



The
**Sideways
Sammy**
Season Review
2014/15



Foreword

Before I get into the meat of this season review, this foreword is an outline of what I set out to achieve.

First of all, the structure of the review will be; an introduction, a brief statistical overview of the season, club-by-club season reviews of the other 23 teams in League One, a player-by-player review of the Coventry City squad, a seven-part re-telling of the story of the season, an analysis of who I think we should keep from the current squad, a review of Pressley's reign this season as well as Tony Mowbray's, awards for player and young player of the season, a brief telling of the story of the League One season overall and finally my closing thoughts.

Secondly, I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to anyone who has read this blog this season or indeed anyone who is coming across my work for the first time here. Your support is deeply appreciated and the level of interaction I have had with people via social media this season has been a rare source of joy during a pretty miserable season. You are all wonderful people.

Aware that as the reader of this season review, you are committing to spending a considerable amount of time reading this compared to one of my long and rambling blog posts, one final thing before the review really begins. This season review has been published on May 15th 2015, all statistics are accurate to this date. Additionally, which is before several decisions over which players will be kept for next season have come to light, so forgive me for my inability to see into the not-so-distant future.

With that business out of the way, this season review begins in earnest. Enjoy.

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Introduction

As the final whistle blew at Crawley Town on the final weekend of the season, few City fans were under the impression that survival was anything to be celebrated. It has been a season where opportunities have spurned at every corner as the club plumbed new depths for hopelessness and ineptitude.

There should have been everything available at the club to make this season a real success. We gave the division a head-start on us by starting the season in Northampton but Pressley had reasonable resources available to him and initially built a team that was solid and tight at the back. The return to Coventry should have been the take-off point for the campaign, the start of a long charge to restore pride at the club but it never really materialised.

Perhaps faith was put in the wrong manager for too long, perhaps that team Pressley built for the first few months at Sixfields the previous season was an illusion and we allowed the desperation of that particular situation cloud our judgement of the manager in an altogether different. Personally, I feel that that assessment is too harsh on a man who worked day and night to drag this club forwards in the most unforgiving of circumstances.

What became increasingly apparent with Pressley though was that he was jaded and low on ideas by the time his reign came to an end. The shocking surrender of a two-goal lead at Sheffield United was the sign of a team low on confidence. The action taken by the board was decisive and wholly unexpected given the credible narrative of underinvestment and negligence that we had been growing during a season of loan signings and underperformance.

The appointment of Tony Mowbray, a man with experience at the top of the game and with a reputation for playing exciting football, was another act of decisiveness to bring in the best available candidate and to avoid relegation. In

contrast to our relegation season from the Championship, there was a clear willingness from the board to fight the drop both in sacking a manager whose reign was on life support and with the amount of loan signings that were made.

It may seem odd that the high number of loan signings was a sign of backing from the board, but it showed that the club were not going to take chances on out-of-form players who might eventually improve. It was a sign though that the strategy at the club had fallen short and that there was no back-up plan aside from taking punts on players with names.

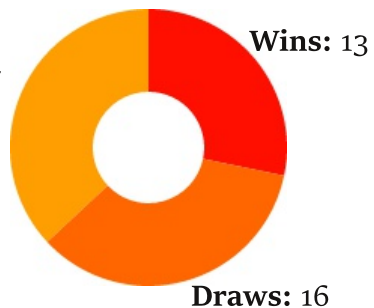
The amount of short-term signings of players as well as the manager, hints at something sinister lying underneath. That without the cash from a multi-million pound sale of a star striker, there will be limited funds available during a season of further budget cutbacks.

We will find out this summer just how true that suggestion is. It will be a litmus test of the board's true intentions for this club. On the one hand they have a manager who could finally deliver promotion, on the other they have another day in court over the summer. As it transpired, this was a season of transition, what they leads to be decided over the next few months.

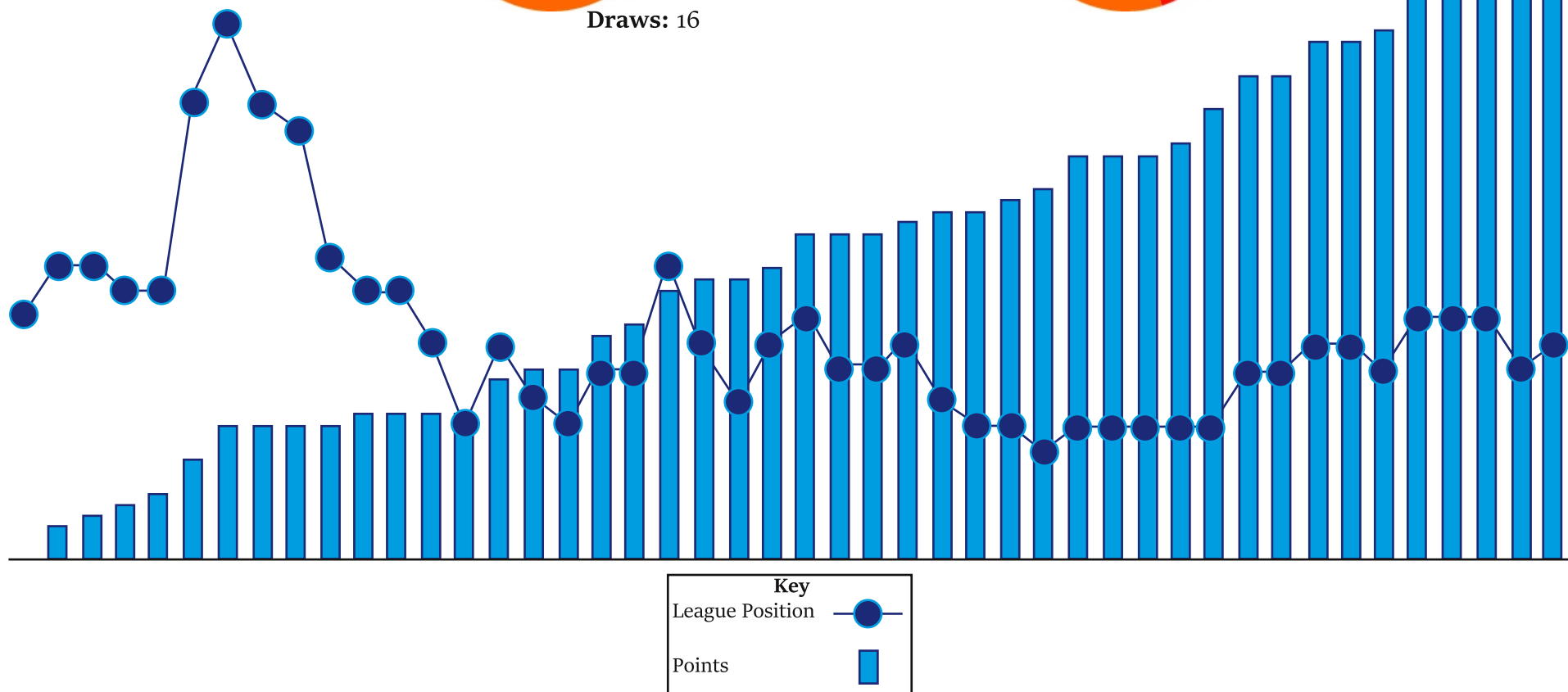
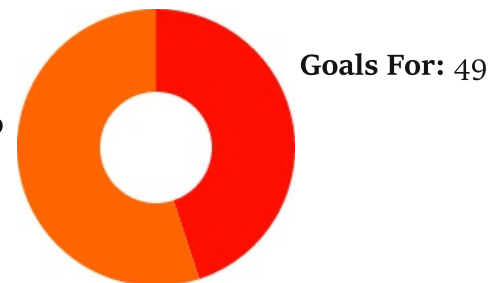
This season review though is a look back at what went wrong, what could have been done better and how we might move forward from what has been another miserable season at Coventry.

League Progress

Losses: 17



Goals Against: 60





Club-By-Club Reviews





Barnsley

Predicted Position

8th

Final Position

11th

Difference

-3

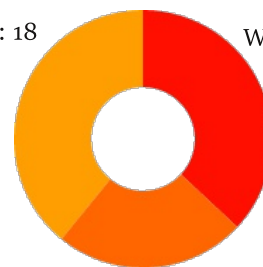
League Cup: First Round

FA Cup: Third Round

JPT: Northern Quarter-Final

Losses: 18

Wins: 17



Draws: 11

The Manager

Lee Johnson - Replaced the dishevelled Danny Wilson in February and was unbeaten in his first seven games, nearly taking Barnsley into the play-offs in the process. An exciting, young manager, he could really achieve something with Barnsley next season.

Star Player

Conor Hourihane - Has shown form in front of goal this season that was completely unprecedented in his career prior. A technical midfield player with excellent set-piece delivery, Hourihane has scored an incredible 14 goals and chipped in with 13 assists this season. Potentially someone who could attract interest from Championship clubs, if Barnsley can hold onto him, he will form a crucial part of a promotion challenging team next time out.

Key Turning Point

Appointing Lee Johnson - Danny Wilson's reign had been on life-support for much of the season and Barnsley were in danger of being sucked into a relegation battle by the time of his departure in February. Lee Johnson has realised the potential of some of the younger players in Barnsley's squad and quickly moved Barnsley to their rightful position of upper mid-table.

Overview

With Barnsley looking to move to build a more progressive club with 'young and hungry' players, the existence of Danny Wilson in the

managerial dug-out seemed an anachronism for much of the season. Barnsley were in danger of getting sucked into the relegation battle by the time Wilson was sacked. His replacement Lee Johnson immediately turned things round and came close to leading Barnsley to a remarkable top six finish only to see the team's form evaporate during the month of April.

