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Monday 28th 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
024 7645 1361

Coventry Sphinx Football Club is a non-for-profit organisation



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Upcoming fixtures

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

AWAY



Rugby Town v Coventry Sphinx

Pitching In Northern Premier League - Midlands
Saturday 30th September 2023 | 3.00pm
Butlin Road
Butlin Road, Rugby, CV21 3SD

HOME



Coventry Sphinx v Corby Town

Pitching In Northern Premier League - Midlands
Saturday 7th October 2023 | 3.00pm
Sphinx Industrial Supplies Arena
Sphinx Drive



CoventrySphinx



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John Woodward and Shaun Thomas have been clear since promotion that Coventry Sphinx aren't in the Pitching In Northern Premier League Midlands to make up the numbers.

We saw that in the first three matches. Games against Quorn, Gresley Rovers and Sporting Khalsa each presented a different challenge that Sphinx stared down.

Two points from three matches might not be the start of the season we wanted but it's important to take the positives. There were a few in game one. There were some in game two.

In game three, against Khalsa here six days ago, there were loads. Sphinx lost the game but at the time of writing Khalsa are top of the table. They could very easily have not been.

Khalsa are a known quantity for us. Our meetings at Step Five were always feisty and fiery affairs and, frankly, generally pretty difficult to stomach from a Sphinx point of view.

They finished fourth in the NPL Midlands last season so we know they've improved in the intervening years. They've added well to the strong core that usually had our number.

But last week was, for my money, the best Sphinx display I've seen against Khalsa including the odd occasion on which we've picked up a point or a win against them.

We took the game to them right from kick-off and, while they took their chance and we didn't, I think anyone not of the baffling opinion that Khalsa were hard done by will agree we were equal at worst. So, despite being winless (again, at the time of writing), I'd argue we're progressing match after match.

In a new division, at a whole new level even, that's the biggest positive of all. I'm proud of and impressed with the way the team have stepped up so far.

You have an advantage over me in the sense that you know the outcome of Saturday's match against Spalding United, another team established at Step Four and building on a great start.

What happens/happened there will throw its light on today's match. The only thing I'm sure of is that the boys will give maximum effort in Lincolnshire because they always do.

Today we welcome the supporters, players, management and officials of Bedworth United to the Sphinx Industrial Supplies Arena for what I'm sure will be a spectacular Bank Holiday clash.

We know each other well. Sphinx and Bedworth have met often in recent years including a couple of tight cup ties. Last year we played in the Emirates FA Cup, a 1-0 win here for the Greenbacks.

Pre-season friendlies had become annual events before Sphinx's promotion so I think it's fair to say we enjoy a friendly rivalry with a team full of familiar faces. Today might feel a little different.

This is the second game of a fascinating weekend. We'll learn a lot this Bank Holiday. The step up has been evident but we've handled it admirably up to this point.

Now, that forward progress has to continue and be translated into more points and, crucially, a win. We've been competitive in every match, superior for significant periods, and that's a great platform as we seek now to push on to bigger and better things. Let's start today.

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.



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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































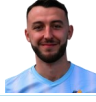


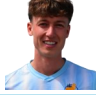




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MEET THE SQUAD

If you're interested in claiming one of our vacant player or management sponsorships, speak to one of our media team today or contact neil@coventrysphinx.co.uk

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

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2023/24 Player Stats (all competitions)

Player	Apps	Mins	Starts	Full 90	Sub On	Yellows	Second Yellows	Straight Reds	Goals	Assists	Goals Per 90	Assists Per 90	G+A Per 90
Billing, Harvey	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Bryson, James	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Carey, Kyle	4	360	4	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Cristofaro, Antonio	2	18	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Cross, Tom	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Downes, Jack	4	356	4	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Downes, Luke	4	214	3	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Draper, Jamie	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Ellis, Sam	3	73	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Fallows, Keelan	3	270	3	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Guest, Louis	4	360	4	4	0	3	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Hayward, Jordan	3	206	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Hedge, Zach	1	90	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Jackson, Sam	1	28	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Johnson, Max	3	242	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Kennedy, Jack	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Martin, Callum	3	217	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Parker, Dylan	4	277	3	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	0.000	0.011	0.011
Peplinski, Dawid	1	20	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Phillips, Leigh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Pursey, Joe	4	360	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Selley-Haywood, Kurtis	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Shipman, Matty	4	360	4	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	0.011	0.000	0.011
Whiteside, Callum	4	346	4	3	0	2	0	0	1	0	0.011	0.000	0.011
Woodward, Callum	2	163	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.000	0.011	0.011

