Cambridge Fans United

CFU

"Uniting Our Community"

AMBER NEWS

Special 'Festive' Edition

December 2024





Opening Gift Wrap,

"If you wish to live to see better days , then you must endure the bad days."
Abdul Kalam

It's been a season of disappointments followed by revival, growing confidence and disruption caused by injuries to one key play after another. After a hugely impressive revival of our fortunes, we crashed to a painful and shambolic defeat to Peterborough of all clubs to be humiliated by. We followed that with successive draws to Barnsley, Northampton and Bolton and further embarrassment away at Reading ,where our players looked, frankly , exhausted. A richly satisfying thrashing of Gareth Ainsworth's Shrewsbury was followed by a fine performance at Wrexham, where we probably deserved to win. I could say that about a number of games this season, where we have avoided the rub of the green and played well without getting our just deserts. The team obviously have heart and ability. They are playing for Garry Monk and ,at times, we look really good. And then we played Huddersfield.



We all looked forward to a Friday night game under the lights and frightening another of the "big" teams in our division with their huge support and great expectations. Many of those who might have been tempted to miss the game to go Christmas shopping were ready to generate our normal fanatical and loud support were in evidence, even on Habbin North where an unusual note of optimism could be detected. This was amplified by some rather silly Undergraduates who were pretending to be genuinely enthusiastic fans. The longer the game went on, the more like satire their act seemed to be.

A good opening ten minutes against a really impressive away team gave us hope. The Terriers were easily the best side I've seen at the Abbey this season. We didn't need to give them the three goals they scored in the first half. The average pub side would have been furious at the way some of our defenders were beaten to the second ball. A number were guilty of ball watching and one of our best players, who may or may not depart for better things in January, failed to track back twice. As a result Huddersfield scored two bad and preventable goals. We could ,and probably should, have had a penalty in the first half. We didn't look hungry enough and it was clear that Brophy and Cousins were being asked to do a job they were not particularly well equipped for. It may not have mattered so much if Watts and Jobe had been fit all season. We would have had more pace and awareness at the back then. Sadly the lad from Blackburn wasn't the answer. I expect he will be gone soon. Okedina has looked terrific at times but is inconsistent. Morro needs someone steady but speedy

alongside him. They have been asked to do too much too often because we have had to do without key players.

How we could have done with Korey Smith last night ,or George Thomas, or Gary Gardener-who won't be playing until February. There are a number of others who are nearly available or not really match fit ,which means that the others are being expected to overachieve each time. The crowd know that and , by and large, are remaining loyal to the team . Of course that is what real supporters do. I was pleased that someone in the Habbin was told to give it a rest having laid into our team's efforts once too often.

This game could have been more like the Blackpool one. Lavery and Kachunga missed really good chances in the early part of the second half. At 2-3, things could have been a little different. We might have had a penalty in the second half too for handball and late on Njoku should have scored but rushed his shot. Instead Huddersfield scored a fourth and suddenly we had been thrashed. Huddersfield were better than us but we gave them a much easier time of it than we should. We all knew that and we had all expected much more.

Walking down Cut Throat Lane, we heard the usual chatter. Was Ben Strang guilty of



High Treason? Will Loft ever score a goal? Should we sack Monk? When will we be relegated? And other pearlers too. Old timers like me have been here before. It was a bad night. We were disappointed . But we were disappointed because we have seen evidence of better things, a style of play that the team is getting used to, promise from those returning to the squad and moments of real quality. If we were rubbish, we would not have been so disappointed last night. Since getting into League One, the second half of the season has been better than the first half. We will avoid relegation and we will do it before the last game. And one day we will see a full strength midfield. Call me an optimist.

JOHN DOCHERTY

This year, inevitably, has seen the sad passing of a number of notable and lifelong fans. Their passing has generally been acknowledged on the scoreboard and by gestures of respect on the pitch, always observed beautifully by both sets of fans. We all recognise that fans are the lifeblood of football. Without them the game we love would not exist.

I was delighted to note, at the home game against Shrewsbury, a minute's applause recognised the lives of Jack Merrit, Roly Horrey and John Docherty. Jack was killed five years ago during the London Bridge terror attacks. A keen supporter, and a young man of immense promise, he was killed before he had the chance to achieve the great things he was seemingly destined to do. Roly Horrey was a wonderful player and a lovely man whose play delighted those of us who watched a very special side gain election to the Football League in 1970.



Docherty was, arguably, our greatest ever manager and made us competitive in the second division, now the Championship, for six seasons. He brought in George Reilly and flying winger Derrick Christie from Northampton and we troubled many established top quality sides. He was fatally undermined by a change of rules which meant that, instead of receiving half of the gate receipts home and away, all teams kept their home receipts. To us, half the receipts at Roker Park or Sheffield Wednesday for instance, helped our finances considerably and made us and other sides more competitive. Endless tinkering, such as changing the number of points for a win and downgrading the importance of the FA Cup were other decisions taken for the good of some people and not so much for others. But that is another story. Docherty had to sell players and then he was sacked because , amazingly , our form dipped. At the time many fans thought that the sacking was premature and unfair but a scapegoat seemed to be required and the Doc fitted the bill. His players loved him. He said exactly what he meant and what he expected and he usually got it. His record at Millwall showed us what we had missed. Hindsight shows that we should have kept him. Of course another of our managers went to Millwall, having promised us long term commitment. He isn't worth remembering but John Docherty certainly was and is. He showed that you can be a man of real principle and successful at the same time. RIP.



Up For The Cup

The magic of the FA cup has been rather eroded in recent years, much due to the attitude to the competition of Premier League clubs such as doing away with replays and generally not being bothered!

Our interest ended with the home defeat to Wigan, but I wish them well in the next round as their fans seem very nice.

Despite having little interest in finding that Wigan would be away to Mansfield, it was good seeing the U's get a mention, Dion Dublin scoring goals back in the 90's as part of the 3rd round draw.

