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Tuesday 22nd August 2023  
Pitching In Northern Premier League - Midlands



## CLUB HONOURS

**United Counties League Premier Division South**  
Winners 2023

**Midland Alliance League Cup**  
Winners 2010

**Midland Combination Premier Division**  
Champions 2007  
Runners-up 1996, 2002, 2005, 2006

**Midland Combination Challenge Cup**  
Finalists 1999  
Winners 2002, 2005

**Coventry Evening Telegraph Cup**  
Winners 1966, 2005, 2006

**Coventry Charity Cup**  
Winners 2007

**BCFA Midweek Floodlit Cup**  
Winners 2007

**Tony Allden Cup**  
Winners 2007

**FA Vase**  
Quarter Finalists 2008

## OTHER HONOURS

**United Counties League Programme of the Year**  
Winners 2023

**Midland Alliance Programme of the Year**  
Winners 2008  
Runners-up 2009

**Midland Combination Programme of the Year**  
Runners-up 2005  
Winners 2006, 2007

**Midland Combination Hospitality Award**  
Winners 2006 (Division 3)  
Winners 2007 (Division 2)



## CLUB OFFICIALS

Chairman: Daniel Cahill  
Vice-Chairman: Joseph Fletcher  
Finance Officer: Neil Buswell  
Club Secretary: Sharon Taylor  
Matchday Secretary: Sharon Taylor  
Youth Secretary: Sharon Taylor  
Pitch Allocator: Dave Bull  
Welfare Officer: Joanne Bull  
Ticket Manager: Mandy Seddon  
Programme Editor: Chris Nee

### FIRST TEAM STAFF

Joint Manager: Shaun Thomas  
Joint Manager: John Woodward  
First Team Coach: Nigel Starkey  
First Team Coach: Tom Cross  
First Team Coach: Dan Gibson  
Goalkeeping Coach: Damian Morgan  
Goalkeeping Coach: Michael Taylor  
First Team Physio: Kirk Holland  
Kit Manager: Paul Seddon  
Chief Scout: Jim McClean

### GROUNDS TEAM

Paul Wright, Martin Sutton

### MEDIA TEAM

Chris Nee  
Liam Cook

### PHOTOGRAPHY

Marcus Robinson  
Stuart Guest

### MATCHDAY HOSPITALITY

Leanne Talbot & Donna Crouch

### MATCHDAY VOLUNTEERS

Martin Sutton, Dave Bull, Alan Townsend

### Coventry Sphinx Football Club

Sphinx Industrial Supplies Arena, Sphinx Drive, Coventry, CV3 1WA  
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Coventry Sphinx Football Club is a non-for-profit organisation



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## Upcoming fixtures

AWAY



### Spalding United v Coventry Sphinx

Pitching In Northern Premier League - Midlands  
Saturday 26th August 2023 | 3.00pm  
Sir Halley Stewart Field  
Winfrey Avenue, Spalding, Lincolnshire, PE11 1DA

HOME



### Coventry Sphinx v Bedworth United

Pitching In Northern Premier League - Midlands  
Monday 28th August 2023 | 3.00pm  
Sphinx Industrial Supplies Arena  
Sphinx Drive

AWAY



### Sutton Coldfield Town v Coventry Sphinx

Pitching In Northern Premier League - Midlands  
Saturday 2nd September 2023 | 3.00pm  
Central Ground  
Coles Lane, Sutton Coldfield, B72 1NL

AWAY



### Quorn v Coventry Sphinx

Isuzu FA Trophy First Round Qualifying  
Saturday 9th September 2023 | 3.00pm  
Farley Way  
Farley Way, Quorn, LE12 8RB

HOME



### Coventry Sphinx v AFC Rushden & Diamonds

Pitching In Northern Premier League - Midlands  
Saturday 16th September 2023 | 3.00pm  
Sphinx Industrial Supplies Arena  
Sphinx Drive



CoventrySphinx



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For almost all the time I've supported Coventry Sphinx, draws have been a rarity. We've been bad and we've been good but we have, generally, dealt in threes and zeroes.

Starting our season with two draws in the Pitching In Northern Premier League Midlands shows the step up we made by getting promoted from the United Counties League.

The quality of opposition has improved, obviously, and the tempo has gone up with it. We have plenty of work to do to adjust. There is a long season ahead.

But a return of two points after two games also demonstrates some causes for optimism. Right out of the gate, Sphinx scored first in both games and found a way through two sturdy teams to do so.

More broadly, we've stayed in both matches for ninety-plus minutes, first against a fellow promoted side and then against a team now established at Step Four.

It's a solid base. But, while the fixtures ahead of us get no easier, we're approaching the time to dig out a win. It will happen and, when it does, it'll be our first at this level of football; more history to make.

It will also be the 64th league win under John Woodward and Shaun Thomas, the joint managers who've done such a brilliant job here over the last few years.

The draw at Gresley Rovers was their hundredth league game in charge at Sphinx. 63 have been won, 15 drawn and 22 lost. That's more than two points per game, a remarkable achievement given the budgets involved and the general upheaval in society that's coincided with their time at the club.

The first draw added to the tally in 2023/24 was here ten days ago. Quorn were the visitors and Callum Whiteside headed in our first eighth tier goal in a 1-1 draw.

A week ago we visited Gresley Rovers and came away with the same result but I thought the boys stepped up a level just a few days after the first game.

The first half performance at Gresley was very encouraging from a Sphinx point of view. We dominated the ball, dictated the play and created the chances. It was excellent.

We scored, too. Dylan Parker's assist and Matty Shipman's finish were superb and the team were good value for the lead they held at half time. Those 45 minutes should boost their confidence no end.

The second half was satisfying too. Although Gresley equalised, the way Sphinx stood up physically and tactically was good to see. I thought about it for hours in the car park after the game.

We now face another big challenge: three tough matches in seven days. Before Spalding United away and Bedworth United here, tonight's game against Sporting Khalsa takes centre stage.

We're delighted to welcome the supporters, players, management and officials of Sporting Khalsa back to the Sphinx Industrial Supplies Arena for the first time in a while. I'm sure it'll be a fun, feisty match.

I'm proud of the way the Sphinx have performed so far. They've showed quality and guts, and collected the rewards, albeit modest, their efforts have deserved. We're at the start of a big week. I believe our first Step Four win is lurking in there somewhere. Come on you blue boys!

**Chris Nee**  
Programme Editor



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# OUR HISTORY

The history of Coventry Sphinx began in 1946. Armstrong Whitworth Aircraft FC had been highly successful in the city before and during the Second World War and changed their name to Sphinx FC.

AWA's legacy was replicated by the new club. Sphinx won a number of league and cup competitions throughout the 1950s and 1960s before playing a major role in the formation of the Coventry Alliance and continuing to win trophies in the following decades.

Coventry underwent significant socioeconomic change in the 1990s. The recession led to the closure of factories in the city and surrounding areas, which in turn led to the dissolution of many of Coventry's football clubs. Sphinx needed a new challenge and joined the Midland Combination Football League in 1993.

In our first season in the Midland Combination we were promoted from Division 2 and reached the semi-finals of the Birmingham Sunday Vase. A second consecutive promotion followed thanks to a second-placed finish in Division 1 the next season.

With promotion to the top division of the Midland Combination secured it was decided that the club should be linked more closely to our city. We became Coventry Sphinx and the first match under our new name was against a Coventry City XI at our home ground.