Where Wilson struggled with nurturing the young talent in the squad, Lee Johnson excelled. Wilson's final few signings in midfielders Ben Pearson and Josh Scowen alongside striker George Waring were in superb form after Johnson's arrival. Barnsley have unearthed an awful lot of talent this season with the summer signings Conor Hourihane and Sam Winnall displaying good form this season and academy products James Bree, Mason Holgate and George Smith showing some potential, there is cause for optimism heading into next season.

To achieve success next time out, Barnsley will have to avoid the almost farcical level of player turnover they had this season. They could also do with finding a few experienced heads to help coach the younger players through the season. Lee Johnson's teams tend to blow hot and cold, Barnsley have to find greater consistency if they want to build on this campaign and challenge for promotion next season.



Bradford City

Predicted Position

12th

Final Position

7th

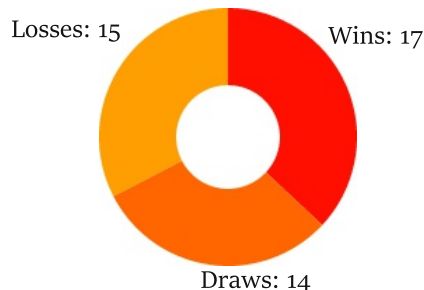
Difference

+5

League Cup: Third Round

FA Cup: Sixth Round

JPT: First Round



The Manager

Phil Parkinson - This season was a crossroads for Phil Parkinson at Bradford and with budget cut-backs to manage, there was potential for things to go badly wrong. Parkinson did an amazing job in improving the playing style at Bradford whilst trimming the wage bill.

Star Player

James Hanson - As always, Hanson has been the key player at Valley Parade. His aerial dominance provided a focal point to Bradford's play as both the Plan A and Plan B. To stop Bradford is to stop James Hanson, something few teams are capable of doing.

Key Turning Point

4-2 FA Cup win vs Chelsea - Whilst Bradford's season had been spent in the upper reaches of mid-table, it took another memorable cup upset in January to really get their season going. Not only did Bradford recover from going two goals behind at Stamford Bridge but all four goals scored by Bradford were of the highest quality.

Overview

Another remarkably successful season for Bradford marked by several remarkable results in cup competitions. They may have fallen just short of the play-offs but Phil Parkinson freshened up his ageing squad, altered the style of play somewhat and delivered results on a reduced budget. There was the potential for this to be a very difficult season for Bradford but the

squad and manager come through it with their reputations enhanced.

James Hanson in attack may still be the focal point for the team, but a more attractive playing style has accommodated technical midfield players such as Billy Clarke, Filipe Morais and Billy Knott who have really flourished this season. Had they not gone so far in the FA Cup and had to deal with the ensuing fixture back-log, Bradford would probably have ended the season in the play-offs.

He may be hard to like from an opposition fans' point of view but Phil Parkinson has shown some real managerial nous to squeeze everything he could from the resources he had available. Whereas going into this season the costly signing of Aaron McLean weighed heavily on the wage bill, the cup run will ensure that Phil Parkinson has more to work with next time around. Bradford's revival under Parkinson continues to build forward momentum and it would be no surprise to see them challenging for promotion next season.



Bristol City

Predicted Position

1st

League Cup: First Round

FA Cup: Fourth Round

JPT: Winners

Final Position

1st

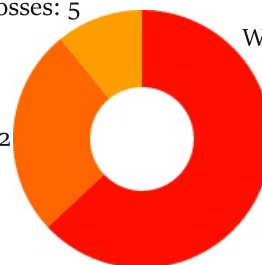
Difference

0

Losses: 5

Wins: 29

Draws: 12



The Manager

Steve Cotterill - An entirely inspiring choice as manager when he was appointed just over 18 months ago. With a reputation for playing dour football, few would have expected him to build a Bristol City team this season that attacked this division with such panache.

Star Player

Aden Flint - The centre-back has gone from looking like 'Bambi on ice' in his first season with the club to a defensive leader this time out. Flint has scored an incredibly 15 goals this season, including a hat-trick on the final day of the season.

Key Turning Point

Opening day win over Sheffield United - With a solid summer in the transfer market, there was quiet optimism at Ashton Gate that something could be achieved this season. Beating fellow pre-season promotion favourites Sheffield United set the tone for a campaign where Bristol City were simply the superior team in every area of the pitch in this division.

Overview

Steve Cotterill will be reflecting on this season having gotten everything right that he possible could have. Every single one of his summer signings came in and improved the team, as did the various loan signings that were made. Bristol City set a relentless pace at the start of the season and a small blip in November aside, have never

really looked like letting their place at the top of the table slip.

The talk going into the season was of how strikers Sam Baldock and Jay Emmanuel-Thomas could fire Bristol City to glory. But it was the summer signings of defenders Luke Ayling and Mark Little, midfielders Korey Smith, Luke Freeman and Wade Elliott as well as strikers Aaron Wilbraham and Kieran Agard that provided the spine of the team. Baldock was sold in August and Emmanuel-Thomas was largely a peripheral figure. The remarkable thing about this team was that it was almost entirely put together this season and looked like a fluent unit from the very first game of the season.

By having the largest budget in the division, Bristol City have inevitably been accused by some of 'buying the division'. That narrow-minded criticism obscures the fact that Bristol City are a big club and can afford to spend the amount they did. It also obscures what a remarkable job the manager did in putting the team together and getting them to win on a consistent basis in a tough division. Bristol City and Steve Cotterill move on to bigger and better things in the Championship, having reversed the post-Gary Johnson-era slump at the club.



Chesterfield

Predicted Position

17th

Final Position

6th

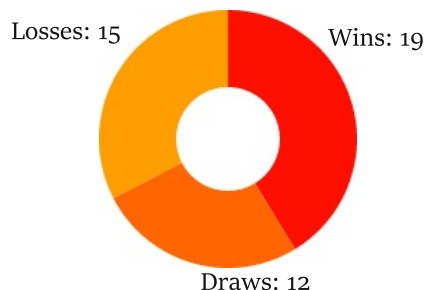
Difference

+11

League Cup: First Round

FA Cup: Fourth Round

JPT: Northern First Round



The Manager

Paul Cook - Last season was about winning promotion from League 2 with one of the highest budgets in the division. This time around it was a different challenge of getting the most out of a limited budget. Paul Cook passed that challenge with flying colours, delivering a team that played spectacular football at times and were a joy to watch.

Star Player

Eoin Doyle - He may have departed half-way through the season but Doyle's unexpected scoring streak gave Chesterfield that confidence at the start of the season that they could upset teams at a higher level. A slow start to life in the Championship with Cardiff may suggest that Chesterfield sold Doyle at peak value.

Key Turning Point

Three Wins In A Row In March - After losing at home to Coventry City, Chesterfield's season was in danger of petering out. Paul Cook's side put together three wins following that loss which put them in play-off contention and were able to take advantage of the lack of consistency from other play-off chasing clubs to eventually nail down sixth place in the final weeks.

Overview

After a modest summer in the transfer market following an expensive push for promotion from League Two the following season, it was felt that Chesterfield would be content with a season of

consolidation at a higher level. That all changed with the form of Eoin Doyle in attack, previously a hard-working but low-scoring striker/winger, the Irishman seemed to revel in the extra space behind defences against opponents who expected to beat Chesterfield left.

That early season form faded heading into the autumn but Paul Cook's side managed to keep up a fairly even pace that had them lingering around the top-half for much of the campaign. Losing their top-scorer mid-season was hardly ideal and it initially looked like that would be the blow that ended their season prematurely. Chesterfield regrouped around March and eventually won themselves the vacant final play-off position with relative ease.

After falling short in the play-off semi-final to Preston, the challenge for Chesterfield is to somehow build on this unexpectedly successful outing. With Paul Cook leaving and an exodus of players expected to follow, the first priority next season for Chesterfield is survival. Despite a record of three relegations in the past four seasons, Dean Saunders' time at Doncaster and Wrexham suggests that he could be someone who could lead the rebuilding process effectively. Next season will be a very different one at the Proact Stadium.



Colchester United

Predicted Position

22nd

Final Position

19th

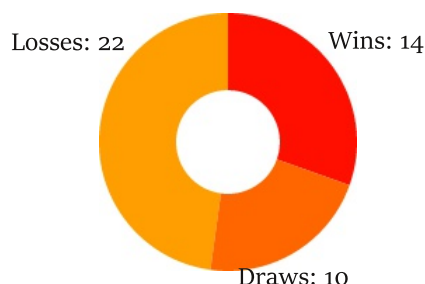
Difference

+3

League Cup: First Round

FA Cup: Third Round

JPT: Southern First Round



The Manager

Tony Humes - A managerial rookie and a risky appointment given the amount of young players in the squad. Humes placed faith in Colchester's academy whilst falling back on the loan market to eventually mastermind a remarkable final-day survival win against promotion-chasing Preston.

Star Player

Chris Porter - A mid-season signing from Sheffield United and a replacement for top-scorer Freddie Sears who departed for Ipswich. Porter offered a more physical presence in Colchester's attack which allowed their quick attacking midfielders to get into dangerous positions.

Key Turning Point

Back-to-Back Wins Over The Easter Period - After a defeat to Yeovil, Colchester headed into the Easter period five points adrift of safety and short of morale. Wins over Port Vale on Good Friday and a second-half comeback against Barnsley on Easter Monday reduced the gap to two and galvanised the squad.