A couple of days later and the TV picks were released, BBC, ITV and Sky all showing live games over a 5 day period.
I am all for seeing the small teams, so Everton/Pish, Liverpool Accrington, Man C/Salford, Tamworth /Spurs and Millwall/Dagenham are good to be shown.



All Premier league ties between Arsenal/Man U and Aston Villa/West Ham are unnecessary, especially when Leeds/Harrogate, Chelsea/Morecambe, Palace/Stockport and Newcastle/Bromley would better spread the TV money to smaller clubs, and probably have a larger audience as many neutrals would watch hoping for an upset. Although perhaps Newcastle might not be so keen…….who did they lose to a few years ago?



I do actually feel a little sorry for Pish fans going to Everton on a Thursday evening. You can't make a weekend of it, and there are no trains home after. I suppose the North Cambs coach companies will make a few ££'s!

Terry Wilby

Reviving a Legacy: My Journey with Cambridge United's Charitable Foundation

In the realm of football, few narratives touch my heart like that of the story of Cambridge United—a club that has profoundly impacted our community through innovation and a steadfast spirit.



My journey with the club began back in 2010 when I first heard Jez George propose an incredible idea: to establish a charitable trust to ensure the future of Cambridge United. Understanding the challenging financial landscape the club faced, I realised how crucial a not-for-profit organisation could be in creating the infrastructure necessary for sustainability. The vision captured my imagination, especially as a former player turned advocate for sports and community development. I may have stepped off the pitch in 1985, but my passion for the club remained undiminished, and the opportunity to return to a place I loved inspired me greatly.

However, the early days of our foundation weren't easy. With a shoestring budget, Jez and the team faced their fair share of obstacles. I remember the stories of Jez walking tirelessly during each off-season, seeking vital sponsorships. Then, everything shifted during the 2013/14 season when the club's promotion to the English Football League (EFL) opened new doors for financial support. That moment was transformative, allowing the Foundation to stabilise and broaden our mission to help even more people in the community. As I reflect on that pivotal time, it's clear that the Foundation was more than just about financial success; it marked a new chapter in our relationship with the community. There was a purpose to our endeavors, resulting in tangible changes across Cambridge.

Central to our journey was a guiding philosophy that I wholeheartedly embraced: "culture eats strategy for breakfast." From the start, the metaphor of being 'on a bus ' resonated deeply with me—it encapsulated our goal of leveraging the football club to drive positive change in the community, especially around the Abbey Stadium. The idea of assembling "the right people on the bus" took shape, revolving around three essential 'C's: character, competence, and chemistry. For me, character has always been key—only those with integrity and trust could truly steer this mission forward. While competence was crucial, I found that it was the team we built—founded on strong moral values—that truly made the difference. The concept of 'chemistry' encouraged diverse personalities to come together, enriching our discussions and fuelling innovation.



Now, as we look back a decade after rejoining the EFL, I feel immense pride in how the Foundation has become a vital part of the club's identity. The seamless blend of our business and charitable efforts showcases a collective commitment to uplifting our community—a vision embraced by owners, fans, and staff alike. We've cultivated a balanced team that adeptly manages our daily operations while cherishing the essence of collaboration and diversity.



The story of Cambridge United and its charitable foundation is not merely about sporting achievements; it's a resonant testament to how determination, community engagement, and shared values can forge a lasting legacy. As we continue to shape our future,

one truth remains clear to me: with the right people on the bus, the potential for positive impact is truly limitless. Drive on!
Graham Daniels

We are all very grateful to Graham for his years of service to an arm of the club that rarely gets the credit it deserves. The community supports the club. Indeed, it is the club. Supporting the community is a duty which Cambridge United performs outstandingly well. I am pleased to see Godric Smith take over as Chair of the Foundation. He was in CFU at the very beginning and knows how important it is for a fully independent and democratically elected Fans' organization to be directly involved with the club. Indeed , I have worked with him in connection with the Shadow Board and found him to be very helpful and very thorough. We wish him well in this new and vital role. (Ed)

Cambridge United Foundation – December Update

As always, December is a very busy time for the Foundation.



Our first main event of the month was our Seniors' Christmas Lunch which took place on Thursday 5th December. Around a hundred people were served a delicious festive meal before being entertained by singers John Woodhouse and Bill Green. Everyone who attended received a festive goody bag which was kindly funded by Waitrose. Thanks also goes out to the dozen volunteers from the Council who helped serve the meals. A fantastic time was had by everyone!

On Tuesday 10th December we took thirty of our Forever United participants to the Arts Theatre to watch Cinderella. It was an excellent show full of songs, jokes and slapstick comedy. Everyone definitely went home with a smile on their face. Massive thanks to Ian Mather for organising the tickets.



On Wednesday 11th December we held our first Community Awards Evening at the Cledara Abbey Stadium. Six awards were handed out to individuals or groups that had made outstanding contributions or progress over the past year. What an amazing evening it was to hear people's stories and their achievements. It was incredibly emotional at times, and really highlighted the impact that the Foundation has on people's lives. Thanks go to Cambridge Charity Fundraisers for donating the awards.

The awards evening was then followed by Carols at the Cledara Abbey. Staff, fans, players, and members of the wider community come together to celebrate the festive period - an embodiment of Simon Cragg's 'United at Christmas' song which was performed on the night along with the Marleigh Primary Academy Choir. We are very grateful that all proceeds from the evening were donated to the Foundation.





On Thursday 12th December, members of staff from the football club and Foundation delivered hampers to vulnerable members of the community. We know that Cambridge is one of the most unequal cities in the country, containing several areas of deprivation, so it is vital that as a football family we try to do our bit. Thank you to all of you that helped out by donating food and toiletries. We know that our support was greatly appreciated.

On Wednesday 18th December we held a Festive Strength & Balance session at the Cledara Abbey Stadium. Residents from several sheltered housing schemes based in Cambridge, including Ditchburn Place and Ditton Court, came to the stadium for a special class led by the Foundation's Jake Potts, followed by festive refreshments. This event was made possible because of a generous donation from John Lewis.





