Cambridge Fans United

CFU

"Uniting Our Community"

# AMBER NEWS

## Special
## 'More Unfinished Business' Edition

**February 2025**



# Opening Welcome,

"There can be no life without change, and to be afraid of what is different or unfamiliar is to be afraid of life."
Theodore Roosevelt

A couple of months ago, I would not have imagined writing about how the season has developed. It has been, probably, the most unpredictable season I can remember as a Cambridge fan of nearly fifty years standing. I have never known bad luck like it, or the number of injuries we've had to cope with. At one stage we had 12 members of the first team squad unavailable. Even clubs with vast financial reserves , like Tottenham, haven't been able to cope with that level of misfortune. Some players we haven't seen yet. Others, like Richards and Longelo ,haven't really shown what they can do. A new goalie lasted a game and a half nearly before a disastrous long term injury took him out of the picture. Two loan forwards were injured almost straight away and so it's difficult to judge Garry Monk completely fairly, although it is clear that it was time to move on. It has been a season of tantalisingly good but unproductive performances. We should have won at Charlton and Wrexham. We should have beaten Bristol Rovers and Wycombe too. But we didn't. What could have been. In the end a depleted squad playing flat out week after week looked exhausted and brittle. Perhaps the home game against Shrewsbury indicated what should have been but the limp performance against Exeter showed us all that there needed to be a change, one that would give us a fighting chance of avoiding relegation and bringing back some pride. The fervent home support and particularly the away support deserves no less.



The club have been very quick to act. I am delighted to see the return of Mark Bonner, surely one of the most decent men in football and Cambridge through and through. There will be some questions about Neil Harris, given the manner of his sudden departure last season but if he does for us what he did for Millwall, I think fans will be very happy at his return .His teams are known for their resilience and solid organisation. He has invaluable experience of dealing with pressure and getting results. With more nous and application, and with the return from injury of more key players, who knows what might be possible. I would love to see Gary Gardener or Mamadou Jobe making a difference, Bennett being more effective and Brophy ,Stokes and Stevenson playing together in midfield and creating chances. Will we see Nlundulu rampaging up front? Loft gaining confidence? Or Ballard showing his class? There is quality in the squad. So much so that many of us didn't expect United to struggle at all this season. Perhaps we might even see a back four deployed.

The management structure has been put in place to ensure a brighter, more certain future. I am sure that there will be other changes too as the club continues to develop. Disappointed as we all are, these are exciting times for Cambridge United. It would be

lovely to think that Bonner and Harris might be there to answer questions at the CFU AGM on Monday but entirely understandable if not. Certainly Alex and Godric will face some interesting questions. It will be held in the Supporters' Club at 7.30 and provides an unmissable opportunity to catch up with all that is new and all that is planned.

I am often accused of being an optimist , as if that is a bad thing, but I have a good feeling about these changes . There will certainly be no lack of effort. I would like to welcome Neil and Mark back to the club . I am certain that the fans will be right behind them and the team as we battle for every point. After all, we are UNITED IN ENDEAVOUR.

# CFU Statement

Following today's departure of Garry Monk, and Ben Strang earlier in the week, CFU would like to wish them both well for their future endeavours. Ben was part of the recruitment team that saw us gain promotion from the National League and League Two and for that I'm sure we are all grateful. Garry did his best with the resources available to him but unfortunately it was time for him to go as results are more important than style of play. CFU urge the fans to unite and get behind the team and whoever takes over for the tough run in.
Gina Parkin- Chair




## Ben Strang.

Some years ago (2013) in the early days of the CFU Play2Win lottery (now the CUFC Lottery) when CUFC were in the Conference I won a Money Can't Buy prize to attend a match with a CUFC scout.

On a Tuesday evening I went with Ben Strang to see Woking v FGR. CUFC were playing at home to FGR the next Saturday.

As the match went on he showed incredible knowledge of all the players on the pitch, where they were from, best positions etc. Before the home game he gave me a copy of the report he gave to Richard Money and the coaches, which was so detailed. He had diagrams of how each team like to take corners, free kicks, goal kicks and how they defended in various scenarios as well as detailed reports on individual players. CUFC beat FGR 2-0.

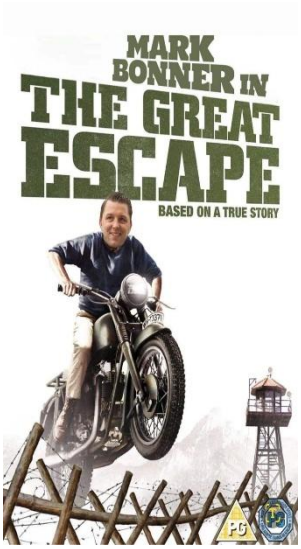
I found him to be a really nice guy who cares about the club, and I was sad to see him get a lot of grief on social media about the current position the team find themselves in. I wish him well for the future.

# Garry Monk.

Garry Monk came to CUFC in March 2024 following Neil Harris' defection to Millwall. I was impressed that we managed to get someone of his pedigree, having managed at clubs at a higher level, and having a reasonable record. His immediate task was to keep the club in L1, which he did.

For this season he spoke about changing the style of play to follow the trend of possession based football, and a host of players with L1 and Championship experience came to CUFC.

In our home pre-season game we played WBA and won by a goal. We lost the first league game at promoted Stockport, then played QPR in the Carabao cup. Despite losing 1-2 ,the quality of play from CUFC especially in the second half where we played them off the park and hopes were high for a reasonable season. Unfortunately that hope disappeared as we lost 11 league and cup matches with only 1 point from a 4-4 draw at home to Blackpool. In many of the defeats I thought we were a bit unlucky in that individual mistakes were punished to allow the opposition easy goals.




The CUFC Board put out a statement of support for Garry, so the Board had belief that he could improve results.

Garry Monk changed tactics and we became more direct. We didn't have so much possession, but had the ball in the opposition half much more. We beat Wigan at home which started a run of 5 matches unbeaten (the win away at Stevenage was great!). The following game against our Cambridgeshire neighbours it all went wrong, but that seemed a blip as 3 draws including against promotion hopefuls Bolton and Barnsley followed, and although we were around the relegation zone it seemed there were 4 teams worse than us!

December and January were not very good, just one win and a couple of draws, but a 2-2 away at Wrexham showed what the team could do.

Another CUFC Board statement of support for Garry at the start of January, I doubt he would have lasted so long at most other clubs.

The January transfer window had 4 players coming in, and the injury jinx immediately put another goalkeeper out of contention so a last minute rush for another keeper.

February saw a couple of draws before not surprisingly being hammered by Birmingham, then the home defeat to Exter sealed his fate.

Where did it go wrong? We know our budget is in the bottom 3rdfor L1 so can't compete with around 16 other teams for top quality players. But we would be competing with 8 teams! Another issue against attracting players can be the expensive housing in the Cambridge area. Players based in the London area could commute, but who wants to spend a couple of hours in their car.



Then there is the injury crisis which is the worst I can remember. Players arriving with an injury is unfortunate, but to have 3 players (Jobe, Gardener, Richards) unavailable for what looks like the majority of the season is unheard of! The style of play at the start of the season wasn't getting results, the change improved matters, but I think some players could not adapt to a different style. We seemed to do quite well against the higher teams, but against the teams in the bottom half of the table we struggled. We also lost some of the fighters in the team such as Digby, Thomas and Gibbons, pla6yers who get stuck in when the chips are down, and perhaps gee up some of the others to do more.

Even if we went down in 21st place I don't think Garry would have been the man to get us up again, the style of football he would like to play is even more alien in L2! Maybe the issue was that Garry couldn't motivate players to be at their best unless it was against a top team?

## Next manager.

Over the last decade of permanent manager sackings CUFC have yo-yoed between getting in someone experienced from outside, or promoting internally: Garry Monk (experienced), Mark Bonner (internal), Colin Calderwood (experienced), Joe Dunne (internal), Shaun Derry (experienced).



If this cycle continues then perhaps Barry Corr (who said he was thinking about applying to replace Mark Bonner) could be the one to bet on!