Overview

Since the departure of John Ward three seasons ago, Colchester have taken a deliberate strategy of attempting to develop very young and raw talent with their limited resources. In each of those three seasons, Colchester have needed a result on the final-day and this year's was the most improbable. The U's had often looked dead and buried in the final months of the season only

to record several late comebacks to secure vital wins.

Colchester are amongst one of the highest users of players this season and Tony Humes perhaps relied on the loan market a little too much. Key players in this year's run-in such as centre-back Bongani Khumalo and winger Jacob Murphy will not be back next year and Humes will have to focus on finding more permanent solutions to he deficiencies in Colchester's squad. Chris Porter in attack proved to be a crucial and he will be around next season. Promising academy players such as Alex Gilbey, Tom Lapslie and Sammie Szmodics will be to, perhaps this experience will stand them in good stead moving forwards.

Colchester have once again been lucky to avoid the drop for another season. The worry is that the club is merely fighting gravity and will be incapable of kicking on from here. Whilst manager Tony Humes presided over much of this season's struggles, Colchester would have been more comfortably safe had his record been stretched over an entire 46-game period. Colchester have the potential to kick on from here and be a surprise package next season, it is all about finally learning some lessons.



Crawley Town

Predicted Position

23rd

Final Position

22nd

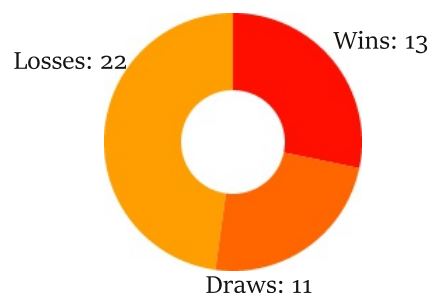
Difference

+1

League Cup: Second Round

FA Cup: First Round

JPT: Southern Second Round



The Manager

Dean Saunders - Took interim charge half-way through the season after John Gregory had to undergo heart surgery. Saunders has rebuilt a tainted reputation by getting Crawley to punch above their weight with his nous in the transfer market. It was still not enough to avoid relegation on the last day of the season though.

Star Player

Izale McLeod - 19 league goals in a season where his team have struggled at the wrong end of the division, Izale McLeod is probably the biggest reason that Crawley were able to remain in contention for survival until the final day.

Key Turning Point

2-1 Home Win Versus Preston - Dean Saunders' interim reign at Crawley had gotten off to a slow start, this win against Preston though showed just how awkward a prospect he had made Crawley at home and was the first of a number of notable wins at the Broadfield Stadium.

Overview

Crawley's squad in the summer had been assembled almost at random by John Gregory with an odd mixture of journeymen lower league players and a few unheard of players who had impressed on trial. Thanks to the goals of Izale McLeod, Crawley had a nuisance factor about them in the opening weeks and started rather well. That early form dipped and by the time John Gregory stepped down to undergo a heart

operation in December, Crawley looked set to sink to the bottom of the table like a stone.

Dean Saunders took over on an interim basis and provided organisation and some inspired signings in the transfer window to restore that nuisance value Crawley began the season with. The form of ex-Sky Blues midfielder Lee Fowler in particular symbolised the remarkable job Saunders did. Fowler had begun the season struggling for fitness whilst with Nuneaton Town in the Conference but was occasionally dominating midfield at League One level after being brought in on loan. Saunders also brought in some high calibre loan signings in Anthony Wordsworth and Richard Wood who added some quality to a workmanlike Crawley side.

Relegation on the final day of the season was cruel but having won just one of their final five fixtures, Crawley had run out of steam at a crucial phase of the season. With John Gregory having formally departed the club in the close season already and Dean Saunders having moved on to Chesterfield, the first priority for Crawley will be to find the right man to stabilise the club. The big spending of the past few years is well and truly over, if Crawley are not careful, their Football League years could soon be over too..



Crewe Alexandra

Predicted Position

24th

Final Position

20th

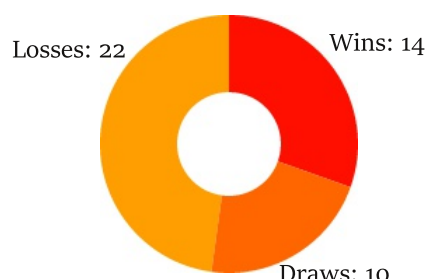
Difference

+4

League Cup: Second Round

FA Cup: First Round

JPT: Northern First Round



The Manager

Steve Davis - The hype around Steve Davis has died out over the past two seasons as Crewe have struggled at the bottom end of League One. He sets his teams up to play counter-attacking football which can frustrate Crewe fans but that ability to hurt teams who set out to beat them has been crucial in their survival.

Star Player

Anthony Grant - An unheralded player and someone you can only get a sense of just why they are effective from watching in the flesh. Anthony Grant is excellent at quietly controlling the game whilst frustrating opponents with his subtle bending of the rules. His ability to manipulate in the centre of the park has made Crewe a frustrating team to fall behind against.

Key Turning Point

Beating Coventry City Twice - Crewe claimed two vital wins over the Sky Blues this season in their bid for survival. The first win was Crewe's first league win of the season and gave them the belief that they could frustrate sides and counter-attack effectively. The second came at a crucial time at the end of the season to all but seal survival.

Overview

Along with Crawley and Rochdale, Crewe entered this season with one of the weakest squads in the division. For the first two months of the season, Crewe looked to be living up to their rather ignominious billing and were cut adrift at the

bottom following a long winless run. Slowly, Steve Davis built a side that could soak up pressure, hit teams on the counter-attack and frustrate with game-killing tactics.

The experienced loan signing of Alan Tate added some nous to their defence whilst Anthony Grant in the middle managed to be both strong in the tackle and remarkably 'light' when opposing legs were sent in his general direction. The emerging young talent of wingers George Cooper and Ryan Colclough showed that Crewe's academy remains capable of producing high-calibre talents. Canadian forward Marcus Haber was a focal-point in attack and allowed the more nimble players around him to come into their own.

It is hard to see Crewe doing much better than scrapping for survival once again whilst money remains so tight at the club. The attractive footballing principles have been sacrificed by Steve Davis in an effort to hold onto their League One status but perhaps finding a way to play good football could help them punch above their weight as they once did over a decade ago. Crewe remain in League One, but they seem unlikely to do much better in the short to medium-term.



Doncaster Rovers

Predicted Position

18th

Final Position

13th

Difference

+5

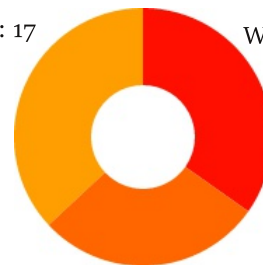
League Cup: Third Round

FA Cup: Third Round

JPT: Northern Quarter-Final

Losses: 17

Wins: 16



Draws: 13

The Manager

Paul Dickov - A divisive manager due to his unambitious tactics. Poor home form this season has put him under pressure from a section of the support. After a tumultuous summer off-the-pitch, Dickov did well to avoid a potentially disastrous campaign.

Star Player

Harry Forrester - Once of Ajax, Forrester has finally established himself in the Doncaster line-up following a frustrating injury-hit first season with the club. A creative talent with excellent set-piece delivery, Forrester is the spark that adds life to a hard-working Doncaster side.

Key Turning Point

Christmas Unbeaten Run - The closest Doncaster came to ending up in a battle for relegation was just before Christmas. A 1-0 win over Swindon Town and a rare home win (against Coventry City) gave Doncaster some momentum to steer clear from danger and put themselves amongst the contenders for what was a very achievable final play-off spot.

Overview

How you judge Doncaster's season is mainly based upon through which prism you view it through. For a recently-relegated Championship side to have spent much of the campaign in mid-table, with a Coventry-esque home record to boot, this was a disappointing season. For a team that was unable to sign players until the end of

July having had its budget slashed by reportedly a minimum of 50% following a failed summer takeover, Paul Dickov did well to keep Donny competitive and battling for the play-offs at stages throughout the season.

Just how much of that can be put down to Dickov's cautious approach to management and what can be put down to the pre-existing nucleus of their promotion-winning squad of two seasons ago is hard to separate. Undoubtedly, having the experience of old-stagers like Richie Wellens, James Coppinger and Jamie McCombe through the spine of the team would have helped them win some close-fought contests throughout the season. In addition, the pace of Kyle Bennett on the wings and the guile of Harry Forrester in the final third gave Doncaster a new dimension from their otherwise prosaic set-up. However Dickov did also supply some structure to help eke out results.

There was the potential for this season to really go off the rails had they not been able to edge their way to points in tight games. Unfortunately for Dickov, his poor home form this season has not given the majority of Donny fans cause for optimism heading into next season. With the core of their last promotion-winning team getting older, this will become more and more Paul Dickov's Doncaster. The pressure is on the manager to prove that that is something that the fans would want to see.



Fleetwood Town

Predicted Position

17th

Final Position

10th

Difference

+7

League Cup: First Round

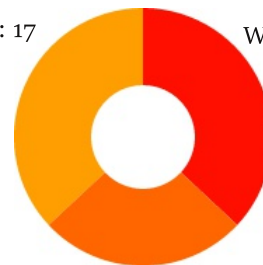
FA Cup: First Round

JPT: Northern First Round

Losses: 17

Wins: 17

Draws: 12



The Manager

Graham Alexander - Has built a solid but distinctly unspectacular team unit at Fleetwood in his two and a half seasons in charge. There could eventually be pressure on his job for a lack of goals considering the money available at the club but he is in a strong position currently after a solid first season for the club in the third-tier.