On Thursday 19th December we celebrated another successful year of Walking Football by inviting participants back to the stadium for a pizza feast. Participants from our Abbey, Bar Hill and Milton walking football groups came along for a final catch-up before the new year.

This was followed by our final afternoon tea of the year as well. As usual a couple of Cambridge United scholars came along to help make cups of tea and talk to the seniors that attended and everyone was incredibly impressed with their contribution. As a special surprise, staff from Novotel Cambridge North came along with some bottles of prosecco and a selection of board games. What a lovely way to end a very busy December!

In future news, Godric Smith has been appointed Chair of Cambridge United Foundation. He will succeed Graham Daniels who has been in the role for 12 years and overseen the significant growth and development of the Foundation over this period. Godric will take up the position on January 1 and both will remain as Directors on the main Cambridge United Board to ensure continuity and alignment across the Club and its community.

In partnership with Cambridge Charity Fundraisers, we are launching our new 'Bright Horizons' drop in café which will start on Wednesday 12th February 2025 (2:00-4:00pm) at the Cledara Abbey Stadium. The session will run on the second Wednesday of each month. This new informal programme will be an opportunity for members of the local community to gather together at the home of the U's and have vital time to talk to one other.

Finally, a date has been set for the next 'United for Cambridge' Sleepout. On Friday 28th February 2025, Cambridge United Foundation and Wintercomfort will once again join forces to raise awareness and vital funds in support of their work with homeless and disadvantaged people in the city. Individuals and teams from across the community will brave the elements for one night, sleeping out on the terraces of the Cledara Abbey Stadium.

If you would like further information about the Foundation, volunteering opportunities, specific sessions that we run, or our fundraising activities, please email foundation@cambridgeunited.com.

I'm grateful to Simon for such a detailed account of a very busy time in the Foundation's calendar. I



remember speaking to Mark Bonner after a CFU AGM about his values and those of the club. These are demonstrated again and again by visits to schools, the support of many just causes and, more recently by the visits of players to the Arthur Rank Hospice and to the HQ of East Anglia Children's Hospice. Children ,in particular, are always thrilled by the visits of their heroes and the presents are always very welcome too. Our club realises what a difference it makes to suffering children and patients reaching the end of their lives to give a bit of time ,a few smiles and a lot of love. It made me proud to see players

and coaching staff looking out for people who need things to look forward to and who need to know that people care. There is nothing more important than caring for others, at Christmas-and at any other time.

I am very grateful to Simon and Jake in particular for their obvious dedication. I think that the Senior's Lunch is one of the very best things the club does. My mother has been attending for years and , now that she has Alzheimer's, has little to look forward to. She loves the lunches there and the kindness she receives which is always so obvious. Here is a need which is not very fully met in society but Jake, Simon and the others do. Thank you. I wrote the following poem just after getting home from the last senior's lunch. I hope it resonates with some people. It is an increasingly common experience.

Echoes

The confusion of voices

Argue in your head

Mixing the certainty of your past

With the learned habits and a chaos

Of confused glimpses of now.

If you could reach backwards

To the confident paths

You trod with certainty

And trust,

I know that you would.



You glimpse

At familiar faces

Which tantalise you

With the tricks you have forgotten.

Sometimes they can save you

For a few minutes.

They are

As they always were

But you cannot recognise yourself.

The more you try

The more the memories recede.

You have your world imposed on you now.

You know that the photo

So long on that shelf

Was your husband,

That the man you see

Only vaguely

Who guides you

Across the restaurant

Is your eldest.

You never intended to come here

You wanted to organise

Every day

Like the books

In your Library

But your mind has betrayed you

And left you spinning

In a place

You no longer know.



DARLERITES

Hi Andrew,
You may remember the story of “The Darlerites”, Roger, Ole and Jens, who decided to follow the U’s and support the fundraising of Ian Darler. They had their first visit (and so far only!) to the Abbey when we beat Pish a couple of seasons ago. (Reminder: The Vikings are coming).

They decided to go for a walk in the area where they live! Here’s what they said:

“Ian Darler walks a million miles, so we wanted to walk a million miles upwards (at least it felt like it) for the NUMERO UNO groundsman, club and people around who we love!

To go places that the Cambridge flag has never been before and re-create the photo from the battle of Iwo Jima (the Victory we feel is near). I think we made it 100% authentic.



We look up to the mountain Rørnestinden (the same as the U's look up the table), and we climb up (the same as the U's, hopefully). We feel something positive is happening, if we forget the terrible result against Peterboring.





So Ole and Jens with some family members took our Cambridge gear and climbed, climbed and climbed for several hours, Roger had an itch so he did not want to sacrifice his life for the club that day. We even found some reindeers that wanted to enlist as Cambridge supporters."

The Raising of the Flag on Iwo Jima is an iconic picture from the end of the Second World War, here Jens and Ole are recreating it in the mountains of Norway:

Historically wherever you place your flag you own, so thanks to the Darlerites CUFC own a mountain in Norway!

Rørnestinden is in the far north of Norway, as shown on the maps below. The route started at sea level and climbed 1041m (3415 feet) which is higher than the tallest peak (Scafell Pike) in England! It took them around 8 hours. To go walking up a mountain in shorts seems to me to be madness!



In the group picture Ole is at the back with his wife Astrid, their children at the front: 9 years old Tiril in the Brewboard shirt and 6 years old Selma in the striped shirt. In the middle holding the flag is Jens alongside his girlfriend Natalie.

Semi naked man walking with CUFC flag!

