

Cambridge Fans United



"Uniting Our Community"



AMBER NEWS

Special 'Season's End' Edition

May 2025



Opening Reflections,

“Optimism doesn’t mean that you are blind to the reality of the situation. It means that you remain motivated to seek a solution to whatever problems arise.”

Dalai Lama

The eagle eyed amongst you may have recognised the quote used as the one which began the first Amber News of the season way back in August last year. At that time we were hoping to avoid the struggles of previous seasons in League One. On the face of it we had a stronger squad and a manager who had tasted success at a higher level. The promise of Gardner, Smith, Lavery and Richards suggested that this time we would be battling in the top half of the table. Well, we weren’t. I note that in my opening in August I suggested that we needed an accomplished number nine to play alongside Lavery. Sadly we missed Lavery through injury for much of the season. Nlundulu showed promise which waned as the season went on. Gary Gardner, an excellent player who played in nearly every game for Birmingham City last season, was never fit enough to play for us. Had he, Lavery and Jobe been fit enough to play for us all season, we would not have struggled. I also noted that elements of our crowd had barracked Jack Stevens. Vincente Reyes failed to live up to his big reputation. Marko Marosi, who lasted a game and a half, looked excellent but, as the injury curse struck again, we brought in Nathan Bishop who made a number of crucial errors. Goalkeeping and goal scoring were problems for us all season. What that meant , taken together, was that we lost, or failed to win games where we played well.

It sounds odd to say that a relegated side played well but at times we certainly did .If you forget the disastrous defeat to a nameless local side at London Road, two bad defeats, at home to Huddersfield and away to Birmingham ,were the only games where we were beaten heavily. It didn’t help that we didn’t beat anyone at all until October 19th but then we went on a run of good results and beat a very decent Wigan

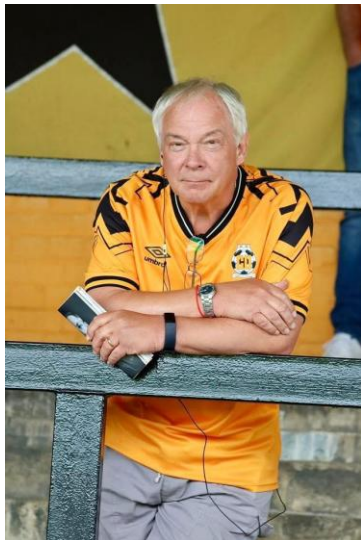


side and a very physical Stevenage side away-which is always very satisfying. A subsequent 6-1 defeat naturally undermined confidence and questions began about our playing style under Garry Monk. Was our squad good enough to play that way? Certainly we saw some different and other, more familiar styles after that, including 442, which always seems the safest formation when a team isn’t firing on all cylinders. We could have beaten Charlton and Wrexham home and away but we didn’t.

We could have beaten Bolton, Northampton, Wycombe and others. We didn’t. It was that kind of season. I have never known one like it for injuries. We didn’t get the luck of the draw with decisions and our forwards were reluctant to shoot. This is what a

relegation season feels like. Lady Luck is nowhere to be found but, over a season, the table doesn't lie. Should Monk have gone earlier? I'm not certain. Had he not been deprived of key players so often it might have been a different story. Either way, for me, losing at home to a dreadful Bristol Rovers team and a pretty awful Exeter City side were the games which left me with the feeling that this time there was, despite glimmers of promise, to be no escape.

Amazingly, given our general level of struggle, gates were impressively high and the away fans remained passionate, committed and loud. Many of the players commented on how good the support was, despite everything. Nine days into May, 1,000 season tickets have been sold for next season and there is a tangible air of optimism about the club. Some have complained that the change of badge and money spent on the training ground detracted from the playing budget. Not so. Our squad was huge, largely because of the number of long term injuries which at times made us feel cursed. Football fans are often very superstitious and seek to find reasons for large helpings of bad luck. There are none but I believe the structure of the club is better than ever and the job that remains to be done is on the field. Neil Harris has talked about the



need to change the culture among the players. He will. The retained list indicated an air of ruthless expectations. Many of the players leaving the club either failed to reach expectations or failed to display the right attitude. I am sad to see Paul Digby depart and wish that Dan Barton had been able, more often, to show what he could do. There is a player there I am sure but he needs a new start.

The stadium redevelopment is a very exciting prospect and combined with the way new fans are coming to the ground in great numbers, we are going to need more space and better facilities. As I approach my dotage, I look forward to a seat in the Habbin, where I have stood among some hardened cynics and some marvellous supporters for many years. I remain optimistic about the proposed

Football Governance Bill, which should make clubs like ours more competitive and enjoy a fairer share of the wealth currently jealously guarded by the much bigger clubs and by the media who depend upon their success. Every fan has the right to feel that their club can and will make progress.

There are a lot of reasons to be proud of our club. One huge source of pride is the way the club puts itself at the centre of the community. The Foundation is flourishing as never before and provides such a lot for the elderly, the vulnerable and those facing hardship. I particularly enjoy the Seniors Lunch, where around a hundred older people are royally entertained each month. Clubs would not exist without the community it belongs to. That is clearly recognised at Cambridge United and is one reason why its fans are so loyal.

I have been delighted with the progress of CFU under the leadership of Gina, who, with Dave Matthew Jones, has worked miracles with Away Travel, making it possible for many, many fans to attend away games who otherwise wouldn't. It was good to

see Gina and Terry presenting James Brophy with his well-deserved player of the season award. CFU played a part in the return of printed programmes and ensured the continuation of Away Travel which was about to disappear. Members have a real voice and understand that our values are to support whatever is best for the club and, most importantly, its supporters. The Shadow Board has continued to develop and, in time, will prove a real asset to the club and to fans who want always to feel that they matter. I am pleased with the role played by the Shadow Board in the new badge project. Of course some people didn't get the outcome they wanted but you can't please everyone. Years ago the badge changed more often without any reference to fans. That will never happen again.



I imagine that some of the cynicism about the badge, the training ground, the stadium redevelopment and the player budget would have been much less prevalent with more success on the pitch. At the end of the last match of the season many of us turned to each other and said, "That was a dreadful season," although far from the worst, followed by "see you next season." That is what being a supporter means, doesn't it?

Relegation to L2

We have been relegated to L2. Quite why it is so unexpected is odd as for the last 2 seasons we have only just avoided relegation (who could forget the 2022/3 season where we didn't know until 15 minutes after the end of the game if we would be staying up).



At the start of the season, according to social media, our fans expected us to finish mid to top half of the L1 table! A nice target to have at the start of the season. But then according to more recent social media apparently our fans said at the start of the season we would be relegated! If only they had known the lottery numbers!

Having been supporting the U's since 1970 I have seen many promotions, and just as many relegations. The worst by far was dropping out of the league in 2005 following the club going into administration. It was during our Conference years when we had 2 playoff at Wembley that we lost, before 2 more Wembley appearances in 2014 that we won.

These games bought new, and mostly young fans to the club, and since then there have been good times: playing Man U in the FA cup, promotion to L1, winning at Newcastle being the highlights.

For these relatively new fans this will be the first relegation they will have experienced, and it can take a bit of getting used to. In these modern times there has to be someone to blame, so the CUFC Board, Garry Monk and Ben Strang seem to be getting the worst of it. In the main players seem to escape criticism, as “it is not their fault they are crap”!

Hindsight is a wonderful thing, and I imagine that the recruitment team wished they hadn't signed some of the players who turned out to be injury prone and have barely featured all season, and the CUFC Board wish they had changed the Manager sooner. Whether the outcome would have changed we will never know.

For fans who don't like the way the club is run there is a simple solution: Find around £8million and buy it! Most clubs of our size lose around £2million a year, so a new buyer would need deep pockets! The old saying “the only way to leave a football club with a small fortune is to go in with a big fortune” is still true.