2023/24 Player Stats (NPL Midlands only)

Player	Apps	Mins	Starts	Full 90	Sub On	Yellows	Second Yellows	Straight Reds	Goals	Assists	Goals Per 90	Assists Per 90	G+A Per 90
Billing, Harvey	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Bryson, James	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Carey, Kyle	3	270	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Cristofaro, Antonio	1	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Cross, Tom	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Downes, Jack	3	266	3	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Downes, Luke	3	152	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Draper, Jamie	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Ellis, Sam	2	45	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Fallows, Keelan	2	180	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Guest, Louis	3	270	3	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Hayward, Jordan	2	116	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Hedge, Zach	1	90	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Jackson, Sam	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Johnson, Max	2	180	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Kennedy, Jack	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Martin, Callum	3	217	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Parker, Dylan	3	187	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0.000	0.011	0.011
Peplinski, Dawid	1	20	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Phillips, Leigh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Pursey, Joe	3	270	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Selley-Haywood, Kurtis	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Shipman, Matty	3	270	3	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	0.011	0.000	0.011
Whiteside, Callum	3	270	3	3	0	2	0	0	1	0	0.011	0.000	0.011
Woodward, Callum	2	163	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.000	0.011	0.011

COVENTRY SPHINX 0 SPORTING KHALSA 1

Pitching In NPL
Division One Midlands
Tuesday 22nd August 2023

Coventry Sphinx got their first taste of Step Four defeat on an otherwise encouraging night under the lights at the Sphinx Industrial Supplies Arena. Sporting Khalsa held on to a 1-0 lead to see out a second half dominated by Sphinx's push for an equaliser.

Joint managers John Woodward and Shaun Thomas opted to start with both Callum Martin and the returning Jordan Hayward on the left. Joe Pursey played on the other flank and the defence was completed by Callum Whiteside and stand-in skipper Louis Guest.

Luke Downes and Jack Downes both started again while Max Johnson came back into the starting line-up with captain Callum Woodward unavailable.

Kyle Carey played off striker Matty Shipman and there was a debut in goal for new signing Zach Hedge, who came in with Keelan Fallows also unavailable.

Sphinx did themselves proud with their best performance yet in the Pitching In Northern Premier League Midlands but were ultimately on the wrong end of a 1-0 result that could so easily have turned out better.

The home team sought to catch Khalsa cold from the start and were competitive right from the off. They had some joy up front in the first few minutes as they hunted an early lead.

Hayward's fine wing work led to a chance in the third minute, Johnson firing over after Carey had kept Hayward's cross alive at the back post.

Hayward took the next shot on himself as a positive start began to look like an excellent one. Khalsa goalkeeper Sam Arnold had to field his right-footed shot after he cut in from the left flank. With Sphinx seeming more connected up front than at any other point so far this season and standing up well to the more experienced and more physical visitors, they looked likeliest to score the game's first goal.

Instead it was Khalsa who took the lead and the first goal was also the last. In the 17th minute the ball was rolled across from the left for Curvin Sanderson-Ellis, who smartly tucked it past Hedge and into the top corner.

The hosts were briefly knocked off their stride by the goal and were more ragged for a spell in the middle of the first half. Their best attempt of the period came from a piece of good fortune. Sphinx

got lucky with a ball going loose in a dangerous area and right back Pursey's piledriver had to be saved well by Arnold at his near post.

Hedge was in action a few minutes later, getting a glove on a powerful shot to turn it onto the bar. As the game grew ever more heated, Khalsa played some neat football in midfield and produced a few half chances but little of note.