Star Player

Josh Morris - In a team set up to play hard-working football, Josh Morris' work-rate has made him a key player under Graham Alexander. The Blackburn loanee has chipped in with seven goals from midfield too which makes him the club's second top-scorer.

Key Turning Point

Six Game Unbeaten Run At The Start Of The Season - In a fairly dour campaign overall, it was a solid start to the season that offered Fleetwood fans the most hope that they could upset the apple cart this season. Eventually that inability to score put paid to hopes of a concerted play-off push but starting the season strong gave the team belief that they could be more than competitive at this level.

Overview

Fleetwood's season looks on paper a lot more exciting than it really was. A final position of 10th in the division is an achievement considering that this was the club's first ever season in the third-tier, but a large part of that final placing was

down to a lack of quality from other teams and Fleetwood maintaining a semblance of consistency. Under Graham Alexander, Fleetwood have been low-scoring and rather dull to watch but it is 'job done' this time out.

For most of the season, Fleetwood's top-scorer has been the Blackburn loanee midfielder Josh Morris, although that was largely down to a run of four goals in three games over the Christmas period. The big-name signings of Stephen Dobbie and Stephen Crainey both fell flat. Young midfielder Nick Haughton and forward Ashley Hunter were the most eye-catching players to emerge from Fleetwood's 'development' squad and those two could make bigger contributions next time out.

With the money available to Graham Alexander at Fleetwood, the onus will now be to make sure that the signings he makes in the summer can make more of an impact. Fleetwood have aspirations of getting into the Championship as soon as possible and chairman Andy Pilley may tire of Graham Alexander's obdurate approach, particularly if it does not result in more concerted play-off challenge next season.



Gillingham

Predicted Position

13th

Final Position

12th

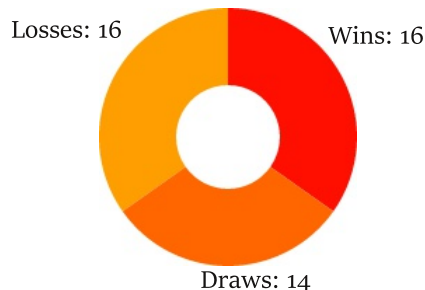
Difference

+1

League Cup: Second Round

FA Cup: First Round

JPT: Southern Second Round



The Manager

Justin Edinburgh - An excellent appointment for Gillingham and a manager on the up who has risen through non-league. A tactically intelligent manager who can produce solid and consistent teams, Edinburgh's presence at Gillingham offers hope that they can be dark horses next season.

Star Player

Cody McDonald - Another good season in front of goal for Cody McDonald once again raises questions as to why he was never really given a fair chance at Coventry City. He should stick around for next season which provides the guarantee that Gillingham will have a reliable goalscorer next season.

Key Turning Point

The Sacking of Peter Taylor - Peter Taylor had done a decent job in keeping Gillingham in League One last season after being handed a limited squad by Martin Allen. Despite some good signings in the transfer market, Taylor's football proved to be too negative for Gillingham fans to accept and his eventual sacking resulted in Gillingham playing better football and scoring more goals.

Overview

Few expected Gillingham to do little more than scrap for survival this season. They were set up under Peter Taylor to play some tidy but negative football and scrape a few results. Taylor was sacked mid-season with Gills fans exasperated

with his paucity of ambition as the club looked set to fall into a relegation scrap. After an extended interim period before the appointment of Justin Edinburgh, Gillingham finished relatively comfortably in mid-table.

Cody McDonald continues to score goals on a consistent basis for Gillingham but the supporting cast this season improved with time. In particular, John Egan in defence oozed quality and is likely to be attracting interest from a higher level. Bradley Dack's dynamic presence in the middle supplied Gillingham with creativity whilst there was raw pace on the flanks from Jermaine McGlashan.

Gillingham have slipped under the radar for many after a season of progress. Justin Edinburgh has an excellent track record in non-league at producing sides that can punch above their weight. There are signs that he can now do something similar with the Gills. Quietly, Gillingham could be on the verge of producing something memorable.



Leyton Orient

Predicted Position

5th

Final Position

23rd

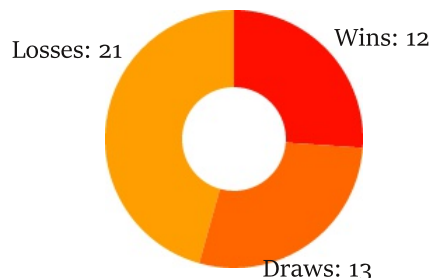
Difference

-18

League Cup: Third Round

FA Cup: First Round

JPT: Southern Quarter Final



The Manager

Fabio Liverani - Arriving at the club with just six games managerial experience, it is fair to say that Fabio Liverani was not prepared for a League One relegation battle. With rumours that he had 'lost the dressing room' floating around for much of his reign, Liverani has been almost entirely out of his depth as Leyton Orient manager.

Star Player

Dean Cox - Few Orient players have emerged from this season with any credit but Dean Cox has continued to display the quality that saw him play a huge role in Orient's trip to the Play-Off final last season. After such a terrible season all-round for the club, you would imagine that Cox may finally be looking to move on from the club.

Key Turning Point

Francesco Becchetti's Takeover Of The Club - It may have happened prior to the start of the season, but there is no doubt that the disastrous decisions taken by Orient's new owner have led them into this mess. The pressure he put on Russell Slade early in the season was contrasted with the patience he gave to Fabio Liverani. Becchetti has quickly turned Orient from a stable club into a complete and utter shambles.

Overview

There may have been a worry that last season's defeat in the play-off final was Orient letting slip their big opportunity to win promotion to the Championship. Yet that fear looked to have been

allayed after Italian businessman Francesco Becchetti took over the club in the summer. Becchetti then funded some expensive purchases in the transfer market, notably Darius Henderson and Jobi McAnuff.

A somewhat slow start saw Slade threatened with the sack only to leave of his own accord weeks later to take the manager's job at Cardiff. From then on, Orient's season deteriorated into one crisis followed by another crisis and another. Slade's eventual successor Fabio Liverani arrived after a spell of two months where two different caretaker managers had been used, with Orient sinking deeper into a relegation mire. Liverani struggled to adapt to English football and every time Orient looked like sailing away from danger, they kept on getting sucked back in.

After an important win at the Ricoh Arena for Orient looked to have set them finally on the course for survival, Liverani tinkered with the tactics and killed the momentum. Orient were relegated on the final day of the season after farcically surrendering a 2-0 lead against effectively a Swindon reserve team who were down to 10 men. This season has been an unmitigated disaster for Orient, the sacking of Fabio Liverani is a step in the right direction but the chairman has to learn deeper lessons if he is to salvage the pride of this storied old club.



MK 'Dons'

Predicted Position

6th

Final Position

2nd

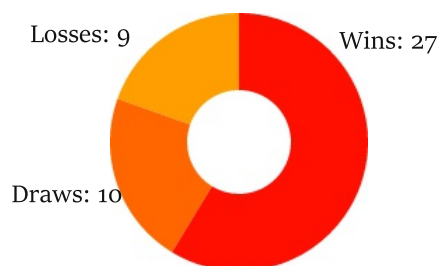
Difference

+4

League Cup: Fourth Round

FA Cup: Second Round

JPT: Southern Second Round



The Manager

Karl Robinson - After some fallow years, this was an important season for Karl Robinson to prove that he had the managerial ability to match his reputation. Backed in the transfer market, Robinson duly delivered a promotion push with a buccaneering style of football.

Star Player

Dele Alli - In a short space of time, Dele Alli has developed from a raw youngster into a force of nature. Excellent technique, a strong frame and equipped with the intelligence of how to use the ball, Alli was bought and loaned back by Spurs mid-season and it would not be a surprise to see him make their first team at some point next season.

Key Turning Point

4-0 Win Over Manchester United - It was early in the season and MK 'Dons' were still finding their feet, a resounding win over Manchester United in the League Cup demonstrated the quality Karl Robinson had at his disposal and gave the team the confidence and extra funds to challenge for automatic promotion.

Overview

MK 'Dons' deliberately targeted this season when the division was weaker after the promotions of Wolves and Brentford and went all-out for automatic promotion. Karl Robinson was handed funds that had not been available to him the few seasons prior where the club fell short of making

the play-offs. It went down to the final day of the season but the much-maligned 'Dons' secured a long-awaited promotion to the Championship after scoring over 100 goals in the league.

The mid-season departure of top-scorer Benik Afobe to Wolves looked particularly costly for a team that can struggle to put away the numerous chances they create. Brentford loanee Will Grigg stepped up in the final months of the season to reach an impressive 20 goals in the league whilst goals from midfield via Dele Alli and ex-Sky Blue Carl Baker more than made amends for the loss of Afobe.

This was a big season for Karl Robinson to prove that he could win a promotion to justify his reputation as one of the up-and-coming young managerial talents in English football. It is a shame that he had done so with this football club as there is much to admire about the way he approaches management, despite numerous inflammatory comments in his post-match interviews. After seasons of challenging for promotion in the third-tier, life in the second could be some adjustment but the experience of winning games and scoring goals regularly can only serve them for the good.



Notts County

Predicted Position

15th

Final Position

21st

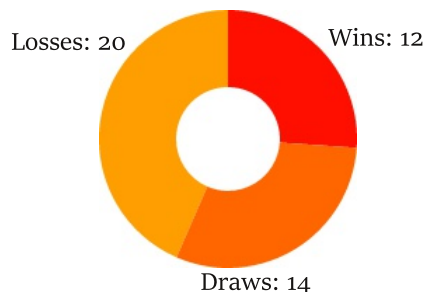
Difference

-6

League Cup: First Round

FA Cup: First Round

JPT: Northern Quarter-Final



The Manager

Ricardo Moniz - A late appointment in the season and a massive risk considering his lack of experience in English lower league football. Moniz did improve performances but it was a case of too little, too late in the end.