Throughout its history, our club has been served by countless loyal and hard-working local people who've contributed enormously to Coventry Sphinx on and off the field. Through their dedication we

have achieved some unbeatable highs. There have also been times of great tragedy.

In November 2001, Sphinx manager Willie Knibbs was killed in a car accident on the way home from a cup match at Meir KA. Willie was a former Sphinx player in his second spell as manager. His death was a terrible loss to our club and to local football in Coventry.

After a painful season, Sphinx went on to win the Midland Combination Challenge Cup and it was renamed the Willie Knibbs Cup as a mark of respect. Our main stand is also named in Willie's honour.

Sphinx became one of the leading teams in the Midland Combination Premier League, finishing as runners-up in our first season and again in both 2005 and 2006. We reached the final of the Endsleigh Challenge Cup on three occasions, losing to Alveston at Villa Park in 1999 but beating Coventry Marconi in 2003 and Feckenham in 2005.

We also won the Coventry Evening Telegraph Cup in successive seasons, making Sphinx the last winners of the competition at Highfield Road and the first at the Ricoh Arena.

Although first team success is a driving force, the heartbeat of our club is the thriving junior section. Formed in 1997, it started with just three teams and has grown ever since. There are now hundreds of players representing Coventry Sphinx and we were the first club in Coventry to achieve the FA Charter.

Our youth team started competing in the Midland Floodlit Youth League in 2003 and one of the

biggest successes to date came in the 2014/15 season, when they won the double after suffering only one league defeat and beating Stourbridge 3-0 in the Birmingham County FA Midweek Floodlit Youth Cup.

Under manager Paul Charnley, Coventry Sphinx's men's first team completed a remarkable treble achievement in May 2007.

In addition to finally becoming champions of the Midland Football Combination – achieving promotion to the Midland Football Alliance in the process – Sphinx won the Coventry Charity Cup and the BCFA Midland Floodlit Cup.

The 2007/08 season saw Sphinx enjoy our best ever run in the FA Vase, reaching the quarter-final for the very first time and losing controversially to Kirkham & Wesham, the eventual Wembley winners, in a replay at Sphinx Drive.

We made a run to the semi-finals of the League Cup in the same season and went on to win the Midland Alliance Polymac League Cup by beating Westfields in the final in 2009/10.

In 2014/15 the club was honoured to become a founder member of the Midland Football League Premier Division. After a top ten finish under Stuart Dutton, Lee Knibbs took over as manager in the autumn of 2017.

Lee is the son of Willie Knibbs and returned to the club after an earlier spell as assistant manager to Danny McSheffrey.

He guided Sphinx to some of our most memorable results of the decade before deciding to step aside in November 2019.

Knibbs was succeeded by his assistants, John Woodward and Shaun Thomas, who became the club's joint managers and ended the truncated 2019/20 season on a long unbeaten run, the foundation of Sphinx's greatest achievement to come.

Sphinx made a sideways move as part of FA restructuring ahead of the 2021/22 season, competing in a newly formed Premier Division South in the United Counties League.

In our first season we finished in fourth place, losing only twice in the second half of the season, and enjoyed a long run in the FA Vase, narrowly missing out on another quarter-final.

The following season saw Sphinx lose on penalties again in the same round of the FA Vase but 2022/23 was the best season in our history.

In the space of one week in April, our club acquired the freehold to the Sphinx Drive ground for the very first time and secured the United Counties League Premier Division South title with a 7-0 win against Eynesbury Rovers.

Sphinx won all of the last eleven league matches to close a big gap at the top and become champions. We scored 106 goals and ended the season three points clear of runners-up Rugby Town to confirm promotion to the Northern Premier League Midlands Division. 2023/24 is our first ever season at Step 4.

Football never stands still. Local football in Coventry has declined over the years, so to be playing at our highest ever level after more than seventy years is an achievement of which the players, officials and supporters of our club can be proud.

The structure in place at senior, youth and junior levels for both men and women promises a bright future for Coventry Sphinx as we work towards the progress Willie Knibbs' memory deserves.



STUART GUEST

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# MARCH OF THE GUESTIES

On Sunday 17th September, our vice-captain Louis Guest and his dad, Stuart, will be walking from Wembley Stadium to Wycombe Wanderers FC in order to raise money for Prostate Cancer UK. They're participating in **Jeff Stelling's Football March 2023**, which aims to raise money to fund better tests and treatments to save and improve the lives of men affected by prostate cancer.

stadium to raise money for a genuinely excellent cause that we can all get behind.

If you are in a position to make a donation, you can do so at [justgiving.com/fundraising/stuart-guest2](https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/stuart-guest2)

Prostate cancer has impacted countless lives in non-league football and Prostate Cancer UK is a charity that's close to Stuart's heart. The Guesties have our full support as they walk a marathon from the national














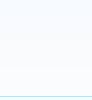



















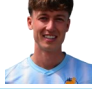




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# MEET THE SQUAD

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	<b>Harvey Billing</b>	Former Sphinx youth team captain who returned to the club after spells with Stratford Town and Easington Sports.			<b>Sam Jackson</b>	Winger who made a welcome return to Sphinx in early 2023 and made an instant impact wide on the right.	Sponsored by <b>JOHN MELLOR</b>
	<b>James Bryson</b>	Strong and steady central defender with a knack for a goal. A crucial part of the title-winning Sphinx team in 2022/23.	Sponsored by <b>MANDY SEDDON</b>		<b>Max Johnson</b>	Classy former Bedworth United midfielder who debuted for Sphinx in October 2022 and went on to claim a league winner's medal.	
	<b>Kyle Carey</b>	Incisive and creative attacker who returned to Sphinx in March 2023 to help secure the league title.	Sponsored by <b>STUART GUEST</b>		<b>Callum Martin</b>	Pacy former Coventry City junior full back who loves a tackle and causes opponents problems in the attacking third.	
	<b>Antonio Cristofaro</b>	Skilful former Walsall youth midfielder with dribbling ability, sharp creative instincts and an eye for goal.			<b>Dylan Parker</b>	Dangerous forward player who signed for Sphinx in November 2022 and has been a consistent scorer ever since.	Sponsored by <b>DANNIE CAHILL</b>
	<b>Jack Downes</b>	Versatile, battling midfielder with a tremendous engine. Outstanding since returning to Sphinx Drive and a league winner in 2022/23.			<b>Dawid Peplinski</b>	Future Pro Academy scholar and former Sphinx youth central defender who joined the first team ranks after playing Step 5 football in 2022/23.	
	<b>Luke Downes</b>	Creative midfield player who returned to Sphinx in 2021 after countless impressive performances here as a youngster.			<b>Leigh Phillips</b>	Experienced wide player who returned to Sphinx ahead of 2023/24 after a successful career in armed forces football.	
	<b>Jamie Draper</b>	Defender who emerged from the Sphinx youth team and has become a regular starter in our best ever team.			<b>Joe Pursey</b>	Sturdy defender who came in late in 2022/23 and had an instant impact in Sphinx's title quest.	Sponsored by <b>LENA MELLOR</b>
	<b>Sam Ellis</b>	Entertaining attacking midfielder who joined Sphinx after spells with Sutton Coldfield Town and Hinckley in 2022/23.			<b>Kurtis Selley-Haywood</b>	A key member of the coaching set-up at Sphinx and a goalkeeper with an exceptional record when called upon.	<b>Sponsorship available</b>
	<b>Keelan Fallows</b>	Talented goalkeeper who joined from Tamworth at the start of Sphinx's first season in the eighth tier of English football.			<b>Matthew Shipman</b>	Physical and mobile striker who led the line in the UCL Premier Division South title season after signing from Long Buckby in 2021/22.	Sponsored by <b>BF ESSENTIALS 07927 649288</b>
	<b>Louis Guest</b>	A former Sphinx junior and now a leader in our squad, Guesty is a long-serving central defender and the club's vice captain.			<b>Callum Whiteside</b>	Versatile defensive player who joined Sphinx at the start of 2022/23 and quickly became a reliable regular for John Woodward and Shaun Thomas.	
	<b>Jordan Hayward</b>	Former Long Buckby wide player who scored on his debut in August 2022 and went on to win the UCL Premier Division South in his first season.	Sponsored by <b>IAN AND PAULINE MCINTOSH</b>		<b>Callum Woodward</b>	Long-serving legendary club captain, a battling mainstay in the Sphinx midfield and a vital source of goals and creativity.	