Obviously Mark Bonner and Neil Harris are out of work ex-managers so feature high in the betting, as does ex-player Jon Brady following his departure from Northampton. I would quite like Paul Warne, Rob Edwards took Luton on a good journey. Others on the list I wouldn't want are Ian Evatt, Gerrard and Rooney.

## Latest news:

And now we have the announcement: Neil Harris as Head Coach, Mark Bonner as Director of Football.

We know Mark Bonner and his history with the club. I guess he realised after his time at Gillingham he is not cut out to be a manager, and his knowledge is better used behind the scenes.

Neil Harris is an interesting appointment. On one side the club knew enough about him to appoint him last season, but when he left quite suddenly it seemed a kick in the teeth. Some clubs might have told him to “sod off”, our club decided to give him more time to do the job they think he can do.

Whether he can keep us up this season is going to be a big task, we have been there before, so we hope we will need to commission another set of “Great Escape” mugs. If not we have to hope that the team is in place to ensure we have a good 2025/6 season in League 2.

Terry Wilby



# CFU Planning For The Future

Every few years it is good practice for every organisation to make sure that it is still being relevant and adhering to its purpose.

CFU are in the process of doing this at present.

Since its founding 25 years ago, much has changed both at the club and the wider world, so we have been asking ourselves ‘are we still doing the right things that our stakeholders will benefit from?’

When the Trust was formed, our purpose was clear, ‘Help the club to survive’. This was achieved and it is now well run and financially sound. Over the years the activities we have been involved with have been much more focused on the Fans and the Community,

In the relatively near future, we will have a Football Regulator that will bring another change to the landscape that we have in front of us, demanding an additional focus that is today

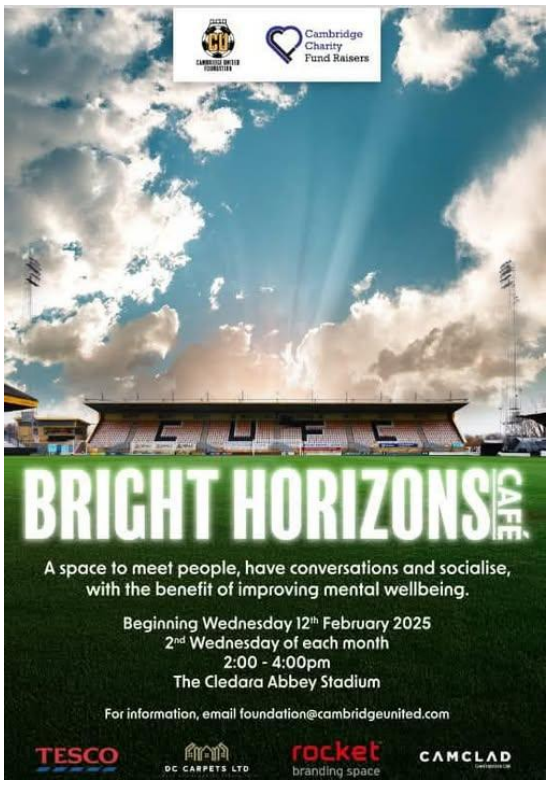
unclear. To be sure we are ready for this we have been asking ourselves three simple questions

WHY – Why are we here, what is our purpose?

HOW – How do we achieve our purpose; what sorts of things would make us succeed?

WHAT – What activities do we need to do to achieve our How ?

So far, we have completed our WHY and our HOW (as far as we can with the future regulation to be added when the detail is known) and we now move to the WHAT. We will be doing this over the coming weeks and seeking input at the AGM, please come along and get involved in helping us set the future direction.




The outcome of this will not stop us doing anything that we do today, where the benefits are enjoyed by the fans, Away Travel being a great example, but add to the range of activities and the influence we can bring to bear with all stakeholders.

Steve Edwards

(It has given me a great deal of pleasure in recent years to see CFU supporting the club, for example by contributing to the cost of the badly needed Fanzone next to the NRE. It has supported some very good causes and is unequivocally behind the club's drive towards greater diversity. This is the future. We admire the work of the Foundation and believe that the club's recognition that it exists primarily to serve its community is exactly the kind of thing we would like to support. We have contributed to the development of the Shadow Board as it evolves in a way which will best serve our expanding fanbase. What Dave Matthew Jones

has achieved with Away Travel has been phenomenal. It has meant that many people who would not have been able to get to away games are now able to. Gina has provided superb leadership of CFU. I am certain that CFU, entirely independent, fully transparent and the largest fans group will continue to provide a voice for the people who matter most- the fans. Ed.)



# Shadow Board-Some Observations

"Football fans share a universal language that cuts across many cultures and many personality types. A serious football fan is never alone. We are legion, and football is often the only thing we have in common."
Hunter. S. Thompson

I think that it is fair to say that the Shadow Board is a work in progress. To some extent it will be difficult to analyse its real function very precisely until we see the Football Governance Bill passed and how watered down its recommendations might or might not be. All being well, the rights of fans will be enshrined in law , irresponsible or unsuitable owners of clubs excluded, wealth more evenly distributed and the grass roots properly catered for. All this will be properly regulated by an Independent Regulator with real power who will make sure that no fans ever face the prospect of their club folding and collapsing. There would be no further need for a Golden Share arrangement which protects fans' rights in heritage matters. Badges, colours and names could not be changed without the agreement of the majority of fans. Grounds could not be sold for the profit of unscrupulous people who are supposed to run clubs for their supporters. We know about that as do many fans of other clubs. Neither could clubs be moved to another ground somewhere else without consent. Wimbledon could not have been moved to Milton Keynes either! We will see. If the legislation is what we

all hope it will be, the function of a Shadow Board will be both consultation and the representation of fans' views.

The evolution of the Shadow Board has, of necessity, been a gradual process but it is happening. In truth, during times of managerial uncertainty, unusual levels of injured players, planning applications and negotiations about the redevelopment of the ground, it has not been a particular priority. Nonetheless, it played a significant role in the consultation process concerning the club's crest, ensuring greater fan input and the offering of greater choice. The Shadow Board now meet separately as well as with the club and has appointed its own Chairman. Minutes and membership of the Shadow Board can now be found on the Club's website and there are plans to publicise what we do more widely, using various platforms. Obviously we respect confidentiality where appropriate but, ultimately, we are responsible to the fans we speak for and represent. Our work is overseen by Alex Tunbridge, who takes a keen interest in our opinions and in our evolution. This process continues as we continue to discuss who should be on the Board and how we can demonstrate accountability to fans' groups.




Currently CFU have two members on the Board. Me and Ben Phillips. Arguably there could be more, since CFU are really the only independent, self-sustaining, fully accountable fans' group whose committee is elected by all its members . The Shadow Board needs to demonstrate a diverse and inclusive nature ,whilst also needing to show just how each member is able to speak on behalf of a particular group of fans, what consultation has taken place, which constitutional process has been followed and how fully our actions and decisions have been reported back to the people who elected us. I am pleased to say that the process by which the CFU representatives were appointed was typically rigorous. To have credibility with the fans, we have to show whose views we represent and how we know what they are.

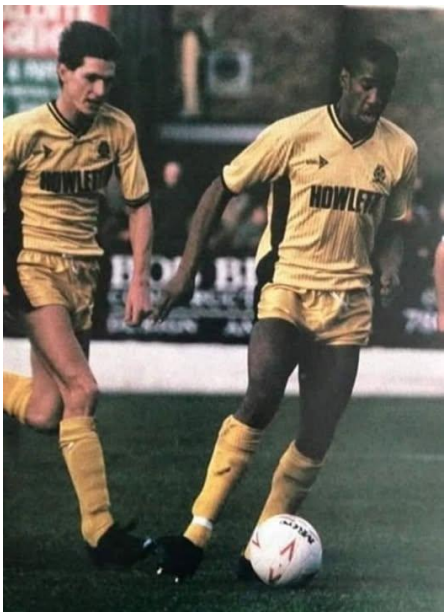
I am certain that by this time next year these things will be better known and that the Shadow Board will be even more effective.

