent weather postponements, there is no doubt that the league table looks a lot brighter than it did at the start of January. The catalyst for the recent upturn in form has been Terry Brown's use of the January transfer window to overhaul the squad. Out have gone Porter, Minshull, Jackson, Mulley and Ademenio while Euell, Knott, Moncur, Hoyte, Harrison and Prior have all arrived, the latter two permanently.

The new arrivals gave the whole club a massive lift before the game at Port Vale. Prior to that confidence was low; we had lost six straight league games, it was hard to see where the next goal, let alone win, was coming from and it looked certain that our first season back in the Football League would be heading the way of a relegation dogfight. The January signings provided a much needed boost of youthful swagger (Knott, Moncur) and seasoned know-how (Euell) and suddenly we travelled to Port Vale almost certain that we'd come away with the three points. Going behind early on (again!) could have dented our new found confidence but we bounced back and claimed a valuable win.

That was followed by an astonishing comeback at Gillingham and a slightly less astonishing one at home to Macclesfield. At the time of writing 17 of the 35 points we have achieved this season have been won from losing positions. I don't know off-hand how that compares with other teams but it strikes me as a remarkable statistic. It certainly suggests that there is plenty of spirit and character in the squad, no doubt aided by the recent arrivals (since when we have contributed 9 of those 17 points).

Of the arrivals, it was naturally Jason Euell who generated the most excitement. A home-grown Wimbledon boy, who has spent nearly his entire career at the top of the football pyramid and was playing in the Premiership as recently as last season, his arrival had the feeling of a homecoming much like when Terry Brown introduced Marcus Gayle as his first signing. On the pitch injuries have meant that Euell has had little chance to make an impact (though there is still time) but off it his experience has clearly had a positive impact on a young and sometimes naive squad.

The two young midfielders, Billy Knott from Sunderland and West Ham's George Moncur, have had the biggest impact to date. Knott is a skilful, powerful

and determined left-sided midfielder with a fierce shot, quick feet and an equally quick footballing brain. He looks a step above at this level and I'm sure in time he will establish himself at a much higher one. Moncur is a classy midfielder, comfortable in possession and adept at making time for himself on the ball. At some stage I'd like to see him played more centrally (rather than on the right side of Terry Brown's preferred midfield diamond) but, like Knott, he looks a confident performer at this level. It's good news all round that both players have decided to extend their stay at the club.

I have yet to see enough of Gavin Hoyte, brother of Middlesbrough's Justin, to make a firm judgment but he looks to be a pacy, attacking right-back. Unlike some fans, I still think that Sam Hatton has the ability to emerge as a highly competent League 2 full back but there's no doubt that he needs to improve on his recent performances. Terry talked of the new arrivals having a positive impact on the players already here and I hope that Hoyte's spell at the club can motivate Hatton to do all he can to get his place back, and hold on to it.

Up front we have added two forwards who, between them, have played the majority of their careers some way down the football pyramid. Byron Harrison is a tall, gangly centre forward who doesn't always look in full control of what he is doing but, on first glance, would seem to be 'a bit of a handful'. I like the look of him and think he will score goals, as well as unsettling defences and setting up chances for others. I have seen only 20 minutes of Jason Prior but even in his cameo against Aldershot he looked promising. He certainly offers us different options up front and it was encouraging to hear that he described himself as an 'old-fashioned centre forward' on his arrival at the club.

Unlike some fans (again!) I'm pleased to see TB continue to scour the lower divisions for uncut diamonds. It has always been the Wimbledon way and if we are to thrive at this level (and possibly beyond) we will need to return to the old philosophy of selling players on for a profit. Harrison shows that non-league players can make it at a higher level. No doubt some Stevenage fans wondered whether he could make the step up but after a run of goals that helped them to promotion they would certainly have changed their minds. Let's hope that Prior has a similar impact here.

Our defence is still shambolic, though I could not care less how many we concede as long as we score more. Jack Midson still looks an inspired signing and Sammy Moore continues his run of impressive performances that make him a clear front-runner for player of the year. Terry Brown continues to divide opinion: some, like me, think he's fantastic, others remain to be convinced. Regardless of your view, it certainly has not been a dull first season back in the Football League.



PAGE SPONSOR: GARY WALKER; Washington

IS TERRY BROWN A VICTIM OF HIS OWN SUCCESS?

WINDLESHAM DON says AFC Wimbledon under Terry Brown have enjoyed a period of exponential success. He writes that under the constraints of a small ground and budget, it would be difficult to find another manager who could replicate what TB has achieved at KM.



THIS SEASON, on the pitch, has probably been the most difficult since the formation of AFC Wimbledon. A poor run of results lasting from mid-October to mid-January led to the first calls amongst some supporters for the head of manager, Terry Brown. But were these calls justified and would a change of manager improve our prospects?

Brown was appointed in the summer of 2007, after two frustrating seasons in the Ryman Premier League cost Dave Anderson his position. Since his arrival the club has achieved three promotions and returned us to the Football League. This has been achieved whilst moving the squad from part-time to full-time, transforming the style of play to an attractive passing game, transitioning to a younger squad and topping the fair play league for three consecutive seasons. All this has been very impressive, but is even more so when considering how our playing budget has moved relative to our opponents in recent seasons. From being amongst the top payers in the Ryman Premier League and the team everyone wanted to play for, the Dons now find themselves in the 'relegation zone' of payers in League 2 and no longer a club to attract players.

However, despite these achievements the recent run of poor results have prompted some of our more opinionated supporters (on the WUP Guestbook, in particular) calling for Brown's head.

It must be very difficult for anyone who cannot get to games regularly to judge the mood around the club and that of the supporters. The advent of social media makes it easy for anyone to gain access to news and opinion throughout the world. For 'exiled' football supporters this is fantastic, as news and opinion are now available 24 hours a day via phone or PC. For those of us lucky enough to get along to most AFC Wimbledon games, social media, especially the WUP Guestbook which is the major source of continuous supporter opinion, merely provides sets of views which can be assimilated and filtered against one's own opinion of a match or incident.

However, for those who cannot get to games but who are still interested in 'all things AFC Wimbledon' there is no personal view with which to judge the opinion of others. Also, the very nature of a guestbook means that views will generally be polarised – there is little to be gained from posting that the team were "OK" and that a particular player was "not bad". Thus any guestbook is liable to contain polarised views – the team were "brilliant" and a player was "awesome", will be followed by an "appalling" performance and the manager "is not good enough".

From my viewpoint, during the recent poor run of results there has never been any dissent from the terraces. The mood amongst the fans obviously became darker compared to the euphoria of the first couple of months and the number of travelling supporters dwindled somewhat. Eyes cast towards the top of the table in September shifted to the relegation positions by Christmas. The first scores to be checked changed from Crawley and Southend to Plymouth and Dagenham. But despite a general nervousness emanating from the terraces on a match day, the support for the team during the poor run was nothing other than wholehearted and there was never a hint of any "Brown Out" chants.

I also believe that there was never any doubt from within the club that Terry would remain our manager.

If we are attempting to judge Terry's performance it is worth considering the whole story of the season so far. In the aftermath of the playoff victory TB stated that he wanted to give the players that got us promoted the chance to prove themselves in League 2. This was an admirable and supportive attitude, but unfortunately it was closely followed by the exit of some key members of the squad. The departures of Kedwell, Gregory and to a lesser extent Kaid Mohamed were not anticipated and could not have helped the planning of the forthcoming campaign.

After a fast start to the season, doubtlessly inspired by the collective euphoria of the playoff victory, it slowly became apparent that some of the promotion-winning squad were not up to the standard required for League football. Performances and confidence dipped and led to the inevitable run of poor results.

Due to the vagaries of the transfer window system it was not until after Christmas that any significant changes to the squad could be made. However, when the window opened five players were transfer-listed and six brought in, either on loan or on permanent deals. It remains to be seen whether the new personnel will significantly change the course of our season, but few would argue that the quality of the squad has not been improved by the new arrivals. In my opinion, looking dispassionately at Terry Brown's decisions so far this season, it is difficult to seriously criticise his actions.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 6]



IS TERRY BROWN A VICTIM OF HIS OWN SUCCESS? CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5 |

We also need to place the criticism of Terry Brown within the context of the club's new-found place within the football hierarchy.

Like it or not, the reality is that nine years of virtually uninterrupted success have come to an end. Despite operating home fixtures at around 95% of ground capacity (a figure that realistically is unlikely to be maintained in forthcoming seasons) we can still only afford a playing budget towards the bottom end of the League. We cannot generate significant extra funds from the fan base, nor from commercial activities. Neither do we have a multi-millionaire chairman, nor 'sugar daddy' to pump in the millions needed to progress our club through the leagues.

On the pitch it is unlikely that things will get better next season. We are trying to play an attractive, passing style of football, but on a pitch which is amongst the smallest in the league and which will always deteriorate as the season progresses due to the ground share with Kingstonian. Opposition managers will do their homework on us next season and make our passing game more difficult to execute. Moreover the quality of players we must attract to execute our quick-passing style needs to be better than if we were trying to play a more direct style – we are unlikely to have neither the budget nor the scouting experience to consistently attract the quality of players needed to progress.

For us to achieve a further promotion within this environment may be beyond the ability of managers with far more league experience than Terry Brown.

One criticism that has been levelled at Terry during the poor spell was that we were conceding too many goals. This is obviously a valid criticism, as the lack of clean sheets proves. TB has talked about the cause being too many individual errors, and this may be true some of the time, but I feel there is a combination of more fundamental reasons. If we accept that we are going to play attacking football then we have to be prepared to get caught out if we commit too many players forward. If we ask the players to play a passing game then we need to accept that they will make the occasional mistake in dangerous areas. Finally, we have to accept that this League contains managers and coaches who are far more experienced at this level than ours are – we have to accept that our coaching team are on the proverbial "learning curve" as far as tactics at this level are concerned.

A further criticism could be levelled that Terry has chosen a style of play which is not best suited to our budget or pitch conditions. It would have been more practical to create a squad of players in the Stevenage mould, utilising a direct and physical style of play. The

players would have been cheaper, the training and tactics would have been simpler and the style would have suited the Kingsmeadow pitch. Arguably it would also be more likely to succeed given our budget, as the promotion of the Stevenage side demonstrated last season.

However, perhaps the story of Wimbledon has come full circle, as despite our Crazy Gang roots I personally have no desire to watch that style of football anymore!

I find it hard to believe that any other manager would have improved on the achievements of Terry Brown over the last four and a half seasons. If the new loan and permanent signings settle in over the next few weeks then safety will be assured and we will be able to look forward to a few squad 'tweaks' during the close season. The mid-season 'blip' and the calls for Terry's head will be largely forgotten as fans look forward to another season in the Football League.

Of course, if the poor run resumes and we get relegated back to the Conference then I feel that Terry would be honourable enough to offer his resignation to the Board – I am sure he would stand or fall by his transfer window signings, and I also have little doubt that he would offer his resignation before he was ever asked to leave. However, I feel that barring unforeseen disasters the current squad is good enough to comfortably avoid relegation.