Many thanks to you all for claiming a mountain for CUFC, and we hope to see you back at the Abbey soon.
We have some fabulous fans around the world. Some indeed are our owners. My friend William Arnold, who teaches in China treks half way across the world to watch Cambridge matches when he can. One of his students has become a regular here and says that he has been made to feel really welcome-which is wonderful to hear. I was surprised to find that a number of United fans live close to me in Downham Market… but we are the world's greatest team-or so the song says.(ED)

Thanks to the entrepreneurial genius of Terry Wilby , CFU are now able to supply the needs of discriminating collectors and the most fashion conscious of us. See links below. T shirts are £12 each, hoodies £24...and you can let us know if you'd like a back pack, lunch bag, place mats , mugs or coasters. Talk to Terry at the CFU Cabin or email us. We are good listeners and happy to meet every whim!

CFU Shop link: https://www.cambridgefansunited.org/cfu-shop/
Buy direct link: https://www.tshirtstudio.com/marketplace/cambridge-fans-united--cfu-



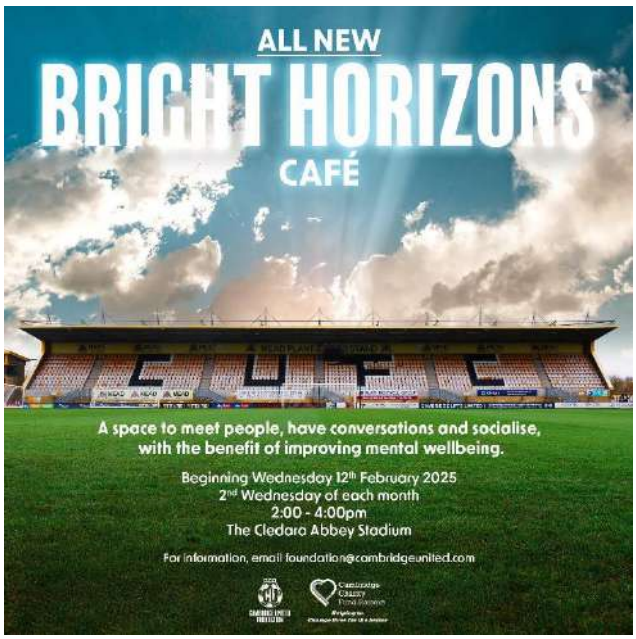
Hot off the Habbin

[programme articles]

Barnsley

"The true measure of success is how many times you can bounce back from failure."
Stephen Richards.

We are no strangers to failure this season but we have also demonstrated that there is quality and grit in the squad by winning five on the bounce without conceding a goal. An amazing turnaround which has raised our hopes for the rest of the season. Of course, injuries have not helped us. We had another paper thin squad for the game at Peterborough and paid a heavy penalty for it. In addition to losing Paul Digby, who used to play for Barnsley, which is a huge loss, we have now lost James Gibbons who has looked so good of late. We can however expect Lavery and Loft on the field to trouble the Barnsley defence. Their away record is excellent but all runs come to an end as we discovered so painfully at London Road. That result will hurt us for a long time but it is vital that we come out and play like we did at home to Wigan, chasing every ball and making sure that everybody knows we are the home side. I wonder if we will see a performance to remember from



Kell Watts and an assured performance from Jack Stevens who has already shown considerable courage and what a fine goalkeeper he can be.

We have had a number of players who have also appeared for Barnsley, including our manager and a certain Luke Berry. Of course, Barnsley fans are more likely to remember players of the calibre of Danny Blanchflower, who was one of the greatest midfielders of all time. Barnsley can also boast of Allan Clarke and Norman Bites Yer Legs Hunter from a very distinguished past. They have been in cup finals, the Premier League and have spent more time in the Championship, or Second Division as it used to be called, than any other team. They have pedigree and will come here expecting an easy game. We have to hope that we respond like a wounded lion determined to put Saturday's nightmare behind us. I would far rather remember James Brophy's stunning winner at Woking. Indeed, I may have to buy some commemorative mugs at the CFU cabin. A Brophy goal is a thing of beauty. Now he has found the net, there will be plenty more. I am mildly surprised that his fanatical followers didn't swarm onto the pitch but I am delighted for him. He really is a fine player.





Whilst in the realms of fancy, it's worth recalling that Barry Hines, author of A Kestrel for A Knave, turned out for Barnsley. The film KES has given many of us an image of Barnsley which is hard to forget as well as moments of sublime comedy. Which of us would have wanted to go to that tough Northern school and be coached for football by Mr Sugden, a PE teacher who compared himself with Bobby Charlton, bullied children mercilessly and expected instant obedience. I met many PE teachers like him during my own teaching career and frequently quizzed them about their reading habits- another dangerous sport! I wonder how their nickname "The Colliers" would go down at the climate summit? No matter. Football is all about tradition and mining was a way of life which has influenced the Character of Yorkshiremen for generations. I admire Barnsley's achievements but, come Saturday evening, I'd love to be talking about ours.

Up the U's!

Andrew



Bolton Wanderers

"In football, everything is complicated by the presence of the opposition team."

Jean- Paul Sartre

Like us, Bolton have had a pretty topsy turvy season. We had a dreadful season, put it all right and then got hammered at Peterborough, the worst place in the world to lose. We really need to win at home and need to make use of our games in hand to get out of the bottom four. Bolton are not doing well away from home and conceded five to Stockport, not what you'd expect when you are realistic contenders for promotion. Ian Evatt had his hands full last Saturday persuading that his team could beat Blackpool at home. In the end they did but they made heavy weather of it. We are 22nd and they are twelfth but that is not the whole story. Against Barnsley and in horrendous conditions away at Northampton, we can see a style emerging. We look a pretty useful team emerging from an incredibly difficult start. But for a brilliant goal line save at Northampton, we would have won there. A change of luck and the return of Barton or Stokes or Thomas, Richards or Gardener would see more reward for our efforts and determination.