Invariably the teams with the biggest budgets end up at the top. Realistically finishing mid table would have been the stretch target, anywhere above 21st place would have been OK. Teams like Lincoln, Exeter and Stevenage have managed a strong mid table position, so it is possible!

We can make a list of the reasons we think we were relegated, most fans would agree we tried to play the wrong style of football with the wrong players, and kept Garry Monk too long. Injuries will always play a part and we seemed to have more than our fair share, then there is luck, of which we seemed to get very little. There were a number of matches where we should have got more points, and in general played well against most of the top sides, but couldn't get enough points against the lower clubs. So many “if only's”!

The CUFC Board have accepted that mistakes were made, and changes have been made to improve for the future. And the future is what we must focus on now.

Neil Harris has made it clear he was not very happy with the players, their decision making, application etc, so I expect a lot of changes to play like a “Harris Team”. Quite what a “Harris Team” is I am not too sure, what I hope is that players work hard, play as a team and have strong mental strength. Players who want to play for the club, even if they are using it a stepping stone to a higher level, or are not very good but give everything

when they cross the white line. I expect a well organised team, a fairly direct style of play (where attack is the best form of defence!) with players who have the ability to change style during a match.

Of course we all hope we'll do what Port Vale have done and get promotion at the first attempt, but it will not be easy, Bristol Rovers, Crawley and Shrewsbury will all be thinking the same. The Board have said we will have a competitive budget, so it is not unreasonable to get excited, but it must be tempered that there are a number of what might be termed "good" sides in League 2, such as Swindon, Crewe, Grimsby, Gillingham, and MK Dons, and currently 3 out of Walsall, Notts County, Wimbledon and Salford will also remain in L2 after the play offs. Barnet will come up from the National League with one of York, FGR, Rochdale, Oldham, Halifax and Southend so will have the promotion bounce.

If we start reasonably well I think the crowds will hold up. This relegation may be a blip and we quickly return to L1, or it may be that we are at our natural level. I think most teams have a natural level and in the main move up or down one division. There will be outliers such as Wrexham with their 4 promotions in 4 years, and the reverse with clubs who drop like a stone due usually to mismanagement like Bury.

The relegation does not seem to affect the long term aims of the Board, which is the redevelopment of the Abbey Stadium, improvements to the training facilities and continuing the changes to the non-playing football staff. Improvements to the "matchday experience" are ongoing, the club shop is much nicer, and the NRE fan Zone (supported by CFU paying half of the set up cost) is always busy, and continuing to have a paper matchday programme remains popular. So the future looks good.

Although there will be no CUFC football for a couple of months, interest will still be high. First the retained list by the middle of May (where I am sure there will be disagreements on who should stay or go), then new player announcements at various times, and on 26th

June the release of the fixture list (and for some fans swiftly followed by hotel bookings for the long distance matches). Personally I shall be looking for when we play MK Dons away, we are due a win there! Gillingham might be interesting too for Neil and Mark

Enjoy the summer,

Terry Wilby



WHY SUPPORT CUFC?

In reply to your comments

My Grandfather Frank lived in Ditton Fields and physically helped build the Habbin Stand. His reward was a few shares. His life was spent in the Supporters Club

My Grandmother served teas from the same Supporters Club match days



My Dad Albert played for a number of years in the late 1940s and early 1950s, including being in our famous Eastern Counties league side that got to the FA Cup 2nd Round

My mum must have been a WAG as she rarely missed a game

All that before I was born.
As you say Andrew, "I had no choice"

Four years as a ball boy as a teenager and now 43 consecutive years working in the ground as a copper and in the Control Room

I agree..... Your Club chooses you and you don't want to escape.

Trevor George

It's always great to hear from Trevor, a very good footballer and a very popular policeman. It made me chuckle years ago when Trevor announced that he'd seen that the Stephen boys were in town and that he would nick them. All we had to say was that our mum was there! Proper community policing.

Andy,

I really became a U's fan in September 1972 on return to the UK. Dad who was in the RAF had just served for 3 years at RAF Episkopi in Cyprus. On return to England, Mum & Dad were posted to RAF St Mawgan in Cornwall. Dad thought it would be better for me to seek employment in Cambridge where my grandmother lived. From my gran's house in Fairfax Road, I could see the floodlights at the Abbey Stadium. I had always played & followed football but living overseas in the late sixties/early seventies meant only radio coverage on forces radio or the BBC world service.

In that 72-73 season United had a decent side with Brian Greenhalgh being the star player, to be fair I didn't know many of the players but soon they all became a familiar bunch. Bill Leivers was of course an excellent manager. Some of my new work mates

were also United fans so I had friends standing on the NRE (then the corona end) with me. United were promoted to the old division 3 at the end of the season, I remember some big matches. My relationship with Cambridge United was born and for 53 years I have been a loyal supporter. This despite me also joining the RAF and spending 28 years on the move in various countries.

I have been a season ticket holder for around 25 years and could never consider following another club. I've probably visited about 75 of the 92 league clubs plus of course a fair number in what is now the national league. You get attached to your club and over the years I've made many good friends. I even looked after the match officials for about 5 years so have seen the club at a few angles.



This season didn't go well for a number of reasons but I am optimistic about reforming and coming back stronger. As always we will be 'United in Endeavour'.

Regards

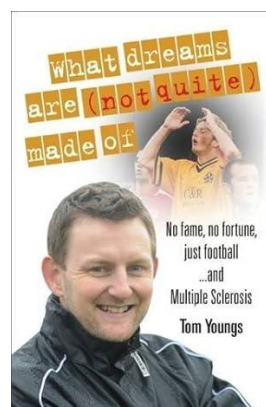
Richard Stephen

These are the kind of comments I would like for my book which will try to explain why this club is so important to us all.

TOM YOUNGS RIP

Very upset to hear the news. Very fond memories of his play including, if I remember correctly, goals scored against then League leaders Rushden and Diamonds back in the early part of the 2002/3 season. I then fondly remember him when he spoke to supporters after the Barnet game at the start of the 2016/17 season where he spoke with great honesty, intelligence and eloquence. I also enjoyed his book which I rate as one of the very best sports books I have ever read. William Arnold May 2025.

I had a lot of Communication with Tom before the publication of his book. He was a very good player but , more importantly, a lovely man. He is a great loss.



Five Highlights of 2024/2025 Season

Highlight 1 was

A 4-4 home draw against Blackpool on 24th August.

It was great for 3 reasons:

1. We came back from being goals behind
2. Lavery scored a brace
3. We got to the dizzy heights of 20th in League One. No one would be able to say we spent the whole season in the relegation zone. (Little did we know that this would be our highest position of the year.)



Highlight 2 was 3 wins in a row in October.

Beating Wigan didn't seem remarkable as Monk's men had beaten them at the end of the previous season but an away win against Stevenage the following Tuesday, whilst keeping a second clean sheet, was most unexpected. The game on the Saturday was to be a relegation six pointer against Burton Albion. This became Monk's finest hour as the week was completed with nine points and five goals had been struck without conceding.

Highlight 3 was a November F.A. Cup win, We knocked out Woking away 1-0. Okay it was only Woking but we got to the Second Round, once again without conceding. Yet there was a more memorable reason for it being a highlight. The winning goal came from one James Brophy. This was at a time when we were singing "If Brophy scores we're on the pitch". Some took this as a threat of a pitch invasion. The more knowledgeable assumed that Brophy would never score.

Highlight 4 was New Manager Bounce.

It happened under Harris in February. We beat Stockport at home 2-0 and Crawley away 2-0 and it took us to 22nd place. We knew that relegation looked a certainty but we wondered just how much higher this manager could take us. Hindsight tells us he took us to 23rd.