Whether Terry can progress the club further up the football pyramid is I feel, doubtful. Terry has become the victim of his own success, as by moving the club very close to its natural ceiling he has made it very difficult to achieve further success on the pitch. This is a situation I doubt any other manager within our budget could rectify – we will only be able to make significant progress as a club if we move into a larger stadium and hence increase our income streams.

Unfortunately, it is likely that any future period of stability, consolidation or lack of success will be perceived by some as stagnation and may lead to pressure on the Board for managerial change. I would hope that the Board could resist this as I believe Terry is the ideal manager for this club. Apart from his tactical ability, he shares the same ethos as the club, as he tries to be honest, decent, unassuming and trustworthy at all times. He is liked and respected by players and his fellow managers around the leagues. He doesn't snipe at other managers, nor rant at officials or reporters. In my opinion he is the perfect front man for the image AFC Wimbledon.

Some of our supporters may be attracted to the bullish notoriety of Steve Evans, the Latin excitement of Paulo Di Canio or the controlled pragmatism of Graham Westley, for me I'm happy to stick with plain old 'Mr Nice Guy' Terry Brown.

— John Martin



STATS DON'T LIE ABOUT 'FRAGILE' DEFENCE

DONS' legend IAN COOKE runs the rule over the Dons' rollercoaster season. He likes what he sees in Billy Knott, rates Sammy Moore for his tireless commitment, scolds Seb Brown for 'throwing his toys out of the pram' and shakes his head at the mistake-prone defence, concerned that the problem has not been fixed.

WELL, what an 'up and down' season for the Dons! I have seen 90% of the matches and the team looked good in a lot of matches early on (but occasionally pretty poor at other times, vis. Macclesfield, Northampton, Torquay. I now turn up not knowing what to expect.

I have wondered if our early successes might have been related to the fact that many teams brought in quite a few new players and were in a 'settling-in' mode.

I say this because I was told that some 600+ professional footballers were out of work last summer and were desperately looking for work at new clubs.

However, that doesn't excuse some of our 'off days' — whilst we have sometimes been unlucky and played well for no points — Burton, Rotherham — it has to be acknowledged (and statistics don't lie !!) that we are very fragile in defence. It's a problem that doesn't seem to have been fully solved by recent changes in the transfer window.

It must also be acknowledged that several of the games won/drawn could so easily have been lost (Port Vale at home, Barnet at home, Swindon at home, Gillingham away).

Unfortunately, Seb Brown looks a bundle of nerves and must strive to get his confidence back (and also to stop throwing his toys out of the pram as he only makes himself look silly and he upsets his teammates), but playing behind mistake-prone defenders can't be helping.

We really have gifted about 15 goals up to the time of writing and I do mean GIFTED.

Turning to the new midfield players it is early days yet to make a balanced judgment, but Billy Knott looks the pick of them so far. His performance against Macclesfield (and I don't just mean his goal) was superb as he ran the show from start to finish. His work-rate was phenomenal.

As for George Moncur, let's hope he's as good as some others in his family but for me 'the jury's out' as I have seen him caught on the wrong side in midfield when he should be marking tight although that may have had something to do with match fitness/pace of the game as I believe he is improving with each game.

Some of our 'stalwarts' have occasionally looked temperamental, a sure sign that they are struggling, namely, Jamie Stuart (he's always 100% committed but sometimes overly aggressive and missing too many tackles/headers),

Sam Hatton (far too casual at times and needs to be seen to be putting in a full shift), Luke Moore (I have always liked his approach and he is a 'sniffer' who will always score goals but must stop throwing himself down looking for fouls/penalties and do the simple thing).

The most consistent are Gareth Gwillim and Sammy Moore, who always give 100% and could teach some of the others about never giving up, plus Jack Midson, who has a very good 'goals per game' ratio.

However, it has been noticeable that whereas in some games Midson has worked tirelessly chasing down defenders (in the Danny Kedwell style) in other games he has been less mobile.

You will know that a number of players have been told they may go and some have already been loaned out. With some of them that is a great pity as I believe that most of them were acclimatising to the speed/skill of the division and it is only because we were hurtling towards relegation that it became desperately urgent to make changes.

For the likes of Ryan Jackson, Lee Minshull, Reece Jones and James Mulley, the promotions may have come too quickly for them to keep up with the pace of the game and quality of opposition but given time they would have got there.

Mulley, in particular, I liked and I was somewhat surprised that he was not given the chance in his preferred midfield position.

Having said all that the priority is to stay up and the next few matches, several against lowly sides, have become 'must wins', but our home form has been abysmal.

We have played our best stuff away from home on the wide open spaces of Morecambe, Rotherham, etc.

I should also mention that we have also been a bit unlucky with injuries/illness with Gwillim, Jolley, Mitchel-King, Djilali, Luke Moore and Jason Euell but they weren't all at the same time and maybe the squad should have been good enough to have got at least a point from some of the games we have lost.

The golf is going ok, thanks for asking, but we are in the grip of the Arctic conditions and I am happy to keep in the warm. I bet you're sitting near a beach reading this you lucky guy!! **[Ed: You're right there, Cookie!!!].**



WHY IS THE DONS' DEFENCE SO BRITTLE?

DAVID BUGG, like the rest of us, is alarmed at the continuing fragility of the Dons' defence this season that keeps the team under pressure in the bottom half. Buggy gives his reasons why the Dons' defence ranks as one of the worst in League Two.



THE recent cold snap has robbed us of any action recently so a trip to Northampton resulted in a larger than normal turnout to see the lads back in action. After a poor first-half performance where the Dons could have been two or three goals down they were much improved in the second half. However, yet again, our inability to keep a clean sheet cost us the chance of a point and a game that was heading towards a 0-0 draw ended in defeat following some sloppy play from Gareth Gwillim.

Giving the ball away in a dangerous area of the pitch by Gwillim resulted in a run and shot from the Northampton player which Seb Brown saved but was then beaten by another Cobblers player following up on the rebound.

Our good recent run on the back of the new signings in January has now become a distant memory and it looks very much like we will be having to scrap for every point to ensure League Two survival.

So why is this the case? Why is it that we have kept only three clean sheets in the League all season? That stat sounds even worse when you consider two of those clean sheets were back in August!

The defence is obviously the place where people will lay the blame and to a certain extent this would be right. I also happen to think that Terry Brown should shoulder some responsibility, though, as he sets the team up to play in a certain way when in attacking or defensive positions.

He has also tinkered continuously with the back four trying to find the right combination which much also have an unsettling affect on the side.

Wimbledon started the season well but the signs of defensive fragility first emerged in the 4-0 stuffing at Macclesfield. Both Jamie Stuart and Sam Hatton were beaten for pace for two of the goals and poor marking from crosses also caught us out.

The home defeat against Northampton also featured some shocking defending but this was largely forgotten as the Dons went into October in third place. It took three heavy defeats in 10 days against Crewe, Crawley and Torquay (where we conceded 12 goals in total) for

people to suddenly realise this league was not going to be a walk in the park, and that our defending was looking very iffy indeed. As it turned out this begun a long run of games without a win which lasted until mid-January and saw us looking over our shoulder at the relegation battle.

Looking at the back four as a unit I think we've suffered from a combination of TB's tinkering and some injuries to key players. We started the season without Mat Mitchel-King and then lost Gareth Gwillim for nearly three months. Both would have been amongst the first names on the team sheet when fit and it's clear we have missed their influence and experience at times.

The central defensive partnership in particular has never looked that solid regardless of the combinations used.

I did think that we might have hit upon the right combination when Callum McNaughton and Mitchel-King were put together for the three wins on the bounce in January.

I am still shocked by the decision to then drop McNaughton and recall the erratic Stuart for the Aldershot and Northampton games.

For me Stuart is one of the reasons why our back four is so unsettled. Last season in the Conference he could get away with a lack of pace and poor positioning at times. This season, though, he has been exposed on many occasions by pacy forwards who find space and have the ability to exploit it. His frenzied behaviour seems to affect the rest of the back four.

In particular I noticed that McNaughton seemed far more confident in his ability when he was playing alongside the much calmer Mitchel-King.

Brett Johnson, Chris Bush and Hatton have all struggled to make the step up. Johnson has been the biggest disappointment as he looked a seriously good player in the Conference but never seemed to recover his confidence after the hand ball in the opening game against Bristol Rovers.

As I've mentioned previously I think Bush looks like he could shed a few pounds and he's not the quickest either. If he is going to make it as a Football League player it may be that a switch to centre half could be the answer. His physical attributes could be far more useful in that position.

Hatton is like Marmite as far as our fans go. Some love him, some loathe him. I must admit I have strayed between the two extremes over the years until he finally won me over in the two seasons in the Conference.

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PAGE SPONSOR: DAVID KENWERY; Centerville, Cape Cod, USA

The Wizard of Oz



The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

WHEN Jason Euell joined AFC Wimbledon he became the first player to have made his Football League debut for both Wimbledon FC and AFC Wimbledon. It was one of the good stories of the season; a heart-warming moment at a difficult time for the team. Living in the UK you get more regular information about Wimbledon than you ever could in Australia; some is good, some is bad and sometimes it is downright ugly.

Because of the Leveson enquiry into phone tapping at the *News of the World* there are constant references to and images of Glenn Mulcaire. Trigger, as he is affectionately known, has his place in AFC Wimbledon history as the first player to score in a competitive match for the club when he netted against Bromley in 2002. He should be held in some esteem by the fans, but Mulcaire is a low-life individual. If you listen to the revelations from witnesses at the inquiry of quite dreadful intrusions into their private lives by individuals such as Mulcaire you can only have contempt for this man.

BBC 3 recently screened *Britain's Gay Footballers* narrated by Amal Fashanu, daughter of Wimbledon's John and niece of Justin. Justin was Britain's first million-pound black footballer, and in October 1990 the first (and only) professional player in Britain to come out as gay. John publicly denounced him: "My gay brother is an outcast". He said his brother would have to "suffer the consequences" and that he "wouldn't like to play or even get changed in the vicinity of him". Although John later apologised, Justin never fully got over what he saw as betrayal by a brother he loved. In 1998, following unfounded charges of sexual misconduct, he committed suicide by hanging. The constant attack on his status as a homosexual by many, and the ostracism by his brother, saw him become so depressed he simply gave up. At the time of his death John, coincidentally in an interview, said "we lost contact years ago and, anyway, I'm past caring. I've washed my hands of him". Later, in a television interview with Esther Rantzen he admitted: "Just before he committed suicide, there was a telephone call to my mobile phone that night and the person wouldn't speak. I could hear breathing; I could feel that it was somebody from my family. I could feel that it was Justin, but I didn't reach out. I just put the phone down and thought: 'Oh, it's him again'. And the next day he committed suicide."

Generous Wimbledon fans will remember John Fashanu for his remarkable effort in the second-half of the 1988 FA Cup final when he seemed to make more tackles that day than you would expect any forward to make in a season. Wimbledon fans rejoiced in the way Fashanu's physicality upset other team's defenders. He was known for using his elbows when challenging for the ball in the air. He was a thug of a player, who cared little for anyone but himself and thought nothing of kicking lumps out of opponents. He wouldn't have lasted five minutes in the modern game. He was, and is, a thoroughly unpleasant man; his attitude to homosexuals and in particular to his younger brother Justin was particularly odious. John Fashanu quite simply is a very ugly piece of work.