Sphinx were by no means second best. Five minutes before half time Arnold had to thwart Shipman's shot on the turn as the home team piled on the pressure, and three minutes after that Carey's clever play from a Sphinx throw-in culminated in the forward making a yard for a left-footed shot that whipped just wide of the post.

Woodward and Thomas were forced into a change at half time. Luke Downes was withdrawn and replaced by Sam Ellis, who was instrumental in the first clear chance of the second half.

His fine turn in the build-up helped to create the opening for Hayward eight minutes into the half. He drilled the shot left-footed across goal and it ended up going just wide. Sphinx, though, were in the midst of another lively start and Khalsa were struggling to keep them at bay.

The home team played with excellent balance against tough opponents. They met the physical challenge head-on – it was by far the best performance of the nascent season by that measure – and played incisive attacking football in the search for an equalising goal.

They thought they'd made the breakthrough with 17 minutes left on the clock. A Khalsa clearance ricocheted in behind their defence where substitute Dylan Parker was able to snaffle the ball, take it round Arnold and roll it home.

The assistant referee watched the whole thing unfold right in front of him and steadfastly kept his flag down from beginning to end. Khalsa's complaints alerted the referee and the goal was chalked off when it was established that the ball had made its way to Parker directly from a block by Shipman. Cue tardy flag.

They say it's the hope that kills you. Really it's the full minute when you're allowed to believe erroneously that the hope has been fulfilled.

By now Sphinx were firing on all cylinders and putting together what was a superb performance in the second half. For the last quarter of an hour

they turned the screw with increasing intensity, yet the one serious opening they needed never really dropped for them.



Stuart Guest

Indeed, the best chance in those final few minutes was a thumping header from a Khalsa corner that forced Hedge to make the best save of the match in the penultimate minute. For all the effort, Sphinx couldn't find a reply in stoppage time and suffered their first league defeat.



Stuart Guest

Despite the result, Sphinx's showing against Khalsa was pleasing.

They tore out of the blocks to have a pop at one of the better teams in the division last season, then made them work extremely hard to hold on for the win after a rousing second half.

The first NPL win is yet to arrive but the players look more suited to this level week by week, adjusting to the speed and physicality of the matches.

They're fast learners – this was only the third game and on another night it might even have gone entirely the other way.

Thomas and Woodward's team now move into a busy August Bank Holiday weekend, starting with a long Saturday trip to Spalding United and concluding with a Monday afternoon home fixture against neighbours Bedworth United.

TEAMSHEET

- 1 Zach Hedge
- 2 Joe Pursey
- 3 Callum Martin ■ ▼ Parker (63)
- 4 Luke Downes ■ ▼ Ellis (HT)
- 5 Louis Guest ■
- 6 Callum Whiteside ■
- 7 Jordan Hayward
- 8 Jack Downes ■ ▼ Cristofaro (86)
- 9 Matty Shipman
- 10 Kyle Carey
- 11 Max Johnson
- 12 Dylan Parker ▲ Martin (63)
- 14 Sam Ellis ▲ L. Downes (HT)
- 15 Dawid Peplinski
- 16 Antonio Cristofaro ▲ J. Downes (86)
- 17 Sam Jackson

SPHINX MAN OF THE MATCH
JORDAN HAYWARD

MATCH HIGHLIGHTS



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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	Purse	Hayward	L. Downes	Guest ©	Whiteside	Parker	J. Downes	Shipman	Carey	Johnson	Ellis	Jackson	<i>Peplinski</i>	<i>Cristofaro</i>	<i>Billing</i>	<i>Martin</i>	<i>Salley-Haywood</i>
12 Aug	Quorn	NPL M	H	1-1	D	Fallows	Purse	Hayward	J. Downes	Guest	Whiteside 1	Parker	Woodward ©	Shipman	Carey	Johnson	L. Downes	Ellis	<i>Phillips</i>	<i>Cristofaro</i>	<i>Martin</i>		
15 Aug	Gresley Rovers	NPL M	A	1-1	D	Fallows	Purse	Martin	L. Downes	Guest	Whiteside	Parker	Woodward ©	Shipman 1	Carey	J. Downes	<i>Johnson</i>	Peplinski	<i>Ellis</i>	<i>Jackson</i>	<i>Cristofaro</i>		
22 Aug	Sporting Khalsa	NPL M	H	0-1	L	Hedge	Purse	Martin	L. Downes	Guest ©	Whiteside	Hayward	J. Downes	Shipman	Carey	Johnson	Parker	Ellis	<i>Peplinski</i>	<i>Cristofaro</i>	<i>Jackson</i>		
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																				
2 Mar	Shepshed Dynamo	NPL M	H																				
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																				