Andrew Stephen



# WHY CAMBRIDGE UNITED? - IT'S A FAMILY THING

I have met so many people who have told me how emotional they felt about the club getting its ground back that I began to wonder why football matters quite so much and why it is that you don't really choose the club which matters to you all your life. In fact your club chooses you or, really, you could argue that supporting a club like ours is part of your destiny or something you inherit through your family. I have never been tempted to support anyone else. Had we gone out of existence all those years ago, rather than change allegiance, I would have supported United as a phoenix club even in a Sunday pub league. That's just how it is.



In truth I didn't really notice football until I was about eight. As an RAF family we moved from place to place and in Germany I began kicking a ball about without much interest in rules. Perhaps I haven't changed! At that time I remember getting the Sportsview Annual for Christmas. It was full of Tottenham Hotspur and their new signing Jimmy Greaves. They were the glamour team then. We moved to Marham in Norfolk where my Primary Schoolteacher was like the PE teacher in KES. Every week we played Celtic against Rangers. It was serious stuff. I played at Left Half (Remember that) and my job was to stop forwards from getting the ball. I enjoyed that and got a real taste for the game. Nowadays I live two miles from where I played then. The thought makes me smile. The school has a lot to answer for. I remember an Assembly when they told us about the tragic death of the mercurial John White, killed under a tree while taking shelter in a lightning storm. I avoided getting the school bus every day and used the money instead for cigarette cards. The newsagents by the school is now a Chinese takeaway but I still have some of those cards.

At 11, I boarded at a school in King's Lynn where I played football 3 times a week. We also went to the Walks regularly to watch the Linnets, a significant force in the Southern League under Reg Davies in those days. I saw Ivor All church, Mel and John Charles and Cliff Jones, among others, play there. It was a good standard. I saw a chap called Malcolm Lindsey play there and a half back called Mick Wright, who made well over 700 appearances for the club. Gates were around 2,000 at the time. I saw a number of FA Cup games, including one against Shrewsbury Town. Jimmy Hill brought members of his Coventry City team to play in a testimonial game. I watched my first semi-professional game there from a public park when we lived nearby for a few months in 1963.

Things changed in 1966 when we won the World Cup. Suddenly football was being shown on TV. Previously the FA Cup final and some England games were the only ones we saw. Players became more like pop stars, attendances went up and more people than ever wanted to play. Villages and pubs had no difficulty finding players then. Many teams ran several sides. Alas the grass roots don't grow so healthily now. The pandemic, computers, Sky TV and fast food have all played a part in that sad decline which must be addressed as a matter of urgency.



My family lived in Andover at this time and so it was possible for my brothers and I to go to the Dell in Southampton to watch First Division football and to see some of the World Cup superstars. We collected Rosettes, some people had rattles, and fans mixed freely too. Within ten years hooliganism had raised its ugly head. It ceased to be a family thing and young men in large boots seemed to think that the game belonged to them and attendances began to decline. This was partly to do with greater TV coverage and rampant inflation but also because notions of sportsmanship seemed to be disappearing. Aggressive and clannish fan behaviour alienated many too but I am getting ahead of myself.

In the mid-sixties I often went to stay with my Nana, whose house on Fairfax Road was within sight of United's remarkable floodlights. Sometimes they seemed a little blurred seen through windows with ice forming on the inside but they were striking and inviting.

When my Grandad died in 1967, nana's next door neighbour Mrs Brown, who ran the tea bar on Habbin South, took her to watch the U's. It helped her tremendously in her grief. That fact wasn't lost on me and I went with her, sometimes risking the attentions of frisky cows which often gathered under the railway bridge. Now, as then, the sight of the Abbey bathed in the golden glow of the floodlights was magical. Sometimes I went with my brothers but more often I went with my Uncle Terry. He lived on Peverel Road where he bred Budgies and rebuilt scooters, some of which worked. For 1 and sixpence I could get into the Newmarket Road End with him. Sometimes we went to places like Hillingdon Borough, Romford and Bedford Town. Exotic. I remember United buying half the Chelmsford team and the arrival of Ian Hutchinson, George Harris and Colin Meldrum. Terry lost interest and was subsequently banned for spray painting part of the ground, but mine grew and of course we became a power in the land and were elected to the league when I was seventeen. After that, we always seemed to be getting relegated or promoted .We saw some fine players, including Frank Worthington, Alan Gowling and Ray Clemence.

I went to Derby to train as a teacher and then spent what passes for a career in Nottingham. I didn't get to Cambridge as often. I remember the reigns of Ron Atkinson and John Docherty who took us to undreamed of heights. Having lived in Derby, I was sad to see my hero Alan Biley sold to them ,of all clubs. The following season we beat them 3-0 home and away. Football gives you moments like that. Nothing else can. Remember the season when we lost to almost everyone but beat the mighty Newcastle United with a star studded line up including Peter Beardsley and Chris Waddle? Inexplicable.



Although I couldn't go as much from the Midlands, my brothers went relentlessly. Richard travelled with a very small number of away fans, including Brian Mansfield and Terry O'Dell. They would get back from Workington at six in the morning and then go off to work. They used to sing a dirge on the bus including the words ,"It's four o'clock in the morning." We are a strange breed.

Over the years we have had many ,many disappointments, lifted by unlikely victories with huge or undeserved scores. Away at Exeter and at Cardiff for instance. My parents moved to Stanesfield Road, close to a young lad by the name of George Rolls.

I was able to visit a little more often then, if I was prepared to risk mickey taking about being a teacher in the Supporters' Club. My Nana led a campaign for the reintroduction of Coconuts, a song formerly played after a home game when we were victorious. She was a huge fan of Willie Watson and was a shrewd analyst. Her greatest moment was being carried up the steps at Wembley Stadium by me and my mum. We had never dreamed that the U's would ever play at Wembley. None of us were going to miss that game. We weren't to know that we would be back quite a few times after that, once to take us back to our rightful place in the Football League. Those moments alone make a lifetime of supporting Cambridge United worthwhile.




In time my mum joined the Vice President's Club. Two years ago was the first year in a very long time that she hadn't had a season ticket. She is 92 though and still very interested.

We've reached the stage where our children and grandchildren have joined the ranks of Stephens on Tour. Paul was with me for my very favourite away game when we beat Stoke City 3-2, despite being battered by them. Later he was mascot at Notts County when we won 3-2 again. Trevor Benjamin got the winner and, prior to that, treated Paul to some of his vast collection of Mars Bars. Paul Wanless was wonderful with him as was peerless gentleman Roy McFarland. They let

him take penalties before the game and demonstrated that good clubs identify with their fans. It's not about winning, it's about belonging.

I have been a season ticket holder since 2002, despite the fact that for ten years we travelled from Nottingham where I was working. There are always members of our family on the Habbin but a particular pleasure is meeting people I've known for years in Carlisle, Cheltenham, Exeter and Newcastle. Win or lose we all belong. Even losing 6-0 at Sheffield Wednesday was something I could accept because of how far we've come since those dark days when CFU were instrumental in saving the club, aided and abetted by Richard Caborn who understood what a football team means to its community.

I could go on, and I probably have, so I will end by saying my favourite player was Alan Biley, favourite kit the one with the thick black stripe at the front, favourite team the one which so nearly took us into the Premier League. Favourite game/ Beating Chesterfield at the real Wembley Stadium in the first ever play off final. There is no team like ours-and there never will be!

*This poem is about appreciating the moments which light up our lives. Much that seems trivial becomes an important part of who we are.*

**Where Did It Go?**

In an instant and at a glance

Those moments

Which make up a life

Are gone before we know they mattered.

Eyes across a room

Party time

The bawling of an infant

And our endlessly shifting desire to be

Successful ,or happy, or loved

Or just known

I am content

I would have some moments again

To savour and explore

Before the battered eyes of age

Which, tempted by cynicism

Reconstruct, reinvent or restore.