Highlight 5 was a notable double in April

This proved that we were not the worst team in the league for we beat Shrewsbury a second time making it 5-1 on aggregate



CONCLUSION

We've had two managers. The first kept us between 20th and 24th and the second took us off the bottom and had us alternating between 22nd and 23rd. So why is there a consensus that Harris is better than Monk? It's not the results Harris got. He was in charge for 15 games earning 4 wins and 3 draws. Against these 15 opponents Monk also won 4 games but managed 4 draws.

I also don't think that Monk is the worst manager we've ever had. The problem has been the team. They lost regardless of who was managing them.

So I come back to the question of why I have more confidence in Harris than I had in Monk? I may be wrong but I feel the telling factor is that Monk had two transfer windows this season whereas Harris had none. Harris tells us what a "Harris Team" looks like and I prefer it to a Monk Team which we were introduced to at the start of the season. Against Crawley I described it as one pussy-footing around at the back. Harris must change the team as it's the team that lets us down.

FRANK PEARSON 7 May 2025



Hot off the Habbini

[programme articles]

Stevenage Town

"It always seems impossible until it's done."
Nelson Mandela



Back to back wins have changed the complexion of a season which, previously, had seemed destined to get worse and worse. Whatever people thought about the change of managers, and I had my own doubts about reappointing Neil Harris, anyone can see that there is a new snap and bite about this team. Indeed, the creepy Crawley commentary team were criticising us for being over physical.

Harris has us fighting for every ball. Loft is certainly putting himself about now and is as popular with referees as Joe Ironside was during his time here. Despite all the injuries, there is no automatic place in our side now. Our loan signings, including Longelo and N'lundulu, have so much to offer but every player has to prove that they deserve a place in the side. Our Goalkeeper has inspired confidence in the defence and we can all see that we have a chance in any game. Brophy looks class and it looks as if all our players have a real belief in themselves. What a shame Gibbons was rather harshly sent off. He is in the form of his life. And so the Stevenage game takes on even greater significance. It is certainly winnable and three wins in a row would transform our chances. Some fans wrote off our chances weeks ago but I am certain that a number of clubs are looking over their shoulders now. Peterborough included.

I don't hold with the idea that Stevenage is some kind of traditional local derby. Other fixtures have a better claim. Our fans are not particularly fond of their stewards and



the floodlighting at their stadium hasn't always been especially reliable. Our matches have tended to be evenly fought and, under Westley's four reigns and under Steve Evans, nobody really liked playing them. Under former United favourite Alex Revell, Stevenage are playing more attractive football and they have obviously been doing better than us this season but we are on our way up and they will, quite rightly, be expecting a tough evening here. Our fans will be

even more noisy, as belief in survival becomes stronger, and I'm sure that the superb following at Crawley must have lifted our players. Harris worked miracles at Millwall, saving them from almost certain relegation and turning them into promotion contenders. It's early days but I can see that happening with the U's.

The Stevenage game I enjoyed most was the home leg of the semi finals for the National League Play Off final in the 2008-2009 season. We finished a strong second that season and losing 3-1 in the first leg of the semi final came as a real surprise. The home leg finished 3-0 to us after extra time, courtesy of a Scott Rendell hat trick. We are often at our best when we have been written off. Sadly we lost the final to Torquay, who haven't really done so well since then. That is the way football goes isn't it? Despite having a strong squad, and a promising young manager in Gary Brabin, under the Chairmanship of George Rolls our progress and achievements were somewhat unpredictable, in huge contrast with the unity of purpose so evident in the club now. Finally, how good is it to see Mark Bonner back at the club, albeit in a new role? Whatever the outcome of the next few weeks, our future is in safe hands. Everything is possible whenever we are United in Endeavour.

Peterborough United

“You can change your wife, your politics, your religion, but never, never, can you change your favourite football team.”

Eric Cantona

The first time I took my son to a game at the Abbey was against Posh. It was a straightforward 2-0 win for us and I chuckled when he asked me if it was always as easy to beat them. Sadly, as we know, it isn't. Overall we haven't done that well against them, especially at London Road. The less said about our away fixture there this season, the better. We owe them for that and no doubt we can get a good result against them today. After the season we have had, a win at home would make the fans much happier. Just before the Great Escape, we were in a similar situation. Thanks to Harrison Dunk, we won 2-0, with surprising ease, and stayed up against the odds. I still have the merchandise CFU produced after that win and remember the good feeling which persisted for some weeks afterwards. Derby games matter. Boro haven't won too often at the Abbey either and, as ever, I feel a sense of cautious optimism. We have had some memorable games against Cambridgeshire's other team, including a 5-1 win at London Road. A centre half previously rejected by Norwich City scored a lot of goals. He did alright after that.



As very local clubs we have shared any number of players. Most significantly of all, was Chris Turner, a great player and manager here, who was equally venerated in Peterborough. He really created the basis of the team which John Beck took so close to competing in the inaugural season of the Premier League. We would certainly have had an impact. That Cambridge team feared no one and beat a number of top teams. We infuriated many managers, including the lachrymose Glenn Hoddle. We apparently had no right to tangle with the big boys. I have always been grateful to Posh for showing the way to get elected to the Football League, which was a closed shop for many years. It's hard these days to fully appreciate just how difficult it was to convince Chairman with somewhat Victorian attitudes to give clubs going places a chance of success.

Going back to players who “served” both clubs. Who remembers Billy Manuel who played ten games for us before we sacked him? Actually, he played rather less, having been sent off in three successive games for violent and vaguely psychotic behaviour. Amazingly, Peterborough took him back but he was never quite the same player. He made Vinny Jones look like Goldilocks by comparison. As I write, we are challenging for points at Blackpool. It's hard to predict the outcome. Having won two



good games, our performance at home to Stevenage was woeful. We were much better away at Wigan but failed to take chances and lost. In our position we can't afford to do that, as a furious Neil Harris told the players. I'd like to see Dan Barton and James Brophy playing as attacking wingers and being used more productively by our midfield. Sitting back and waiting for things to happen is an approach which has helped to put us in this position and there are no more games to waste. We are owed some spirited performances. Let's hope we see one of them today. We all know how much it matters.

Northampton Town

"Who you are tomorrow begins with what you are today."
Walt Disney

Some people are arguing that there is nothing left for us to play for this season. I can't agree. What we do now until the end of the season will have a huge bearing on how we do next year and for the seasons which follow. Many players are playing for their futures and I am sure that Neil Harris is thinking long and hard about how to change the culture, as he put it, and create a team that expects to win. We should have won at Barnsley, away at Wrexham, at home to Peterborough, and many other games where we dominated but couldn't score. It has been "the season that nearly was". I've never known another like it and I've been following United for a long time. Things have been much worse. Having to sell our stadium and crashing out of the League was the very worst. I saw grown men reduced to tears at the thought that the club they loved might go out of existence. We have come back stronger and had great days since then but in football, great days can't be guaranteed, not for the Manchester giants, money bags Chelsea-or anyone. Competition means having to embrace the good and the bad. Remember the 1983-84 season? I wish I didn't. We had three managers and went 31 games without a win...then we had Ken Shellito. We got used to ever reducing expectations until it turned around again. And it always does.



I remember talking to Town fans walking across the common when there were stories about financial irregularities and doubts cast on their future. I felt for them. This was a club which went up and down through all the leagues inside a single decade. They had Spurs legend Bill Brown in goal and took local heartthrob Graham Felton from us. I remember girls crying about that and he had only been with us for a season! In later years we borrowed Jim Hall from the Cobblers and what a difference he made to our fortunes! Goalkeepers were terrified of him and his challenges could be felt a long way back on the NRE. In 1978 we acquired Derrick Christie and George Reilly from

Northampton. We were on our way up at the time and Town were not. We paid big money for two of the best forwards we've ever had at United and, as a result, we sat comfortably in what was called the Second Division at the time for several seasons under John Docherty. We might have stayed there longer if the powers that be hadn't changed the rules about gate money. Previously, it had been split between the home and away clubs, which meant that when clubs like United played at huge grounds, their income was vastly increased. This arrangement was changed so that clubs from then on kept their home receipts, which meant a catastrophic loss of income for us and other clubs.