Defender Callum Whiteside gets stuck in against Sporting Khalsa. (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

BEDWORTH UNITED

History

The first Bedworth Town football club was formed in 1895 when several matches were played against other local teams. They became founder members of the Nuneaton and District League in 1898, but by 1900 the club had disbanded.

Finishing runners up in the Second Division of the Coventry and North Warwickshire League in the 1904-05 season, the ECS changed their name to Bedworth Town on winning promotion and stayed in existence until the early 1920s. During that time, the town fielded a fine player in Jack 'Sandy' Sheldon who later played for Manchester United, Liverpool and Luton Town.

A third club came on the scene in 1925, when Collycroft United, formed in 1916, became the third team to name themselves Bedworth Town.

This was the most successful of the pre-war clubs, they were members of the Coventry and North Warwickshire League and spent one season in 1936-37 in the Central Amateur League.

The last club to become Bedworth Town was formed in 1947, and as a

semi-professional club, secured membership of the Birmingham Combination and soon hit the headlines. They won the championship in successive seasons - 1948-49 and 1949-50 seasons - and in the 1949-50 season were also defeated in the final of the Birmingham Senior Cup.

For season 1954-55, Bedworth joined the Birmingham League and they qualified for the Northern Section for the league's inaugural First Division. The Birmingham League was re-named the West Midlands League in 1962, but lack of success and problems off the field saw Bedworth Town change their name to Bedworth United in 1968.

In 1972 they obtained membership for the Southern League Division One North.

In their first season they finished bottom, but this was only to be a setback as they made rapid strides into the Premier Division when the league was re-formed in 1982.

In the Premier Division, they finished 5th in 1982-83 season, and were stable in this league until a poor run saw them relegated at the end of the 1988-89 season.

On February 23rd 1982, the non-league world was staggered when a crowd of 5,172 - then a record for the Southern League in its new form - turned up at their Oval ground to watch them beat Nuneaton Borough 1-0 to go top of the league.

After becoming Bedworth United, they won the Birmingham Senior Cup on three occasions in the 1980s and were beaten finalists to West Bromwich Albion in the 1987-88 season.

Bedworth United were relegated to the Southern League Midland Division in 1988-89 season until the appointment of St Lucia-born Brendan Phillips as manager in 1990 launched a revival in the club's fortunes.

From 1990 to 1997, the Greenbacks pushed for promotion back to the Southern League's top flight and enjoyed a top six finish in four of the next five seasons. Phillips was tempted to move to Stafford Rangers during the 1992-93 season but progress was continued under the helm of former Notts County midfielder Dean Thomas.

Unfortunately, achieving the heady heights of a third place finish in the

1995-96 season, the club overstretched itself financially - and they faced possible closure until a group of die-hards acted to keep the club alive.

After that, the Greenbacks occupied a bottom half finish for 14 seasons until the appointment In May, 2011, of a bright, forward-thinking management team led by Steve Farmer, assistant Adam Cooper, and the experienced Ian Roper on the field.

In his first season, Farmer - at 31 the youngest manager in the club's history - led them to their first promotion in their 65-year semi-professional history.

After finishing in a highly-creditable third place, they won promotion after beating Uxbridge 2-1 in a semi-final play-off, and defeating Beaconsfield SYCOB 3-1 in the final.

Sadly, the fledgling manager showed his inexperience by changing his promotion-winning team from the start and it culminated in the club lasting just one season back in the Southern League Premier Division as they finished in 21st place and went down on goal difference

2013-14 The Greenbacks played in the Evo Stick Northern League Division One South. Andrew Fuller took over as Manager, however he resigned after a few weeks and was replaced by Nick Hawkins who unfortunately was unable to improve the results.