Easy lies

Dim the agony of progress

And obscure

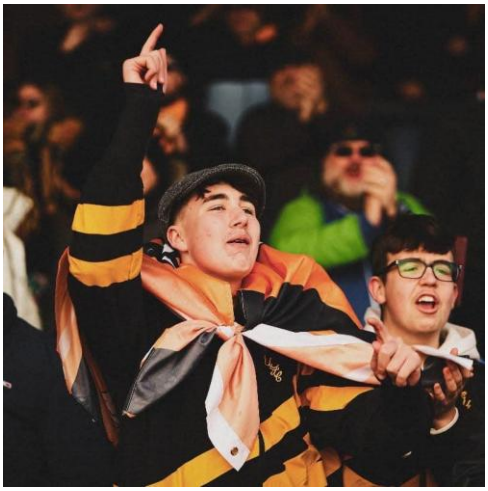
What we sacrifice to be wise

Or safe

How much we miss

In our endless search

For the perfect beauty.



Age is for other people

Inside, we are immortal, unchanging,

Restless still

And struggling to find

Where we went wrong

And how moments

Which lit our hearts

Drifted by like the days

Which became memories

Which turned into

Ourselves.

# A Positive Part of an Awful Day.

I just want to write something positive about our trip up the A1 earlier this year (it's not about the football you won't be surprised to read!!)
I stand in the NRE with my 13 year old daughter. She has been hooked since her first game just before Covid. She was smitten by the atmosphere, the hostility, the joy, the tribalness (if there is such a word) of it all. She was 8 at the time.
When Covid was over we got season tickets (great value for the kids!) and have travelled to many away games. I am always aware of the potential difficulties of travelling away,

wearing the colours, not sure about the reception we will get. We have never had a problem and mostly it's been a hugely positive experience for us both.
So, the Cambridgeshire derby beckons. We decided to take the train and get there early. We queued at the Drapers. She was nervous. We got in and the noise was fabulous. Within a few minutes, we had seen Matt who we stand with in the NRE, a neighbour of mine and his lad, my middle daughter who was there with her colleagues, my mates son who has not missed a game in a millennium or two. All of them talked to her as an equal and a supporter. The look on her face that she was a true part of this.
The singing intensified and was being led at times by a young lad on a table! We walked to the ground with the crowd. Some unnecessary aggro, she held on a little tighter.
We find our spot, sing our hearts out during the warm up.
The young lad from the pub ends up right in front of us.
For 20 minutes we are all filled with hope. And then……..
For the second half, my daughter and the lad in front talked about school, travel to the match, history lessons, our Premier League favourite teams, what they had for lunch and on and on.
The bond, all of this makes, is unparalleled. Whatever happens on the pitch, this is what life is about. Admittedly it's better when we win, but it's also an amazing tribe to be part of, whether you are 13 or somewhat older.

Thanks all for being part of our 'family'!
Steve Edwards



# Hot off the Habbin

[programme articles]

## *Reading*

"No matter how hard the past is, you can always begin again."
Buddha.

It may seem at times that we are the only club to have reached dizzy heights but then have our very existence threatened but of course it isn't so. Reading spent decades in the Third Division until a certain Mr Madejski invested them with a new stadium and considerable spending power. They spent time in the Premier League but of course having a sugar daddy comes with its own risks. As soon as they leave budgets change and you never know who will take their place. Reading knows the curse of financial insecurity and points deductions and are still waiting for a take over to save them from similar indignities in the future. Reading fans will perhaps remember being able to buy Dave Kitson at a knock down price of £150,000 with no sell on clause as one of the greatest bargains of all time. The move was sold to us as a way of guaranteeing the security of our club. In time the ground was sold for the same reason and ended up in the hands of Grosvenor while we slid out of the league and very close to liquidation. The story is well known but it seems appropriate to remember it now on New Year's Day when another new start gives us the opportunity to climb up the league and to gather the points we are capable of winning. Whatever our results are like, I feel profoundly grateful that we still have a club, that we own our stadium and that our future is secure. Any football fan who has seen the existence of their team threatened will tell you that nothing is more important than that.



So far this is a season when we have deserved more. We have drawn games, like the one at Wrexham, which we should have won. We have slipped to many odd goal defeats and even at Charlton surely deserved a point after a very effective tactical switch at half time. I'll gloss over the reasons we were so soon two down. Everyone knows them but the fact that the home side were reduced to time wasting and feigning injury tells you how worried Charlton were despite the empty rhetoric of Nathan Jones, who is clearly not popular with the club's fans. We have missed key players through injury and the remaining players have had to put in a huge physical effort. It's tough to do that, particularly when games come thick and fast .We have a number of good players regaining match fitness and we are bound to see the benefit soon.

Early on in my days of watching Cambridge United, as we worked our way towards entry to the Football League, we signed a player, a winger, from Reading, called George Harris. This seemed very exciting to me since, compared with us in the Southern League , Reading were a famous club with a big ground and an obvious pedigree. To sign a player from them really was a gesture of intent. He played 35 times for us in the league and scored 11 goals. He always looked likely to score. He was fast skilful and good in the air. All these years later I can't understand how Reading let him go . Of course we sold them Harvey Knibbs and Sam Smith but neither sale seemed such a grievous blow as Dave Kitson's. I always felt that Harvey would make a really good centre forward but Mark Bonner saw him as a midfielder. Who am I to argue? They are both welcome back to the Abbey Stadium but that's as generous as I want to be. We need points and our luck has to change sometime. Of course we might have won at Orient but if ever there was a time for Resolution and Improvement, that time is today.

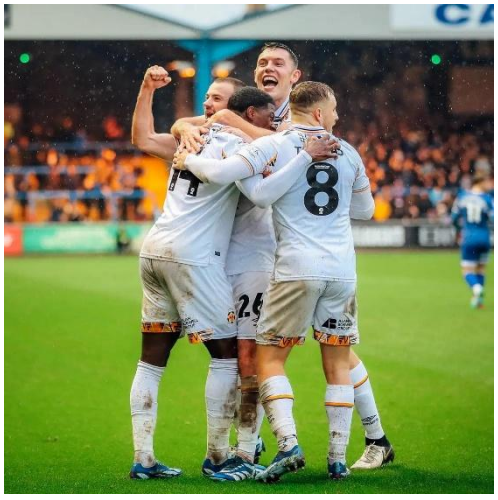


United in Endeavour.

## *Bristol Rovers*

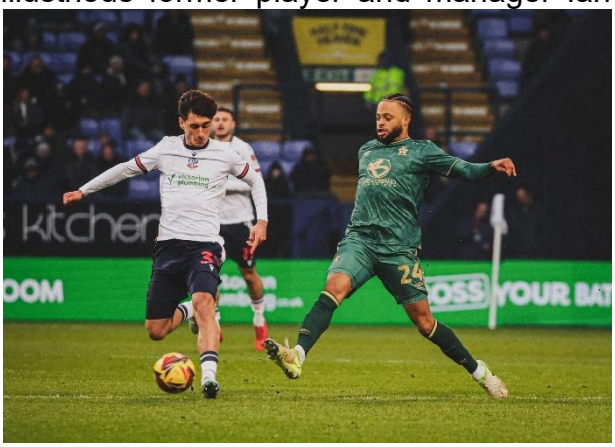
"Bristol Rovers were 4-0 up at half-time, with four goals in the first half."
Anthony Adamson

I must say, straight away, that the score recorded above is in no way a prediction for today's game. Given the 3-0 reverse suffered by Rovers at Stevenage , such a score would seem unlikely for them and disastrous for us. They have been very inconsistent this season and on their third manager this season. I don't think that I can describe our form at all. Inconsistent doesn't really cover it . Despite superb away support , our performances at Charlton and Orient were hugely disappointing and the less said about Huddersfield the better. This is a new start as the New Year begins. There have been glimpses of real ability. It might be that all we need is a boost to our confidence and fewer key players in sick bay. Both clubs will be confident of escaping relegation. Both clubs have had up and down careers with the odd flirtation with financial disaster in amongst the highs and lows. Like us, Rovers went through a period when they didn't own the



stadium they played in. Like us, they do now. Rovers spent some time playing at Bath City, when their lease at Eastville ran out. They moved to the Memorial Stadium in 1997 but had to share it with the Rugby club for some years.