Turn on the telly and you'll find Vinnie Jones in a reprise of his stand-over man routine from *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*; Vinnie Jones is the epitome of everything that is supposed to be bad about *The Crazy Gang* of Wimbledon. He was sent off 12 times and has twice been found guilty of criminal assault by the law but Jones has moved on from grabbing Gazza by the testicles to helping people "Stay Alive" as the face of the British Heart Foundation's excellent video on how to treat a person with a suspected heart attack. You can find the video on their website; it's well worth a look. In June 2010 he gave his FA Cup winner's medal to AFC Wimbledon and wished the club all the best for the future. Jones was Bad, he was Ugly but now he seems to have turned to Good!

I heard Jobi McAnuff interviewed recently on a Football League podcast. McAnuff was with Wimbledon when they went into administration in 2003; he left to join Crystal Palace in the January transfer window in 2004. He is the captain of Championship side Reading and at 30 years of age is planning his future after he has to retire from playing. In a new twist on the ethos of giving something back to the game he is becoming a player agent but not the type who want to rip off clubs and players and enjoy the spoils of the occasional bung but as a mentor. The particular focus is on young players, trying to find their way in the game. McAnuff remembers well how hard the situation was at Wimbledon when they went bust and how little support there was for the players in that situation. "I've been in a situation at Wimbledon where we went into administration and every day was a struggle – one day there was no powder to wash the kit. It was a tough time and, as a player, you are wondering what is happening." Along with his best mate Lionel Morgan, who had to retire from the game at the age of 21 – again with no advice or support as what to do next – they have formed a company called *Infinite Sports Management* "A lot of the agents, as good as they are at negotiating a contract, haven't played the game and they haven't got the day-to-day understanding of what

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PAGE SPONSOR: STEWART KEVILL-DAVIES; Sunshine Coast, Queensland

WHY IS THE DONS' DEFENCE SO BRITTLE? [CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8]

It's worth remembering that Hatton has been with us since the Ryman Premier days and I think that this season has just proved to be a step too far for him.

Going forward at right-back he is still quite effective but defensively he has been very poor and really struggles when faced with a pacy forward.

It was noticeable watching the Northampton game that loanee Gavin Hoyte was similarly eager to get forward and join attacks but the difference was that his pace enabled him to race back and recover if we lost possession.

Obviously it's not just the fault of the back four that we concede goals virtually every game. The midfield hasn't done its job properly at times and frequently gives possession away when under little or no pressure.

This has improved slightly with the additions of the loan players Billy Knott and George Moncur, but it's still something that affects our play. I think we've missed Stephen Gregory far more than we thought we would.

None of this has really helped Seb Brown either. With a settled back four he can come to a proper understanding with them.

Too often this season, particularly on crosses, he has looked on a different wavelength to them. Through the season it seems that Seb has retreated further and further back into this goal to the extent that he now very rarely leaves his line for crosses.

This results in some hairy moments in games. Two in particular in the Aldershot game could easily have resulted in goals as Seb and the outfield players waited for each to claim the ball as it sailed into the penalty area unchallenged.

The other thing that has rattled his confidence is the constant demands to throw the ball out rather than kick it. Sometimes the options are limited and he still feels obliged to throw it out to a defender. Too often this results in us losing possession straight away and putting ourselves under unnecessary pressure.

There is no magic wand to solve all this. Just hard work on the training ground and a consistency in the selection of the side. In particular, I would like Terry Brown to stick with a centre-half partnership (preferably McNaughton and Mitchel-King) and allow them time to build an understanding. Hopefully we will then be able to manage a few more clean sheets!

Take Care, Bugsy

Wizard of Oz



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it takes to become an apprentice, to get a professional contract and to be trying to get into the first team," says McAnuff, "It's impossible for those agents, we feel, to relate to a player as well as we can do...A lot of players don't know what kind of mortgage they have on their house, or what finance they're paying on their car because people are doing everything for them. Realistically, there will come a point when they do need to learn. We want to help them get the best mortgage possible, but we also want them to have an understanding of why they've got that product."

McAnuff and Morgan have been joined in their venture by Mikele Leigertwood, who also was at Wimbledon at the time of administration and coincidentally now plays for Reading. These young men never had the chance to try to emulate the *Crazy Gang* exploits, or play together in an FA Cup Final, but unlike some of the more unsavoury types from those old days they are doing something to genuinely give back to the game that has given them so much; it is a refreshing attitude that should make Wimbledon fans feel proud.

One last thought: Wally Downes is one of the most interesting of the former Wimbledon heroes. It is simplistic to call him a founder member of the *Crazy Gang*: he is much more than that.

A skinny kid with a coltish confidence has matured in to a, literally, well-rounded figure with a football brain that belies his early reputation. On suffering his fourth broken leg he called time on his playing career and moved into coaching. He began at Crystal Palace, under Steve Coppell; 22 years on and he is one of the highest-qualified coaches in the English game, described by our Dave Bassett as "a very clever man, who can talk with some authority about religion, politics and literature".

He has twice been a manager, with Brentford and Reading, but for the most part he has been a coach, usually working with Steve Coppell. He earned a reputation as a defence coach helping Reading have the best defensive record of all four top divisions when they won promotion in 2006 to the Premier League. That reputation led him to join West Ham in 2010 under Avram Grant; his quality is such that even when Grant was dismissed following the Hammers' relegation Wally was retained by Big Sam Allardyce.

With his Wimbledon pedigree, his undoubted coaching nous and his particular expertise in the science of defending he would be an ideal candidate to replace Terry Brown when the great man decides to call it a day.

[READ MORE WIZ ON WDSA.COM.AU](http://WDSA.COM.AU)

DONS HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO STAY UP

AS much as this season has been a difficult adjustment, COLUM MCANDREW writes that he has seen enough to suggest that the Dons have the capability for a 'mid-table' finish, but warns that next season will be even harder to survive if the squad limitations aren't weeded out.



AS this is the first issue of 2012 let me start by wishing all WDSA readers and their families a very Happy New Year. I hope those resolutions are still in tact. It certainly seems like Terry Brown's are, but then his were there for all to see. The pain of watching our performances throughout November and December was excruciating. There were flashes of brilliance but the back-to-back defeats showed only too easily the deficiencies in the squad.

It had all started so well. Jack Midson and Christian Jolley had been scoring for fun and we rode high in the table as a result. We even allowed ourselves to dream of another double promotion, but that soon turned into a nightmare of *Hammer Horror* proportions.

It didn't really take much. The loss to Crewe was a setback, nothing else, and the defeat to Crawley could be put down to losing to a better team. The problem was that this was the first time this young squad had questioned their self-belief. Throw in an injury to Jolley and you had no one to step in and help poor Jack up front.

In midfield we slaved away with workmanlike performances but the same old problems persisted. Our midfield was effective defensively but as potent as a wet paper bag going forward. Against teams that were well organised tactically we often struggled to grab control. Long-term injuries to players like Kieran Djilali didn't help. From the fleeting glimpses we have seen of him, he could be just the type of marauding wide midfielder we were looking for.

However even from day one it didn't take a tactical genius to see where our real issues lay. Defence! A goal difference of minus 14. Some 53 goals conceded to date at an average of 1.9 a game. Those are relegation statistics and place intolerable pressure on the rest of the team. It means they have to score two goals just to be in with a chance of gaining a point. That could not continue.

So Terry's New Year resolution was simple. Fix the defence and if possible get the midfield scoring goals to keep us in League Two. He didn't take long to act. A statement of intent on 5th January with the announcement of Charles Ademenio, Ryan Jackson,

Max Porter, Lee Minshull and James Mulley were being put out to pasture. No real surprises there but there was not a defender amongst them. Why was this?

For a start if we were top heavy in any department, it was midfield. Competition was fierce for a starting line-up there, but the same could not be said about our defence. Only in early December was there any worthwhile competition for the centre-back pairing. At left-back Gareth Gwillim was the obvious first choice and at right-back, well, we had Sammy Hatton.

Hatton is one of those players that I can't quite figure out. Last season he was an inspiration once he moved to right-back. He is definitely best going forward but the problem has always been that he can get caught out of position. To be honest I can forgive that as it is Wimbledon's style of play to get the ball down and play it wide behind the opposition's defence. He also has a great long diagonal ball in his armoury when his range-finder is working. Unfortunately, this season it rarely is. What is more, even his short distance distribution frequently is severely lacking. He is definitely one who needs to buck up his ideas if he is to make the grade in League Two.

Mat Mitchel-King and Callum McNaughton are for me the obvious first-choice centre backs. I think they'd done okay and look stronger together than any other centre back pairing this season. The stats confirm this with most of our big defeats when Jamie Stuart is playing. Both Jamie Stuart and Brett Johnson are useful as backups, especially Brett who can cover at left-back although Chris Bush is the obvious number two there. So if I was either Brett or Jamie I'd be concerned about my long-term future at the club.

In midfield we have an abundance of hard-working and skilful players. The big issue has been getting goals. Sammy Moore is the pick of the bunch but his defensive role in the midfield diamond does little to utilise his skills going forward. The likes of Ricky Wellard and Rashid Yussuff are good players but they aren't particularly creative. I'd like to see Yussuff stay the course as he never stops running. His commitment is admirable, especially when he hasn't got the ball, but he needs to deliver that killer ball in the final third. He's young, so if he can add that to his game he'll be an interesting player in years to come.

Up front we have Midson and Jolley. When they're on fire, we are always going to get goals. They frequently need support from out wide and it is this area where we have been found wanting. Luke Moore flatters to deceive.

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THE DAVE BASSETT INTERVIEW

DAVE 'HARRY' BASSETT symbolises the unforgettable Wimbledon FC story from non-league to Division One. 'Harry' in this extensive interview with WDSA relives those extraordinary times of the 'Crazy Gang', his debt to Allen Batsford, his memories of the iconic Dons' players, the most talented player he ever coached, his battles with Sam Hammam, leaving for Watford, the FA Cup victory, his views on Milton Keynes, Terry Brown, the possibility of consultancy/mentoring work with the new Dons and the question we all keep asking: whether AFC Wimbledon can do a 'Wimbledon' and climb the leagues.

Harry, we'll start off with Allen Batsford. Allen in his interview with WDSA in March 2009 said it was obvious to him that you would develop into a good manager. He praised your understanding of the game and looked on you as a mate (although he did say he could not forgive you for bringing Ron Noades into his life!!). What influence was AB on your football career, what was the abiding thing/s that you carried on in your management career from your experiences with him?