# FIRST TEAM MANAGEMENT

John Woodward	Joint Manager	Sponsorship available
Shaun Thomas	Joint Manager	Sponsorship available
Nigel Starkey	First Team Coach	Sponsorship available
Tom Cross	First Team Coach	Sponsorship available
Dan Gibson	First Team Coach	Sponsorship available
Michael Taylor	Goalkeeping Coach	Sponsorship available
Damian Morgan	Goalkeeping Coach	Sponsorship available
Jim McClean	Chief Scout	Sponsorship available
Kirk Holland	First Team Physio	Sponsorship available
Paul Seddon	Kit Manager	Sponsored by CEFOVID UGANDA
Sharon Taylor	Club Secretary	
Martin Sutton	Matchday Volunteer	
Liam Cook	Match Commentator	
Chris Nee	Programme Editor	



To our own Lionesses. The players, coaches, volunteers, managers, supporters, mums, grans, aunties, sisters and daughters who help to make Coventry Sphinx the club it is.  
**Thank you.**



## COVENTRY SPHINX 1 QUORN 1

**Pitching In NPL**  
**Division One Midlands**  
Saturday 12th August 2023

Drawn matches were few and far between for Coventry Sphinx in their two seasons in the United Counties League but they had to share the points with fellow promoted outfit Quorn in their first match in the Pitching In Northern Premier League Midlands.

The match ended in a 1-1 draw that both sides can consider a job well done but it might have been all three for the Sphinx, who conceded an equaliser within seconds of opening the scoring and had a big goal-line decision go against them deep into stoppage time.

This was Sphinx's first ever match in the eighth tier of English football and joint managers John Woodward and Shaun Thomas kept faith with the bulk of the team that was eliminated from the Emirates FA Cup at Stourport Swifts.

Captain Callum Woodward returned from injury with Luke Downes making way. Jack Downes and Max Johnson played in midfield with the skipper behind a fluid front three comprising Kyle Carey, Dylan Parker and Matty Shipman.



Marcus Robinson

Goalkeeper Keelan Fallows made his first league start for the Sphinx. Louis Guest and Callum Whiteside started in the centre of defence, flanked by Joe Pursey on the right and Jordan Hayward on the left.

After being unable to have a substantial impact in the FA Cup, the home side made a positive and incisive start in the league.

Quorn quickly found their feet too and it was Fallows who had the first bit of handling to do,

saving comfortably to keep out a volley from twelve yards out in the twelfth minute.

For a spell in the middle of the first half it seemed a presentable chance for the Sphinx wouldn't be far away, but the visitors consistently looked threatening in the first half hour of a very competitive match.



Marcus Robinson

Woodward and Thomas were forced into a change after 25 minutes. Left back Hayward succumbed to an injury he sustained while stretching into a tackle a few minutes earlier and Martin was introduced in his place.

Shipman battled hard up front all afternoon and was the catalyst for a couple of half chances for the home side around the half-hour mark as the wind really picked up.

First, he teed up Carey for a left-footed shot that flew wide. Then, after hunting down a lost cause in the Quorn penalty area, he managed to get an unlikely shot away. It didn't have the heft required to test goalkeeper Charlie Woods.

In the 39th minute the Quorn stopper was in action again, fielding a curling effort from Callum Woodward that caught the wind after the referee played advantage in Sphinx's favour.

Quorn had their moments too – a free kick in the last minute of normal time in the first half sailed over Fallows' crossbar after a short period of pressure – but the closest either team came before the break was an effort by Parker in the third added minute. His strike on the turn drifted just wide of the post when Woods appeared beaten.

The tempo in the first half was frantic but there was plenty of quality on show between the 18-yard

boxes. Playing at that kind of pace with the wind whipping around your ears isn't easy and both teams showed that they were good value for their respective promotions last term.

Quorn made the better start to the second half but by the hour it was Sphinx who were starting to put together some sustained attacks. They were quickly rewarded with their first ever Step Four goal.

In the 57th minute Shipman was played in behind and opted to try to lob Woods as he came out to meet him. The goalkeeper made a fine save and the ball struck the post on its way out for the corner from which Sphinx opened the scoring.

There aren't many goals scored by this team that don't involve a Callum. On this occasion, two combined to make it 1-0 in the 58th minute. Woodward stood the corner kick up at the back post. Whiteside rose highest to get his head on the ball and divert it beyond Woods and into the corner of the net.

Sphinx's elation was short-lived. Quorn equalised from the restart, catching the home team cold in a manner that justifiably frustrated the players in blue. Paddy Webb scored the goal, driving a nicely struck low shot across Fallows and into the far corner from the left of the Sphinx box.

Perhaps inevitably, Sphinx – though they rallied later – wobbled a little after conceding in those circumstances. Quorn hit the crossbar with a header from a free kick three minutes later and Sphinx lived dangerously for a few minutes before the game turned scrappy.

With quarter of an hour remaining, substitute Martin took matters into his own hands and drove hard at the Quorn full back. He hit the byline on the left and cut the ball back to Parker, whose powerful shot from just outside the box was well blocked.

Though Sphinx shaded the last ten minutes, Quorn had a couple of big chances drop their way. Both were headers from dead balls. Both were met flush by defender Patrick Zito. Both – thankfully from a Sphinx point of view – missed the target.

Zito's header over from a corner came in the last minute of regulation time just as the match looked destined to remain a draw. Sphinx had other ideas and two corners of their own nearly forced the issue in stoppage time.

With Woodward and Johnson having been replaced by Luke Downes and Sam Ellis on his league debut, Carey assumed set piece duties. Shipman's shot was blocked after the ball was headed back to him from one delivery.

From the next, Shipman and his team-mates thought he'd gone one better. With the ball loose, the striker got his head on it to send it goalward. Desperate goalkeeping from Woods and panic among his defenders eventually forced it clear.

The home team were convinced the ball had crossed the line but the assistant referee disagreed and a close game ended 1-1. On the balance of play it was really the fairest outcome.

The late disappointment was a bitter pill to swallow but this was an exceptionally tight game that Quorn will rightly believe

they didn't deserve to lose. The visitors carried a genuine threat for good stretches of the match and Woodward and Thomas had cause to be pleased with what had to be a robust Sphinx showing.