He was then replaced by our current Manager, Stuart Storer along with Andy Penny as his assistant. Both came from Hinckley United. After a

difficult start they produced a settled squad and staved off relegation at the end of the season.

2014-15 The Greenbacks returned to the Southern Football League. Stuart Storer remained as manager and in his first full season in charge the club once again won promotion after a 2-0 win over Barton Rovers in the play-off final. This was after finishing 4th after the league programme had been finished. This was the clubs first season on its new artificial grass pitch.

2015-16 The club played once again in the Southern Football League Premier Division. The season started slowly and a number of changes to playing staff made up until Christmas.

The club pushed to avoid relegation but ultimately were unsuccessful, although all agree this was due to the start of the season and not the group of players at the club at the end. We have now returned to the Northern Premier League Division 1 South

The 2016-17 season saw the club play once again in the Northern Premier League Division 1 South. A season that saw a number of injury problems and changes in playing staff saw a mid-table finish. The club did have a successful run in the FA Cup, eventually losing out to National League side Curzon Ashton.

2017/2018 Saw the team struggle in the league early on with injuries and Stuart Storer was unable to field the same team for 2 games in a row. Come Christmas though with the team becoming more settled results started to come and the Greenbacks

push saw them finish 4th in the league and make the playoffs where they met Chasetown in the semi final running out 2-1 winners to book a place against Stamford in the final.

Bedworth eventually won 2-1 after extra time after conceding 7 minutes into injury time. With the restructuring of the Leagues Bedworth were now promoted into the Evo Stik Southern premier league central. Unfortunately this foray into step 3 of the Non League ladder was short lived and the team were relegated back to step 4 at the end of the 2018/19 season.

In the Season that never was due to Covid-19 The Greenbacks were getting a head of steam up and were looking like they might have made the play offs but with the season being brought to a premature halt Bedworth would start the 2020-21 season in step 4 again.

Bedworth started well in the 2020-21 season only suffering defeat in the games they played and were sitting second in the league when again due to Covid the season was curtailed.

After a poor start to the 2021/22 season a good run in December and January saw the Greenbacks come within touching distance of the playoffs but a poor ending to the season saw them finish 12th.

The 2022/23 was on reflection an extremely poor season for the club.

Only guaranteeing avoiding the relegation playoffs with a game to spare after high hopes before the season of mounting a challenge at the other end of the table.

TODAY'S OPPONENTS

BEDWORTH UNITED



Squad

Stu Storer – Manager

UEFA A Licensed. Former professional footballer at Birmingham City, Everton, Wigan Athletic, Bolton Wanderers, Exeter and Brighton & Hove Albion. Manager at Bedworth United for 10 years.

Andrew Penny – Assistant Manager

Product of the Birmingham City Academy. Former player of Torquay, Solihull and Hinckley United. Former Assistant Manager of Hinckley United.

Jamie Lenton – First Team Coach

UEFA A Licensed. Product of Coventry City Academy. Previous playing career – VS Rugby, Bedworth United, Hinckley United, Nuneaton Borough and Leamington. Current Manager of Bedworth United Academy.

Will Grocott – Midfield

Previous Clubs – Aston Villa U18s, Tamworth, Toronto Lynx (Canada), Rugby Town, Kettering, Stourbridge and Stratford. Proud football moment – scored in the first round of the FA Cup against Shrewsbury on ITV.

Niall Rowe – Centre Back

Previous Clubs – Cheltenham Town, Barwell, Atherstone, Coventry United, Heather Saint John's, Romulus and Coleshill Town. Can play anywhere along the back four, powerful in the air.

Liam Murphy – Striker

Previous clubs – Bedworth United junior system. 10 goals last season. Winner of Chairman's Award, Golden Boot and the John Roberts Memorial Shield at the end of 2022/23 season.

Sam Lomax – Goalkeeper

Previous clubs - Nuneaton Town, Aston Villa, Barnsley and Rugby Town.

Kory Burke – Striker

Previous clubs – Birmingham City, Romulus, Racing Club Warwick and Chasetown. 16 goals in 24 games last season.