Harry: Allen got me to Walton & Hersham and channelled my energies into the right direction. He got me interested in the other side of football of what the team had to do instead of the individual. He implanted that you had to be disciplined in football, you had to work hard at what you were doing, and you had to be enthusiastic and determined and to get the qualities to be a winner. Allen was a good guy, but he was very firm, you knew you had to toe the line with him as such. He wasn't going to allow you to destroy any team spirit and that was important. I respected him because he got hold of me, I had played a lot of non-league football, but no manager had inspired me, a lot of them never seemed to have too much of an idea in my opinion, they just expected the players to go out there and there was no structure. Allen taught me how important it was to have a structure to your team and a plan of how you wanted to play so Allen was a big influence and obviously I went with him to Wimbledon as well. We all knew as a unit what Allen expected from us and we did that in training. Allen was good at understanding all our different characteristics. He would be quite firm with me, but he would be a bit more lenient with the types like Roger Connell. He would be on the case for example with me and Billy Edwards, he treat Dave Donaldson differently again and I saw this and I learned that everybody's different. To get the best out of people, what he did with me wouldn't necessarily go down well with Roger Connell. He was a big influence. Allen was an honest bloke, he was straightforward and I respected him for that. He definitely got me thinking about football. He got me interested in developing in terms of a coach, thinking what you wanted you do after playing and there's a lot more to football than people give credit to.

You became Wimbledon manager in January 1981 and led the Dons to the first division on the back of three promotions in four seasons and just nine years after the club joined the Football League. What was the successful formula of those amazing seasons?

Harry: We got promoted when I took over and then we got relegated the following season because of the money, etc., and then it was a matter of rebuilding with the youth. We already had Alan Cork, Steve Ketteridge and we were able to add the likes of Paul Fishenden, Mark Morris, Glyn Hodges from the youth. Dave Beasant developed as a goalie, Wally Downes was already there and we had a young side and the idea was to build players who were good technically. I knew they had ability, but it was bringing them into a team ethic. Obviously, I used my coaching and management experience with the people I worked with like Allen Batsford and Charlie Hughes. We got promotion straight away and I was able to get Nigel Winterburn the following year, Kevin Gage and Brian Gayle came out of the youth scheme and we set out about what we wanted to do. We played a style of football that was reasonably successful and then I decided to switch to a longer ball game I felt we could play because we had the players who could do it. People think that the long ball game is easy but you've got to have good players. When you think about it, it's easier to pass the ball 10 yards than 40, but the long ball looks more exaggerated when it goes astray than the 10-yard ball. I built a team on tactics, but I made sure we didn't have any square pegs in round holes and vice-versa, that the players were capable of doing that and what was also important was to foster a good team spirit. We always had a wonderful team spirit, where the players were together, they respected one another, they enjoyed the work, they used to laugh and enjoyed themselves which is important when you're working, but they were serious about what they did, but they were never given credit for their seriousness because of the Crazy Gang image that people thought we were a load of clowns, but in fact we were quite professional and we were on the ball, we knew exactly what we were doing. Even in those days when I was manager in '82 we had a guy Vince Craven cutting up videos of our games and top teams, people don't realise that back in those days we were doing those things and nowadays people are talking about Prozone (performance analysis) that is something magic and has just come on to the scene and no other people did the same. We were totally professional in many ways, we allowed people to think that we were unprofessional.

Did the Crazy Gang image irk you?

Harry: No, no. The Crazy Gang was there, Sam (Hammam) loved that, no, we enjoyed it. I think it was brilliant and we used it to our advantage. We knew we were more serious about it, we had great fun and there were things going on and the image because what we did was to carry it through from the non-league days. I knew that when we trained and we played everything was very serious, the players knew what was going on. We had a good laugh but when we were working and playing we were switched on completely. In no ways did it affect me. I am not asking for plaudits, we took it and we did what we did and the Crazy Gang is part and parcel of football folklore and history. But the team didn't get as much respect as everybody should have given it for what it is because that whole team was sold and went on to play in top-league football, so it showed how thick people were because they didn't realise how many talented players we had.

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PAGE SPONSOR: JOHN TARRANT; Perth

THE DAVE BASSETT INTERVIEW [CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12]

So many iconic Wimbledon players made their names under you at Plough Lane. Your thoughts on Dave Beasant, John Fashanu, Vinnie Jones, Lawrie Sanchez, Nigel Winterburn and Dennis Wise?

Harry: Dave Beasant was nearly a disaster when Dario (Gradi) first put him in the team he wanted to get rid of him, but I'd seen Dave play for Edgware and knew that he could succeed. Dave worked very hard at his game, he thought about what he was doing, he accepted the coaching, and Lurch was quite bright in was required and he spoke his mind. He could produce saves that were important and at the same time he contributed to where the team was going. He went on to turn into a top-class 'keeper.

When we signed John Fashanu we knew we needed something to help us get over the line (promotion from Div 2). We had been watching Fash and we needed a bigger centre-forward to go along with Corkie, Andy Sayer and Stewart Evans. Fash gave us that physical presence, he could score goals and he helped us get over the line (into Division One), although he didn't play that many games. When he played in the Premier League (First Division) Fash became very much a focal point where centre-halves hated playing against him because he was powerful, he had a great leap and when he was on his form he was a complete and utter handful to deal with. The club bought him for £150,000 and sold him for £1.5 million. Fash did the business for Wimbledon over a considerable amount of time. He was different to a lot of the other boys in the team. He wasn't 'Crazy' Fash, in terms of doing things. He made it quite plain he didn't want to be part of that. He didn't mind a good craic but he didn't want anyone affecting him and he wouldn't affect anybody else, if you did then you got into all sorts of problems.

We turned Vinnie Jones away at Wimbledon when he was 15 but Allen Batsford had him at Wealdstone and Allen brought him more to my attention. Vinnie had a great attitude, he's one who sees everything as half-full, he's positive, he's not negative, he actually thinks he's miles better than he is, but that is a great thing to have because that's belief rubbed off on other people and Vinnie was always for the cause, a great team man, he wanted to be part of it and his life's fulfilled because he's a very positive and hard-working guy. Vinnie was never late for work, he loved training, he train twice a day, so it's not a surprise. I couldn't say to you that I thought he would be a film star and a success, but he had a tremendous work ethic.

Funny enough Lawrie Sanchez made his debut for Reading against me when I played for Wimbledon and I thought at the time that he was only 17 and I was 30-odd and his attitude was good, he was tough and he got a few kicks and we were watching him, we felt that we needed someone with his presence. He did a lot of unsung work, he was quite outspoken, he didn't always agree with everything, but he had his say, but he became part of the team, he was a bit like Fash in that he wasn't in the larking about scene, Sanch was away from it, but he took in his stride and he had his position in the club. While he wasn't always the most popular lad in the team whenever he went out and played the boys knew that he was part of the team and he was never going to let them down.

Nigel Winterburn was a masterstroke, a bit of luck for us, getting him from Oxford United. Nigel had three fantastic seasons for us. When I first met Nigel I wasn't that sure about him, he didn't seem to have much of a personality, or say anything at all, but when he got on the field he was a totally different character and Nigel was

quick, a great defender one-on-one, he could get forward, and he could have a nasty little streak in him; he didn't take liberties. He went on to play for England and Arsenal in that great period for the Gunners.

Dennis Wise came in to do some training with us and what impressed me was even at 17 he had a really good control and technique. Dennis could see a pass and for 17 he was a confident boy he had a couple of tackles, he wasn't a shrinking violet, and I thought oopsie-daisie we have a player here and he turned into a top player. Dennis is ruthless, he's very much a team member and he proved that by going on to captain Chelsea and Dennis doesn't worry is nobody likes him, he's a winner in his own right. He's very strong mentally. He played for England 46 times.

Again with all those players clubs used to come and watch them, but none of them ever started to sign them until they'd done a year in the First Division, Wise went for £1.6 million, Nigel went for £300,000 straight away, Vinnie went for £650,000, Beasant went for nearly a million and when consider that lot cost us about £190,000, not bad, was it?

Who were your best/worst signings while at Wimbledon and who was the most talented player you ever worked with at the Dons?

Harry: Nigel Winterburn was a great signing, we got him on a free transfer, Dennis Wise was a good transfer, he was released by Southampton. They turned out terrific. The most talented was Glyn Hodges. The boy should have played for Manchester United, or another top club, but he didn't work hard enough nor look after himself. But he was incredibly competent, a great technique, Glyn could see passes, he could score goals. Wise was very close, and that's a hard one, because Dennis was a talented boy, but Glyn in that period for me because Dennis only had one proper season with me, whereas Glyn had come all the way from the fourth division. The worst signings were Dave Martin from Millwall. We paid £40,000 for him when we got into the Second Division, it just didn't work out. Talented boy but just didn't have the character and willpower to start there. We made a mistake signing Colin Gordon, we got out of it, we bought him for £110,000 and managed to get £70,000 back. We thought he had something to offer as a centre-forward, but he turned out to be a weak character in terms of what we required and he couldn't cope really. And another one was Ian Holloway, he's a lovely fellow but he just couldn't cope with the transition to Wimbledon. He did have a go and said he thought there was a bully culture at Wimbledon. He wasn't bullied, but it was a hard school. We sold him to Brentford for £25,000 and we paid £40,000, but he ended up having a good career at QPR.

By the summer of 1987 you resigned as manager to take up an offer from Watford. What were your reasons for leaving and did Sam Hammam play a role in your departure (asserting his right to pick the team, perhaps)? Did you ever regret leaving for Watford?

Harry: I didn't want to leave Wimbledon, but my relationship with Sam Hammam had deteriorated. It had been going on through that year in Div 1 and my contract was running out and it was difficult and Sam did say he wanted the right to pick the team if he felt it

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 14]

THE DAVE BASSETT INTERVIEW [CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13]

necessary which I said 'I've not let you down before and I'm not going to sign a contract that you can undermine me at any time'. But the other thing was that Sam was jealous. The crowd were always singing 'There's only one Harry Bassett' and he couldn't understand why they weren't singing 'there's only one Sam Hammam'. He felt he had kept the club afloat, he had helped find the money for John Fashanu, and he had done good, but the crowd don't start singing the chairman's name, do they? And Sam couldn't quite cope with this, he wasn't the number one man. He was a character, he had a big ego, so Sam decided that it was time for me to go and he knew that by being awkward on the contract business that he knew that at the end of that season I would say I was moving on. I didn't want to, but I knew he was going to do things with players, he was going to make life difficult for me so I came to the conclusion that it was best to go. I should never have gone to Watford, that was a mistake. Elton John was around to my house and it was the wrong time and I didn't give it enough credence or time to it because I was being considered for the Man City job at the time. I knew it was time to move on, but I shouldn't have gone to Watford, I regret going to Watford, but it turned out I only had six months and moved on to Sheffield United where I had a really tremendous eight years.

Twelve months after leaving Wimbledon, the Dons won the FA Cup under Bobby Gould. What were your thoughts that day, what might have been? (recall you working with ITV that day and the players waved at you on their victory lap of Wembley.)