Losing Hayward to injury in the first half was a blow but Martin came on and demonstrated Sphinx's depth against a challenging opponent. Whiteside's goal capped a terrific performance at the back, while Jack Downes made his presence felt in midfield as Shipman did up front.

Nobody at Sphinx is expecting to experience an easy game in 2023/24.

Tough games against quality sides is the only flavour on offer and the team will have to develop a taste for it very quickly.

Next on the menu is a return to Gresley Rovers for a Tuesday night fixture that promises to be every bit the task Quorn presented on the opening Saturday.

### TEAMSHEET

- 1 Keelan Fallows
- 2 Joe Pursey
- 3 Jordan Hayward ▼ Martin (26)
- 4 Jack Downes
- 5 Louis Guest
- 6 Callum Whiteside ⚽ ▼ L. Downes (73)
- 7 Dylan Parker
- 8 Callum Woodward @
- 9 Matty Shipman
- 10 Kyle Carey
- 11 Max Johnson ▼ Ellis (90)
- 12 Luke Downes ▲ Woodward (73)
- 14 Sam Ellis ▲ Johnson (90)
- 15 Leigh Phillips
- 16 Antonio Cristofaro
- 17 Callum Martin ▲ Martin (26)

**SPHINX MAN OF THE MATCH**  
**CALLUM WHITESIDE**



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The Daniel Wilkinson Foundation is a charity set up in memory of Daniel Wilkinson who died in 2016 aged 24, while playing the game he loved, from an underlying heart condition called Arrhythmogenic Right Ventricular Cardiomyopathy (ARVC).



Dan played football from an early age and joined Hull City AFC when he was 10, earning a professional contract aged 18. Loughborough University followed where he completed a degree in Accounting and Financial Management while playing non-league football. He was an athlete who enjoyed the gym and took his health and nutrition very seriously. He lived life to the full and had so much ahead of him.

Other than feeling light-headed on a few occasions in the month before he died, he had no symptoms!

## SUDDEN CARDIAC DEATH IN THE YOUNG (SCD)

- SCD is the leading cause of death in young athletes during sport and the majority of deaths occur with NO SYMPTOMS or family history.
- ARVC can be found in one in every 1,000 to 5,000 young adults - IF IT IS LOOKED FOR.
- Warning signs may include light-headedness, fainting, palpitations, swollen legs, breathlessness.
- Every week in the UK, 12 apparently fit and healthy young people (aged 35 and under) die from previously undiagnosed heart conditions.
- In Italy, where screening is mandatory for all young people engaged in organised sport, they have reduced the incidence of young sudden cardiac death by 89%.

## OUR MISSION

The Daniel Wilkinson Foundation has been set up to raise awareness of SCD and to provide funding towards heart screening, defibrillators and CPR/defibrillator training primarily for grass-roots sporting teams.

**Tragedies can be prevented through cardiac screening. It is vital that young people are identified and treated.**

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Date	Opponents	Comp	H	A	Res	Starting Eleven											Substitutes ( <i>not used in italics</i> )						
						1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	14	15	16	17 / GK	18	19 / GK
5 Aug	Stourport Swifts	FAC EP	A	2-0	L	Fallows	Pursey	Hayward	L. Downes	Guest ©	Whiteside	Parker	J. Downes	Shipman	Carey	Johnson	Ellis	Jackson	Peplinski	Cristofaro	Billing	Martin	Salley-Haywood
12 Aug	Quorn	NPL M	H	1-1	D	Fallows	Pursey	Hayward	J. Downes	Guest	Whiteside 1	Parker	Woodward ©	Shipman	Carey	Johnson	L. Downes	Ellis	Phillips	Cristofaro	Martin		
15 Aug	Gresley Rovers	NPL M	A	1-1	D	Fallows	Pursey	Martin	L. Downes	Guest	Whiteside	Parker	Woodward ©	Shipman 1	Carey	J. Downes	Johnson	Peplinski	Ellis	Jackson	Cristofaro		
22 Aug	Sporting Khalsa	NPL M	H																				
26 Aug	Spalding United	NPL M	A																				
28 Aug	Bedworth United	NPL M	H																				
2 Sep	Sutton Coldfield Town	NPL M	A																				
9 Sep	Quorn	FAT 1Q	A																				
16 Sep	AFC Rushden & Diamonds	NPL M	H																				
30 Sep	Rugby Town	NPL M	A																				
7 Oct	Corby Town	NPL M	H																				
14 Oct	Shepshed Dynamo	NPL M	A																				
21 Oct	Coleshill Town	NPL M	H																				
28 Oct	Harborough Town	NPL M	A																				
4 Nov	Anstey Nomads	NPL M	H																				
11 Nov	Walsall Wood	NPL M	A																				
18 Nov	Hinckley LR	NPL M	H																				
25 Nov	Boldmere St Michaels	NPL M	A																				
2 Dec	Loughborough Dynamo	NPL M	H																				
9 Dec	Cambridge City	NPL M	A																				
16 Dec	Gresley Rovers	NPL M	H																				
23 Dec	Quorn	NPL M	A																				
26 Dec	Lye Town	NPL M	H																				
1 Jan	Bedworth United	NPL M	A																				
6 Jan	Spalding United	NPL M	H																				
13 Jan	Sporting Khalsa	NPL M	A																				
20 Jan	Harborough Town	NPL M	H																				
27 Jan	Coleshill Town	NPL M	A																				
3 Feb	AFC Rushden & Diamonds	NPL M	A																				
17 Feb	Rugby Town	NPL M	H																				
24 Feb	Corby Town	NPL M	A																				
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16 Mar	Cambridge City	NPL M	H																				
23 Mar	Loughborough Dynamo	NPL M	A																				
30 Mar	Sutton Coldfield Town	NPL M	H																				
1 Apr	Lye Town	NPL M	A																				
6 Apr	Walsall Wood	NPL M	H																				
13 Apr	Anstey Nomads	NPL M	A																				
20 Apr	Boldmere St Michaels	NPL M	H																				
27 Apr	Hinckley LR	NPL M	A																				



Callum Whiteside's header against Quorn was the first goal scored by Coventry Sphinx as a Step Four club. (Photo: Stuart Guest)



## YOUTH TEAM FIXTURES

Thursday 17 August	1-4	L	Solihull Moors	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Thursday 31 August	19.45	H	Rugby Borough	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Thursday 7 September	19.45	H	Stourport Swifts	FA Youth Cup Preliminary Round
Thursday 14 September	19.45	H	Inkberrow	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Monday 18 September	19.45	A	Halesowen Town	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Thursday 28 September	19.45	H	Stratford Town	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Thursday 5 October	19.45	A	Rugby Town	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Thursday 19 October	19.45	H	Bedworth United	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Monday 23 October	19.45	A	Stourbridge	MFYL Southern Premier Division
TBC		H	Alvechurch	MFYL Southern Premier Division
TBC		A	Alvechurch	MFYL Southern Premier Division
TBC		A	Bedworth United	MFYL Southern Premier Division
TBC		H	Halesowen Town	MFYL Southern Premier Division
TBC		A	Inkberrow	MFYL Southern Premier Division
TBC		H	Kidderminster Harriers	MFYL Southern Premier Division
TBC		A	Kidderminster Harriers	MFYL Southern Premier Division
TBC		A	Rugby Borough	MFYL Southern Premier Division
TBC		H	Rugby Town	MFYL Southern Premier Division
TBC		A	Solihull Moors	MFYL Southern Premier Division
TBC		H	Stourbridge	MFYL Southern Premier Division
TBC		A	Stratford Town	MFYL Southern Premier Division



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## TODAY'S OPPONENTS

# SPORTING KHALSA

## History

The club was established in 1991. Over the years the club has always played senior football in the local Walsall & District Sunday leagues. For two seasons between 1995 and 1997 the club played Saturday football at a semi-professional level. It has enjoyed modest success throughout.