Star Player

Garry Thompson - The veteran winger was converted into a striker during an injury crisis this season and finished as top-scorer. His work-rate and experience was endemic of the type of team that Shaun Derry tried, and failed, to build.

Key Turning Point

Poor Form In December And January - After a 1-0 win over Coventry City at the end of November, Notts County entered December in contention for automatic promotion. Shaun Derry's side won just once over the next two months destroyed the team's confidence and began a slump that took until the end of April to right.

Overview

For Notts County this season, read Coventry City last season. A fantastic first half to the campaign under an up-and-coming young manager in Shaun Derry had Notts County in contention for the play-offs and, for a short period, automatic promotion. A typically ground-out win at the Ricoh Arena back in November proved to be the apex of Notts' season as they won just four of their remaining 29 games.

Their early success was built from a core of experienced, hard-working players in the form of Gary Jones, Garry Thompson and Roy Carroll. Derry then added quality on top of that with some inspired loan signings in the form of Louis Laing in central defence and wingers Stephen McLaughlin and Zeli Ismail. Notts were unable to secure their loanees on a longer-term basis and the inability of their subsequent replacements to match their predecessors left County desperately short of quality.

The blame for this season's relegation surely has to lie with Chairman Ray Trew, who has sacked a manager every season since taking over the club. Whether it is a case of poor judgement or an itchy trigger finger is hard to tell, what is clear is that the constant turnover of staff and players is counter-productive to long-term success. Trew took a risk in appointing Dutchman Ricardo Moniz when there was no time for him to even make loan signings. From the sounds of things, Moniz is an excellent coach but the surrender of a one-goal lead at Gillingham saw County pay for Moniz's learning how to manage at lower-league level on the job. If Notts are to bounce back, greater stability and better decisions are needed.



Oldham Athletic

Predicted Position

14th

Final Position

15th

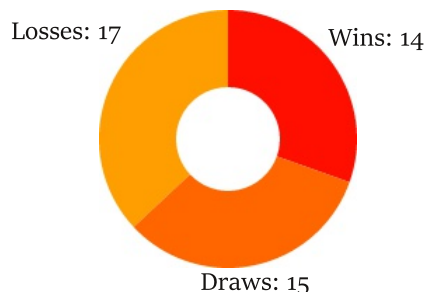
Difference

-1

League Cup: First Round

FA Cup: Second Round

JPT: Northern Semi-Final



The Manager

Dean Holden - A placeholder for Oldham's next permanent manager following the mid-season departure of Lee Johnson, Dean Holden ensured Oldham stayed in the division and then did little else.

Star Player

Jonathan Forte - A surprise force in this division after barely playing first-team football for the past two seasons. The forward's pace and power terrorised defences in this division and without him Oldham failed to score. Oldham's lowly final position is largely down to Forte's struggles to stay fit.

Key Turning Point

4-0 Defeat To Yeovil Town, 7-0 Defeat To MK 'Dons' - These back-to-back defeats completely took the wind out of Oldham's sails in December when they were hunting down the play-offs fairly relentlessly. It began a process of downing tools that was further accelerated by manager Lee Johnson's departure to Barnsley as Oldham's season petered out from February onwards.

Overview

Oldham failed to live up to an impressive start to the season, the division's longest-serving side subjected their fans to yet another season of mid-table purgatory. Under Lee Johnson, Oldham were brilliant at times but lacked a killer touch in front of goal whenever Jonathan Forte was injured, which was often. Johnson's exit in the

middle of the season put Oldham back in hibernation mode despite an impressive start.

Jonathan Forte in attack was very much like Reda Johnson's presence in defence for our us, with him there Oldham were brilliant but he was ultimately missing for too long to make a difference to the team. Liam Kelly's in midfield offered pure class and the ability to spring their pacey attackers in behind opposing defences. Mike Jones and Carl Winchester either side of Kelly excelled as dynamic box-to-box midfielders. Another classy performer was centre-back James Wilson who is equally adept at challenging for the ball physically as he is playing it out from the back.

For the new permanent manager, ex-Sunderland youth boss Darren Kelly, they will be pleased to that caretaker Dean Holden used the opportunity of their being no pressure on the club in the final months of the season to experiment with a few of the options in the squad. Keeper Joel Coleman was the main beneficiary but the end of season dead rubbers also allowed forward Dominic Poleon to play himself into form after a quiet season following his summer move from Leeds. Darren Kelly will know there is the nucleus of a very good side at Boundary Park to build on.



Peterborough United

Predicted Position

3rd

Final Position

9th

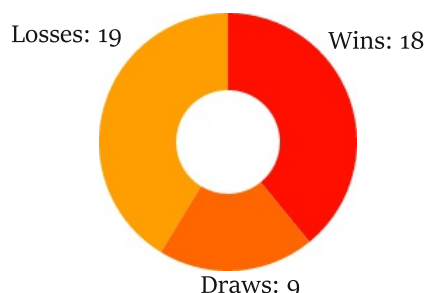
Difference

-6

League Cup: First Round

FA Cup: Second Round

JPT: Southern First Round



The Manager

Dave Robertson (Caretaker) - Stepped in to fill the vacancy left by Darren Ferguson's departure in February, Dave Roberson initially did rather well and threatened to get Peterborough into the play-offs. His prosaic style of football saw that early form quickly unravel and put paid to any hopes of taking on the job full-time.

Star Player

Marcus Maddison - The winger was another star signing plucked from non-league this season. His long-range shooting and set-pieces caught the eye but his form dipped towards the middle of the season as the demands of professional football caught up with him. Maddison's form returned in the final weeks and he will be a key player for next season.

Key Turning Point

The Sacking of Darren Ferguson - Ferguson's second spell at Peterborough looked like coming to an unsuccessful end long before his eventual sacking in February. His inability to bring defensive organisation and the loss of a killer touch in front of goal left Peterborough wanting at both ends of the pitch and he had clearly run out of ideas.

Overview

The reign of Darren Ferguson at Peterborough United had begun winding down with last season's failure in the play-offs, possibly before that with their final-day relegation from the

Championship the season prior. Shorn of the attacking flair that Britt Assombalonga and Lee Tomlin provided last time out, Peterborough lacked that ability to play the buccaneering football that they have become famous for over the past few seasons.

In attack, Luke James, Conor Washington and Kyle Vassell struggled to convince in front of goal on a consistent basis. That meant that the defence had to be the star for once at Peterborough with goalkeeper Ben Alnwick having a particularly good season. Winger Marcus Maddison was a rare beacon of attacking hope but he flickered on and off slightly too often to lift Posh into the play-offs.

Despite some initially impressive form under Dave Robertson who replaced Darren Ferguson on a caretaker basis in February, Peterborough's season petered out in abject fashion. Robertson may well feel that with a summer to build his own team he may get better results but his style of football failed to inspire either the fans or Chairman Darragh MacAnthony. A new managerial appointment looms in the next month, MacAnthony will be hoping not to repeat the errors he made the last time he tried to replace Darren Ferguson, experimenting with three different managers before re-appointing Ferguson just over a year later.



Port Vale

Predicted Position

19th

Final Position

18th

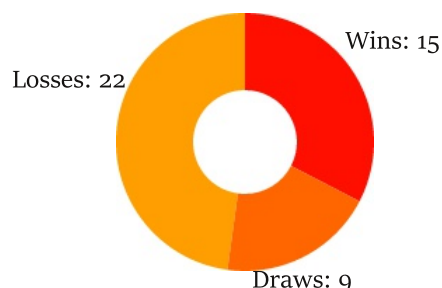
Difference

+1

League Cup: Second Round

FA Cup: First Round

JPT: Northern Second Round



The Manager

Rob Page - Replaced Micky Adams early on in the season and has endured a start to life as manager that has had its ups and downs. Under Page, Port Vale have been inconsistent and have spent as much time viewing themselves as outsiders for the play-offs as they were outsiders for relegation.

Star Player

Mark Marshall - An inspired signing as it turned out to be, Micky Adams picked up Mark Marshall following a fairly nondescript spell at Coventry City. The winger showed a touch in the final third that he failed to demonstrate during his time with the Sky Blues.

Key Turning Point

Sacking of Micky Adams - The ex-Coventry City manager had clearly run out of ideas at Port Vale and with him in charge they were likely heading for relegation. Rob Page took some time to bed in but his appointment brought some new energy to the club.

Overview

After a strong return to the third-tier last season, Port Vale were seen as potential victims of 'second season syndrome' heading into this campaign. It has been a topsy-turvy time at Vale Park as the club transitioned from the Micky Adams-era of functional lower league football to having aspirations of playing a more progressive brand of football with younger players. A 3-2 win

at the Ricoh Arena back in March had Vale looking like outside contenders for the play-offs only to suffer a complete loss of form and end the season scrapping for survival.

The star performers at Vale Park remained the experienced stagers brought in by Micky Adams. Michael Brown and Michael O'Connor added graft and guile respectively after signing in the summer. Tom Pope had a quiet season in front of goal by his standards although injuries and contract wrangling have played a role. The stand-out performer though has been ex-Sky Blue winger Mark Marshall who has provided the potency in the final third that he lacked during his short spell with us last season.