I've always enjoyed away games in Bristol. Great pubs, plenty to see and very hospitable and friendly fans. Many, like illustrious former player and manager Ian Holloway , sound like pirates, but their accent has a warmth typical of Bristolians. One place I like to visit, apart from the pubs is St Mary Redcliffe, one of the finest parish churches in all England. Its fan vaulting may not match king's College Chapel, nowhere does, but Bristol, like Cambridge is full of History and an obvious respect for tradition. Our matches have worked out to be quite close run affairs, with the exception of a resounding 6-1 home win for us during the John Beck era . Mr Beck however committed the crime of the century by exchanging John Taylor and £100,000 for Devon White . Devon was a lovely man who I had the great fortune to teach in Nottingham. He was no Alan Shearer though and he wasn't with us long. Happily, John Taylor came back to us, a United man through and through.



One man who preferred Rovers to us was Rory Gaffney, perpetually injured to start with and then loaned out to Rovers as soon as he was fit enough to play. He didn't like us. Indeed , he was quite rude about the club but he never achieved what many thought he should have. Some justice perhaps. One Rovers player I saw a few times who should have achieved great things was Alan Warboys. He seemed a tremendous player with strong physical attributes and real skill but he didn't rise to the top as I was sure he would. How many other potentially great players might we say that about? Football is a great game and, as we've seen this season. You don't always get what you deserve. Many have commented on the strange kit worn by Bristol Rovers . They are quartered because a former manager became convinced that the design made his players look bigger, stronger and more intimidating. It hasn't always worked. But in football nothing ever does. Just ask Pep or Marcus. Anyhow, today is about points. I wish Rovers well but we need to see the real United, on the front foot, unafraid and with an eye for goal. Happy New Year.

## *Mansfield Town*

"It's not the size of the dog in the fight , it's the size of the fight in the dog."
Mark Twain

I don’t think I’ve ever known a season like this one where a ridiculous number of injuries and poor decisions have gone against us so often. How many games should we have won or got something from with a little more luck or a bit more self-belief.




Even our most recent game at Bolton should have earned us three points but for a somewhat unfortunate own goal right at the death. To be positive, however, to have played so well at times with a squad down to the bare bones, shows that the team are fighting for the manager and for the fans and logic suggests that , with a number of our most influential players back in the team, we can yet pull ourselves out of the mire and surprise many of our critics. And some of our own fans too. I hope that we will have added a couple of players by the time we take on the Stags. Our new keeper looks like a very sound acquisition and we might hope for another forward and a central midfielder. We will see but there is no denying that this game is vital for us. We are a long way apart in the table but I am certain that we will have taken confidence from the Bolton game and this game is winnable.

It's good to see that football in Nottinghamshire is on the up. When I lived in West Bridgford, we used to see Brain Clough and a number of his family. They were lovely people and Nigel, the Stags manager, was charm itself when we interrupted his meal at a restaurant near Sixfields. We associate him most with games against Burton Albion, which were always difficult and its clear that he has rescued Mansfield from The doldrums. I was startled to see posters on windscreens saying Haslam Out! During the eighties. Like many other owners he seemed happy to run his club into the ground while money kept going into his own pocket. Indeed he still owns the retail park next to the Away End at Field Mill and wouldn’t sell the ground back to the club until 2012. We know what it’s like not to own our ground and fear for our future. We too spent time in the Conference and know how hard it is to fight your way up the leagues. Genuine fans recognise how hard it is, particularly when competing with super rich rivals.



I’ve had some great experiences in Mansfield, although not too many of them involved winning. I remember chatting with Mark Johnson there when he’d just published a book about league grounds. I remember that the Gents was a glorified pit on the away terrace. Apart from freezing to death, it was perfectly possible to watch the game from there. On another occasion, we were in a pub near the ground when a man asked us what we thought of Nathan Arnold. One of our number compared his play with a headless chicken, before realising that the man asking the question was Nathan’s Dad. Oops! We have always been welcome in their Supporters’ Club . Real fans are happy to chat to rivals. We all know the endless cycle of good and bad times. Stags owner John Radford has been promising progress and success for years.

Although they were a bit fortunate to beat us earlier this season, they have done well in their first season in League One since promotion. My favourite game against them was the last game of the 1972/73 season when our victory secured promotion. Victory today would mean just as much.

Come on you U's!




## *Wycombe Wanderers*

"The greater the obstacle, the more glory there is in overcoming it."

Moliere




The more this season goes on, the more it seems to turn into some kind of gruesome Revenge Tragedy. Bad luck piled on bad luck and a list of injuries which defies credibility. Our new goalkeeper who had made such an inspiring start with us lasted less than a game and a half before tearing a hamstring. Watts and Okedina were injured playing against Steve Evans' over physical side at Rotherham and there are jokes trending on social media about any injury being likely to keep players out for 8-10 weeks. Except it isn't funny for the players concerned-or for the club. In all the decades I have been supporting

United, I have never known a time like it. How fans can criticise a manager who has been hamstrung by injuries all season or players exhausted by the demands of playing flat out to compensate for the loss of high quality players is beyond me. Reinforcements have begun to arrive. Two young forwards from Southampton and Forest respectively are exciting prospects. A midfielder from Pompey was spotted in the warm up at Rotherham. There is talk of Jordan Rhodes, a centre back and yet another Goalkeeper. We shall see. At least we don't have a Daniel Levy figure deciding on our recruitment needs.

And what a week it's been so far on the pitch. We played exhilarating football against Mansfield, much higher than us in the league but with no answer to us during the first half. Until they got a dodgy penalty and Rossi was hurt leaving us with ten men, there was no doubting the result. The win was there for the taking at Rotherham when Loft scored his second very good goal in successive games. You could argue that substitutions didn't pay off or that Rotherham's robust style did us out of three points but that game is gone now and today's game against Wycombe looks crucial. They have been the form team in our division this season but they have lost a very good manager and it remains to be seen if they continue to be as potent as they have been. If we play as we did against Mansfield, they should be nervous. Certainly it won't be a walkover. We should be playing as if our lives depend on it. We can get out of trouble but it depends on having enough fit players and the rub of the green. The support from the fans has been phenomenal and I know that it makes a real difference.



I couldn't help but notice that Bill Leivers was 93 years old this week. He managed the first United team I ever watched. They were easy on the eye and resilient. Of course he didn't have Facebook or anonymous keyboard warriors to undermine him with their gripes and spoilt brat outbursts. Not that he would have taken any notice. When I met Garry Monk at last year's CFU AGM, I was very taken with his mental toughness. It was a baptism of fire for him but I was impressed with his honesty and confidence. We will need those in the coming weeks. I'm sure that Garry will face a few more interesting questions at the next CFU AGM, which features a Fans' Forum, in the Supporters' Club on Monday February 24th. A lot will have happened by then and I hope we will be in a much stronger position. Finally, I am delighted to see Michael Morrison, James Brophy and Ryan Loft getting the recognition they deserve. They have faced a lot of criticism but their contributions are vital. Lets get behind them all today.

# *Exeter City*

"If you're going through hell, keep going."
Winston S. Churchill

Sometimes, in a season like this, nostalgia is what keeps

the diehard fan going. Both sets have had great seasons to remember and crises they'd rather forget. Such is the lot of real fans who support a team through thick and thin because they become part of their lives. Most lives are marked by bad times and by moments of joy. None of us are entitled to non-stop success or reward. Because of this, moments like beating Newcastle in the cup, playing at Old Trafford and getting into the League are talked about over and over again. Like us, Grecians fans have seen their club crash out of the League and flirt with extinction, due to poor leadership. Exeter were taken over by a fans trust and are run by their fans still. Most of us applauded their fight back. We know what it means. Sadly, I have seen some of our fans turn on the team, the manager and each other. It baffles me. To call yourself a supporter means accepting the difficult times too. Doesn't it? This season has been a struggle but I trust we will fight for every point until the end of it. As I write we are preparing for a game at Birmingham City. I hope we get something from the game but I think it's fair to say that our chances against Exeter look rather better.