From 1991 to 1997 it used to have a small number of youth sides and gained considerable success within the season 1995/96 by winning the Birmingham boys Under 16 league. Due to lack of resources, both financial and manpower, it reluctantly abandoned the youth policy.

With a more solid foundation and re-organization of the executive committee in 2004, the club re-joined the West Midlands Regional League Division Two (semi-professional level seven league). In season 2004/05 the first team gained promotion into Division One of West Midlands Regional League (FA League Pyramid Structure level six). It also restarted a youth policy this season. 2005 became a year to remember, as the club became the first Asian semi-professional football club in the country to own its own ground. The decision to purchase the Abbey Park Stadium (formerly home to Bloxwich Town) was taken by the club as it needed a permanent base from which to build upon its successes and built a centre for footballing excellence.

Walsall Football Club played a friendly to mark the official opening of the new ground. A ladies team was introduced in 2006 that played in the South Staffordshire League. In 2007 the club played in the FA Vase for its first time and lost in the First Qualifying Round and also introduced a Veterans Over 35s side in the Central Warwickshire Over 35s League.

After five years at Abbey Park ground, Sporting Khalsa announced in May 2010 that they would be purchasing the five acre freehold grounds of Willenhall Town FC from the Receivers. After extensive work on the pitch and social facilities with the total outlay of over half million pounds the

stadium was finished on the eve of the 2010/11 season. In its first season at their new Aspray Arena home the club gained promotion to the Premier Division of the West Midlands Regional League. 2012/13 the club played in the FA Cup for its first time in its history and progressed to the First Qualifying round. Our Sunday team won the Warley Sunday Premier League and also progressed to the Fourth Round of the FA National Cup. The following season the first team finished sixth in the league and were runners up in J W Hunt Charity Cup at the Molineux Stadium.

At the start of 2014/15 season we appointed our current manager Ian Rowe who promotion to Step 5 Midland Football League by winning the West Midlands Regional Premier League's in its 125th Anniversary year, with a record points total, on top of this they were crowned winners of the Staffs FA Vase too.

2015/16 season was our first season for the club at Step 5 saw us finish a credible third in the league. On top of this the club cemented its place amongst the non-league fraternity with a memorable FA Cup run, missing out to another non-league giant FC United of Manchester for a place in the First Round Proper.

The final game of the season saw us lift the JW Hunt Cup in its 90th year at Molineux. The season also saw the introduction of our Ladies and Girls teams with the Ladies first team playing the National Women's League.

2016/17 season saw us reach the Quarter-Finals of the FA Vase losing narrowly to Coleshill Town and also finish third in the League. The next season we finished fifth in the league.

Season 2018/19 saw the opening of the 3G stadia pitch with a total investment of £1 million which also included a new 300 seater stand and new changing rooms. Again we finished a creditable third in the league and won the J W

Hunt Cup for the second time this time the Final was against Highgate United and again was played at Molineux.

Both the 2019/20 and 2020/21 never were completed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. 2019/20 season we were second in the league when the season were curtailed in March 2020 and also reached the FA Vase Quarter-Final. 2020/21 season we were first in the league when the season was curtailed in December 2020. Due to the re-structure of the National League at Steps 3-6 we gained promotion for the first time in our history to Pitching In Northern Premier League Midland Division (Step 4) on PPG over the two seasons, finishing top of the Midland League.

Season 2021/22 saw our men's first team in the Pitching In Northern Premier League Midland Division the highest league the club has played in and had an impressive first season by finishing eighth. In the FA Cup, Khalsa progressed to the Second Qualifying Round eventually losing to Conference North side Kidderminster Harriers. It was our

## Squad

**IAN ROWE (Manager)** - Formerly a robust and no-nonsense striker with local outfits including Gornal Athletic and Causeway United, Rowe entered management at Dudley Town in 2008. After leading the club to their highest league positions in two decades, Rowe moved to neighbours Gornal Athletic in the summer of 2010. In three seasons at the helm, he led the Garden Walk outfit to the West Midlands title, Quarter-Finals of the FA Vase and the top three of the Midland Football League. After a season at Tipton Town - where he led the club to the top six of the MFL and the Final of the League Cup - Rowe moved to Sporting Khalsa in the close-season of the 2014/15 season. Bringing some of his trusted soldiers and adding some new recruits to the ranks, Rowe's side swept all before them in winning the title with a record points tally and goal total. Since then, Khalsa have finished in the top six consistently in the Midland Football League in addition to winning the JW Hunt Cup, reaching the Fourth Qualifying Round of the FA Cup and the Quarter-Finals of the FA Vase.

**SAM ARNOLD** - Joining a few weeks into the 2017-18 season, Sam soon established himself as the default first choice goalkeeper at Khalsa, impressing with a series of Man-of-the-Match performances. His second season was even more impressive, winning the Supporter's Player of the Year award at the end of the 2018-19 season which saw him help Khalsa to third place in the league and the JW Hunt Cup. The former Wednesfield, Hinckley and Rushall custodian is as impressive with his feet as he is his hands, often proving a decisive first line of attack as much as a last line of defence.

**CARLO FRANCO** - Free-scoring full-back and occasional centre-half who, since joining Khalsa in the summer of 2014

debut in the FA Trophy, Khalsa lost in the Third Qualifying Round to Rushall Olympic who did the double over Khalsa by beating Khalsa in the Final of the Walsall Senior Cup played at Bescot Stadium, which saw goalkeeper Sam Arnold given his marching orders after six minutes.

Last season the club finished in its highest league position, qualifying for the Northern Premier League Midland Division play-offs having finished in 4th place having occupied a top 5 spot for most of the season.

Promotion hopes were dashed by a narrow 2-1 defeat at Spalding United in the play-off semi final just 3 days after beating the Tulips by the same score at home to confirm their play-off spot.

FA Cup and FA Trophy hopes were ended at the first attempt by Boldmere St Michaels in both competitions while leading scorer Miracle Okafor was named the Northern Premier League Young Player of the Season.

having spent several seasons with Wolverhampton Casuals, has held a cast-iron grip on the number two shirt, impressing with his defensive duties and forward duties alike. After helping Khalsa to the West Midlands Regional League title in 2014-15, Carlo really established himself as one of Khalsa's stars in the 2015-16 season where his performances earned him Supporter's Player of the Year.

**TES ROBINSON** - Towering centre-half for Sporting Khalsa and St Kitts and Nevis, Tes joined part way through the 2014-15 season as a series of injuries to centre halves threatened the championship winning campaign and was appointed captain for the start of the 2016-17 season. Tes has previously turned out for a host of non-league sides, including Shawbury, Oldbury United, Rushall Olympic, Romulus, Redditch United, Evesham, Chasetown and Halesowen Town.

**JAMES McGRADY** - A left sided attacking midfielder who joined Khalsa prior to the start of the 2019-20 season making his full debut against Stourport Swifts in August 2019. James scored ten goals in a pandemic shortened season, his first coming in a 5-0 win over Coventry Sphinx.