Having edged over the finish line with a few decent results against teams towards the top of the division, question marks remain over whether Robert Page has the ability to lead the club forward. Pointedly, none of Vale's key performers this season have been Page signings and as much as he had a team that was not his challenging for the play-offs, a dismal end to the season raises doubts over Page's true ability. It looks set to be a summer of high player turnover at Port Vale and fans will wonder whether the right man is in charge to take Port Vale to the next level.



Preston North End

Predicted Position

2nd

Final Position

3rd

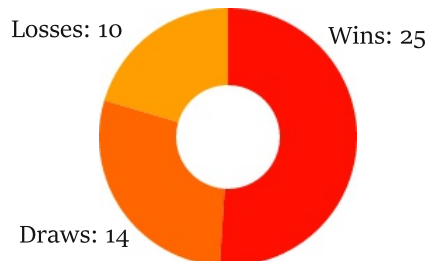
Difference

-1

League Cup: Second Round

FA Cup: Fifth Round

JPT: Northern Final



The Manager

Simon Grayson - Preston have been a relentless, consistent force since Simon Grayson's appointment nearly two years ago. An expert in winning promotion from the third-tier, Grayson has reversed what had been an alarming decline from Preston stretching back from the end of the Billy Davies-era.

Star Player

Joe Garner - Since the start of last season, Joe Garner has been in remarkable form, scoring 43 goals in just 71 appearances. Doubts remain over his ability to play at a higher level but the consistency he has shown over these past couple of seasons indicates that he might be able to score goals in the Championship next season.

Key Turning Point

Seven Game Winning Streak From September To October - After a solid start to the season, it was an incredible winning streak early on in the campaign that put Preston in contention for automatic promotion. That ability to win games on a consistent basis saw Preston end the campaign with their hopes of automatic promotion in their own hands.

Overview

Preston North End motored through this campaign at the exact same relentless pace that they approached last season with. We all know what to expect from Preston under Simon Grayson, physical defending, narrow wins and

the goals of Joe Garner. Whilst promotion rivals MK 'Dons' and Swindon Town played more aesthetically pleasing football, they were equally as prone to winning streaks as they were to unexpected winless runs. However Preston dropped silly points at the worst time of the season to squander multiple chances to secure automatic promotion.

Joe Garner was once again the star of the season for Preston, finishing the campaign as the division's highest scorer despite a lengthy spell in mid-season out with injury. Fellow forward Jermaine Beckford displayed his quality despite his own struggles with injury and Paul Gallagher's excellent set-piece delivery was the source of multiple assists this season.

Simon Grayson will have to pick Preston up from the psychological blow that failing to beat a relegation battler on the final day of the season to secure automatic promotion will engender. They have the chance to make amends for a shocking 1-0 final-day defeat to Colchester United in the play-off final. For the serial League One promotion-winner Simon Grayson, he has to live up to his reputation and get the job done after two seasons slowly building towards this.



Rochdale

Predicted Position

21st

Final Position

8th

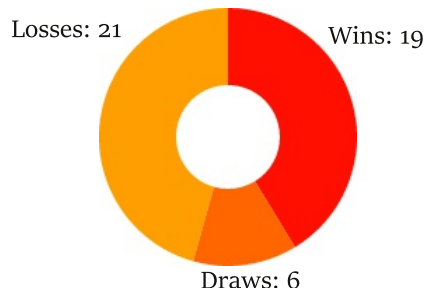
Difference

+13

League Cup: First Round

FA Cup: Fourth Round

JPT: Northern Second Round



The Manager

Keith Hill - The man knows how to get the best out of a limited budget, particularly when he is managing Rochdale. Having led the club back into League One last season, Keith Hill made Rochdale into awkward customers at a higher level this season and almost earned them a place in the play-offs.

Star Player

Ian Henderson - The forward's quality offers Rochdale craft and invention in the final third. Scorer of 22 goals and provider of 8 assists, without Henderson in the side, Rochdale would have undoubtedly been scrapping to avoid relegation.

Key Turning Point

5-2 Victory At Crewe In August - It was important for Rochdale to get off to a good start this season in order to boost the confidence of players who may have felt that the best they could have done was battle to avoid the drop. An emphatic win away at Crewe gave the team the belief that they could be greater than the sum of their parts if they stuck to Keith Hill's footballing principles.

Overview

It would have been a brave man who would have tipped Rochdale to have the season they have had and as you can tell from my own prediction of them, a brave man I certainly am not. Keith Hill had led Rochdale back into League One in his first full season since returning to the club after a

mixed spell at Barnsley. In that promotion season from League Two, it was the goals of Scott Hogan who fired Rochdale back to a higher level. Hogan was lost in the summer to Brentford without a genuine replacement recruited.

It wasn't just the loss of Hogan that had many tipping Rochdale for a relegation battle, the team lacked experience of third-tier football and appeared too lightweight at both ends of the pitch to cause teams problems. Hill's ability to get the best out of limited resources though was typified by the surprise form of Matt Done as a striker, having spent last season as an emergency left-back. The signing of ex-Barnsley midfielder Stephen Dawson gave Rochdale a physical presence in the centre of the pitch combined with the angular attacking midfielder Peter Vincenti and the division's second top-scorer Ian Henderson.

Another remarkable element of Rochdale's season has been the development of home-grown talents in the form of left-back Scott Tanser and midfielders Jamie Allen and Callum Camps. Keith Hill's attractive footballing principles provided the team with identity and allowed players of limited ability, at least based on prior reputation, to excel as part of a strong collective. Falling just short of the play-offs in the final weeks, Rochdale should continue to punch above their weight next season with Keith Hill at the helm.



Scunthorpe United

Predicted Position

9th

Final Position

16th

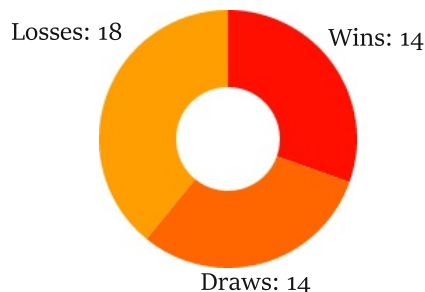
Difference

-7

League Cup: Second Round

FA Cup: Third Round

JPT: Northern Second Round



The Manager

Mark Robins - Despite a strong start as Scunthorpe manager, Mark Robins will enter next season having to win over fans after a shocking loss of form in Spring that saw the Iron end the season scrapping for their lives.

Star Player

Paddy Madden - Played most of his football this season on the wing despite being a fairly traditional goal-poacher centre-forward. 16 goals is a very good haul considering he has been played out of position for much of the season.

Key Turning Point

Poor Form In February And March - After back-to-back wins against Preston and Chesterfield, the talk at Glanford Park was of mounting a push for the play-offs. That failed to materialise and a win of nine games without a win changed concerns towards staying in the division.

Overview

It has been a bumpy return to third-tier football for a Scunthorpe United looking to move into a new stadium within the next few years with some forward momentum. Russ Wilcox proved unable to cope with the pressure of managing a team capable of losing games and was quickly disposed with in October. His replacement, ex-Sky Blues boss Mark Robins, initially had the Iron purring but his impact proved short-term as Scunthorpe spent the final month of the season scraping results for survival.

Robins' cautious approach and his use of the loan market proved effective in his first few months with the Iron keeping games tight and coming out on top thanks to the quality of midfielders Liam O'Neil (on loan from West Brom) and Luke Williams (on loan from Middlesbrough). Last season's big signing Paddy Madden proved himself to be an effective goal-getter at this level but was strangely deployed no the right-wing for much of the season. The Coventry City connection at Scunthorpe continued this season with Gary McSheffrey sparkling intermittently to give a functional team some penetration in the final third.

After a mid-season revival under Mark Robins, the failure to push on at Glanford Park and the end of season scrap for survival has put pressure on the former Sky Blues boss. Accusations of negative football and a preference for loan players over contracted players have turned a section of the support against him, heightened by a 5-2 defeat in a local derby against Doncaster on the final day of the season. There is pressure on Robins after a poor end to the season and he needs a strong start next time out to win over those fans who have turned against him.



Sheffield United

Predicted Position

4th

Final Position

5th

Difference

-1

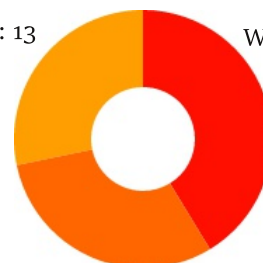
League Cup: Semi-Final

FA Cup: Fourth Round

JPT: Northern Quarter-Final

Losses: 13

Wins: 19



Draws: 14

The Manager

Nigel Clough - Failed to build on the momentum of a fantastic end to last season that nearly got Sheffield United in the play-offs and FA Cup Final. Despite a trip to the League Cup Semi-Final this season, Clough's constant tinkering has been counter-productive and disrupted any sense of consistency that Sheffield United could have built up.

Star Player

Jamie Murphy - The attacking midfielder has been used in a range of positions by Clough but his direct running and skill on the ball has made Jamie Murphy a threat wherever he has been utilised. Joint top-scorer, Murphy's form will be crucial for Sheffield United in the play-offs.

Key Turning Point

Hot Streak In February - After bringing key right-back John Brayford back to the club in January, Nigel Clough briefly rekindled the spirit of the end of last season in an eight game unbeaten run that went a long way to ensuring Sheffield United at least ended the season in the play-offs.

Overview

A thoroughly frustrating season for Sheffield United fans which has somehow included a top six finish and a run to the League Cup semi-finals. Expectations were high this season, particularly because they ended last season so strongly and have the financial backing of a Saudi prince. This is a football club that should not be

at this level in the first place and to be possibly be playing a fifth season in League One is an underachievement of considerable proportions.