Bolton have pedigree and have spent some years in the Premier League. Quite what Nat Lofthouse or Eddie Hopkinson would have made of Big Sam's methods would be interesting to know but he was certainly successful. When John Beck managed here, people were critical of our style but, again, much of this was jealousy because so called big clubs were losing to us regularly. I remember Glenn Hoddle in particular whining that the better team had lost. The game is about winning and about convincing your fans that everything has been left on the pitch. Allardyce and Beck demanded that and the results spoke volumes. It is a shame that N'lundulu is unavailable to us on Tuesday-he is after all, a Bolton player. He has been a revelation of late but Loft and Lavery are more or less fir now and are both more than capable of troubling defences. Lavery in particular has been missed. Had he played the whole game at Northampton, I am sure that we would have won.

Games between us show us as coming out relatively even. We've actually won 11 games each against each other. Having said that, Bolton were in the playoff final last season and we narrowly avoided relegation for the second successive season. We will be comfortably clear of that this season but Bolton will be tough opponents . One significant player we had in common was Goalkeeper Keith Brannigan, surely one of our finest. He had a fine career at Bolton having left a side which was struggling against financial disadvantage and the inevitable slump of a club which many people thought had overachieved. There are those who say that we don't have the attendances, potential or crowds to compete in League One but I don't believe that. We have big plans, a decent squad , a fine manager and we have James Brophy. I wish Bolton the best of luck but sooner or later we are going to shock some of the wealthier clubs and that would be great for football. It's really important that we all have a realistic chance , isn't it?

Andrew



Shrewsbury Town

"Giants are not what we think they are. The same qualities that appear to give them strength are often the sources of great weaknesses."
Malcolm Gladwell

There is much to admire about The Shrews. Like us, they compete in a league against a number of clubs with relatively vast wealth and much more choice of players to bring in. For us to succeed requires proper governance of football and more realistic opportunities for fair competition . We are all hopeful of a more level playing field ,whilst recognising the need for all clubs to be well run, well managed and astute in the transfer market. Town were elected to the Football League twenty years before us and spent some time out of it, following a period of decline and lackadaisical leadership off the field. Shrewsbury spent time in higher leagues, played in an early final at Wembley and produced some outstanding players, often Goalkeepers. Steve Ogrizovic and Joe Hart were the pick of the bunch but they have had many other fine players. Like us, Town have made good money out of selling good players. They have also signed some bargains as well.



One such was Nigel Jemson, who scored a wonderful goal from distance against a very embarrassed Shaun Marshall, who was never quite the same keeper afterwards.

This was at the remarkable Gay Meadow, a ground I loved to go to, if only because they had to employ a man in a coracle to salvage footballs kicked into the River Severn right next to the ground. Maybe it wasn't ideal. On another occasion I ran across our very own Trevor George, a Cambridge policeman who'd gone under cover to spot potential troublemakers. He had a digital camera, which was a new and revolutionary device at that time. I may be the first face recorded on that camera but I'm sure he was just testing it out . The New Meadow is much more practical and spacious but I preferred their old ground. I'm

delighted that we are staying here at the Abbey where our venerable stadium is going to get the makeover it deserves. I'm reaching the age where I'm beginning to look forward to a seat in the Habbin!

Several players have played for both clubs; wingers Kai Kai, Tudor and Tracy come to mind. Many of us will remember the hugely skilful colossus that was Mick Heathcote. It was hard to lose with him in the side. You could argue that he was our best ever centre half, although I wouldn't tell Liam Daish that. One other obvious connection is Gareth Ainsworth recently appointed to save the Shrews from relegation. Few would bet against him doing just that. He certainly inspired them for his first game which was against highly fancied Birmingham. We know what to expect from his sides. Certainly, they will be committed and he won't tolerate any lack of effort. His own playing style relied much more on skill and a fairly languid style but management demands a very different approach. We will need to match their effort and I'm sure we will. We have had very bad luck with injuries and what Shaun Derry used to call fine margins . Let's hope fortune favours us for once today.

Andrew Stephen



Huddersfield Town

"Diligence is the mother of good fortune."
Benjamin Disraeli

It has always felt good being involved in games against the Terriers although , in truth , they have come out on top more often than not. Before we were promoted to the Football League in 1970, we could only dream of playing a team which had appeared in cup finals and who were the first club to win the Division One title for three seasons in a row. We lost our first fixture with them when we were fresh to Division Three in 1973. Our rise had been steep but we found it tough to match many of the teams we played that season. Huddersfield had just sold Frank Worthington and Roy Ellam when we played them . After our narrow 2-1 defeat, town manager Ian Greaves described us as a good side who played good football. Our lack of experience and cash was always going to tell against us but I saw a terrific return game at the Abbey on New Year's Day 1974. We were 2-0 down in front of a crowd of 5,667 . The support for the U's never wavered and Bobby Ross and Abbey legend Brian Greenhalgh earned us a 2-2 draw. I reminded Brian of this when we met him at Blackpool last season. He gave us so much pleasure as we sought to establish ourselves as a team going places. That would come later of course.

Mike Ferguson was our skipper that year, taking over from Terry Eades who felt that the responsibility was affecting his game. He was a hard and resolutely honest player and I wonder what he would have made of Kyle Walker's disgraceful theatrics against

Manchester United. We have surely reached the point where players should be sent off for trying to get opponents red carded. I am not always full of praise for Referees but cheating is a blight which threatens to ruin our game. During the same week we played Oldham in the cup. Their team featured one Andy Lochead who I'd previously seen playing for Burnley. Truly, this seemed like the big time. Since then both clubs have had their ups and downs. Indeed both clubs came close to going out of existence but lived to see another day as both sets of fans will have demanded. United fans are incredibly loyal and passionate and the same can be about Town's.