**KIERON WHITTAKER** - Former Wednesfield midfielder who signed for Khalsa in February 2019 having spent the rest of the season at West Midlands Regional League side Wolverhampton Casuals.

He made his first appearance for Khalsa in a 1-0 win against Lye Town in March 2019 and followed this with a string of impressive performances which he wrapped up by scoring his first goal in Khalsa colours during the 5-2 win against Dunkirk on the last day of the 2018-19 season.

**SEAN WILLIAMS** - Returning to Khalsa in December 2018 from Quorn, 'Willo' has been a regular on the local non-league scene for many years, turning out for Willenhall Town, Oldbury Athletic, Cradley Town, Bromsgrove Sporting, Studley and Highgate United amongst others. He previously had a short spell with the club during the final stages of the 2014-15 championship season. Despite being one of the senior players in the squad, he plays with the energy and enthusiasm of someone half his age. He made his first appearance during his second spell in a 4-1 Boxing Day victory over AFC Wulfrunians and got his first goal in the following game against his old side Quorn. During the 2018-19 season he bagged five goals in 21 appearances and was awarded the Midland Football League Player of the Season.

**GAZ SINGH** - A dynamic front-man with an excellent goalscoring record, Gaz was a prolific scorer for Smethwick and Tipton Town before clinching a move into the full-time game with Kidderminster Harriers in the summer of 2015. During his time at Aggborough he did well at National League level before moving on to Hednesford Town and Redditch United prior to his arrival at Rushall. After a spell with Sutton Coldfield Town, he returned to Rushall before joining Khalsa in March 2018. Injuries meant his contribution was restricted to four starts and three substitute appearances and a single goal (in the final game of the season against Dunkirk). Gaz returned to Khalsa for the start of the 2019-20 season scoring 13 goals.

**TODD FERRIER** - Promising young midfielder who was developed at Dudley Town before moving to Wolverhampton Casuals and then to Bilston Town for the curtailed 2020-21 season. Joined Khalsa last summer and established himself as a regular feature in the midfield in his first season at this level.

**MATT FULLOWAY** - Central defender signed from Stourport Swifts in the summer of 2020 having made over 150 appearances for the Worcestershire side. His debut came in the FA Cup defeat at Leek Town in September 2020 with his league debut a few days later in the 2-1 win against Highgate United. Missed the start of the NPL campaign last season due to injury but performed well when returning to the side.

**RAAJAN GILL** - Signed from Witton Albion in July 2022 Gill began his career at Leicester City and has also featured for Cirencester Town, Newcastle Town, Tamworth and Alvechurch. The 'keeper has also represented Punjab on the international stage.

**HARRY CUNNINGHAM** - Signed from Chasetown in July 2022 Harry is a tough tackling midfielder who began his senior career at Wolverhampton Casuals with spells at Shifnal Town and Wednesfield before joining the Scholars towards the end of the 2021/22 season.

**ANDY PARSONS** - An experienced defender 'Parso' is no stranger to football at this level having played for Alvechurch, Halesowen Town and Bedworth United before making 17 appearances for Chasetown last season. Having won promotion at this level with Alvechurch his experience will be invaluable.

**YUSSIF ADAM**  
A young defender who made a dozen appearances last season during the club's first season at Step 4 having made his debut the previous season.

**RICHARD BATCHELOR**  
Midfielder who signed in the summer after helping Rushall Olympic to promotion to the National League North via a dramatic Southern Central Premier play-off success. Formerly of Chasetown, Hednesford Town, Stafford Rangers and Stourbridge 'Batch' also gained cult status at Leamington during a six season spell with the Brakes.

**JONATHAN LETFORD**  
Striker signed in the summer after spells with Rushall Olympic, Sutton Coldfield Town, Gresley and Chasetown. Made his name with his goal scoring exploits for Wolves Sporting during their promotion to step 5.

**DILANO REID**  
Signed in the summer Dilano is a winger with an abundance of pace who is able to beat the opposition defenders to get balls into the box.

**CURVIN SANDERSON-ELLIS**  
Curvin is a new addition for this season and is a big six foot five forward who has been previously featured for Sutton Coldfield and Stratford Town as well as playing for Boldmere St Michaels last season. He has a big strong physical presence and has a great attitude.

**TOUMANI SIDIBE**  
Forward who signed from Southern Football League Division One side Evesham United in September 2022 and scored 9 goals last season. Has also played Southern League football for Highworth Town, Cirencester Town and Slimbridge.

**CAIN SMITH**  
Midfielder who joined from Stourport Swifts in February 2023 scoring 3 goals in 7 games. The former Mansfield Town youngster enjoyed a spell in the USA before joining Hednesford Town and also featured for Redditch United.

**PETER TAYLOR**  
Young Midfielder joined from Southern Premier outfit Alvechurch in February 2023. Came through the junior ranks at West Bromwich Albion.

**CHAY TILT**  
Winger joined the club in the summer from Hednesford Town. The former West Brom scholar has also featured for Stourbridge and Redditch United.

**BRETT LLOYD**  
Experienced defender who joined in March 2023 from Bedworth United. Has also featured for Sutton Coldfield Town and Halesowen Town.

**ALEX WOODHOUSE**  
Midfielder who returned to the club in the summer and was a key contributor to the club's promotion campaign which saw the club move up to step 4.

**LUKE BASTABLE**  
An energetic defender who is a product of the Kidderminster Harriers Youth Academy. Gained valuable first team experience in 2021/22 for Harriers, featuring on the bench in high-profile FA Cup matches and making his debut in their National League North fixture at Leamington.

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## GRESLEY ROVERS 1 COVENTRY SPHINX 1

**Pitching In NPL**  
**Division One Midlands**  
Tuesday 15th August 2023

Coventry Sphinx's first away fixture in the Pitching In Northern Premier League Midlands might have appeared, on the surface, to be a game of two halves. Superficially and statistically, it's true. But that's not really what was going on in this 1-1 draw against Gresley Rovers at the Moat Ground.

In fact, what was happening was a Sphinx team acclimatising to Step Four football on the job, learning and evolving in real time. They were superb in the first half against established NPL opposition, playing with intent and good value for their 1-0 lead at the break.



Stuart Guest

The second half was more about dealing with the other side of the game at this level. The faster tempo and increased physicality are already clear to see and Gresley made sure the visitors were aware of both. Sphinx are standing up to the challenge.

With Jordan Hayward unavailable through injury, Callum Martin was given his first league start of the season at left back. The rest of the back four was unchanged, with goalkeeper Keelan Fallows protected by Joe Pursey, Callum Whiteside and Louis Guest.

Joint managers John Woodward and Shaun Thomas opted to unite the Downes brothers in midfield. Luke Downes came in to link up with Jack Downes and skipper Callum Woodward. Dylan Parker, Kyle Carey and striker Matty Shipman continued in the forward positions.

The home team made a strong start to the game but Sphinx gave as good as they got in the early

exchanges before taking the initiative. Pursey was effective at the back and also produced the game's first shot on target, firing into the arms of Gresley goalkeeper Lewis Fenney from 30 yards.

Carey's effort from 25 yards ended with the same result a minute later as the visitors began to play some excellent football in the middle of the park. Gresley were resolute and Sphinx pushed for the opening goal.