We now know that this led directly to the sale of our star players, a marked decline in our fortunes and the unfair sacking of one of our greatest managers. Since then other steps have been taken to keep most of the money generated by football in the hands of those clubs and institutions which currently dominate the game. This has made football less genuinely competitive and made it harder for clubs like United and Northampton to enjoy the levels of success we have enjoyed in the past. We have to hope that the Football Governance Bill, once it has been enacted, reverses some of this damage and allows Cambridge, Northampton and the real Wimbledon, for example, to have a realistic chance of challenging the much bigger clubs. Real competition is vital for the long term health of the game we love. My hope for today is that Brophy scores again, that Ryan Loft scores a couple and that we play without fear, expecting to win. It's been tough watching us at the Abbey at times this season. The fans deserve to have a season to look forward to. The future begins now.



No one is
PERFECT.
However being a
Cambridge United supporter
is close enough.

Wrexham

“There is in the worst of fortune the best of chances for a happy change.”
Euripides.

I certainly wouldn't argue with Euripides and, even if I could, any genuine fan of most football clubs outside the top six would talk about peaks and troughs. Wrexham are one of the oldest teams in the world. They have played in the European Cup Winners Cup and got as far as the quarter finals one season. Micky Thomas scored a very famous FA Cup goal for them against Arsenal in 1992. It was a wonder goal and is still talked about. In the late seventies they lost to a Tottenham team featuring Villa, Ardiles and a host of household names. We too have had our moments against the odds and, like Wrexham, our disasters too. We had our own financial crisis and slid out of the



league for nine years. Wrexham's financial crisis came in 2008 and they too dropped into the non-league wilderness. They featured in no less than five play-off campaigns before regaining their rightful place in the Football League in 2023. Both sets of fans know triumph and disaster and understand how important it is to support a club which is reliably solvent and has genuine aspirations for progression.

Of course both clubs are in good hands now. Wrexham are co-owned by Hollywood personalities Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElheney. They have invested an enormous amount of money in their project and the idea of it appealed to media companies which have filmed some of it. Similarly, United will feature in at least three programmes made by American company CBS. No doubt next season will be triumphant and an American audience, who already know about Cambridge University and the history of a wonderful city, will identify with this little club as it attempts to gatecrash the top two leagues. Wrexham have of course benefitted hugely from the Hollywood cash injection. Firstly they tempted our own goal machine Paul Mullin to the Racecourse Ground before effectively replacing him with Sam Smith, for whom they paid the kind of fee that we can only dream about. We hear that he has fallen out of favour with manager Phil Parkinson and the rumour mill has him at the Abbey next season. Premature no doubt but what a difference his goals would have made to our season. No doubt there will be plenty of comings and goings in the close season.

Another United hero of yesteryear went on to play for Wrexham before pitching up at Manchester City. Bobby Shinton was head and shoulders above any other player at our level and one of our best ever forwards. Perhaps he never quite hit the heights he

should have done but any club is fortunate to have someone of his calibre in their team.

The gap between us and Wrexham may be wider after this season but we shouldn't forget that we might well have won the away fixture earlier, the season that nearly was I suppose. However difficult it has been for us this season, at least we know that set backs are generally temporary. I can't help being sorry for Reading fans, who may well see their club thrown out of the league because of irresponsible or inadequate ownership. They deserve better. Finally, how good it was to see both sets of fans join in the applause in memory of Simon Dobbin before the Northampton game. We all crave success but, more than that, the true values of sport transcend success. Nothing justifies violence. Rivalry is great but we all love the game and respect everyone who is doing just the same.



Charlton Athletic

“Success is found balanced between optimism and realism, where it is unhindered by pessimism.”
W. Fesler

The realist would probably say that a team who are flying high and in great form have nothing to fear from a team as near the bottom as United have been for most of the season, but the whole picture is more complicated than that. For a start, there is more pressure on the Addicks than there is on us. We played with real freedom against Northampton who, a week later crushed Posh on their own pitch 4-0, and against Shrewsbury. At the Valley, without the goalkeeping errors and profligacy of our strikers, we might well have won. It was a similar story against Wrexham, home and away, where we could have had six points rather than two. We play well against good sides, and higher resources will never guarantee success, as both Manchester clubs and, to a lesser extent, Chelsea have found out. It was hard to stomach the nonsense that came out of Phil Parkinson's mouth after they failed to beat us at the Abbey. It was the sound of a manager under pressure to win every match to justify the fortune spent by

ambitious owners. I sincerely hope that Nathan Jones is blaming the pitch or supernatural forces for losing at the Abbey. Jones has a great track record at Luton but less so elsewhere. His comments haven't always made him popular either. Results are what counts as our old friends Steve Evans and his gentle assistant Paul Raynor have discovered.

Our record against the Addicks is remarkably even, with very few high scores. On the other hand they spent seven seasons in the Premier League under Steve Curbishley, surely one of the greatest managers of all time. They have had a great many truly great players, including Sam Bartram, and a bit of a record of signing our players. The current squad contains Lloyd, Mannion, Berry and a certain Ahadme who hasn't really covered himself in glory since moving there. Actually we only had him on loan from Ipswich, who sold him to Charlton for something reputedly over a million. We certainly can't compete with that kind of money. Several players have played for both clubs, including Mitov, the Kimble twins, the evergreen Michael Morrison, Phil Chapple, Jordan Cousins and Sullay Kai Kai, good players all. Interestingly, several goalkeepers have played for both clubs. I expect that Harry from Coconuts can name them all.

My first experience of this fixture came in 1973, when we won 2-1. Some visiting hooligans got into the NRE, where they caused mayhem until they met two burly farmers. To the best of my memory, some of the intruders were thrown over a wall. I remember the appearance of Alan Simonsen, a recent European Footballer of the Year, and thinking-how did he do that? He was certainly not inspired by the Abbey. Charlton have had their hard times too and I remember being immeasurably sad at the sight of the Valley completely overgrown and semi derelict. All real football fans would have understood how hard it must have been to bear that. At least they didn't have to play at Millwall. Which reminds me that visiting fans won't want a Neil Harris side to triumph. All the more reason to do it. What we all know about football is that its unpredictable. Some people are talking as if we are already down but all we can do is to win all our remaining games. I know that will be the aim today.

Come on You U's!





Stockport County

“We must accept finite disappointment, but we must never lose infinite hope.”
Martin Luther King Junior

I suppose it's fair to say that we've suffered the odd disappointment this season. There have been moments when our fortunes seemed to be on the turn, but losing at home to a frankly unimpressive Charlton Athletic was a good representation of a season which promised a lot and delivered rather less. Blame poor fortune, ludicrous levels of



injury, poor decisions, dodgy goalkeeping, profligate finishing- or all of them. Frankly, I've never known a season like it and, like many fans, I'm already looking forward to next season. Next season is always the best ever, at least until it starts. But I have faith in Harris and Bonner. I expect that there will be plenty of comings and goings, possibly among the

backroom staff and a team built to our manager's demanding expectations. Who knows whether we will see the return of Paul Mullin? What a difference he, or any other prolific striker, would have made to us this season. But there is no point dwelling on what might have been. We must try to win our remaining games and start next season with a clear vision and a settled team.