They will have been particularly miserable when, under Malcolm Macdonald, they were destroyed 10-1 by Manchester City in the days when they used to win. Worse still, just before we were threatened with going out of existence, it seemed that Huddersfield would go bust. They were saved and almost as soon moved to what was then known as the McAlpine Stadium . Before that, I was delighted to see one of my former pupils, Phil Starbuck, playing for them . He had so much talent that it's a mystery he didn't go much further in the game-but that's football. The other game that sticks out in my mind is a 2-2 draw at their new stadium in August 2004. I felt as hot that day as I'd ever been and I felt sorry for the players who were having to cope with Mediterranean conditions. Chillingworth scored for us, Town scored two and looked to be cruising to a win when Kitson headed an equaliser from a Tudor cross. He was standing not far from me and his face was a picture of joy. He cared about us. He still does. I hope that we have a great game and after Shrewsbury, Wrexham and the return of many injured players, that United fans are celebrating at the end. We're on the up again.



Match Reports

"Courage is not the absence of fear. It is rather not letting your fear control your actions."
Brett Harris

Making Up For Last Week-A match report of sorts

Just before our game with Barnsley, I was chatting with a Barnsley fan and making fun of his reluctance to pay £4 for a programme. "Well, you are from Yorkshire," I added, hoping that he wouldn't accuse me of hate crime. Fortunately, he chuckled. I told him that some years ago I had met the partner of Barry Hines a few times. Like any good fan, he remembered that Barry Hines had played for Barnsley but had quite forgotten how many of us had formed our opinions of Yorkshire from his one great novel, A Kestrel for A Knave. Most know it better as a very memorable film called KES which looks closely at the lives of miners, the effect of poverty and one boy's love of nature. Most of all, many of us of a certain age would recognise the behaviour of Mr Sugden as typical of Heads of PE we had known. His remark about being Bobby Charlton because Denis Law was in the wash has me laughing now. At about that time, as a schoolboy, I went down Barnsley Main on a school trip. Health and Safety would have a field day now. Actually…that's what they called it. But I ramble. All this because they are known as the Colliers, a concept unknown to many.



Things did not look good for us. We had been thrashed by that team I won't mention only last week. We are ravaged by injuries more than ever. Now we had lost James Gibbons, surely one of our unsung heroes this year. Reyes was sunning himself in Chile and Loft and Lavery may or may not be available for part of the game. Certainly not fit. Certainly not match fit. Which brings me to the quotation I have chosen and Jack Stevens. When I saw his loss of confidence at Reading last season and a couple of eccentric howlers earlier this season, I, like many others, assumed that that was probably the end for him. He apparently had confidence problems at Oxford where he had established himself as a very fine goalkeeper. His position is one where every mistake is highlighted because they are often crucial. Garry Monk announced that he had no qualms about picking him, whatever the doubters and boo boys might say. And he was absolutely right to have such faith in him. He made three top-class saves keeping us in a game against very strong opponents. He looked calm and unshakeable throughout the game and the defence had complete faith in him.

Some armchair critics blamed him for the Barnsley goal because it went in at the near post. Didn't we all think that the Barnsley forward was going to shoot across him? It was hit hard and surprisingly accurately. We might ask questions about why he was allowed to run so far but that is another matter entirely. The childish celebrations in front of the Habbin suggested to me that the away team were relieved rather than triumphant. For me, Jack Stevens was our man of the match, for being excellent and for demonstrating tremendous character. He deserves to do well here.

Someone who may not do quite so well in the future is the bafflingly inconsistent Referee. Not as bad as the fella who officiated at the Greece vs England game-but nearly. He missed a number of nasty fouls but his chief blunder was booking Loft who had won the ball cleanly and was away, except the Ref had seen a foul not witnessed by anyone else. One of the worst decisions ever seen in fifty years of watching football. I hope that someone has told him.

I had an idea that Brophy would play an entire game this time. A great rarity. He had earned his substitution though. Like Morrison, he had made a real difference to us, leading by example. He has his critics too. They don't seem to realise that he is one of our best players. Now he knows how to score, he will keep doing so and spawning a whole new range of CFU merchandise.



When you have experienced a drubbing, it's more vital than ever to begin the next game well Nlundulu put us ahead after only four minutes and was a thorn in Barnsley's side till he was taken off exhausted. Later Morrison was unlucky not to put us ahead again with a header from corner. Unfortunately, it came back off a post but the team has Barnsley worried at times by fighting for every ball and contesting every inch of territory. Quite why the away side were wearing shocking pink was a puzzle unless they thought it would be easier to find their players in the distance. It certainly seemed to work for Ipswich as they claimed an unexpected win at Tottenham. Much as I like our green shirts, I do wonder how visible they are to players trying to make a pass in gloomy conditions but I'm sure that somebody somewhere has done a lot of research on the subject. Of course, yellow is pretty visible too.

It was good to see Kell Watts take the field for a few minutes and when Lavery came in his movement and class were obvious. It is easy to forget just how many first choice players we've had to do without at times and just how stretched the squad has been. We have still managed to look good at times. Who knows how well we can play if ever we get a first choice eleven on the pitch.

In conclusion, Barnsley looked a very good side. We gave them problems and earned a point. By the end of the game both sets of players looked exhausted. That said it all and it's all we ask.

Andrew Stephen

What Is It About The North West ?

I'm not given to any manner of stereotyping but I am beginning to wonder what it is about players from Lancashire, or thereabouts, which impedes their balance. The Bolton player who Okedina seemed to have destroyed with a playground slap and a

succession of Wigan players determined to get some of ours booked obviously found staying upright was impossible-or at least not to their taste. At least this time we had Trevor Kettle's son controlling things in the middle so cheats were unlikely to prosper-surely? Interestingly Zac had adopted the current fashion for double barrelled surnames which gave him a measure of anonymity for a while, although some questionable bookings of our players for us while the team in white got away with some harrowing challenges showed that he has learned a lot from his distinguished dad who, it has to be said, has never done us any favours. Not that they should. Wigan looked a really good side when we beat them here in the league a short time ago. This time they weren't. Any confident side doesn't have to be schooled in the dark arts -and, it seems, players with experience of playing at a higher level do seem to be better at it. Not that its doing Manchester City much good at the moment.