The away side's defensive shape was good and the back four were reliable on the cover, providing a robust base from which attacks could spring. With passes connecting all over the pitch a goal seemed imminent by the middle of the half.

Gresley had their say before Sphinx took the lead. Stephen Hart tried to test Fallows with the outside of his boot in the 27th minute. Another Gresley shot went over on the half hour, and Fallows had to make a tidy save soon after. The hosts were starting to gain some control but they didn't have it for long.

Sphinx led at half time thanks to a goal of some quality in the 38th minute. Gresley had a throw-in deep in their own half on the Sphinx left.

Martin read the flight and won a clean header to divert the ball to Parker. Parker turned the ball round the corner to set Shipman in behind, where



Stuart Guest

he showed strength and composure to fire past Fenney and claim his first of the season.

The second half started as the first had ended. Sphinx's shape was making life difficult for the home team. Gresley pushed but Sphinx contained them reasonably well for the first quarter of an hour of the half.

They came close to a second. Carey's clever threaded ball picked out Shipman only for his cross to be slid out for a player right under Fenney's nose but the pressure from the home side was building by the hour mark.

A free kick from a long way out in a central position was leathered just over Fallows' crossbar. The goalkeeper had to react quickly to save with his feet in the 65th minute and Sphinx needed to get on the ball as the match ticked into its final quarter.

John Woodward made a change with 20 minutes remaining, bringing on defender Dawid Peplinski for his Sphinx debut in place of Parker.

It wasn't designed to be a defensive move but Gresley made sure to keep the away team under the cosh. Sphinx put in a terrific defensive shift but the Gresley threat continued to grow.

When Sphinx were able to put together attacks they were effective. With 15 minutes remaining Martin whipped a vicious ball across goal but Woodward wasn't able to get enough on the glancing header as he threw himself at the ball.



Stuart Guest

Five minutes later a brilliant Shipman run gave him the opportunity to swap passes with Jack Downes before smashing the ball towards the far post. It just swung away and it was just a few seconds before the ball was in the other net.

Gresley's equaliser was as simple as can be. A dangerous ball was loaded into the box from a deep free kick and James Tague managed to attack it with enough determination to get to it first and flick his header beyond Fallows. It wasn't a suckerpunch for Sphinx but it was a shame to concede so late.

Gresley looked the likelier winners for a spell but it was Sphinx who made the late chances, most notably after a couple of corners. Woodward clipped in the second and Guest met it full, sending his header just over. Neither team would get another opportunity before the final whistle.

Despite conceding a late equaliser, the Sphinx shouldn't be disheartened. They're two matches into life as an eighth tier club and the challenge is already evident.

To lead in both games and take two decent points is cause for encouragement. The efforts that went into the draws against Quorn and Gresley were massive and the team can be proud of how they've taken to the new level in the first couple of weeks of the season.

The first half against Gresley, in particular, was proof that they belong where they are. The boys were excellent before the break at the Moat Ground and deservedly led. They worked their socks off after half time. It's all we can ask and it's got us off to a solid start.

The next step is to turn one point into three and that task won't get any easier. Sphinx will round out August with a home match against Sporting Khalsa and a Bank Holiday double-header against Spalding United (away) and Bedworth United (home).

### TEAMSHEET

- 1 Keelan Fallows
- 2 Joe Pursey
- 3 Callum Martin
- 4 Luke Downes
- 5 Louis Guest
- 6 Callum Whiteside
- 7 Dylan Parker ▼ Peplinski (70)
- 8 Callum Woodward @
- 9 Matty Shipman ⚽
- 10 Kyle Carey
- 11 Jack Downes
- 12 Max Johnson
- 14 Dawid Peplinski ▲ Parker (70)
- 15 Sam Ellis
- 16 Sam Jackson
- 17 Antonio Cristofaro

**SPHINX MAN OF THE MATCH**  
**MATTY SHIPMAN**







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Sunday 3 September	14.00	H	Solihull Sporting Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 10 September	14.00	A	Shifnal Town Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 17 September	14.00	A	Crusaders Women	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 24 September	14.00	H	Worcester City Women	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 8 October	14.00	A	Solihull Sporting Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 15 October	14.00	H	Lichfield City Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 22 October	14.00	H	Coundon Court Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 29 October	14.00	A	Kidderminster Harriers Women	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 12 November	14.00	H	Lye Town Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 19 November	14.00	H	Shrewsbury Town Women	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 26 November	14.00	A	Burton Albion Women	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 3 December	14.00	A	Worcester City Women	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 10 December	14.00	H	Knowle Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 17 December	14.00	A	Lichfield City Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 7 January	14.00	A	Lye Town Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 14 January	14.00	H	Crusaders Women	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 28 January	14.00	A	Shrewsbury Town Women	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 4 February	14.00	H	Burton Albion Women	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 11 February	14.00	H	Kidderminster Harriers Women	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 18 February	14.00	A	Coundon Court Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 25 February	14.00	A	Knowle Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 3 March	14.00	H	Shifnal Town Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division



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# The Golden Age of English Football

If I ask you to close your eyes and picture the golden age of English football there's a good chance you'll see in your mind's eye one of three things.

First, 1966. England winning the FIFA World Cup under Alf Ramsey, Geoff Hurst, Bobby Moore with Jules Rimet still gleaming, Nobby Stiles dancing – you know the score.

Second, the flagrantly over-advertised “Golden Generation” that achieved the square root of bugger all in the noughties or whatever they're called, if for no other reason than the word 'golden' has been planted into your brain and you've been distracted by the label.

Third, the football culture in England in your formative years. Football writer Ian King, among others, argues that the best World Cup is the one that happened closest to your tenth birthday. We each have a football and it's the football that existed when we fell in love with the game, frozen in time.

1966 is the logical choice. Football came to England and England won the football, Wembley awash in Union flags as Hurst claimed an historic hat-trick and Kenneth Wolstenholme uttered the immortal piece of commentary that seemed to further etch the World Cup win into sporting lore. England have yet to repeat this triumph and it is therefore a pinnacle by definition.

International football matters. It's part of the central nervous system of the game. It meant even more in 1966 and, while the modern temptation might be to under-appreciate its significance in light of representative football's waning popularity in this country and others, it remains the beacon.

But it wasn't a golden age. One trophy, even the trophy, is too meagre a justification in a nation that likes to count itself among the giants of the game. The others have multiple major tournament wins to their names. England must pan for their precious nugget elsewhere.

Football is a glorious technicolour tapestry and there are myriad criteria when it comes to inconsequential debates like this one. Winning the World Cup might be the outstanding success for the nation in its united form but football is rather more complex a landscape than that.

What about club teams dominating on the continental stage? What about influence? The employment of the best players from all over the world? Economic power? Money isn't the deciding factor but even the most ardent romantic would do well to argue against it playing a part.

By those definitions England has produced a number of eras of note in the 160 years since the Laws of the Game were committed to paper. The very fact that it happened here can't be ignored, for one.

November 2023 will mark the 70th anniversary of England's infamous loss to Hungary. With Nándor Hidegkuti operating between midfield and a front two of Ferenc Puskás and Sándor Kocsis, Hungary became the second team to beat England at home. They were regarded as the best team in the world. England, reeling from the ignominy of the World Cup in 1950, were dismantled by them again in Budapest in 1954.

Much of England's prestige prior to 1950 had been self-regarding – not competing in the World Cup avoided the probability of evidence to the contrary – but the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first couple of decades of the twentieth warrant a mention. And there it was. Next!