Will Edgenguele – Defender/Midfielder

Previous clubs – Coventry City, Bury, Dundee United. Also played in the top French, Swiss and Greek leagues.

Elliott Parrott – Defender/Midfielder

Previous clubs – Bedworth United junior system. Been with the senior team for 7 years, 350 appearances. Winner of Manager's Player and Supporter's Player Award at the end of the 2022/23 season.

Rich Blythe – Midfielder

Previous clubs – Aston Villa, Wales U19, Kettering Town, Barwell, Rushall and Rugby Town. Proud football moment – promoted to Step 3 on 3 occasions, captaining Bedworth for 1.

Nuno Gomes – Winger

Previous clubs – Leicester Road, Loughborough Dynamo, Oadby Town and Lutterworth Town. Proud football moment – Nike Academy 2nd Stage trials at Manchester City.

Ryan Moore – Right Back

Previous clubs – Birmingham City, Redditch & Sutton Coldfield. Winner of Player's Player Award at the end of 2022/23 season.

Reece Blackmore – Midfield

Previous Clubs – Derby County. Proud football moment – Bedworth United promotion.

Jakob Burrough – Midfield

Previous Clubs – Rushall Olympic, Chasetown, Tividale FC and Boldmere St Michaels. Proud football moment – Football scholarship in Canada.

Josh Endall – Centre Back

Previous clubs – Coventry City, Redditch United, Hednesford Town and Stratford Rangers. Proud football moment – Solihull Moors debut at 16.

Brady Middleton – Midfield

Previous clubs – Nuneaton Griff, Atherstone, Lichfield and Hinckley.

Leo Stone – Midfield

Previous Clubs – Rugby Town U18s, Long Buckby and Coventry Sphinx. Proud football moment – Reaching FA Youth Cup third round.

Ash Sammons – Midfield

Previous Clubs – Birmingham City youth system and first team, Walsall, Chesterfield, Solihull Moors, Hereford, Redditch, Corby, Hednesford, Rushall, Halesowen and Stratford. Proud moments in football – Birmingham City debut against Sunderland and playing for England U17s, U18s & U19s.

Chris Cox – Right Back

Previous Clubs – Coventry United, Stratford, Tamworth and Nuneaton Borough.

Luke Rowe – Left Back

Previous Clubs – Bedworth United for 10 years and New Zealand International.

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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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2023/24

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Why the hell do people collect football programmes?

In my bedroom in the house I lived in between the ages of ten and sixteen there was a large see-through plastic storage box.

In this box sat a couple of hundred matchday programmes, the amassed souvenirs of matches at AFC Bournemouth and Aston Villa throughout my childhood.

There were only two programmes from games I hadn't attended. The first was a thin, yellowing paper number from a pre-season friendly at Dean Court that happened before I'd even been to a football match and was presumably watched by my dad.

The other, a copy of the *Villa News & Record* from an historic UEFA Cup win against Inter Milan, was picked up by my uncle.

Every other programme in that box was mine. For every game a programme and a programme for every game.

Many were signed before Bournemouth fixtures by the likes of Scott Mean, Vince Bartram, Steve Fletcher, Scott Murray, Neil Masters, Steve Jones and who even knows who else. Efan Ekoku, probably. Maybe even Buster Merryfield.

They should have been prized possessions but the truth is they were disorganised and badly kept and I have no idea whatsoever what became of them. None.

I feel a little guilty about that but certainly not regretful. I'm not a football programme collector.

I don't have the necessary internal wiring to understand the attraction of stockpiling something big enough that a serious collection demands you rent it a flat. I don't have the space in my house or my brain.

Admittedly, there is a modest collection building just over my left shoulder as I type. It contains every home programme from Coventry Sphinx since the beginning of the 2018/19 season. Somewhere on the property is stashed an unloved bag full of Tooting & Mitcham United programmes from 2011/12.

Turns out I do care when I make them myself. Anyway, as a non-league programme editor I have huge respect for the collector even if I'm not one myself.

As a sociologist I'm intrigued by them. What is it that makes these bizarre little magazines – and all manner of other

memorabilia for which we'll continue to use programmes as a proxy – so important?