Harry: Watford hadn't worked out, Sheffield United had been relegated and I was envious of Bobby and you think 'I would love to be there with those boys' but I really wanted them to win. I remember having an argument on TV with Ian St. John. He was saying 'this is rubbish, they don't even pass the ball' and he couldn't understand what the Wimbledon ethos was about. I was delighted when Beasant saved the penalty and it was great. They did come round and Vinnie and the boys threw the Cup up to suggest to me that I was part of it. In fairness to Bobby Gould he gave me credit, saying a lot of it was Harry's team and the work that was done. That was very nice, but he achieved it and I would have loved to have been part of that particular one, but that's the way life's goes on. Who's to say I might have been the Wimbledon manager and we lost a game or something went wrong and the team wouldn't have got to Wembley, so you just don't know the answer to that.

Much has changed at Wimbledon in the intervening years. Firstly, your views on the move to Milton Keynes and the rise of AFC Wimbledon from the Combined Counties League to the Football League in nine seasons?

Harry: The whole concept of Wimbledon was down to the people who owned the club. They allowed the situation to come. AFC Wimbledon and Milton Keynes have got this animosity. I'm not part of that, although I'm more to AFC Wimbledon because I know Dickie Guy, Ian Cooke, Billy Edwards, Jeff Bryant, the boys go down there and the committee and fans are more the Wimbledon people. A lot of those people were supporting Wimbledon when I was there, whereas Milton Keynes is not. Now with Milton Keynes Pete Winkelman took an opportunity where he could get a franchise going. He didn't break any rules, the Football League allowed it to happen and the Wimbledon directors allowed it to happen with Selhurst Park and the whole concept of not finding a

ground and everything else and it was always going to be a major problem when Wimbledon got relegated what was going to happen. So I won't slag off Milton Keynes because they took an opportunity to get a club up to Milton Keynes without having to go through the process. Obviously I can appreciate the people who were Wimbledon feel that they had something pinched away from them but the Football League and all the legal process have happened. I'm really chuffed to pieces to see what AFC Wimbledon have done. They've come from the Combined Counties, they've come through the non-league and they've got back in (to the Football League) and I was at the playoff final, I'm absolutely delighted they're in the league and I'm hoping they make sure they stay there because obviously I've got more affinity but when I go to Milton Keynes I'm well received, so I won't take sides on the way it happened, because there was nothing illegal. You could look for blame at other people, like Sam Hammam selling the club to the Norwegians, there was all sorts of things going on and the Norwegians didn't realise they had bought a pup and they wanted to get out and allow Milton Keynes to take advantage of that. So, yep, I hope AFC Wimbledon can push on.

Can AFC Wimbledon legitimately lay claim to Wimbledon's past honours?

Harry: I think AFC Wimbledon can. I don't think Milton Keynes particularly want Wimbledon's past honours. I think they want to be Milton Keynes and there's a big lot now going on about 'the Dons' being dropped. I can see in the coming years that Pete Winkelman will be quite happy to be just called Milton Keynes United or whatever it is. I don't think he's interested in trying to claim the FA Cup. I think everybody knows that AFC Wimbledon is more that way because they are in the same part of the world, you couldn't expect the Wimbledon fans - alright a couple of them have gone up to Milton Keynes but do they want travel all the way up there and call it their club realising that it is in a totally different city, that's not feasible. What's happened is that the phoenix has risen from the ashes, Wimbledon has come back. Vinnie Jones has given AFC Wimbledon his FA Cup winner's medal, I've given them some memorabilia and when you have Dickie Guy and all those old Dons going to the games you've got to say that AFC Wimbledon is really in everybody's eyes the old Wimbledon that died and are trying to recover.

You have been to watch the Dons at Kingsmeadow and you were at the Conference Playoff final last year. What do you think of the club's set-up, does the fans-owned club have a future in the higher leagues and are there any similarities of the time Wimbledon were starting out in the Football League in 1977?

Harry: I don't think there are any similarities. They did brilliantly to get to the Football League but it's a different cup of tea because Ron Noades was chairman back then and AFC Wimbledon is a fans' operated club. They've come through all the leagues and they don't want someone like Sam Hammam to come in and can own the club and then move on and leave the club vulnerable, So while that is a strength in one way, it's a difficulty in the

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THE DAVE BASSETT INTERVIEW [CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14]

future. Will they be able to progress because football needs more money now than when I was around, when it was a bit more equal. Can the fans-owned club raise the money because even in that league now Wimbledon's wage bill won't be as high as a lot of the others. Crawley's paying a helluva lot more money on less gates than Wimbledon. Nothing's to say you can't do it, it's not impossible, it can be done, but it's going to make it very difficult because as Wimbledon progress and they go up a league they might find they might have to sell some of the players they want to keep. I like to think that dreams can come true, that's not an impossibility for them to emulate what we did, but I think that's going to be extremely harder for any team to do it unless they have someone (rich). Crawley are going to be promoted, now if their people keep pushing on and they are prepared to pay the wages and the transfers then anything is possible, but I'm not sure Wimbledon could do that on the basis of how they're set up.

What do you think of the football the team play under Terry Brown, how do you rate him as a manager and can the Dons progress further with him in charge?

Harry: Terry Brown has obviously done a very good job, he's a very experienced guy and I know Terry from his non-league days. He's got his own brand of football and I'm pleased. People have said he doesn't want to be with the Crazy Gang and I understand where he's coming from. He doesn't want try to emulate something that was there, he wants to put his own mark on the club and rightly so and he's done terrifically well. I'm glad that when it got all a bit sticky they've done some business in the transfer window and borrowed some young players, added some players to it and they've supported Terry and with a bit of luck it looks like they've picked up enough points to push on. I think he should be given the opportunity to progress. For me, if Wimbledon stay in League Two this year and consolidate, then that's a good move. They're going to add a stand at one end of Kingsmeadow and keep the revenue and they could become an established League Two club and then try to get into League One.

As you look back down the years in your association with the club and its fans what memories do you hold dear? What was the greatest thrill for you as manager of Wimbledon FC and what gives you the most pride from your time in the Dons' dugout?

Harry: That could take yonks! Doing the double over Manchester United when we came up, beating Liverpool at Anfield, doing the double over Chelsea in the same season, knocking Everton the Cup holders out of the FA Cup, finishing sixth in the league and our wage bill was under £300,000 that year for everyone, and even by those standards in those days that was ludicrous. The day at Huddersfield when Lawrie Sanchez scored the goal and all of a sudden we were promoted (to the First Division) and you realised you were in with the big boys. At the time Sam said to me 'how are we going to cope in the top league?' and I said 'I think we'll survive' and he said 'do you really mean that?' and I said 'I do, I think we've got the character, we've got the players and people don't realise how good some of these players are and they're not going to enjoy playing against us.' I was confident we'd stay up, I wouldn't have said we'd finish sixth, I didn't think that but I was confident we would survive. Perhaps I was crazy because if we had gone straight down people would have said well what do you expect. Another special memory was Corkie

scoring the winning goal at Sheffield United over Easter 23,000 at Sheffield and we've gone up there and we've beaten them 2-1 and that more or less got us promoted to the Second Division. Getting 96 points when we murdered the Fourth Division. Beating Nottingham Forest over two legs in the Milk (League) Cup when we were a Second Division club. There were some wonderful great memories in terms of that. Wimbledon, for me, was a fantastic roller-coaster, there were some disappointments but to see those players develop and go through all four divisions and then look back and see how successful all those players were. They've all had good careers and Wimbledon was the foundation for them.

After your last foray in management at Leeds United in 2008, apart from TV punditry, speaking engagements and work with the League Managers Association do you have any active associations with clubs? Would you perhaps be interested in a consultancy/mentoring role if approached by AFC Wimbledon?

Harry: Basically, I'm semi-retired and I watch football and I've been offered scouting jobs that I don't want to do, I do a little consultancy for the chairman of Sheffield United but that's nothing to do with the football, that's just for him, I've known him a long time, Kevin McCabe As regards to AFC Wimbledon, I'm a great believer in you cross bridges as and when you do, I don't count anything out, but I don't go round wanting or expecting anything, if somebody asks me to do something, like Dennis Wise did at Leeds United and that came out of the blue. There's no pressure for me from Wimbledon. When I go there, I'm most welcomed, it's not for me to say. I was asked to help out Barnet a few seasons ago. I met them, I was impressed, but we couldn't quite agree on everything and at the end of the day I decided it wasn't the right decision, so I couldn't say to you that if Wimbledon offered me I would automatically say yes because it depends on what the circumstances, the amount of hours and what people expect from you because I also like going on me holidays and playing golf, so I've got to decide if I do something is it in my interest.

Finally, Harry, could a club like AFC Wimbledon ever achieve what Wimbledon FC did in your time at the club?

Harry: Dreams can come true. But, yes, of course it can, but it can be very difficult. We had a period where it was right and we achieved against all the odds, we surmounted so many obstacles and it was a fantastic achievement to do what we did. Sam Hammam was very lucky we made him a rich boy by coming through and producing all those players and providing the team structure. Again Wimbledon don't get the credit for what they did we achieved. No one else has ever done it. Wycombe come from the bottom of the leagues but they were given bundles of money to do it, Watford got there, they were infinitely better and they had 10,000 crowds and Northampton did it once and went straight down, Wimbledon survived. They could do it, but I think it's very difficult. Crawley are passing Wimbledon because they've got the finances to get more players and in terms of that I think that money is a bigger factor now than what it was in my Wimbledon days. Realistically, AFC Wimbledon are a League Two side on their gates and possibly could nick into League One and perhaps do a Wycombe, but it's hard to get there because the money becomes so difficult.

BASSETT FORGED WIMBLEDON INTO THE CLUB WE CHERISH

SOME senior fans might point to the likes of Allen Batsford and Dickie Guy as Wimbledon all-time legends. They are, but there is really only one man who symbolises the full extent of the Dons' rise to the extraordinary heights the club achieved, and that's our Dave 'Harry' Bassett, writes TREVOR PEARCE.



IT's not hard to identify just what makes Dave Bassett the Wimbledon legend he is. When he took over the Dons were ninth on the old fourth division; when he left we'd just finished 6th in the old first division, just six years later. That on its own is enough to guarantee you the keys to the stadium. If any context was needed the current team that is ninth in the "fourth" division is Burton Albion; the current sixth-placed team in the "first" is Liverpool.

And of course, while the likes of Noades and Hammam might just tell you different, it was Bassett who made Wimbledon the club what it was; not just successful, but the world's most successful pub team, the *Bash Street Kids* who got the keys to the mansion and wouldn't give them back.

Our style of play was loathed by those that played us and loved by those of us who watched it. We were the *Crazy Gang*, the home of the Downes', Hodges' and Jones' of this world, mayhem on the pitch, carnage off it.

As we rose higher in the leagues and our profile and reputation spread, teams were beaten by the pace and power of Fash or the strength and, erm, commitment of Jones and Sanchez, but also by the *Crazy Gang* myth that Bassett, more than any other character, embodied.

We didn't just tolerate our ramshackle ground and tiny attendances, but celebrated them, along with our limited (but underrated) players and rudimentary style.

It wasn't all plain sailing, of course. Bassett got us promoted in that first season, but what we tend to gloss over is the 1981-82 season when we went straight back down to the fourth. Bassett left us having taken us as far as he thought we could go – in 1984, with the club having just won promotion to the second division. He earned further legend status by changing his mind after three days at Crystal Palace and coming back. It took Palace a good few years to exact their terrible revenge upon us for that one.