In 1977, Bob Paisley's Liverpool became the second English team to win the European Cup. The next five winners of the continent's premier club competition were Liverpool, Nottingham Forest, Nottingham Forest, Liverpool and Aston Villa – six English wins on the bounce ending in 1982.

Ipswich Town and Tottenham Hotspur won the UEFA Cup in 1981 and 1984 respectively. Everton won the Cup Winners' Cup in 1985. Such a period of domination should be fondly remembered, albeit

only three teams took home the top pot in those six years around the turn of the decade.

Unfortunately it's not that simple. Two weeks after Everton's final against Rapid Vienna in the Netherlands, the Heysel Disaster happened in Belgium and English clubs were banned from European competition.

It wasn't a one-off. Villa also won their trophy in the Netherlands but crowd trouble at their semi-final second leg – against Anderlecht in Belgium, incidentally – might easily have led to expulsion.

The seventies and eighties included lots of success, some fabulous teams and countless iconic, historic moments and matches. Traditions were sculpted, legends written, but nostalgia for that period is necessarily tempered by trouble and tragedy, not to mention the direct cultural impact they had on football as a spectator sport.

With Hillsborough, the Taylor Report and the creation of the Premier League coinciding with the changing public mood around the game around and between World Cup Italia 90 and EURO 96, a different football altogether started to take hold. English football was at the forefront of the modern game as we now know it, all pristine pitches and peak performance.

Through its foibles and failures it found itself bested by Italy and Spain time and again but the robustness of the Premier League and its attractiveness to star players made it the world's league.

Another spell of European prominence soon arrived. Between 2005 and 2009 English football supplied six of the ten UEFA Champions League finalists and two of its winners.

All the while, the domestic league continued to be celebrated and respected the world over. Elite club football was in rude health but England embarrassed themselves and the collapse of ITV Digital in 2002, among other causes, continued to inflict damage lower down.

In the same five-year period there were points deductions due to administration for ten Football League clubs (including current Premier League outfits AFC Bournemouth and Luton Town and recently relegated Leeds United and Southampton) as well as a glut of non-league clubs that didn't all survive.

All of which leads us to a question that's pretty uncomfortable for cynical old blokes like me, people who like thinking back to muddy pitches covered in sand and the frisson of life on the terraces.

Are we living the golden age of English football right now?

There's a strong case for it. The Premier League is by far the world's most successful league by a bunch of metrics I don't care about. It's richer than god and the coaching and playing talent that comes with that is undeniably here. Every weekend the planet is watching and getting its money's worth.

Only one of the last six Champions League finals hasn't featured an English team. There have been two all-English finals in which Liverpool and Chelsea added to their previous European Cup wins.

In 2023 Manchester City will seek to become the first English team to beat foreign opposition in the final since Chelsea's first, against Bayern eleven years ago. They probably will.

Even the national team is playing its part. Gareth Southgate is constantly criticised and that's the prerogative of England supporters, but it's important to apply some perspective.

Younger fans might not remember year after year of penalty shoot-out defeats and group-stage exits. They might not have lived through failure to qualify in 1994 and 2008 just as I didn't suffer through the seventies. England are good. Really good. Deliberately and systematically good.

Yes, the here and now could be the golden age of English football. It might not stack up to those of Italy

or Spain or Germany or France or Brazil or Argentina but this could well be ours. Yet many of us can't experience it as such because these cold calculations come at a competitive and cultural cost.

If we're to designate a golden age shouldn't it be one in which it seemed like anyone could win the league in any season, an open and chaotic contest that captured the essence of the sport more purely than perfection ever could?

Shouldn't it be tied to the soul of football?

To the atmosphere of a big game, to European nights that felt like the be all and end all?

To proper pubs and wet streets under orange light and everyone watching the FA Cup Final?

To at least a semblance of morality and parity?

By every reasonable measure the golden age of English football is now.

But football isn't just about measurement. It has heart and community. Business success and commercial clout don't really feel like things to be celebrated in these terms. They seem like meaningful criteria for debate but the truth is they're just hot air.

All of football's most powerful phenomena are intangible – intrinsically human, often universal, yet impossible to grasp. It's not mere economics. Football is politics and psychology and sociology too. It's magic.

There is no objective golden age of English football. The bigger picture is too complex for that, the details too wrapped up in life and love.

**Chris Nee**

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# PITCHING IN NORTHERN PREMIER LEAGUE

## DIVISION ONE MIDLANDS FIXTURES

Tuesday 22nd August

AFC Rushden & Diamonds	v	Bedworth United
Anstey Nomads	v	Spalding United
Boldmere St Michaels	v	Loughborough Dynamo
Cambridge City	v	Quorn
Coventry Sphinx	v	Sporting Khalsa
Hinckley LR	v	Sutton Coldfield Town
Rugby Town	v	Corby Town
Shepshed Dynamo	v	Harborough Town
Walsall Wood	v	Gresley Rovers

Saturday 26th August

Anstey Nomads	v	Lye Town
Bedworth United	v	Hinckley LR
Corby Town	v	Coleshill Town
Gresley Rovers	v	AFC Rushden & Diamonds
Harborough Town	v	Walsall Wood
Loughborough Dynamo	v	Cambridge City
Quorn	v	Boldmere St Michaels
Spalding United	v	Coventry Sphinx
Sporting Khalsa	v	Rugby Town
Sutton Coldfield Town	v	Shepshed Dynamo

Monday 28th August

AFC Rushden & Diamonds	v	Corby Town
Anstey Nomads	v	Gresley Rovers
Boldmere St Michaels	v	Sporting Khalsa
Cambridge City	v	Spalding United
Coleshill Town	v	Sutton Coldfield Town
Coventry Sphinx	v	Bedworth United
Hinckley LR	v	Quorn
Rugby Town	v	Harborough Town
Shepshed Dynamo	v	Loughborough Dynamo
Walsall Wood	v	Lye Town

# PITCHING IN NORTHERN PREMIER LEAGUE

## DIVISION ONE MIDLANDS LEAGUE TABLE

Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
1	Spalding United	2	2	0	0	5	1	4	6
2	Sporting Khalsa	2	2	0	0	5	1	4	6
3	Anstey Nomads	2	2	0	0	5	2	3	6
4	Lye Town	2	1	1	0	5	4	1	4
5	Quorn	2	1	1	0	3	2	1	4
6	Walsall Wood	2	1	0	1	5	4	1	3
7	Harborough Town	2	1	0	1	4	4	0	3
8	Bedworth United	2	1	0	1	3	3	0	3
9	Corby Town	2	1	0	1	3	3	0	3
10	Rugby Town	2	1	0	1	2	2	0	3
11	Shepshed Dynamo	2	1	0	1	2	2	0	3
12	Coleshill Town	2	1	0	1	5	6	-1	3
13	Cambridge City	2	1	0	1	4	5	-1	3
14	Hinckley LR	2	0	2	0	4	4	0	2
15	Coventry Sphinx	2	0	2	0	2	2	0	2
16	Gresley Rovers	2	0	1	1	3	4	-1	1
17	Loughborough Dynamo	2	0	1	1	4	6	-2	1
18	Boldmere St Michaels	2	0	0	2	4	6	-2	0
19	AFC Rushden & Diamonds	2	0	0	2	0	3	-3	0
20	Sutton Coldfield Town	2	0	0	2	1	5	-4	0

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