Some people just have to collect. Psychologists sometimes describe it as an urge or an impulse.

Sigmund Freud (a collector of a few things, incidentally) theorised that it's associated with childhood toilet training challenges and – *and!* – as a “redirection of surplus libido onto an inanimate object”.

The English game has a handful of Holy Grail programmes. Original copies from matches like the 1966 World Cup Final or the 1968 European Cup Final can move for hundreds or thousands of pounds because they have the three things a collector needs: they're scarce records of history in a quantifiable series.

There's something about scarcity that strikes at the collector's very soul.

In the early 1990s Russell W. Belk, an American academic and consumer behaviour expert, linked the act of collecting to possessiveness, materialism and a need for control.

Programme collecting is a good example of why that connection – while Belk makes no claim that it's universal – exists.

A more recent study of the links between collecting and adaptive evolution found that collecting might enhance “survival and reproductive success”.

That's right, folks. Programme collectors are sexy devils.

Rarity breeds exclusivity. Exclusivity breeds demand, then desire, then realisation and possession.

Collecting objects like football programmes packs a thrill beyond the worth of the items themselves, including, occasionally, as a quite real investment.

One of the overlooked strengths of ye olde matchday programme is as a record of history.

It's documentary evidence in the most literal sense; it's full of information that serves both as an historical snapshot and a source of knowledge about what came before it. News, match reports, results, even statistical data are listed for the ages.

As a record of the past, the document itself is arguably even more important than the details within. The most potent collectibles are those with a pronounced emotional bent and football programmes have that sewn up.

Programmes connect us. To our clubs. To one another. To football culture in a much broader sense. Even for non-collectors they're often part of the matchday ritual.

That's why I had so many as a kid. It's also why I produce one now, years after they stopped being mandatory in our former league.

As football supporters we trade on memories and moments – the stories we tell about the teams and players we love and hate, and the sights and sounds and smells that can only come from being there. It naturally follows that it's spawned an enormous nostalgia satellite economy.

What proportion of the people who buy programmes are collecting the object and how many are instead collecting the moment?

Programmes are proof of attendance and it's the attendance, the experience, that actually counts. Just ask any one of Britain's legion of groundhoppers.

For them and other collectors printed football programmes exist as a measurable series to tick off. They're like Panini stickers except you don't need to sell a kidney to fill up a season's worth.

Matchday programmes form sets and subsets, date-stamped if not numbered, and therefore offer the prospect of completion. Freud would have loved that.

Academics usually agree that collecting involves a personal challenge and sense of achievement – it's a competition against ourselves.

Studies (including a series of experiments a decade ago by human resource management academic Howard J. Klein and the wonderfully named social psychologist Zlatan Krizan) show that self-competition is crucial to the achievement of our individual goals. When we play games against ourselves, we're driven by the will to win.

Acquiring a programme collection that would sink a small boat isn't for me but I completely understand the impulse.

In many ways, it's strange that I don't buy them. I value programmes massively as proof of the enduring demand for physical media, as contemporary records and as a social ritual in a sport whose primary role is, to me, to provide precisely that.

A sunny weekday morning, a little before 9.30am and a corner kick away from Wembley Stadium, Hanwell Town are opening up their ground for assessment.

It's part of the intensive drive to look in depth at all Step 3-6 grounds in the National League System by the end of October, with National League clubs to get the same treatment later in the season.

The NLP has been invited along to see what we'd traditionally know as a ground grading in action.

Launched at the end of July, the FA and Premier League have joined forces to launch the Stadium Accreditation Programme. For the first time since ground grading was introduced over 15 years ago, the process has been digitalised with a new tool called StadiumPower.

Think of this process as a giant audit of Non-League grounds to essentially answer the questions: What have we got? Where are the challenges and areas of need? And, crucially, how can funding be best utilised?

"Up until now, although many will be surprised at this, there has been no central database capturing not just facility information but also the nuances around it," Mark Harris, chairman of The FA's Stadium Accreditation sub-committee, tells The NLP.

"So digitalisation will give us a central database of facilities. It will allow us to identify areas of non-compliance but, more importantly, look at common areas of non-compliance.