Bassett was Dons' manager for only one season in the first division, but it was the season when many myths and legends were formed. At first we had a few stories, along the lines of "good old plucky Wimbledon" when we turned over the likes of Charlton and Aston Villa to briefly lead the table after 4 or 5 games. But when we

started beating the likes of Spurs, Liverpool and Man Utd, the nature of the stories changed. We beat these teams not with silky flowing football, or even after having defended for 89 minutes and then sneaking a last equaliser, but by kicking, pushing, intimidating. Simply enter "Wimbledon Nico Claesen" into *YouTube* to see an example of where our reputation could sometimes lead us. We were expected to turn up for a season, enjoy the ride and then join the likes of Carlisle United as one season wonders in the top division. When we started winning games and not paying due respect to the proper football teams, we rather outstayed our welcome. And we loved it.

There are many contenders for the best game of that first season – the win at Liverpool or the cup win at home to Everton live on BBC (I still have the video somewhere) were highlights – but my favourite was the 2-1 win at Spurs. Graham Roberts, Spurs' so-called hard man defender was reported in the paper later as saying that 5 foot 2 inch Steve Galliers had clattered him twice and had followed up by telling Roberts that "*I'm the hard man on this pitch*". Roberts tried to exact his own revenge on Lawrie Sanchez with a bad challenge, to which Sanchez reacted by kicking him. Both players got a red card, but Roberts went off on a stretcher. This was taken as evidence of the club's thuggery by some, but to some of us it was the true spirit of the underdog – we weren't there to be tolerated and patronised (see Blackpool last season), we were there to win, and win we did for another 12 seasons.

But, of course, the stories and the myth were a huge exaggeration. Terry Venables accused us after the Spurs match of "destroying the dreams of which football is made" – the fact is that, allied to the strength and, let's not be coy, intimidation we also had quality players – Hodges, Wise, Fairweather – who had plenty of skill as well as strength and athleticism.

It was always interesting to see when exactly the transformation of a Wimbledon player from mindless thug to quality player would occur after they had left the club; the likes of Hodges, Wise, Gayle, Thorn, even Jones would miraculously become good footballers once they'd left us for large sums of money to go to bigger clubs. But the myth suited us; that Everton game on television is a fantastic example of a team who simply couldn't handle playing that team, in those surroundings, in front of 10,000 fans camped on top of them, with salt instead of sugar in the half time tea and a cold shower to look forward to.

And for once the football story did not have an unhappy

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PAGE SPONSOR: '10,000 miles from KM but still kicking every ball' - COLUM McANDREW; Sutton, London

DONS HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO STAY UP

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11]

He has scored important goals but he is all too easily brushed off the ball by the larger burly defenders you frequently find in League Two. With a fit Kieran Djilali I'd fear for Luke's future.

So what of Terry's signings in the transfer window. Like most fans I was most excited about Jason Euell. Unfortunately, he's played only 42 minutes for his old club, and that was an away game. That's hardly a good return on whatever we're paying him. As it looks likely he is to return to Charlton, he'll leave without most fans even seeing him play.

Billy Knott has been the most influential in my opinion. He has loads of talent and just loves getting the ball. He can also score as his beauty against Macclesfield proved. He is the sort of player that excites you enough to make you want to attend a football game. If we could secure his long term transfer at the end of the season it would make many fans happy.

As for Byron Harrison, his appearances so far have been acceptable without setting the world alight. I can see glimpses of why Terry wanted to spend some money on him but I guess time will tell. He certainly seems to have found League One a step too far so let's hope he can score some goals to keep us in a league in which he has proven calibre. The other loans signings also seem to be of the right sort.

Gavin Hoyte from Arsenal would seem to be the one defender that we desperately needed. His performance against Aldershot was very assured so I'd hope that his initial loan spell is extended. Where does that leave Sammy Hatton? From what I've seen, it means fighting for his place back. Only time will tell if he'll still be doing that next season.

Terry seems to have done enough. I didn't truly ever believe that we would be relegated this season, even after those six successive league defeats conceding 14 goals in the process.

Had Terry not acted I think we would have had just enough to have stayed up. Maybe that is blind faith but it certainly would have made for a nervous end of the season. All said and done, I believe we have what it takes to maintain a comfortable mid table position.

However just before we all start to relax, I think the real work will start at 5pm on Saturday 5th May. It is always harder in the second season in any division.

Other teams have got you worked out and you in turn have to adapt. Our squad's limitations have been laid bare this season, so we'll have to show we have the ambition to cement our place in the Football League. Can Terry do that? I believe so, but only time will tell.

BASSETT FORGED WIMBLEDON INTO THE CLUB WE CHERISH

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16]

ending. Bassett resigned more or less at the top, after finishing sixth place in Division 1; there were rumours that Sam Hammam had interfered in team selection, and that had provoked his departure, but Bassett has always said he had taken the team as far as it could go. He was proved wrong of course when we won the cup the following year, but Bobby Gould, who was always rumoured not to get on with Bassett, made a point of dedicating the cup win to him.

Bassett's next job, with Watford, did go rather less swimmingly; Bassett attempted to apply his old methods straight onto his new team with fairly disastrous effects, and he was sacked six months later having sold most of the team and dropped plenty of others. But he ended up establishing a bit of a niche as a firefighter, coming in to manage top-flight clubs struggling against relegation and having a fair amount of success (with the occasional losing battle) at the likes of Crystal Palace, Sheffield United and Nottingham Forest. Bassett's last job was assisting Dennis Wise at Leeds, where he left in 2008 upon Wise's resignation.

At 67 he's probably had his last job as a manager but can look back on a career of greater success than 95% of top flight managers.

For some of us old-timers, some of the stuff we hear now about what great football we play, can seem odd and even grate; hearing our fans berate the likes of Hampton and Richmond as we go up, for their rudimentary style, poor facilities and low numbers of supporters seems a memory failure to me at least. Since AFCW were formed we've normally been one of the big boys, attracting comparatively high numbers of fans and bringing in comparatively high quality of players. Terry Brown likes to play a passing game and the reliance on power, pace and letting the opposition centre forward know that the centre back is just behind him has gone – probably out of necessity as much as choice given the changes in rules.

But the old Crazy Gang is still with us – as Wimbledon fans we know that a run to the Premier League is pretty unlikely, but not impossible. We don't need 25,000 fans a week and a rich sugar daddy for success, although it would be a bit easier if we did have those things – we just need to have the Wimbledon spirit, a bonded team who fight together to add up to more than the sum of its parts.

And while some of the more senior fans might point to the likes of Batsford and Guy as the Wimbledon all-time legends, there really is only one man who symbolises the full extent of our rise back in the day to the extraordinary heights we achieved, and that's our Harry.



OFF THE POST WDSA forum Send in your views

SLICE OF THE DONS IN DEVON

I'VE been reading the WDSA web-site since I saw it linked on the WUP site. BTW, very professional and very astute commentary (better than what I can get elsewhere I think!) I was born and raised in Wimbledon (Downs Road), and first saw Wimbledon when I was 14 (Nuneaton Borough in the Southern League I remember). Been there and seen a few great moments (haven't we all?) I don't get to more than three or four games a season sadly these days but Plymouth, Torquay and Bristol grounds are all commutable, and that helps! I live in Bideford; where, for my sins, I am a Councillor and former Mayor. (I got chastised for declaring myself a Wimbledon supporter over our up and coming Bideford (Western League) side. Sadly, AFCW declined my pre-season invitation to play Bideford but C'est la vie! — **ANDREW POWELL (Devon Womble), Bideford, Devon, England.**

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE VERY UGLY

On my recent trip to the UK I was lucky enough to catch a couple of matches. The first of which was against Swindon and saw us play what I thought was some really good football. We passed the ball well and defended solidly. I was really impressed with Sammy Moore and can completely understand why he picks up injuries; he seems to have his foot in everywhere. All in all, I think Swindon were relieved to go home with a point.

The second match against Burton Albion, started off in much the same vein, we passed the ball well and at pace, putting the opposition under pressure. All the hard work, however, was undone by what seemed like incredibly naïve defending. The first goal was conceded because our defenders forgot one of the cardinal rules i.e. play the whistle. The second was conceded because Brett Johnson inexplicably didn't clear the incoming clearance from the Burton 'keeper. Before you knew it we were 2-0 down.

At the beginning of the second half we came flying out of the blocks again, but while we got 2 goals back we'd left ourselves with a mountain to climb. We all too often seemed to run out of ideas. While Burton were well organised, it seemed that in the final 1/3 of the pitch we were at a loss as to what to do next; have teams worked out how to play us? A (dis)honourable mention must, however, go to the referee. If Johnson's failed attempt to clear was inexplicable then so was the ref's inability to give us at least a free kick, if not a penalty, in the dying minutes. If the ref through James Mulley was trying to

con him and gain an advantage then why didn't he book Mulley?

And now for the very, very ugly. I'm sure that when I used to stand on the terraces at Plough Lane I would hear some rather colourful language. What I experienced at Burton, however, saddened me enormously and had such a negative impact that I came away not really caring about the result. Even in 2011 it would seem that a small number of Wimbledon supporters still think it's ok to abuse an opposition player because of the colour of his skin. I have yet to work out what being black has to do with a player being a bastard and why it's necessary to mention the colour of a player's skin when questioning their parentage. It's not as if the colour of a white player's skin is mentioned when they are abused in a similar fashion.

I realise that these views are held by a minority of Wimbledon supporters. It almost seemed to be a reaction to the various racism allegations in the press at the time and to an article by Erik Samuelson in the Swindon programme about terrace abuse, but it doesn't make it anymore excusable.

I also realise that people may condemn me for being too sensitive and then go on to suggest that if I don't like this type of language I shouldn't go on the terraces. In my view both responses are a kop out. I grew up on the terraces at Plough Lane and in fact I think I learnt to swear there so this is not about me being over sensitive. It's about the use of blatant racist language, the use of which done in any other public setting would, in all likelihood, result in arrest. It's also about the need to speak up and stamp it out.