Manager Nigel Clough has been a source of frustration for Blades fans with his constant squad rotation and a bizarre recruitment policy that involves signing too many players for some positions and not enough in others as well as a proclivity to play players out of position. It has made Sheffield United a 'stop-start' side this season, whenever they looked set to kick-on, Clough would change things up leading to the dropping of some silly points. Sheffield United's squad is deep and brimming with talent but they have lacked key elements such as a reliable goal-scorer, a dominant centre-back and more importantly a settled starting line-up.

Despite failing to win promotion via the play-offs, Nigel Clough may just about cling to his position as manager. For next season to be a success, he first has to address glaring holes in his squad and then settle upon a settled starting line-up. With the knives out for him from a section of the support at Bramall Lane, Clough will also have to quickly win over his doubters to take advantage of a second-chance he arguably does not deserve.



Swindon Town

Predicted Position

11th

Final Position

4th

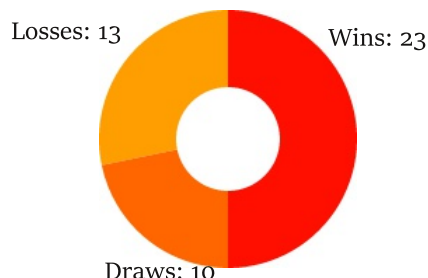
Difference

+7

League Cup: Second Round

FA Cup: First Round

JPT: Southern Second Round



The Manager

Mark Cooper - Built on a quietly impressive last season at the County Ground to put together a Swindon Town side that surprised the division by playing by far the best football despite a summer where no major signings had been made.

Star Player

Massimo Luongo - The Player of the Tournament at this year's Asian Cup shows the pedigree that Australian international Massimo Luongo has. Signed at an absolute bargain basement price from Tottenham two seasons ago, the playmaker symbolises how well Swindon have done on a limited budget over the past two seasons.

Key Turning Point

1-0 Win Over Bristol City - The first team in League One to beat Bristol City this season, this win demonstrated the quality Swindon had as they played the runaway league leaders off the park in a resounding victory.

Overview

This season should not have been this good for Swindon Town following a summer defined by a legal battle surrounding the ownership of the club. With no major signings brought in, aside from the usual young Premier League loanees, few expected Swindon to approach this season with the style and flair that they have displayed.

Just why Swindon have been so good for much of this season has been down to the management of

Mark Cooper, last seen in the Football League failing abjectly with Peterborough United. Cooper used last season to bed in a patient, passing style of football and allow young talents like midfielders Massimo Luongo, Yaser Kasim and Ben Gladwin to find their feet. Swindon have spent most of the season passing teams off the pitch with wing-backs Nathan Byrne and Harry Toffolo providing service for the potent Michael Smith, Andy Williams and Jon Obika in attack.

A result of Swindon's financial problems has been a chronic lack of squad depth, a drop-off in form over the final months was largely a result of the team running out of steam. The gamble seems to have paid off with Mark Cooper's side securing passage to the play-off final after a memorable 5-5 second-leg draw with Sheffield United. With a squad made up of a combination of loan players and others highly-coveted by clubs with bigger budgets, it is a case of seizing upon this chance to win promotion or watch as a special team is dismantled over the summer.



Walsall

Predicted Position

20th

Final Position

14th

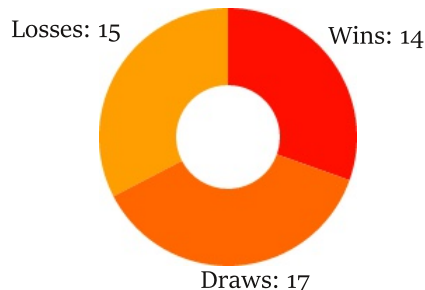
Difference

+6

League Cup: Second Round

FA Cup: First Round

JPT: Final



The Manager

Dean Smith - Works wonders on a shoestring budget at Walsall and led the club to its first ever appearance at Wembley in the Football League Trophy. There were concerns as Walsall nearly finished the season in a relegation battle but Smith kept things steady to lift Walsall into mid-table.

Star Player

Tom Bradshaw - Walsall are two different teams with and without Tom Bradshaw. The forward's goals make a massive difference but his overall play gives the team a greater cutting edge generally. His troubles with injuries have held Walsall back from a potential play-off push.

Key Turning Point

Strong Form In Early Winter - Walsall had been struggling as October drew to a close but found a defensive meanness which combined with the goals of Tom Bradshaw shot Walsall up the table. That run of form was probably the difference between Walsall struggling for the season and their final comfortable position.

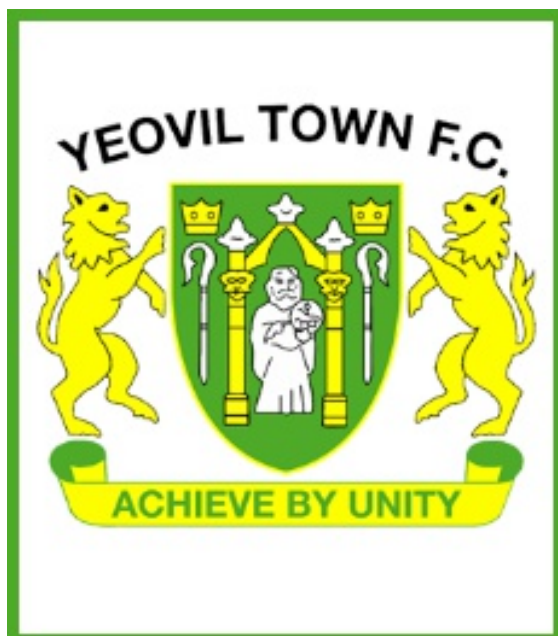
Overview

Walsall's continued survival in relative comfort in League One given their resources remains an achievement but this season's effort lacked the play-off near-misses that previous seasons contained under Dean Smith. This season will be remembered more for Walsall's first ever visit to Wembley in the Johnstone's Paint Trophy final,

even if they were thoroughly outclassed by Bristol City. The final weeks of the season saw Walsall scrape to survival which slightly clouds another positive season at the Bescot.

The undoubted star of Walsall's season and someone who without they would probably have been relegated is striker Tom Bradshaw. The forward who once went nearly two years without scoring a goal whilst at Shrewsbury, scored 17 goals and transformed Walsall's promising build-up play into a threat up front. Bradshaw's battles with injury held back an already impressive goalscoring tally and that factor may keep the impressive forward at the club for at least one more season. Elsewhere, Richard O'Donnell continued to marshal a tight Walsall backline from the goalkeeper's position. In front of him in central defence, Paul Downing has continued to develop into a solid presence at the back.

Whether Walsall can do it all again will depend upon Dean Smith's ability to continue to pull rabbits out of hats when it comes to signing players in the summer. Keeping Bradshaw seems vital but finding players who can take the attacking burden off him will also be important. It still feels like it will only take one bad summer of recruitment to place Walsall's stable position in League One at threat.



Yeovil Town

Predicted Position

7th

League Cup: First Round

FA Cup: Third Round

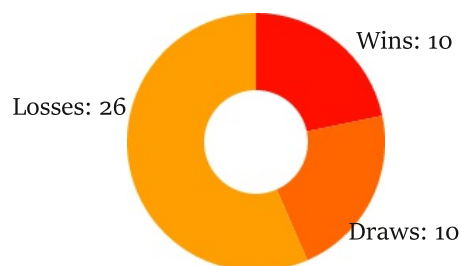
JPT: Southern First Round

Final Position

24th

Difference

-17



The Manager

Paul Sturrock - His appointment came too late to reverse a shockingly poor season for the club but the improvement in form under him will have Yeovil fans hope that they are in safe hands to stabilise things in League Two next season.

Star Player

Joe Edwards - The defensive-midfielder formed a crucial part in Gary Johnson's play-off winning side two seasons ago. Out of contract in the summer, his signing would provide an asset to any League One side looking for strength in midfield.

Key Turning Point

Failing To Replace Gary Johnson - Gary Johnson had lost the plot at Yeovil by the end, as evidenced by a shocking level of player turnover during his half season in charge. Terry Skiverton had previously managed the club but was previously asked to step down after proving himself to be out of his depth, allowing Skiverton back in charge for most of the rest of the season saw Yeovil cut adrift at the bottom of the table.

Overview

Despite relegation from the Championship last season, Yeovil looked well set to compete for at least mid-table this season. Particularly as manager Gary Johnson was someone who intrinsically understood what it meant to be Yeovil Town, having been the man to have led them out of non-league over a decade ago.

Despite losing a few key players, the replacements had been more than adequate and there was quiet optimism that Yeovil could repeat the play-off position they had earned the last time they were in League One.

What followed was an unmitigated disaster, Gary Johnson's divisive motivational techniques saw the club use 40 different players over the course of the season. Despite some signs of improvement, Johnson left in January and will now manage Cheltenham Town in non-league next season. Yeovil have Terry Skiverton another go in charge to little effect and the appointment of Paul Sturrock in April was far too late to save the club from double relegation.

Yeovil are a tiny club and a disastrous campaign this time around constitutes a massive missed opportunity to compete for promotion back to the Championship. It is unlikely that they will have this chance again and it has been by putting too much faith in Gary Johnson and Terry Skiverton that they have found themselves here. The appointment of Paul Sturrock though could help stabilise the club at a key juncture in their history. Double relegation is bad enough but the bottom could really fall out of the club if they don't reverse this sudden slump next season.

Coming Next Season...