Hats off to Orient, a proper club with knowledgeable and passionate fans. I have always loved away games there and a glass or two in the Coach and Horses. I enjoyed seeing John Ruddy saving a penalty there on his debut and discussing tactics with Herve Renard, having eluded some unnecessary safety tape. Orient need a good

result today as they stand on the threshold of the playoffs. They have held their own, having had a creditable and thoroughly enviable season . They are in the half of the table which we hoped to inhabit this season . They have limited resources , which went a bit further as a result of a cup tie with semi-finalists Manchester City. And what a show they put on, complete with a wonder goal. We can aspire to that level and I'm sure that we will be doing. Plans to develop the stadium, commercial enterprises and a media presence in the USA are well under way. Watch this space.

Orient have had their own difficulties, having spent time in the First Division years before being engulfed in financial uncertainty and sliding into non-league in 2017. Unlike us, they were only there for two years, before assuming their rightful place in the Football League. We might consider Burton Albion too, who spent two months without a manager and are poorly supported for a team at our level . There is every chance that they will be in League One again next season. It is remarkable what can be achieved with the right approach-and a bit of luck. We have had many players who also played for Orient. Two managers too. The less said about 3 year project Ling the better, but many of us were sorry to see Tommy Taylor join the O's from us, taking Scott McGleish and Billy Beall with him. It was a situation which reflected badly on our club at the time, but football is a different business now. Jo Mayo, James Brophy, Josh Coulson and Luke Gutteridge also played at Brisbane Road and were highly regarded here. Paul Raynor is perhaps not so fondly thought of but I won't go into that. I wish Orient well but I, and thousands of others, would love to see two successive home wins. Let's start as we mean to go on.

United in Endeavour



Birmingham City

“Things that appear unlikely, impossible or paradoxical from one point of view often make perfectly good sense from another.”

H. Nibley

Congratulations to Birmingham City, worthy champions of League One this season with over 100 points. A great achievement. One would think that a game against newly relegated United would be a formality, given that Birmingham have hardly lost all



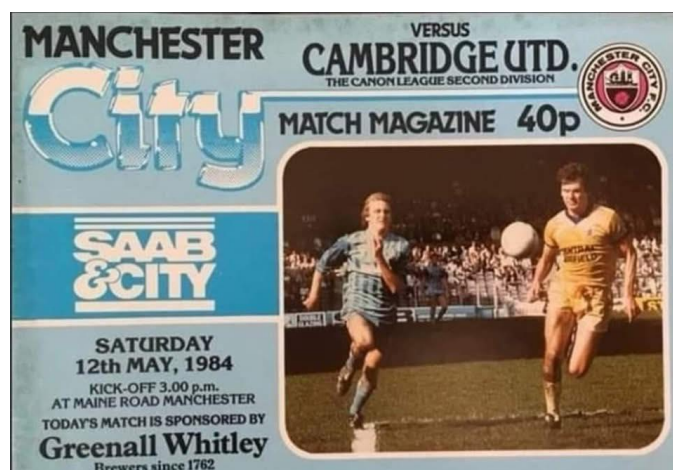
season. Of course one of their defeats was to Shrewsbury, who were the first team to be relegated from League One this season. In a sense neither side has anything to play for but United fans will be looking for a performance which offers us hope for next season. Many of us have been looking ahead to next season for some time now and hoping that Fortune's wheel turns the right way for us next time out. The table doesn't lie. Leaving aside terrible luck with injuries and some poor Refereeing decisions , teams finishing in the bottom four deserve to. We looked, at times, capable of much more but we failed to score at vital times or to win some games that were there for the taking. Today will see the last appearances of a number of our players and the summer ahead will see speculation and enormous interest in the kind of players that the Bonner-Harris partnership will want here. Of course we can't match Birmingham's budget but

I am fairly confident that there will be far greater scrutiny of the character of players lucky enough to join us.

We do have several points of connection with the Blues. Skipper Michael Morrison whose example and leadership has been quite inspiring this season did well there ,as did Gary Rowett. Ian Atkins much less so. I hope we get to see a fully fit Gary Gardner next season. What a difference he might have helped. Gary Monk, who also managed City would have done a lot better with Gardner in midfield but it was not to be .City of course have had to overcome hard times of their own. They slipped from being European contenders, winners of League Cups and perennial members of the top division towards seasons of mediocrity against a background of financial insecurity. Having a huge stadium and a distinguished history is no guarantee of success. Clear and responsible leadership is a vital component of a clubs progress. It is a long time since the days of England's first million pound footballer and the likes of Hatton and Latchford. City fans, who have been very patient, must be hoping for such days to return.

St Andrews of course is a proper and impressive football ground and the Brummie support loud and intimidating at times. Having said that, we've won there twice, including an astonishing 3-0 victory there in 1991 under General John Beck, a man who would not have liked the mentality of some of our players any more than Neil Harris does. We may see a changed team today. If Jack Stevens is still injured, I'd like to see young Briggs in goal, I hear that he's a fine prospect. Possibly this is time to experiment with some of the younger players who will be involved next season. A number of them have shown great promise and deserve their chance. We may of course come up against Wayne Rooney as a manager next season, not that he did too well at Birmingham. He was an odd appointment in many ways. City were doing well before he took over and did rather less well with him at the helm. I have great faith in Our management to bring us straight back up. Let's hope for a great game.

United in Endeavour



Match Reports

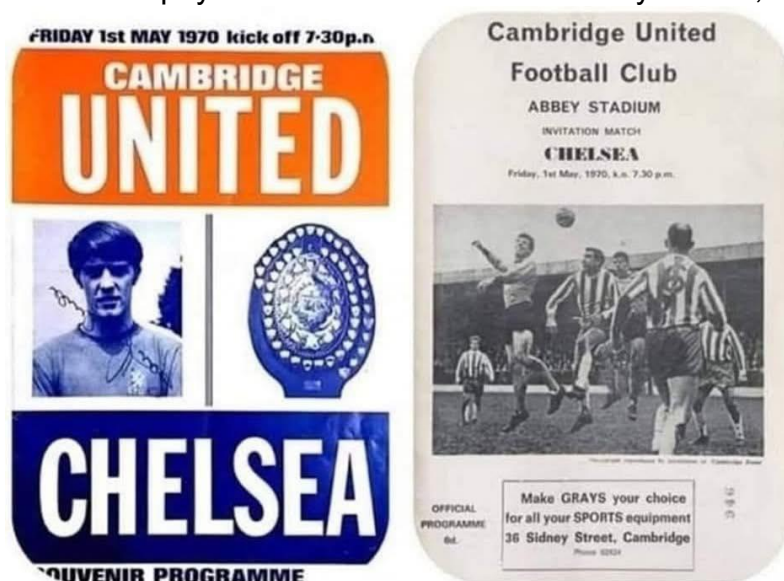
THE STORY OF OUR SEASON

"You've got to get to the stage in life where going for it is more important than winning or losing."

Well, that's ok Mr Ashe, but that doesn't include losing to Peterborough. Neither does it take into account the number of times this season when we've been the better side and drawn or lost because we couldn't score. Even at my ancient age I have seen chances spurned which I am certain that I would have put away. Certainly against Peterborough we had far more chances than we could reasonably have expected against a side which put six past us earlier the season. I hoped for revenge but we

have snatched defeat from the jaws of victory so often this season that I felt that we needed to remove a curse at the very least to return to winning ways. I suspect that some of our team have got too used to losing this season to be able to press home any advantage. That, no doubt, is what Neil Harris meant by needing to change the culture. There will be comings and goings aplenty in the Summer, I am quite sure.