As for the match, an away defeat and vehement racism – an ugly day indeed. — **SHARON MATHEWS, Sydney**

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2011-12 FIXTURES & RESULTS

Fri 29/7	A Crawley Town CCPrel L2-3 3,205
Sat 6/8	H Bristol Rovers L 2-3 4,629
Sat 13/8	A Dagenham & Red W 2-0 2,904
Tue 16/8	A Plymouth Argyle W 2-0 5,900
Sat 20/8	H Hereford Utd D 1-1 4,239
Sat 27/8	A Macclesfield Town L 0-4 1,881
Sat 3/9	H Port Vale W 3-2 4,404
Sat 10/9	A Aldershot Town D 1-1 4,110
Tue 13/9	H Northampton Town L 0-3 4,271
Sat 17/9	H Cheltenham Town W 4-1 3,860
Sat 24/9	A Bradford City W 2-1 10,255
Sat 1/10	H Gillingham W 3-1 4,606
Tue 4/10	H Stevenage JPT D 2-2 pens 1,416
Sat 8/10	A Morecambe W 2-1 2,631
Sat 15/10	H Crewe Alexandra L 1-3 4,604
Sat 22/10	H Crawley Town L 2-5 4,549
Tue 25/10	A Torquay Utd L 0-4 2,353
Sat 29/10	A Shrewsbury Town D 0-0 5,861
Sat 5/11	H Barnet D 1-1 4,369
Tue 8/11	A Swindon Town JPT L 1-1 pens 4,321
Sat 12/11	H Scunthorpe Utd FAC1 D 0-0 2,933
Wed 16/11	A Tooting&Mitcham SSC W 2-1
Sat 19/11	H Swindon Town D 1-1 4,581
Sat 26/11	A Burton Albion L 2-3 3,282
Tue 29/11	A Wingate&Finchley LSC W 2-1
Sat 3/12	A Bradford City FAC2 L 1-3 3,432
Sat 10/12	H Accrington Stanley L 0-2 4,053
Sat 17/12	A Rotherham Utd L 0-1 3,343
Sat 26/12	H Oxford Utd L 0-2 4,547
Sat 31/12	H Southend Utd L 1-4 4,529
Mon 2/1	A Swindon Town L 0-2 8,374
Sat 14/1	A Port Vale W 2-1 4,326
Sat 21/1	A Gillingham W 4-3 6,236
Tue 24/1	H Macclesfield Town W 2-1 4,000
Sat 28/1	H Aldershot Town L 1-2 4,634
Tue 31/1	A Corinthian Casuals SSC L 1-2
Tue 14/2	A Northampton Town L 0-1 4,072
Sat 18/2	H Morecambe D 1-1 3,964
Tue 21/2	A Cheltenham Town
Sat 25/2	A Crewe Alexandra
Tue 28/2	H Metrop Police LSC
Sat 3/3	A Hereford Utd
Tue 6/3	H Plymouth Argyle
Sat 10/3	H Dagenham & Red
Tue 13/3	H Bradford City
Sat 17/3	A Bristol Rovers
Tue 20/3	A Oxford Utd
Sat 24/3	H Burton Albion
Sat 31/3	A Accrington Stanley
Sat 7/4	H Rotherham Utd
Mon 9/4	A Southend Utd
Sat 14/4	A Crawley Town
Sat 21/4	H Torquay Utd
Sat 28/4	A Barnet
Sat 5/5	H Shrewsbury Town

2011-12 LEAGUE 2 TABLE AS AT FEB 18

	M	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts
Southend United	31	18	5	8	57	37	20	59
Cheltenham Town	31	18	5	8	50	30	20	59
Swindon Town	29	18	4	7	50	22	28	58
Shrewsbury Town	30	17	6	7	44	27	17	57
Torquay United	31	16	8	7	45	34	11	56
Crawley Town	28	16	7	5	52	35	17	55
Oxford United	30	12	11	7	41	29	12	47
Port Vale	30	13	6	11	48	41	7	45
Rotherham United	30	12	8	10	48	43	5	44
Accrington Stanley	30	11	10	9	38	37	1	43
Burton Albion	30	11	10	9	44	46	-2	43
Crewe Alexandra	30	13	3	14	40	43	-3	42
Gillingham	29	12	5	12	49	43	6	41
Morecambe	30	10	10	10	46	37	9	40
Aldershot Town	29	11	4	14	28	35	-7	37
Bristol Rovers	31	10	7	14	38	51	-13	37
AFC Wimbledon	30	10	6	14	40	55	-15	36
Barnet	29	9	6	14	36	48	-12	33
Bradford City	29	7	10	12	35	40	-5	31
Macclesfield Town	30	8	6	16	26	36	-10	30
Plymouth Argyle	31	6	9	16	35	52	-17	27
Hereford United	31	6	9	16	29	49	-20	27
Northampton Town	29	6	6	17	34	57	-23	24
Dagenham & Redbridge	30	7	3	20	30	56	-26	24

LEAGUE TWO ODDS

1/1	Swindon Town (from 10, 10, 10)
15/8	Crawley (3-1, 5-6, 4-7)
10	Southend (22-1, 8, 9/2)
10	Shrewsbury (14-1, 14, 12)
12	Torquay Utd (33,150, 40)
16	Cheltenham (80-1, 40, 14)
66	Oxford United (12-1, 14, 20)
150	Gillingham (16-1, 25, 25)
150	Macclesfield (100, 125, 100)
150	Rotherham (16-1, 50, 28)
200	Burton Albion (66-1, 66, 33)
200	Crewe (40, 160, 200)
200	Port Vale (25-1, 25, 33)
250	Morecambe (50-1, 33, 33)
250	Bristol Rovers (9-1, 100, 50)
250	AFC Wimbledon (25-1, 66, 66)
250	Accrington Stanley (40, 500, 66)
350	Bradford (22, 300, 175)
400	Aldershot (33-1, 150, 50)
400	Hereford (66-1, 400, 250)
400	Northampton (16-1, 300, 300)
400	Dagenham (33-1, 750, 500)
400	Barnet (80-1, 1250, 500)
1000	Plymouth Argyle (2500, 1000)

AROUND LEAGUE TWO

A traipse around League Two to check on what the other clubs' fans are saying.

SWINDON TOWN

THE biggest challenge for our club this season is to get back in to League One. It's never easy getting out of any league, but with the resources and board backing we have it is a reasonable expectation. If only it was that easy. In the cups we have beaten a championship team (Bristol City), two League 1 clubs (Colchester away and Exeter away) and are only a two-legged area final win away from Wembley in the JPT. We beat Premier League Wigan in the FA cup but lost to Leicester City in the fourth round. But it's the league that counts, and after a shaky August we have improved. Recently we have been on an unbeaten 15 game run and conceded very few goals in the process. It's going to be tough getting automatic promotion, but that is what we need to aim for. Anything less than the playoffs will be a failure. It may seem arrogant to say so, but we have a significant resources advantage over many League 2 clubs. Life under Paolo di Canio certainly isn't dull! It certainly seems to be his way or the highway. I'm sure the Clarkegate incident made it Down Under courtesy of 'Mr Murdoch'. PDC has also substituted players after 25 minutes if he thinks they aren't interested. After the poor start we made I wondered whether we'd made a big mistake appointing him. However his undoubted determination and passion has slowly but surely started to have a positive effect. This is his first managerial job and so there was always likely to be a learning curve for him. I still think he teeters on the edge of madness and genius, but if we keep winning I'll go with the latter! At the end of last season almost all of last year's yellow-bellied flops left the club, there was quite the rebuilding job to do. And subsequently PDC brought in quite a few new "foreign" players, the type that has other fans wondering how they'll perform on a cold Tuesday in January. Unfortunately many of these early signings have been duds. Oliver Risser is OK but not a regular starter, he initially had the club captaincy and then had it removed from him! Atiku has already had his contract cancelled, and 'keeper Mattia Lonzano looks to follow suit. Alberto Comazzi hasn't been seen since the Doh-Doh and...well you get the idea. There have been some slightly disappointing signings too. Everyone thought Alan Connell would be the goal machine that would fire us up the league, yet he has had to settle for being substitute a lot. Lukas Magera played for the Czech Republic not so long ago, yet looks to be struggling to come to terms with division 4 directness. Wingers Etienne Esejas and Lander Gabilondo haven't

featured much either. Added to that arguably our best four performers this season: Aden Flint, Paul Caddis, Matt Ritchie and Simon Ferry were already at the club. Ferry was nearly bombed out by PDC but got his act together to show he is a class above division 4. However it's not all bad! In the loan market he addressed our early defensive frailties by bringing in a good young keeper from Palace, a left back from Huddersfield (now returned) and moved our central midfielder Alan McCormack (A PDC acquisition) to the centre of defence. It worked. Look at our goals against column, at the time of writing 18, 7 conceded since the end of September, and 3 of those in one match! Permanent acquisition Smith has added some steel into midfield, and early on striker Mehdi Kerrouche was on fire. He has disappeared from the match-day squad now, another PDC bust up, who knows? Up front has been an issue, on our books we had Connell, Magera, Kerrouche, Storey, Jervis (in on loan), Murray (in on loan), with Bodin, Benyon and Clarke out on loan. We look like we have just unloaded Clarke in a swap deal with Charlton's Paul Benson - so maybe know PDC will settle on a front two. In the JPT game at the County Ground Wimbledon looked a well organised team, but one I thought we should have beaten in normal time. Thankfully we did the business in the penalty shootout. In the game at Kingsmeadow was very different. I think Wimbledon physically dominated us, and for 65 minutes were clearly the better team. There did however seem to be a bit of a soft centre, Alan Connell missed three gilt-edged chances that would have undeservedly got us back into the game. For the last 25 we came on strong and scored the equaliser. Oh and don't mention that stonewall penalty the ref didn't give! Hope this doesn't come across as rubbing your nose in it but here are my thoughts on the League game on January 2: Wimbledon came for a draw and baring some sort of fluke there was only ever going to be one winner, Swindon, assuming we could break you down and score. The first half was slightly frustrating for us but the signs were there that it was to be a "when" we score not if. In the second half when we did score Wimbledon had to attack us, but it left us space. This is where the difference in quality came in, we used the space to pass to good effect, scored a second and from that point on the fight left Wimbledon. In the end we could have scored another three or four goals. You won't thank me for saying this but I was disappointed by Wimbledon (or should that be delighted!). In our previous two games there has been fight, at your place you dominated us physically

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AROUND LEAGUE 2

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and arguably could have felt unlucky to only draw. Today you looked like a team devoid of confidence, fight and quality, and with little attacking threat. A losing streak can do that, as we Swindon fans know from our relegation last year. We played Northampton around the same time and they seemed to have more about them in all departments despite sinking to the bottom of the league. This has to be concerning. But don't give up just yet! It should of course be remembered this is just one game, that we have an excellent home record, and have lost just once in 17 or 18 games. I sincerely hope you regain form soon. Especially if it means Bristol Rovers going down. All the best, I have a genuine admiration for what AFC Wimbledon have achieved, particularly given the unsavoury reasons for needing to do so. — **SIMON BATCHELOR, (Batch), my first Town game was 21st Nov 1989 - hooked ever since.**

AN ALTERNATIVE SWINDON VIEW

I handed in my ST when Di Canio was appointed and haven't watched the first team play since. Which is probably a bit drama queen but personally I couldn't reconcile myself to the idea of cheering a self-confessed and unapologetic fascist on a match day, so I decided to keep my head down until he inevitably flounces out or gets poached by West Ham and then I can come back to supporting my team. I didn't even post on *The TownEnd* (except for a Happy Christmas post to the people I used to banter with) as I didn't want to piss on everyone's strawberries when most people are understandably delighted at a "big name" appointment followed by what is so far proving to be a very successful season. Sadly unable to share in that as for me some things are more important than football - actually that's the same for everyone, it's just for me this is a "red line" issue I can't get past; others would undoubtedly have different ones. Best of luck and hope you guys have a great season - I was one of the people who helped mobilise anti-Franchise demos at Swindon and I'm an AFC shareholder from back when you were looking to raise money to buy Kingstonian so always look out for your results. All the best. — **PAUL DAVIS.**