"It's about identifying big issues that can then be linked to funding. I don't want to set any hares running but, as an example, if we found there were high numbers of perimeter fencing not compliant for whatever reason, that

enables a business case to be put together to talk to funding partners like the Premier League Stadium Fund and say: There is a common need here. Let's look at whether we should focus some funding on the bigger problems club face.

"It is not there as a bigger stick to beat clubs with. It's to bring transparency and also ensure impartiality."

That and consistency are key. Previously, grading at Steps 1-4 was handled centrally by The FA, with Steps 5 and 6 overseen by leagues themselves.

Naturally, and understandably, that has led to a variation across the country.

Stadium Accreditation assessors – 25 of them all trained together – are now undertaking the mammoth task to visit around 820 individual National League System grounds.

As part of this year one assessment, at least 400 individual items at each stadium are being recorded — of those, 160 linked to the ground grading criteria for 2023-24.

There are nine sections to be filled in by the assessor, accompanied by a league observer.

It starts with general information like ground details and who uses the pitch.

Then entrances and exits, clubhouse details, how big is the clubhouse and how many can it hold. Spectator information and capacities, standing and seating. Others areas include Medical & Safety, Pitch & Floodlights, Transport & Parking, Media & Broadcast.

With the app, photos and videos can now be taken and instantly uploaded to give a literal picture of what each ground has. A key part of this fact-finding information will link into those extras. The FA can get

an idea of suitable ground stock for England youth games as well as to aid the exploding growth of women's football to help clubs get permanent bases. Likewise, it will help the FA Competitions team at Wembley HQ with their planning.

Women's Super League games require an anti-doping room. Is there one available? It all goes into the app.

An important note, nothing in respect to the actual grading criteria has changed. But the in-depth collection of data will be reviewed by The FA's now monthly-meeting Stadium Accreditation Sub Committee.

"It may well be that arising from this first round of inspections that it actually highlights some changes we may need to think about making to criteria going forward," Harris says.

StadiumPower will allow clubs to keep tabs on their own improvements, give transparency on other clubs and there will be a public-facing element so the everyday fan can see what facilities they may attend.

Another feature of the app will be a stadium simulation tool where a club can, at the click of a button, see what work is required should they be promoted to the level above.

"This is about trying to move the mindset from compliance to opportunity," Harris says.

Nearly three hours on and there are still areas to be looked at, measured and photographed. But it's another one ticked off the list with the vision for a stronger Non-League game at the end of it.

Matthew Badcock

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PITCHING IN NORTHERN PREMIER LEAGUE

DIVISION ONE MIDLANDS FIXTURES

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

Saturday 2nd September

Loughborough Dynamo	v	AFC Rushden & Diamonds
Lye Town	v	Bedworth United
Quorn	v	Walsall Wood
Sutton Coldfield Town	v	Coventry Sphinx

Tuesday 12th September

Gresley Rovers	v	Boldmere St Michaels
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Saturday 16th September

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

Tuesday 19th September

Lye Town	v	Rugby Town
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PITCHING IN NORTHERN PREMIER LEAGUE

DIVISION ONE MIDLANDS LEAGUE TABLE

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

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MATCH SQUADS



Harvey Billing	Reece Blackmore
James Bryson	Richard Blythe
Kyle Carey	Kory Burke
Antonio Cristofaro	Chris Cox
Jack Downes	Nathan Davies
Luke Downes	William Edjenguele
Jamie Draper	Joshua Endall
Sam Ellis	Nuno Gomes
Keelan Fallows	William Grocott
Louis Guest	Sam Lomax
Jordan Hayward	Brady Middleton
Zach Hedge	Ryan Moore
Sam Jackson	Liam Murphy
Max Johnson	Elliot Parrott
Callum Martin	Luke Rowe
Dylan Parker	Niall Rowe
Dawid Peplinski	Ashley Sammons
Leigh Phillips	Leo Stone
Joe Pursey	
Kurtis Selley-Haywood	
Matthew Shipman	
Duncan Van Den Top	
Callum Whiteside	
Callum Woodward	

Referee: Martin Beard

Assistant Referees: Toby Carlisle and David Patrick



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