When Njoku scored I thought that maybe it was job done. Perhaps it should have been but Wigan were given far too much time in our box which allowed Aasgaard to turn and beat Reyes. We were all waiting for the challenge which never came. The Habbin didn't seem thrilled at the prospect of extra time, let alone penalties but of course it never came to that. Johnny Smith's winning goal at the death was a mystery. Was it a cross? Did it hit something? Was Reyes just unsighted? Either way it was bizarre. How had Wigan managed to win when we had created so many good chances? Well, that's football. Sometimes you just lose when there's not much in it and especially when it's the FA Cup. One of the delights about the competition, whatever the "Big" clubs say, is it's unpredictability. I didn't mind that at Newcastle and I really didn't mind it yesterday.

We missed good chances but the difference on the day was two stunning saves by Sam Tickle. Perhaps they deserved to win the game. What a shame that he let himself down by taunting the NRE and swearing at them. It incensed Shane Lavery and some of our players and could have caused serious crowd disorder. He should have known better. One of the stewards told me that his antics had been reported to the Referee. We will wait and see. On a gloomy winter afternoon, it's his antics I will remember most. Which is a shame. As my neighbour said at the time, "Well, he's a bit of a bell ringer, isn't he?" Or something like that.



Andrew Stephen



Shrews To The Slaughter

"Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does."
Nelson Mandela

Our match against Shrewsbury Town was meant to be all about the elemental effects of Storm Darren, sorry Darragh. I stead it was dominated by some astonishing football, respect for the Cambridge United family past and present and the club raising awareness and resources for the East Anglian Children's Hospices. There are times when the rivalry between clubs is forgotten and we come together to remember the things which unite us. Respect and kindness are commonly found among football fans, whatever the press and a noisy minority of tribalists might say. John Docherty will never be forgotten here. You could argue that he was our greatest ever manager, achieving what he did with ever dwindling resources. Roly Horrey, quite simply, was a joy to watch. He was a member of the first United side I ever watched in the late sixties and a fine example of wing play at his finest and trickiest. How good it was too to see the club host the family of Jack Meritt tragically killed five years ago in the London Bridge terror attack. He was a very able and kind man with his whole life in front of him. And he was one of us. How fitting that both sets of supporters recognised that we belong together in such moments.



By contrast, how sad it was to hear the Shrewsbury fans, who had made a great effort to get here in such numbers ,despite the fact that the storm was much worse where they come from singing, "We're going down, " and ,"We're f-ing s-".I sympathised with them. We've all been there in that moment when we've spent all that money and travelled all that way only to witness yet another abject defeat. Indeed, not all that long ago, my son and I travelled by train to Shrewsbury through snow storms to witness what appeared to be an abject capitulation. I won't dwell on the subject-we all know that feeling.

The experts on social media had been saying all week that Monk should be sacked and that we should have appointed Gareth Ainsworth instead. He was going to save Town from certain relegation whilst we were going down. The unending list of crippling injuries we have suffered all the season were all the fault of Ben Strang and Ryan Loft was no better than Darryl Clare…. They are quiet today. Less so on Tuesday after our defeat at Reading where our few remaining fit players looked worn out. They have put in a massive physical effort for weeks trying to compensate for all the talent and experience missing from our ranks. That is beginning to change as will our fortunes. There is no doubt about that.

After twenty seconds a ball over the top to Kachunga looked suspiciously offside. He crossed, the keeper spilled it and Lavery swept it into the goal. The Habbin was astonished but roared anyway. Could we come back from Tuesday's dispiriting defeat? Apparently. Did I say offside? No matter. It was given. And we have been victims of bad luck on any number of occasions this season. We have been waiting for the rub of the green this season. Was this going to be our day then?



Town came back into it for a while and were the better team for about fifteen minutes until Lavery scored again. The keeper might have done better but he didn't and suddenly Shane was standing in front of the Habbin celebrating as if a curse had been lifted. We celebrated too, although one chap behind me bemoaned the fact that Lavery," Didn't hit that very well…"

We might have had a third but everyone was happy with the first half. I told a couple of bemused Shrews fans that I thought that Welsh people were supposed to be good singers. I knew really that they don't like to be called Welsh, but there was no excuse for the toneless dirges they were coming out with. When they sang at all

I thought that they would come at us in the second half but, just as in the first half, we scored within a minute and with less than an hour on the clock we scored a fourth. It was a Kachunga header, a real collector's item. The cynic behind me was almost cheerful for a few minutes until we conceded a scruffy and fairly unnecessary penalty.

"What did Rossi think he was doing?" he screamed. Two youngsters in front of me suggested that perhaps he should develop a sense of perspective. Later he was chuntering that we hadn't tried to score five which shows how impossible to keep some people very happy for long.



Typically, Mr Ainsworth gave us no credit for demolishing his team, claiming that all four goals were defensive howlers. I hate to disagree. I think we played very well. Kell Watts was especially good but it was really a fine team performance full of pride and heart.

As I set off across Stourbridge Common in the hope of catching a train home, I reflected that football is at its most rewarding when it is at its most unexpected. I'd forgotten about the storm. I'd forgotten about Reading. And I didn't have to make a long coach trip back to stormy Shrewsbury thinking, "Why did I bother?"

Some days are good days, aren't they?

My Friend

Finally, I've talked before about the rag tag army of people brought together by Phil Mullen to play walking football. Over the years I have spoken to players who have been bereaved, suffered from poor mental health, low self-esteem and loneliness. The group has been instrumental in supporting so many people who had lost their way. One of the very best at doing this was my friend James Clear, a man who I wouldn't have met or known but for football. Some months ago, he told me that he had been diagnosed with a brain tumour. He was defiant and positive and determined to recover. Sadly, shortly before his operation was scheduled, he had a stroke and subsequently died. During our last chat together, he told me that my poems in Endless River had brought him some comfort. I am so glad. I hope that he would approve of this poem I wrote in his memory. Rest In Peace my friend.