There was no lack of effort in this game. At times we ran Peterborough ragged and our determination was great to see. We have been a bit tippy- tappy and namby-pamby at times this season and easily bullied. Peterborough claimed that we had intimidated them !They seemed out of sorts from the beginning, arguing amongst themselves, whinging to the Referee and falling theatrically, as so many players seem almost to have been coached to do. The Referee , I thought , seemed wise to this approach and not over sympathetic. Indeed, some of their players were quite happy to be over physical. One who wasn't was Tayo Edun, a man whose belief in his own



consummate ability meant swinging a punch at James Gibbons who had had the temerity to beat him to the ball. Gibbons moved off, quite wisely- only to be booked for evading trouble. Edun was also booked, but if the Referee had seen what the entire Habbin had seen, he would ,and should, have been off. You can't raise your arms, let alone throw a punch, even if it only

connected with Gibbons' arm. We don't seem to have had our fair share of decisions this season, or, come to that, any luck at all with injuries. Still no Jobe, Smith, Gardener, Lavery or Thomas. What a difference they might have made. And there must be questions about the attitude of Richards and Longelo ,who both have plenty of ability but no apparent desire to play for us.

As the game went on, we got better and better. To the point where I really fancied us playing towards the NRE and buoyed by the knowledge that Posh weren't much of a threat. Easy chances came and went. Encouraging that we caused so much alarm in the Peterborough defence. Deeply disappointing that Stokes, Ballard-twice- and Malone missed chances. We know what happens if you don't take chances. The other Cambridgeshire team scored from a questionable free kick and the scorer, inevitably, was a man who shouldn't have even been on the pitch. The risible, temperamental and much abused Edun. If only he were as good as he evidently thinks he is .As he scored, I found myself idly wondering how many more points we would have had, had Marko Marosi not been injured after a mere game and a half, in which he looked superb. We have conceded far too many goals this season which another goalkeeper

would have saved. If only Marko had been in goal for us all season. That's all I'm going to say about that.

Bennett was unlucky with a header, Nlundulu fluffed his lines just a yard in front of goal and all our lively pressure amounted to nothing in the end. In Habbin North we were all baffled by our failure to win, given the performance. In particular I thought that Cousins, Malone, Loft and Brophy played really well but the absence of a predator up front has cost us dearly. I hear that Parkinson has fallen out with Paul Mullin. If only his wife had let him stay with us. How different things would have been.

Edun was eventually sent off but it was scant consolation. It was far too late. Ferguson was naturally critical of the Referee and proud of his team, failing to give United any credit. I suppose that would have defied convention and his own unique character traits. The Boro fans were more honest. The ones I spoke to after the game all said that we deserved to win but that is another theme of a season of torment and disappointment.

The crowd applauded a fine effort and I was pleased to hear widespread condemnation of homophobic chants and some fairly immature attempts of a handful of fans to spark trouble. Real fans have no time for those who dream of the Neanderthal intimidation rightly left behind in the seventies. Real fans don't hate each other. They know that the chief asset of fans of all clubs is loyalty and that stubborn belief that next year will be our season. We've had plenty of worse seasons than this and next year we'll be millionaires. Won't we?



NORTHAMPTON

"You have to give 100% in the first half of the game. If that isn't enough, in the second half, you have to give what's left."

Yogi Berra

In truth, as I approached the Abbey yesterday, I wasn't expecting nonstop entertainment. I wasn't even expecting victory. I certainly wasn't expecting another Brophy goal, a Ryan Loft masterclass -or too much change from previous games, where we have often flattered to deceive without being able to minister the Coup de Grace. The first half offered very little excitement, other than a very strong wind which promised a slightly easier second half and another defensive howler which made Northampton look a little better than they actually were. To be fair, they were

industrious, determined and a bit over physical, given the fact that they are no longer in danger. Their number 8 was particularly spiteful I thought and I was a little surprised that our enthusiastic and energetic Referee didn't seem to want to take any names. On Habbin North we discussed how many more points we might have had if Marko Marosi had remained fit. The consensus was between six and eight. How many others might we have had if we'd had better finishers at the club? Reading that Paul Mullin was no longer required at Wrexham and hadn't featured for ten games added a little energy to the conversation, which occupied us rather more than the football. We seemed likely at that point to suffer another unremarkable, uncontested home defeat. We were resigned, apart from two NRE rejects who were determined to force us all



into mindless chants against the Northampton Goalie. The power of strong drink should never be underestimated should it? Meanwhile we decided that the strong wind meant that we should bring on Bennett to fire in crosses and Loft to make use of them, and of course that is exactly what happened.

Neil Harris must have had a bit of a word at half time because suddenly we were aggressive, purposeful and determined .Liam Bennett

seemed determined to prove a point and broke forward repeatedly. Suddenly we looked like the home side and the crescendo of booing heard at half time was soon forgotten. A season of disappointment has sometimes spilled over into that kind of reaction. Not surprising , given our astonishing home gates this season. Our away support has been particularly wonderful, considering how little hope our fans have travelled with. Anyway, Northampton achieved very little in the second half and looked increasingly like a very poor side, as they did during the away fixture. When Brophy scored direct from a corner in the 52nd minute, no one was particularly surprised. Northampton were rattled. They went to a back five and hooked their big and troublesome number nine. Surely you don't defend a point when there is nearly half an hour to go? But they did. Players started to fall down, apparently injured. Goal kicks and throws seemed to take a long time. Burge may well have been a little embarrassed by the goal he conceded. Nolan claimed that two Cambridge players had been pulling him. Mind you he also said that Loft should have been sent off for elbowing the acutely sensitive Pinnock who had fallen inexplicably to the turf during the first half. Never a good idea in front of the inventively satirical Habbin. To me the goal looked like a very good corner borne along by the wind and hopelessly misjudged by Burge, whose tantrums suggested that really he knew whose fault it was.



Sadly our rousing finish didn't amount to much. A winning goal would probably have sent us all home feeling happy but we didn't really expect it. This has been a real if only, almost, nearly season. One in which we have seemed to be almost cheated by fate, injury and wavering confidence. Poor seasons often look like that, although I don't remember one quite like this . When we've gone down before it has always been obvious that the team or the manager or both weren't very good, but this time we've actually looked quite capable some of the time. We have shot ourselves in the foot in some games or simply not taken the chances on offer. You can't be a Cambridge fan and expect glory every season. We accept that the Wheel of Fortune turns and we will love our club whatever.

The most important part of the afternoon, surely, was the minute's applause for Simon Dobbin. All true fans have the same values and it was wonderful to hear the Shoe Army join in the applause. Without the fans there would be no point. The fans are the clubs they support. Simon will never be forgotten. What brings us together is what matters- as the seasons turn and bring us what they will.



ANOTHER GAME THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

"I've always believed that it is important to show a new look periodically .
Predictability can lead to failure."

T.B.Pickens

For a time yesterday, I thought the most predictable disappointment was witnessing the usual weekend chaos on Greater Anglia. Relying as I do on the rail service between Downham Market and Cambridge North, watching games at the Abbey Stadium this season represents an exercise in optimism varying on the heroic. At least once you get to Cambridge North you can rely on a friendly welcome at Costa and from those in a Greater Anglia uniform. At times my brother and I have been offered cake, or grapes, at the help desk and heart felt apologies when the service has dropped below an acceptable standard. It has not always been like that at the stadium this season , despite any number of disappointments. We are a resilient lot. We talk



about injuries, unlucky bounces and poor decisions but mostly about our failure to score. I don't know how many games we might have won if we had taken our chances. Certainly we wouldn't be in the bottom four if we'd earned the points we should have done. Relegation seasons are like that. If anything can go against you , it will. Yesterday 14 members of the first team squad were unavailable. In the cases of Richards and Nlundulu , physical well-being had little to do with it. We have changed goalkeepers relentlessly and the best was seriously injured after a mere game and a half. Ah well.