PORT VALE (AND ROBBIE EARLE)

IT's been an exceptionally worrying season for the Vale, as on-field matters have been well and truly overshadowed by an horrendous 12 months off-pitch controversy this time involving mainly but not limited to the club's old 'supporter' lead board who denied what seems to be a perfectly reasonable and progressive bid, surviving a vote of no-confidence and the ousting of two key members at a close season EGM only to then attract the club's questionable current CEO and recent Chairman who lasted three months. We have experienced incredible issues that most clubs would probably on encounter in a life-time of a

supporter including promissory notes for shares (that's buying lots of shares through IOUs to me and you), threats of lawsuits, broken promises, failed investment, mortgages taken out against the ground which contravene a long standing council loan out of sheer desperation following failed investment talks, excessive figurehead salaries, withdrawal of promised squad strengthening funds at the 11th hour and our star player being advised he needs to take a pay cut despite earning less than the former Chairman whose post previously was unpaid! Most Vale fans are rallying behind the supporters' club who are committed to calling a second EGM inside 12 months and so removing the pair who have officially resigned/been removed from their positions but remain board members along with the two surviving members of the old board who 'hoodwinked' and have hidden from the truth ever since the last EGM! For Vale's sake, I hope it's sooner rather than later. On the field it started well with only minor blips in our 3-2 reverses at home to Southend and away to your good selves and once again as per last season Micky Adams seemed to have us riding high with the front-runners. However the ongoing injury issues to our main goal-threat Marc Richards, who is being managed through the season until he can have an operation to cure an eight-year ankle problem when we have either failed to reach the play-offs or avoided relegation have caused obvious problems and without him to a degree we are somewhat toothless and our superb defence of last season is now leaking goals despite containing virtually the same faces! Rumour has it a number of players are playing when half-fit and this is once again generally felt to be an issue caused by the board who had given Adams a budget and told him to identify targets for the January window only to withdraw all such opportunity around a week before the window opened! Against AFC Wimbledon we had 12 senior pros, our most creative midfielder at left-back, two strikers on the wings and the bench was made up with 4 rookies who have not started a game between them. Worrying times! Although we dominated the game against the Dons, though nothing like the fixture at your place when we spurned enough chances to win 20 games, we rarely looked like winning from a personal perspective. Our goal was wonderfully created however conceding the horrendous equaliser that we did (not for the first or last time this season!) saw the confidence disappear from our players and for me it was clearly only a matter matter of time in the second half before

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AROUND LEAGUE 2

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you broke and scored a winner. Once Luke Moore's goal went in there was never a sniff of us getting back into the game and so it proved. It was quite apparent that you had blooded a number of brand-new players particularly in the first-half but as Vale's confidence dwindled following the Dons equaliser so your confidence and was clearly boosted and you became more fluent with movement and retained possession far better particularly in the second half. I think if Christian Jolley had played the score would have been far more one sided as we simply cannot cope with pace specifically when teams break on us into our full-back areas and this has been a tactic utilised against us on a number of occasions during the last 12 months. For me the stand-out player was Billy Knott, a few more energy filled performances like that and Terry Brown will do well to keep hold of him on a long-term basis. Robbie Earle for me is the closest thing to a hero I will ever have. He joined Vale in 1981 after initially being with Stoke as a YTS player but broke his leg and was released from where we snapped him up. Initially he started out flitting between striker and midfield and was equally successful in each role. He played his part in promotions and the superb FA Cup win over previous season finalists Spurs in January 1988. However I remember him best for his dynamic box-to-box runs and industrious midfield play. My favourite memory of Robbie, as will be the case for a number of Valiants, was his contribution in both legs of the 1988/89 3rd Division (now League 1) playoff final against Bristol Rovers. Back in those days there was no Wembley Final so we played away at Twerton Park in the first leg drawing 1-1 with Robbie scoring the equaliser and then in the second leg following a superb performance from Rovers keeper Nigel Martyn and with the score at 0-0 our now infamous corner kick routine which involved a near post ball from Simon Mills to Darren Beckford who flicked on for an onrushing Robbie to bury a header into the net worked for what seemed like the 100th time! Despite a few nervy moments we hung on and celebrated promotion to the equivalent of the Championship for the first time in a lot of Vale fans memories. At the end of the game Robbie walked past me (I was a ball boy in front of the tunnel) weeping with emotion and sat by the entrance (where the iconic picture in my avatar comes from), a few seconds later myself and one of my fellow bellboys ran over and hugged him and he lifted us up as fans invaded from everywhere. It was a momentous day and as a 10 year old one I am so grateful I have the memories of. That really was the catalyst for the greatest period in our history and around 10 years of unparalleled success under 'Sir' John Rudge which saw us narrowly miss out on the play-offs to the premier league and enjoy further magnificent and heralded cup victories. Oh for a second of those glories

now! When he left to join Wimbledon in 1991 I was devastated but things didn't turn out too bad in the end and I went to watch him a couple of times when you played Villa away. Indeed he almost came back in 1999 as Rudge was lining him up as our new manager when he was intending on moving upstairs only for Rudge to be sacked and that dream to end. I also watched all the Jamaica games he played in during the World Cup in France in 1998 and it was an amazing feeling watching him score against Croatia. The Jamaican fans were superb to celebrate with although there were a hell of a lot of English there supporting him and the Reggae Boyz too! Robbie is now a weekly columnist in the local paper *The Sentinel* and until recently has stayed out of the politics although I understand the Supporters Club are looking to approach him to potentially sit on an interim board if the aims of our forthcoming EGM are successful. The following article may be of interest as he mentions the parallels between our situation and the demise of Wimbledon FC - <http://www.thisisstaffordshire.co.uk...ail/story.html> . — **JAMES SMITH (Robbie Earle's Perm) and has been following the Vale since his Dad took him to his first game in PV's promotion season of 82/83.**

GILLINGHAM

EVEN after two league losses on the trot the Gills remain in 8th place with 20 games to go and therefore 60 points available. So if we are to achieve this season is certainly down to us and promotion is not out of sight, though not looking too good at the moment. We have certainly had our share of injuries and suspensions but then so have others. Andy Hessenthaler (Hess) sorry to say I feel has short-comings, his habit of slating players publicly, playing guys out of position, being amongst them and cannot be conducive to good morale. Having said this his comments following the game with the Dons' game seem to be a collective criticism of our defence which has to be an improvement. He is also talking of recalling a young defender from a loan spell. Hess, I'm sure, has the club at heart but is it enough? Time will tell. Danny Kedwell, unfortunately, has been asked to play up front on his own for a large part of the season, and I do not think this suits him, but you can not fault his work-rate and commitment. Thought the Dons looked capable even if it took a little while to show, your new boys look as if they are going to give you a lift. Well done you Dons and good luck for the future. — **DAVE CARTWRIGHT has been following The Gills since the early 1980s.**

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AROUND LEAGUE 2

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DANNY KEDWELL has become a real hero of the Rainham End, There are still those who will knock his lack of goals from open play But for me he is everything I want in a centre forward at this level. Hess likes to play his centre forward deep and this is something Danny does really well as Bayo Akinfenwa did for us last season. Keds' commitment as shown against the Dons for 90 minutes with a cracked rib was amazing. Hess has signed some good attacking players unfortunately the defence is collectively too slow. This is something your players used to their advantage .I was impressed by your side and fans' turnout over 1,000 in league two is rare although we do take that many to many local games, I was really pleased that you are going to do well enough to finish mid-table. I wouldn't mind Hess signing one or two more of your players in future. I will always back any manager while they are at the club as I feel football has enough pressure on managers with us always baying for blood after every defeat. Despite the wind and a 'picky' ref it was a good game. Gutted about the end result but Tomlin, Kuffour and Kedwell will win us a few more yet this season. Good luck. — **CHRIS HOWARD, who has been following the Gills for over 30 years.**

CHELTENHAM TOWN

AS a season ticket holder for well over 20 years I went my usual way in buying one in the summer expecting a better season than the last [finishing 17th in L2] and was hoping for a mid-table place just pushing for the play-offs, so at this stage I'm very pleasantly surprised Cheltenham are currently top with just a little over four months remaining of the season. I have to say (and I don't wish to count my chickens) we must be looking good for at least for a top seven finish anything else in our current position would be very disappointing. Paul Baker [chairman] has stated openly that we are financially good, especially after a successful FA/JPT trophy run, he also very keen to extend Mark Yates & Neil Howarth contracts in which all Cheltenham fans will welcome with open arms, he is doing a fantastic job building a solid squad on a limited budget, in this transfer window we have signed just one player Jamaine McGleshan, who played at Aldershot, a winger with great pace that will terrify full-backs, he has recently received the 'man of the match' award for Aldershot against Manchester United in this season's League Cup. We have recently been looking at a possible move to the town's famous racecourse, building a 10,000 capacity stadium and at present the club has dismissed this potential project but has not rule it out completely. Being top of the table, with an excellent squad of players our crowds are not that great, at the moment we average around 3,300 home attendances which I love to see increase by at least 20%. Gloucestershire is a rugby county and we do tend to find it hard to attract fans to watch

games at the ABS stadium. Kaid Mohamed has had a 'hot & cold' start at Cheltenham. He had a great pre-season and showed plenty potential to do very well for us. This season he has been playing on the left wing; has plenty of pace and gets the crowd excited with his great runs but his final touch tends to be his weakness, saying that has scored some crucial goals for us this season and was a fans favourite at AFC Wimbledon with his brief spell there. — **ANTHONY WELLS, a season ticket holder for over 20 years.**

My honest thoughts: - Common expectation for this season amongst our support was quite modest with mid-table/top half seen by many as improvement after an awful 2-3 previous seasons. So it's certainly a surprise we are top but given our overall performances we certainly deserve it so far.

- In terms of how we will perform for the remainder of the season, it's hard to tell. It would be a disaster if we failed to make the playoffs however automatic promotion should be the aim now given the side we have assembled.

- I'm not sure we face too many challenges in League Two, our crowds are typically above average, although given the previous two years they are down on our average league following of 4200, currently around 3400. The expectation is these will return and we have shown previously we can attract gates of 7000 when doing well. Our budget while not the largest is far from the smallest and we have one of the richest men in Britain as a majority shareholder.

- I went to the game at your place, great set of home supporters and on the pitch it was the only game we were well beaten this season. I thought that was a case of your team playing well, good effective lower league football and also us being unusually poor.

- Overall feeling on Mark Yates as manager is pretty positive although he made a very slow start and was under huge pressure last season after we fell away from a playoff place in January to finish fourth bottom. Had we not made a significant improvement I have no doubts he would have been sacked early this season however he has demonstrated a great eye for signing players and tactically improved considerably versus his early days of managing us.

- I would say Kaid Mohammed is like marmite in that fans either love him or hate him. Overall he is more popular than not but clearly frustrating. For 90% of the game he will demonstrate poor control and decision making but the other 10% he will be a game change with a moment of brilliance. Good to see Wimbledon back in the league and hopefully soon above the Franchise. — **MARK CLEMENCE, following the Robins for 29 years.**



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