We have played a lot of games against Exeter, having been in the same League more often than with many other times. Our record against them is impressive. We have won or drawn two thirds of our games. Some of our wins have been impressive and high scoring. Irritatingly, the game I remember most is the one held at Wembley in 2008 to decide which of us would escape from the Conference. They had scraped into the playoffs at the last minute and their fans were pessimistic before the game. It was an awful game which we lost one nil. Our comeback waited for a few more years. Not a good feeling losing at Wembley, especially when you have been playing well. Football is unpredictable isn't it? And that's the way we like it. I was dismayed to hear that Kemi Badenoch thinks that the introduction of an Independent Regulator for football is a waste of time. No one who supports a team whose existence has been threatened by greed or malpractice would agree ."Little" clubs simply want to see a return of fair competition. Only those making vast profits already and who currently dominate the game have an interest in preventing change. Clubs like

Cambridge United and Exeter City, not to mention the grass roots, must press for the changes which will guarantee the future of the sport.

Two other fixtures between us provide happier memories. The home game here at the end of the 77-78 season ,which took us into the Second Division, was a real nail biter. Richard Key starred in goal for Exeter. So much so that we bought him soon after. Against the odds, we stayed in the division for some years. Would that be possible now, given the huge inequalities in income and support? I doubt it. The other game that comes to mind was the one at St James' Park in 1994. My brother took his young children there on the train to see the U's triumph 5-0. Remarkably, Steve Butler scored all five. No doubt the youngsters thought that it would always be like that. But we know that it isn't. Fortune's Wheel is always turning. Finally, a tip of the hat to a certain Mr Tisdale, who managed the Grecians for many years. He was a very good manager but he was also the snappiest dresser ever seen in the dugout at the Abbey. Things will get better .And soon we hope.




## *Stockport County*

"There is no shame in falling down but there is pride in getting back up."
L. Singh

I think that we all felt that the last home game was to be a defining moment of our year and so it turned out to be. Many of us had so much hope at the beginning of the season. In particular we thought that we wouldn't be fighting relegation until the very last day ,as we had done for the last two campaigns , and now it is perhaps the best we can hope for. Garry Monk saved certain players from the Birmingham fixture in the hope that we would be fresh for a game against an out of form Exeter exhausted by their heroics against Nottingham Forest in midweek. At times we have looked good and up for the fight. Not so long ago we thrashed Shrewsbury 4-1. Since then they have done well and we just haven't. I thought that losing at home to a very poor Bristol Rovers would be the nadir of our season. I was wrong. Saturday was awful. In particular, hearing fans complaining that we played without energy and determination in such a vital game was hard to take but we must take it on the chin. It was clear that it was time for a change and it has come.

There were all manner of suggestions of men who might replace Monk and save us from relegation. The choice of Mark Bonner as Director of Football with Neil Harris as manager is an interesting one. Bonner, rightly, is hugely popular with the fan base.

Harris has the credentials and experience for a rescue mission. They will become heroes if they achieve it. Mark is a legend already. Neil can join him and perhaps he owes us that. Can we be saved? It's a long shot but it can be done. We have to believe it. Each game of the last 15 needs to be played like a Cup Final and we need to play without fear. High flying Stockport will be tough to beat and a good test. We have Wrexham and Birmingham at home too but we shouldn't forget that we might well have won at Wrexham. Playing at that level would give us the seven or eight wins we need. There is still a chance if we play with the urgency and intent we are capable of. And every United fan expects exactly that. In particular ,one possible highlight of a traumatic season would be to drag Peterborough into a relegation scrap. Wouldn't it?

Oddly enough, Garry Monk once played for the Hatters as did one other former United boss. Tom Elliott had a spell there and Kyle Knoyle is still playing for them. For a time it looked like Jack Stretton might be joining us. Not sure what's happened to him or to one or two other members of our squad. Perhaps we will see some of them this season? Stockport have had their own tribulations in the past and, like us, spent some time in the Conference. They have done well in their first season back in League One and I'm delighted for them. However, we need the points more today. Overall they have had the better of our clashes. Most have been evenly fought, apart from a memorable 5-0 win for us at the Abbey in 1986. We shouldn't forget either that United clinched the Fourth Division Championship there on a Friday night at the end of the76-77 season. My brother and his wife were there to witness Malcolm Webster make a brilliant injury time save to guarantee the point we needed. A great night at Edgely Park and plenty of lively celebrations. Let's hope for another great performance and plenty of celebrations today. Our astonishing support really deserves it.



# Match Reports

## HOME AGAINST BRISTOL ROVERS

"Born under a bad sign, been down since I began to crawl,
If it wasn't for bad luck, I wouldn't have no luck at all."
William Bell

I didn't trust myself to write a word until I'd seen the highlights of one of the most depressing games I've seen for years. The Habbin was strangely subdued, fatalistic almost, apart from some very loud and completely negative prima donnas with a huge sense of entitlement. Having watched the U's for more or less half a century, I am familiar with the current situation. I've seen better of course and infinitely worse too. All genuine Cambridge fans accept the ups and downs and recognise the inevitable cycle of progress and decline. It has never been easy for us to compete with clubs with huge financial backing and vast stadia and support. We have defied the odds,



despite the game's controlling bodies, including the all-powerful, profit is never our motive, Sky TV .We beat the world's wealthiest club at St James' Park in the FA Cup. We never complained about their Saudi Arabian owners. Mind you, neither did the F.A. It remains to be seen whether Manchester City will be punished in any way for their 150 breaches of Fair Play rules. Many of us have been delighted to see them and Manchester United on the slide because big clubs seem to be able to buy decisions and success- up to a point. However, I ramble. The link I suppose is the way that some so called fans feel entitled to endless success and take it personally when they don't get it. In turn they encourage the players by shouting abuse at them, booing and criticising every aspect of the club. You pays you money and you're entitled to your opinion but my opinion, for what it's worth , is that these loud and impatient critics can't really call themselves supporters. Can they?

I had a feeling of foreboding. We played so well at Charlton, Wrexham and Orient-for a while anyway. We didn't chances. Against Reading they took their chances and we didn't. Many of their fans thought we deserved at least a point which of course we didn't get. It begins to smell like a relegation season when you don't get the points that perhaps you should have. Confidence is affected and then you just need an early goal to lift it. Look what happened against Shrewsbury. Should we have had a penalty against Reading early on in the game? Of course we should. The referee was badly positioned and the Linesman must have been sleeping. We gave away two bad goals and then Smith, who else? Scored a stunning third. In the meantime we created plenty

of chances, put crosses into the box and didn't capitalise. No one wants to shoot or run in after those crosses . Harvey Knibbs did-and they won.

There was some inevitability about losing to a woeful Rovers side, who could scarcely believe their luck. Their goal was like those scored by Blackpool earlier in the season when headers were scored at the back post because we had a slight midfielder marking a man who had an unchallenged header. Our Goalkeeper might have done better but there were three opportunities to prevent a really bad goal. I'm not sure why their second goal was disallowed but they didn't do much else. On this occasion the referee seemed interested in what the Linesman had to say. Just as well because he was clueless. How many chances did we miss. Good chances I mean, not half chances . in an ordinary season at least half of them would have been taken. The Football League paper had their keeper in the team of the week, which tells its own story. I could write reams about the clown who took over as Referee but those who were there, and many watching on TV, saw what happened. Rovers were so desperate that time wasting began comically early. Some of the Rovers players were an embarrassment to their profession, collapsing regularly and writhing about as if poisoned. Morrison got himself booked when trying to pull the cheat to his feet. He made the prime mistake of looking angry, which most Cambridge fans were at their antics. Unlike the ref, we could see what was going on. The final insult was the sending off of Morrison instead of the defender who wrestled him to the ground and held him there. It's as clear as day on the highlights. A penalty and a sending off. I have some sympathy for refs because of the sheer volume of cheating they have to deal with but this was inexcusable. He even went to talk to his Linesman who can't have seen much from where he was standing. Indeed , he didn't see much all afternoon. There was still time for the excellent Stokes to miss an open goal. A home win should have relieved the position we are in but it was not to be. We've all had afternoons like it.