We started quite well against a Charlton team which didn't particularly impress me. Nothing

happened until Tyreece Campbell advanced past Gibbons and fired a low shot past Jack Stevens. Some overcritical Habbinites- surely a contradiction? claimed that Stevens was to blame. He wasn't. Indeed he had a really good game and has made a very impressive come back from some shocking errors this season and last. Oxford fans would agree, there is a decent keeper in there. We came back against Northampton when we switched ends. Attacking the NRE with the wind behind us generally gives us a bit of momentum. Not many goals but certainly some momentum. The first half had narrow misses at both ends but the most notable incident involved the ostentatiously limping Tyreese Cambell pushing over James Gibbons, having raised both arms. Did he push him in the face? Not sure it matters. It was a petulant, uncontrolled and violent act. For me a clear red but



another inconsistent Ref gave yellow instead. Those of us close to the incident couldn't believe that he hadn't been dismissed- something which might well have altered the outcome. Amazingly, Campbell might well have received a second booking later on, after another ill-advised and late tackle. Charlton seemed to get away with some rough house tactics, 5 yellow cards notwithstanding. They played in the time honoured style of their boss, falling down, arms flaying and trying to get our players booked. Horrible.

Significantly, Athletic were time wasting throughout the second half. What we have, we hold seemed to be their philosophy. Never wise and often unsuccessful. Ballard might have scored twice. Danny Andrew fired over and Kell Watts had a header diverted, but a feeling grew that we were not going to score. Burton were three up and the win we needed, and not for the first time, was there for the taking and yet not taken. There was no lack of effort, just a lack of quality. The substitutions, if anything, made matters worse. Kai Kai and Kachunga seemed almost languid. Njoku did nothing but jump ineffectually at giant keeper Mannion. Despite the crippling injury list, there was no sign of any youngsters. Well, there's nothing to lose now. The Ref missed the most obvious handball you'll ever see when Morrison slapped the ball across the area. The entire Habbini heard the sound. It was so ludicrous that we were reduced to laughter. He got it wrong too when he booked an unusually innocent Loft because a handful of cry baby Athletic defenders complained and put pressure on him. The Ref should have booked them all. I certainly don't blame the Ref for our defeat but he got a lot of simple decisions, including throw ins and corners, wrong. He was not particularly mobile and was reduced to making guesses about incidents which occurred too far away from him. His Assistants didn't help. Stokes and Stevenson were excellent, as were Morrison and Bennett. The others tried hard but it wasn't enough. The antics of Nathan Jones at the end showed how relieved he was to get the points. He is a hard man to like and I know some Charlton fans think the same. If he has success with a team which plays in red, it will be a novelty.

Jones concluded that, "This is a really, really tough place to come." Next season, after several comings and goings, I hope that will be the case. I look forward to looking forward to coming to games once more. And to a promotion chase marked by entertaining football and goals. Oh, and I've love the trains to run on time. Surely that's not too much to ask?



A TOUCH OF DEJA VU

Home vs Orient- A little touch of Déjà vu

Before the game Stephens On Tour and associates debated the points we might have had, should have had and deserved to have. If only we had kept Lavery fit, been able to see a team with Smith, Thomas and Gardener in it and not seen the best goalie we've seen here in ages seriously injured after a game and a half. You couldn't make up a season like this one. Even loan players got injured. 14 squad players have been injured at one time or another. Fate has had it in for us and yet we've spurned points that were there for the taking, consistently. 19 games so far lost by the odd goal. Apart from away at Peterborough we were never that bad. Had we been, Monk would have gone earlier. Losing at home to an awful Bristol Rovers side should have been the time. Hindsight is a wonderful thing. Anyway, we were realistic about the game, which turned out to be a good one. Orient looked like a team heading for the playoffs and realistically, barring a miracle we were doomed. Burton and Brizzle Rovers aren't going to lose all their games and Reading won't disappear. League two it is with a management team we can trust and who are far more committed to the club than Monk was. New faces aplenty too I am sure.

For 15 minutes or so, Orient outplayed us. Assured in midfield they stroked the ball about very confidently. Only a matter of time before they scored. Except we did. Kai Kai put in a great cross and Loft headed it straight to Stokes who poked it into the net. Cue rejoicing and delight on Habbin North. The Orient fans went quiet and stayed that way for some time. It is



symptomatic that Stokes is currently our top scorer with 7 goals. Many have him as their player of the season but for me it has to be Michael Morrison; composed, classy and commitment personified. If all our players had given as much as he had, we might well have been safe. Brophy was battered by his old mates who know his quality. He has been excellent all season however ordinary we have been. He is always capable of something extraordinary. I really hope that he will keep up his new scoring habit next season. His goal at Huddersfield was a real pearler.

The first Orient goal, their equaliser was a defensive disaster and entirely preventable. I am certain that Harris will have told the guilty parties what he thought. He won't tolerate laxity. How we have needed that attitude this season. Lavery when he came on showed what we have missed for most of the season. A full season from him might well have given us enough goals. We certainly weren't going to get them from Taylor Richards who plainly doesn't care anymore about us than he did about QPR. A real Lyle Taylor type, determined to waste his talent-and our time. Fans will forgive anything except a lack of effort won't they?

The second Orient goal was class. Some of those around me blamed Stevens but that's just nonsense. It was the kind of goal scored by very good teams and very good players. In the end Orient deserved to win. It wasn't down to our missed chances or another Referee who seemed to dislike us as much as they did in the Beck era. It was



a good and entertaining game. We battled well and Loft surely has won over some of the snipers who seem to enjoy undermining our players. Supporters? I don't think so. Credit to Jack Stevens too. His confidence was very low earlier in the season and a goalkeeper needs confidence more than players in other positions. Goodness knows many of our players have made more

mistakes. Just when we really needed Jack , he rose to the occasion and played really well. It was great to see him up for a corner at the end. He cares and it shows.

As we shuffled along Elfleda Road looking forward to Summer, we reflected that the table doesn't lie. Whatever happens we will be back next season and this time we'll have the season we should have had this time.

United In Endeavour

Andrew Stephen

BIRMINGHAM

Glad That's Over. Match Report vs Birmingham City

"The secret to life is to have more beginnings than endings."

Oddly enough matchday began with a walk from Cambridge North across Stourbridge Common in the company of an Ely U. We dissected the season , chose players for next year, discussed the merits of Garry Monk and a squad decimated by injury. We assessed our many goalkeepers, the number of defeats by a single goal and the chances we'd missed. We listed the games we should have won and the number of decisions which went against us . He went of to Hospitality and I continued my disconnected thoughts, wondering how we would fare against a record breaking Birmingham team and how we didn't win home and away against moneybags Wrexham. We have not been a bad side and yet the season had relegation written all over it from the moment we lost at home to Bristol Rovers, who were a truly awful side. If you don't take your chances....