My Friend

You and I

Watched the years roll away

As we were Pele and Greaves

On our Thursday mornings

With the veterans.

From different worlds

We came together for a while,

Team mates, rivals and fans,

We shared the pain

Of some who struggled

And lost their way

Or lost themselves.



You always had time

And a smile to spare

For those who couldn't find one.

You were a warrior

Who knew that true courage

Is always gentle.

We talked about poems

And the power of sport

To bring people together

When they least expect it.

I only knew you for a while

But I won't forget you.

Andrew Stephen.

In memory of James Clear.

BOOK REVIEW

It has already received great reviews. Here's one from Marc Starling:

The Story in Your Eyes
Andrew Stephen

This is Andrew's third book, following on from his educational memoirs (Reading, Writing and Redemption) and his poetry anthology (Endless River). In this latest volume, he relates his 'voyage of self-discovery' as he explores the influences which have helped form him, both people and places. The prose is interspersed with a selection of new poems, in the same arresting style the reader will recognise from the earlier volume.

A catalogue of someone else's ancestors could be a tedious litany, but Andrew is fortunate to have many fascinating characters in his family, and the knack of bringing them to life for the reader. He discovers some of the frustrations of genealogical research, such as unreliable record keeping by previous generations, but also draws heavily on his own memory of the more recent family members and the recollections of those still with us. We travel with him to the places which so often inspire his writing, such as Norfolk and Dorset, and better understand the influence these have had on him. As so often, Andrew's writing brings these much-loved landscapes alive. Similarly, he explores and explains the origins of some of his enthusiasms, such as football (Cambridge United in particular) and railways.



The poems here are as delightful as in Endless River, and Andrew's unfailingly apposite choice of the perfect word is again apparent. No teacher can fail to identify with 'Playing Parts'; Andrew's trademark positivity is on display in 'Sweeter Springs', and he never shies away from the poignant or difficult subject.

Andrew has again been fortunate in having Dave Phillips as his editor; the design of the book and the selection of photographs add greatly to the text.
From the opening loving dedication to his children, to the affecting final poem for Remembrance Sunday, 'Fallen Leaves', this is a rewarding book, and leaves the reader feeling privileged at having shared the author's journey to greater self-understanding. As
Andrew says, 'Without our authentic voice, we are nothing'. Andrew's voice is indeed authentic.
Marc Starling
December 2024



and finally….

"Optimism is the one quality more associated with success and happiness than any other."
Brian Tracy

One of the saddest developments in football in recent years is the fan who supports from afar, gets involved with clubs because that are successful and whinges and moans when "their" team fails to win as easily and as often as expected. These glory hunters have a real sense of entitlement to years of endless success, and sulk when their team let them down. Most of us real fans understand that following a team without the advantages of a Manchester City say, will have years of disappointment, which are quickly forgotten as we celebrate that season or this cup win which came against the odds. Manchester City have started losing and the experts are suddenly scratching their heads. Has Pep forgotten what to do? Has facing all those breaches of Fair Play charges finally worried the club? Or is it hard to motivate yourself when you win season after season seemingly just by turning up? I think when football is at its most unpredictable, it is at its best. FIFA, Sky, the Big Six and the media might prefer it if success could be bought, predicted and limited to the same old clubs but we don't. Fair competition is the essence of sport. Without it, it's pointless. For the few that do well out of the system, it's the grass roots and smaller clubs that pay the price. This systemic cheating of the rest of us must end. Am I glad to see Manchester City struggle? Of course. And you can see why.



I have been a critic of Referees in recent years. Those at our level, too often, aren't good enough. But I can see why no one wants to referee. It is made much harder for them by players who cheat and by managers who encourage them to. I hate seeing Refs pressurised by managers and groups of players and wish they had greater powers and protection. And players who try to get other players sent off by playacting should be sent off themselves. I know that Kyle Walker has lost his pace and is no longer the player he was but his antics against Manchester United were ridiculous and shameful. He is not alone. Manchester United's Fernandez and their Turkish Goalkeeper are no better. No real fan has any time for players who roll about as if they've just been shot, even if they play for us. So, if I could ask Santa for a gift for football, I would want to see the Football Governance Bill delivered and an end to footballers who belong on children's TV.

I would like to see our fans recognise how far we have come. We own our stadium and it is soon to be re developed. Gates are up and the away support has been fantastic. I know that the players are fully aware of how loyal Cambridge fans are and how fanatical. Not all clubs are as lucky. Increasingly, the club seeks to involve fans more closely and the creation and the development of a Shadow Board is a sign of this. Soon the rights of fans will be enshrined in law and we should never again see clubs like Bury almost destroyed by selfish and incompetent owners. I would like to see a bit more in the way of support from the City Council, better public transport measures for matches, for a start. A local railway station perhaps , or leaving the Newmarket Road Park and Ride just where it is, instead of using yet another valuable site to build houses on. Service rather than profit…as the pensioners , farmers and those faced with ever increasing water bills might say.

This edition probably has a bit too much of me in it but it is notoriously difficult to persuade people that they have something worthwhile to say. We all love reading about people's memories of watching Cambridge United and we don't all need to be Charles Dickens standard to write them . I like articles, opinions and suggestions which are authentic and thought provoking. That said, I am very grateful to all my contributors over the last year who have added a touch of quality to my own observations. I hope that there will be more of you in future.



Hats off to Gina, who has effortlessly replaced me as Chair of CFU and who has made such a success of Away Travel. That kind of devotion to supporting ordinary people is very much the reason I got involved with CFU in the first place. A football club is centred on its community and owes it everything ,which is why we try to support the Foundation and as many community projects as we can.

May you all have a Merry Christmas and a Happy, Peaceful and Prosperous New Year,

Andrew

Make a difference and join CFU.
Your opinions and contributions are always gratefully received: acstephen@hotmail.com

[Deadline for next newsletter- **15th Feb 2025**]
United in Endeavour