I hope that we will all support the team as fervently as ever. Should we sack Monk? Not in my opinion. We need to be active in the window and get new players in to provide momentum and cover our threadbare squad. Give the bloke a chance with a full and competitive squad. We are not relegated yet but if we are, I will still be there and I bet that most of you will.

Up the U's!

# STAG PARTY

"Success is not measured by what you accomplish, but by the opposition you have encountered, and the courage with which you have maintained the struggle against overwhelming odds."
O.S.Marden

Was the best bit about yesterday hearing that Peterborough are in apparent freefall and only six points above us, having played a game more? Or simply hearing that they lost 5-1 in what was, according to Mr Ferguson himself, a gutless performance. Shrewsbury and Crawley also stumbled to defeat, we won and the table suddenly looks a little different. Victory against Mansfield and a draw away at Bolton won't win any trophies but I detect a turning point. Gradually some of our injured players are returning to the fold, a couple of signings are likely before our next game and we've stopped losing. In football confidence is everything. Losing , even when you have played well and deserved more, is demoralising. You have to know you can win.




En route to Habbin North, I got chatting to a very pleasant Mansfield Town fan about the damage a certain Mr Haslam had done to his club and how the Stags were doing well at last, after a long fight back against irresponsible owners and asset stripping. Nigel Clough knows how to win, as we have found to our cost in the past, often in connection with Burton Albion. In fairness, Clough has been very supportive of us, saying that we are one of the best teams to play at Field Mill or the Whatever Stadium this season. We lost of course, and shouldn't have, but it's been that kind of season. We went our separate ways and the fan said that he wished us luck after today. They knew what it was like to have a disastrous season and not to know where the next win was coming from. Comforting. I remembered a conversation I'd had in a pub in Mansfield about Nathan Arnold, who I described as a headless chicken. He was when he played for us. Anyway, the man I was speaking to turned out to be Nathan's Dad and the chat didn't end on friendly terms.

Within a minute we were ahead. Michael Morrison leads from the front doesn't he ? He might have scored another later but I won't criticise him in any way. He was immense. We ripped into them from the kick off and Stokes got our second from the penalty spot after 7 minutes. I took a photo of the scoreboard just in case I was dreaming. I don't know how we didn't score again. Mansfield offered nothing. Were they undone by complacency? From where I was standing, we were just too good for them. The injury curse struck once again when Marosi had to go off. He had been superb. The defence clearly had confidence in a man obviously in command of his area. I hope that the injury is not too serious because I think he is going to be a really important player for us. To be struck down like this, after less than a game and a half, is typical of the season we've been having. The football gods owe us a huge backlog of luck. I live in hope that we will field our best eleven by the end of the season. I felt for Jack Stevens coming on under these circumstances but he had a fine game and showed that he can handle pressure and make good saves. How good it was to hear the U's cheered from the field at half time. It's been a while. I had heard nothing from

the 1,000 Mansfield fans that were in attendance. They had had nothing to get excited about to be fair. Mike Barnes was noticeably chirpy overseeing the half time entertainment.

Would we get a third goal early in the second half to make the rest of the game a stroll? We missed some chances and then Ryan Loft did what I always hoped he would, he scored an absolute screamer. It was so good and so unexpected that the club photographer in front of me didn't capture it. The Abbey erupted , Loft celebrated and it was obvious that his team mates were thrilled for him. A goal like that must be great for his confidence and we are going to need his hold up play and physical presence. Mansfield were a team of giants and they were happy to exploit that advantage. At 3-0 down they became fairly robust. Maris scored a good goal and then, inexplicably, Loft was taken off, having played really well and competed superbly against two massive centre halves.




Mansfield strengthened their midfield and replaced half their team at once and they began to dominate. We began to sit back and way before the end Njoku dribbled to the corner flag when he was behind the defence and should have got a cross in. Rossi should have scored from a header before becoming our latest injury when tackling Warne. This was a real shame, as he had been playing well and his departure from the field left us with ten men for the final 8 minutes. Referee Parsons had also awarded a penalty, which I thought was fair enough until I watched the highlights. Soft to say the least but then I would. At least he gave us ours, although he took a little time over it and we had had equally good claims in the last two games. Nothing surprises me. I often wonder what instructions are given to the Linesman in front of the mainstand. They always seem less involved in the game than I do. Anyway, we held on. We deserved to and the only way is up now. There were many good performances for us but I thought that Josh Stokes was outstanding. If we can sign him, we must. I'm not sure what the Mansfield fans would have said on the coaches home or what Posh fans had been muttering last night-and I don't care anyway. Clough



admitted that we deserved to win, and we did, and thousands of Cambridge fans, having been reminded of how good football can feel at times, went home with a spring in their step. I bet Ryan Loft did. I did too. Until Tuesday then.

# A Game Of Two Halves - Wycombe Wanderers

"It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop."
Confucius.

It would take someone a lot wiser than Confucius to predict how we were going to perform against high achieving Wycombe, a team with a 6 million pound striker in their squad, on the verge of signing Will Norris and whose hugely successful manager had just been poached by Luton Town, currently in the championship and desperate to spend money to stay up. United had brought in promising forwards from Southampton and Nottingham Forest respectively and a midfielder from Portsmouth who was unknown to us but highly rated. We feared the long term loss of Marko Marosi, a Goalkeeper who had brought a sense of calm and confidence to our defence, which has been a bit of a rarity in an extraordinary season in which we have played very well at times and failed to earn the rewards we deserved. He, Rossi ,Watts, Thomas, Nlundulu, Kai Kai, Smith, Lavery, Gardener, Jobe ,Barton and Gardener, all first teamers, were unavailable to us due to injury. Richards and Longelo seem to have gone missing for other reasons. On the face of it United seemed to have no chance but football is not like that-is it?




Wanderers began confidently and you could see why they are doing so well. They are a team of giants but they are well coached giants with some very skilful players. Richard Kone and Josh Low were missing for the away side but no one would argue that we weren't understrength. The football gods seem to have been playing similar games with us and with Tottenham Hotspur, whose resources are probably greater than ours. The Chairboys attacked with menace but we were holding our own. Indeed Ballard hit The Wycombe goalpost and we were troubling their defence. As Habbinites began to feel more optimistic, Lubala's fairly tame shot was spilled by Jack Stevens . As luck would have it the ball went straight to Humphreys who scored. That's the way things have gone for us and for Jack Stevens, a fine Goalkeeper who thrives on confidence but who has struggled with it for a while. His body language after the goal said everything and it says a lot for his character that Wycombe didn't score again even when they were dominant. After the goal they took control for a while and we knew that it would take a supreme effort to get something from the game, however

desperate we were to win it.I was pleased that it was only 1-0 at the interval. You always have a chance when the margin is a single goal. For me, we were much better in the second half, particularly after Stevenson came on. He always wanted the ball and knows exactly where to pass it. He, Stokes and Brophy began to play some exhilarating football and suddenly the Wycombe fans were eerily silent as they could sense a change in the balance of power. The Referee awarded us a penalty after 65 minutes. To be honest I felt that it was yet another mistake from a man who seemed pretty confident giving free kicks in no man's land but oblivious to some pretty overdramatic rolling about and time wasting from Wycombe. However, having watched the incident on replays, you can see that the Ref was well placed to see an obvious swing of the arm in Morrison's face. He was right to give the penalty and right to send off Bradley, despite his theatrical attempts at disbelief and implied injustice. So many footballers at the current time would do better in soaps or melodramas. But that's another debate altogether. Anyway, Stokes' penalty was well saved by Ravizzoli, a very good Goalkeeper who blotted his copybook ,I felt ,by wasting as much time as he could throughout the second half. At times he reminded me very much of our own Danny Potter- although I always liked Danny. After that we attacked-repeatedly. It was like the Alamo, except I didn't think we would breach their defences-until we did. And what a special goal it was. From where I was standing I could fully appreciate the bend Stokes put on the ball as it hurtled into the top corner. I was pleased for him after his penalty miss and because he is so obviously desperate to do great things for us. Some of our loan players could learn a thing or two from him about honesty and endeavour. United fans don't like big time Charlies who won't get their shorts dirty and who think they're doing us a favour.