At the CFU cabin I met fashion icon and merch designer Terry Wilby and CFU Chair and Away Travel miracle worker, Gina. They were going to present James Brophy with the player of the season award. The wise men and women on Habbin North have been

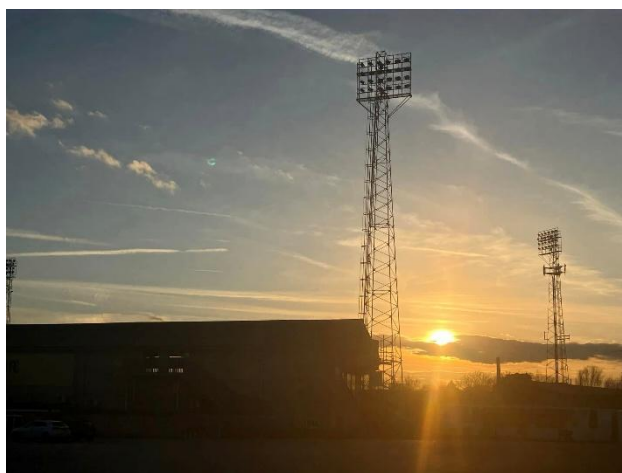
flummoxed by the criticism of Brophy over the season. He has obvious class, cares about the cause and thinks quickly. He has also scored some excellent goals, an area of his game which was lacking a bit perhaps. Having said that, many of our forwards have been reluctant to shoot this season which is partly why we didn't win the games we should have done. There were meant to be 1036 fans from Birmingham but they made very little noise during the game. Quite a surprise really. A steward told me that



many of them were still in town drinking. Well, a number of ours stayed in the Supporters' Club for much of the game- although their reasons might have been different. For twenty minutes or so we played really well and made Birmingham look pretty ordinary. No mean feat. Then they scored. By mistake. An intended cross floated over Bishop into the goal. The scorer looked embarrassed. It was a complete fluke but they are Champions and luckless Cambridge were relegated. This have been a season where everything that could go wrong-did. We could have scored in the first minute and had a number of chances. Allsop was impressive in the visitors' goal but other than their strange goal, Blues were never a threat. They looked as if they were playing a practice match with their minds on their Summer holidays. Maybe we made them look that way.

The second half continued in the same way. A number of Birmingham players collapsed in apparent agony which was embarrassing frankly, until Myung Lee got Kachunga a second yellow with an Oscar winning performance in writhing. Referee Breakspear, who always seemed to have it in for us, generally sends someone off. He'd booked Kachunga in the first half for very little and seemed to favour the bigger club. He certainly lacked consistency and seemed happy for Blues players to kick the ball away and for Allsop to waste time consistently. I should have said that Shane Lavery had scored a quite brilliant equalise before half time. What a difference he would have made to our chances of survival, had he not been injured so much of the time. Indeed, he didn't reappear in the second half and probably is still not fully fit, like Stokes and a dozen others.

The game seemed to be heading towards a draw, even after we went down to ten men, until a cross hit Kell Watts on the backside and flew past Bishop. We felt that there were suggestions of fouls on Watts and Bishop but Mr Breakspear was never going to spoil the City party. Still their fans didn't sing. Habbin North remained quiet and accepting of a fate we have become used to. In some ways we were relieved to hear the full time whistle with the realisation



that a dismal season was over. Have I known worse? You bet. Dropping out of the league, the quality of football under messrs Ryan and Shellitoe , losing 5-0 to Histon and struggling to beat teams like Nuneaton or Tamworth were infinitely worse. Gates have been up this season. The away support has been incredible. We know that things are happening at the club and that Bonner and Harris will get rid of players with poor attitudes and bring in replacements with decent values. I vividly remember Mark Bonner at a CFU AGM talking about his values and admiring his principles and honesty.

As I walked back to Cambridge North I fell into step with another Habbinite. We assessed the season, used the benefit of hindsight and decided which players will be at the Abbey next season. We are always at our most optimistic before a new season. Next season will be wonderful won't it and however disappointed we're feeling, we'll be back for it, won't we?



and finally....

"Reflection is the lamp of the heart . If it departs, the heart will have no light."
Alawi

I had thought that the final Amber News of the season would be done by now but various other things have needed my attention and, in some ways, I have been glad of the time for further reflection, not just on the season but also what it is about football which is so compelling and how it can bring us closer together and bring out the best in us.

Yesterday I completed the North Norfolk Mighty Hike for Macmillan. 14.5 miles in blazing heat and contending with a strong and surprisingly cold wind. At 72 years old, I am pleased to still be able to do it. Many cancer sufferers die young and many of the Hike participants were very young. All had a tale to tell about someone special to them

who had been badly affected by the terrible and indiscriminating disease . We tend to be critical of our young people and assume that many are too busy on their computers and mobile phones to care about the community. Plainly that stereotype is not true. I found myself, or rather reminded myself, that the vast majority of people are essentially kind. Many make huge efforts on behalf of vulnerable people and any society worth its name depends on that.

Similarly, last week we saw many reminders of the appalling disaster of the fire at Bradford City. At the time many rival fans took great risks to try to help those fans who



were in danger from the flames. 56 people went to a game that day and never returned home. Football fans everywhere remember it and care deeply because, even though we are all rivals, we understand that we all love the game and instinctively understand how people feel about their clubs and the sport they love . Also, we lost Tom Youngs a few days ago. He was in his forties and succumbed to the MS he'd fought so bravely for years. He is remembered as a very good player and a thoroughly nice man. Life can be brutal and thoroughly unfair. As we lick our wounds ,following our first relegation in twenty years, we must remember always to have a sense of perspective. No one wins all the time. Neither should they. Competition-fair competition- is an essential

component of any sport . Relegation itself isn't tragic. The deaths I have mentioned were . Football is only a game, however much we love our clubs. And we do.

Last week I heard from my friend and Abbey legend, Paul Wanless. These days he runs his father's business, which makes doors and windows. I'm sure that he is just as competitive in the business world as he was as a player-certainly with his quotes! Anyway, he is looking to expand the business into other areas, Cambridge in particular. The company only supplies, they don't fit, but if you know any builders or window fitters who would like products supplied by one of our all-time favourite players, let me know.



Finally, some of you will know that I am part way through writing a book about United and the season just past. Why? You may well ask. My intention is to show exactly why it is that Cambridge United enjoys such fanatical and loyal support. Why do we keep going year after year, decade after decade? We know that we are unlikely to be in the Champions League or field teams full of famous internationals but we have had our moments. I remember Elton John crying when he saw Watford play in an FA Cup Final at Wembley-a sight he thought he would never see. They only did it because they lured George Reilly from us, but no matter. It meant as much to us to see United in the first ever Wembley Play Off Final against Chesterfield. The stadium where we'd watched cup finals on TV,

where England won the World Cup and Manchester United-who were good then-won the European Cup-and we were there in our thousands making a huge din, a sound I've got used to over the years.

Of course we've been to Wembley a few times since, most notably against Gateshead to reclaim our rightful place in the Football League. I will admit to having the ghost of a tear in my eye on that occasion. Of course there was the little matter of beating the world's wealthiest club on their own ground, St James' Park ,in the FA Cup, the kind of miracle that all fans have to be able to dream of. I'm hoping that the proposed Football Governance Bill will make the game fairer, more responsible and distribute its vast wealth more fairly. Interestingly, Newcastle have announced that they are going to change their badge. Might I suggest that they consult their fans and offer real choice? Manchester United and Tottenham know how difficult life becomes when the fanbase have no faith in the owners. The club is the fans after all. Anyway, I would love to hear why you are a Cambridge fan, what your favourite memories are and how you got to be a fan in the first place.

I will use elements of the Amber News to describe the season and will include sections on Fans' Groups and on the Foundation. They are both important elements of what makes Cambridge United such a special club. The way the club sees itself as part of the community it's based in is one of the things which makes me proudest of it. The Foundation has developed and expanded no end since the Community Trust began and many, many people, feel the benefit. CFU were the first organised fans' group. I will consider why it was formed and what it became. In its time it was an important shareholder and had a place on the board, the Fans' Elected Director. Of course the Shadow Board continues to evolve and the aim must be to give it credibility with the club and fans alike, so that it is seen to give the fans a real voice and to provide invaluable feedback to the club. In future I think fans need to see who Shadow Board members represent and the manner in which they were elected to represent those people. My view is that CFU should act as an umbrella group for the other fans' groups to improve coherence and accountability- but we will see how things develop.

The book will be called, "The season that nearly was." If you have views on anything I've said above, let me know. If you'd like to tell your story about how you became a Cambridge fan, your highs and lows, and why you think Cambridge United is a unique club, please let me have your contribution by June 12th at the email address below.

The Amber News will re appear just before the new season. Enjoy the Summer,

Andrew

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

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

United in Endeavour