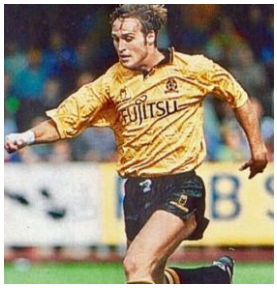





Anyway, that goal alone was worth the admission money. I'm not sure that I've seen many better at the Abbey in nearly fifty years.

After that, Wycombe were hanging on. I thought that Brophy had won it for us at the death but Ravizzoli made another wonderful save. There were other close calls and maybe a handball in the Wycombe area but it was not to be. Did we deserve to win? I think we did. Not only that, but I realised just how gripping I found the last thirty minutes and that hasn't happened often this season. This team are giving their all for us and for the manager. No fan could ask for more. Escape looks difficult but I wouldn't write us off. Will we see a new Goalkeeper on Monday? Jordan Rhodes? Paul Mullin? A new midfielder? I don't know but we haven't given up yet. Play like we did against Mansfield Town in the first half and as we did against Wycombe in the second half then anything is possible. Play like it in both halves and we will surprise quite a few teams.

Up the U's!




## By Far The Greatest Team…

Across the mist allotments
Where men escape
And smoke and mutter,
Through the faded curtains
Of my nana's bedroom,
Gleam the great and yellow lights
Majestic in the dark nights
Shining on the theatre
Of our passing dreams.

Bovril and tea
Old men in macs
With pipes
And reluctant opinions
Surround the pitch
As expectations rise
With the crowds
As success builds on success
And little Cambridge
Startle the giants.
As a boy
I knew only dimly
About closed shops and jobs for the boys.

Bradford Park Avenue

Sounded exclusive to me

All those years ago.

We have been to Wembley

Beaten the richest club on Earth

On their own turf

Overcome decline

And near extinction

To thrill generations

Year after year

Bringing our children

And grandchildren

To touch their heritage

And feel the anguish and the joy.

Your club chooses you

I say

As once it chose me.

It’s in our blood

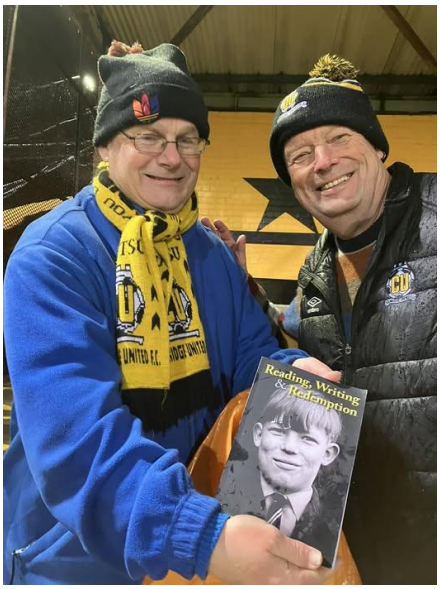
And inherited by right.

Be proud.



I have included this poem and the piece “A Footballing family” from my book “The Story In Your Eyes” because this seems as good a time as any to think about why we are Cambridge fans in the first place. I have no envy of those who follow the so called big clubs because they seem to guarantee success. Equally, I have no time for those whose misplaced sense of entitlement makes them shriek and complain when their team “lets them down”. Those of us who have supported this club for decades know just how special it is. We have experienced terrible times when our stadium was sold, our future placed in jeopardy and when we might have fallen below the Conference. Indeed it took us many years to get out of it. We endured humiliation against Histon, Hayes and Yeading, Tamworth and Alfreton but we came out of it stronger and got promoted from League Two before we really expected to.

As against that we’ve been to Old Trafford, Wembleys old and new and triumphed away at Newcastle, all a far cry from forming a conga because we’d actually won a corner at the Abbey. We have welcomed West Ham, Manchester City and Tottenham in various competitions, beaten Aston Villa in the same year that they won the European Cup and played in a pulsating cup tie against Forest when they were in the top division and we were way below. These are the things we remember and the good and the bad are all part of the same deal. We love our club no matter what. It troubles me that some of our own fans came to blows at Lincoln, that others have booed the team and shouted abuse at the manager and coaching staff.




The true United fan supports the team in front of them and whatever manager it has at the time. That is what the word supporter means. It is not a question of being a happy clapper, more of being loyal when the going gets tough . The triumphs are always sweeter then when they come-as they always will.

This has been a tough season. When it’s over, it will be the subject of my next book, in which I will try to explain what being a Cambridge United fan for life really means. Gates are up, the stadium is ours and will be extended and modernised soon. The Foundation Trust looks out for the community it serves and, in time, the team will rise again. They say, “It’s the hope that kills you.” Yes, but we wouldn’t be without it. I couldn’t.

My books, Reading, Writing and Redemption, Endless River and The Story In Your Eyes are all available on Amazon. The last book has a lot of Cambridge related content in it. If you love the city and you’re interested in history, you might like it…..

And if you could think of a suitable title for my next book…. How might we define this season?




# finally….

"He knows not his own strength who hath not met adversity."
William Samuel Johnson.

This is a time for optimism. Most of us are feeling a sense of excitement and anticipation about the Stockport game, rather than the resigned fatalism of recent weeks. Reaction to the managerial appointments is mixed and Neil Harris himself has been talking about the need to reconnect with and win over the fan base. Personally I am delighted by the return of Mark Bonner who has already proved himself sufficiently at United to be welcome always. Even the Cambridge United Supporters' Club- China branch- is saying that if Harris is successful, he too will join our Pantheon of Greats. Is it possible? We must all believe that it is and trust that we will fight for every scrap against Stockport and everyone else. Our manager has form for saving lost causes and, as Bonner knows, we have come back from the dead before.

The Stockport game is the fourth annual "Her Game Too" dedicated match. Why does that matter so much? I think that the amazingly high gates show that the club have been successfully pursuing diversity policies which actually make many more, groups of people feel welcome at football matches than was ever the case in the tribal days of the seventies or even earlier when football was a rare kind of escape for working

class men. Economically it makes sense to move on. Morally, the case for making everyone feel safe and welcome at football matches is irrefutable. Liam Bennett and Glenn McConnell are the club's Player Advocates. They follow Lauren Webb , Alysha Stojko-Down and Darren Marjoram, who are the advocates for the women's team. Darren was the campaign's very first Manager Advocate. It is good to see our club in the vanguard of another movement which serves our whole community in a very real way. Her Game Too is now partnered with 77 clubs across the Premier League and EFL. The U's became partners in 2021. I am always aware that , whatever our club does on and off the field, its most vital role is the service of its community. Having said all of that, we all want 3 points- maybe seven times during the rest of the season!




One of the more interesting home games coming up is the one against a certain other Cambridgeshire team. They are flirting with relegation and it would be a terrible thing to send them down while we stay up, wouldn't it? I hope that people will flock to the CFU Cabin to buy pin badges and coasters which relate to this game . We owe them a defeat in return for the 6-0 humiliation at London Road and their form seems to have deserted them since then. There is plenty of other contemporary CFU and Amber Belles merchandise available to the discerning fan. I wear my somewhat understated bright yellow hoodie where I live in Norfolk with great pride. I have also received a lot of commiserations on the platform at Downham Market station too. We United fans wear our hearts on our sleeves and support our team no matter what. Don't we?

I hope that fans will turn up in numbers for the CFU AGM. The fans' Forum presents a very good opportunity to ask Alex Tunbridge and Godric Smith, who was in CFU in the early days, questions about the club. This kind of transparency is still rare in football and we should be grateful for the opportunity to ask the people who really know what the future might hold . Obviously, and unusually, we won't have the manager there but they have only been back at the club for a few days and have it all on preparing for the next Great Escape. We are in for quite a ride over the next couple of weeks.

Once our aspirations were limited simply to survival. There is so much more to be optimistic about now. We remain United In Endeavour.

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

[Deadline for next newsletter- **15th March 2025**]

**United in Endeavour**