Blackpool

League Finish: 24th (Championship)

Chairman Karl Oyston is reaping what he has sowed at Blackpool as he continues to pilfer the legacy of the club's season in the Premier League. Blackpool faced an uphill battle after having just eight contracted players just one week prior to the start of the season but it was an excess of players that eventually defined Blackpool's season on the pitch. Jose Riga was replaced by Lee Clark mid-season to little effect as Blackpool's season ended with clashes between owner and fans. Lee Clark has already resigned as manager and it hard to see any capable manager stabilising a club in crisis.



Wigan Athletic

League Finish: 23rd (Championship)

Having finished last season in the Championship play-offs under Uwe Rosler, Wigan looked set to go from strength-to-strength after some decent summer signings. Rosler's regime strangely fell flat this season and chairman Dave Whelan made a poor choice in picking Malky Mackay as Rosler's successor. Deeply-unpopular upon his arrival, Wigan's shocking home form under Mackay saw them cut adrift in the relegation battle. With parachute payments still sloshing around, Wigan should be well-placed to bounce back. A lot of faith is being placed in rookie manager Gary Caldwell.



Millwall

League Finish: 22nd (Championship)

A club for whom relegation from the Championship has seemed inevitable for the past few seasons. An okay start to the season under Ian Holloway quickly became a battle against the drop with a lack of quality at first-team level achingly apparent. Holloway's sacking came slightly too late despite caretaker boss Neil Harris improving results somewhat. Club legend Harris has now been named permanent manager but will face a huge task in adjusting the mentality at the club after several seasons of struggle in the Championship.



Burton Albion

League Finish: 1st (League Two)

The mid-season loss of manager Gary Rowett to Birmingham City had the potential to derail Burton Albion's bid for promotion. Rowett's successor, Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink, took to the task of leading Burton over the line with ease. Hasselbaink managed to combine the League Two industry with some Dutch flair and now has the chance this summer to stamp his mark on the squad. There is the danger that introducing too many foreign signings could destabilise the equilibrium at Burton but Hasselbaink has thus far been able to find the right balance.



Shrewsbury Town

League Finish: 2nd (League Two)

A root and branch restructure of the club following relegation from League One the previous campaign has breathed new life into Shrewsbury Town. Ex-Fleetwood manager Mickey Mellon was appointed and built an entirely new squad that possessed far too much quality for other League Two sides to handle. Shrewsbury's main strength is their physicality and that should provide a solid platform for success at League One level. In fact, a couple of good signings in the transfer market could turn Shrewsbury into one of the surprise packages next season.



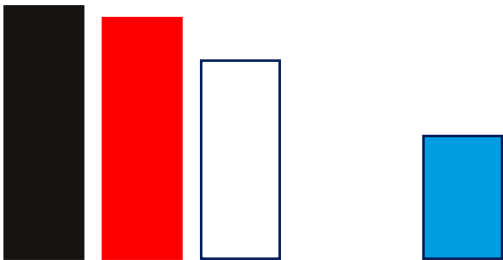
Bury

League Finish: 3rd (League Two)

Bury were the big spenders in League Two last season but spent much of the season outside the promotion places. Manager David Flitcroft finally found some defensive steel, led by the ex-Sky Blue Nathan Cameron, which allowed Danny Mayor the platform to hurt teams with his creativity at the other end. Bury seem well set-up under Flitcroft to upset a few teams expecting an easy trip to Gigg Lane next season. Like the other promoted teams from League Two, Bury will be feeling quietly confident about their prospects next season at a higher level.

Stats For The Season

Goals For



1st: MK 'Dons' (101)
2nd: Bristol City (96)
3rd: Preston North End (79)

4th: Coventry City (49)

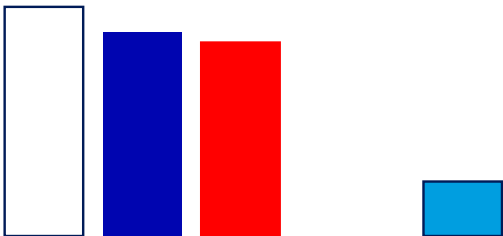
Goals Against



1st: Bristol City (38)
2nd: Preston North End (40)
3rd: MK 'Dons' (44)

4th: Coventry City (60)

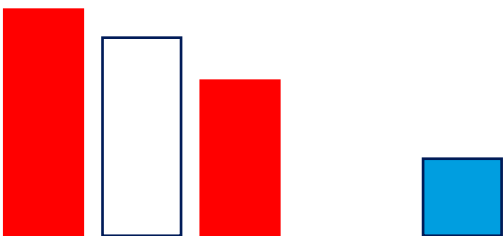
Top Scorer



1st: Joe Garner, Preston North End (25)
2nd: Ian Henderson, Rochdale (22)
3rd: Andy Williams, Swindon Town (21)

> 50th: Jim O'Brien, Frank Nouble & Dominic Samuel, Coventry City (6)

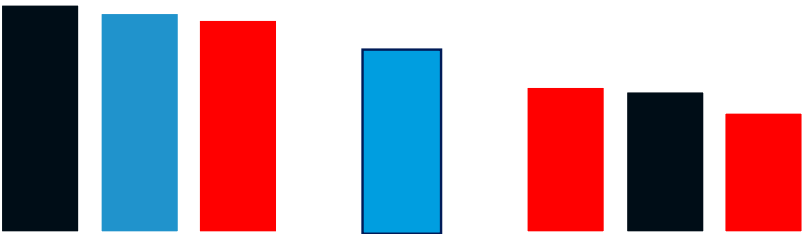
Most Assists



1st: Luke Freeman, Bristol City (18)
2nd: Paul Gallagher, Preston North End (14)
3rd: Conor Hourihane, Barnsley (13)

4th: Jim O'Brien, Coventry City (7)

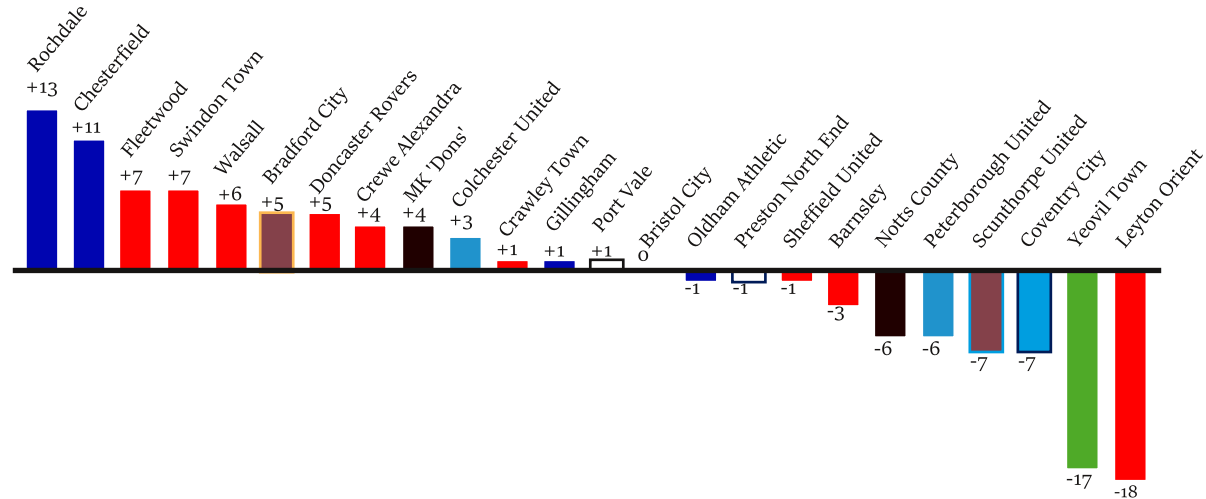
Players Used



1st: Notts County (45), 2nd: Colchester United (43), 3rd: Barnsley (42)
4th: Coventry City (36)
5th: Walsall (29), 6th: MK 'Dons' (28), 7th: Bristol City (24)

Prediction Accuracy

Average Difference: 5.63





The Players

37 different players were used this season in all competitions, a level of turnover that shows that plenty of options were tried this season without too many paying off. The amount of loan players in that 37 speaks volumes about the almost random way in which players were signed in the summer which left the club playing catch-up with the better run clubs in the division.

Most fans will agree that the players should have had everything available to them this season to do a lot better than struggling for survival. Steven Pressley may have struggled himself with this 'group' but even under Tony Mowbray, many have still let themselves down.

The lack of urgency and fight on display this season has seen the team out-thought and outfought by numerous limited opponents playing with greater organisation and commitment. Next season, there needs to be an

understanding from the players that this club should be challenging from promotion. It should not be good enough to coast through the season as many have. Whoever plays for us needs to take greater responsibility for their own performance levels as well as the team's.

Most of those 37 have either already left or will do in the summer. This section is a look at which of the players came out with any credit and where we went wrong with player recruitment over this past season.



Ryan Allsop

Apps (Goals): 27(0)

League: 24(0)

First Appearance:

Bradford City 09/08/14

Last Appearance:

Gillingham 17/01/15

Ryan Allsop struggled initially to replace the presence of Joe Murphy in goal. It became clear early on that the defence had little confidence in him which led to some completely avoidable goals being conceded. His short spell at the club looked to be over when he was dropped in favour of Lee Burge back in October.

A red card to Burge against Worcester City after some shaky performances led to Allsop being handed a second chance. His confidence levels improved from then on and he looked a completely different player. His departure at the end of his loan spell was odd as it left us in the lurch in goal at the mid-point of the season..

Score: 6/10



Lee Burge

Apps (Goals): 22(0)

League: 18(0)

First Appearance:

Cardiff City 13/08/14

Last Appearance:

Crawley Town 03/05/15

There were questions over Lee Burge's long-term future at the club after a petulant sending-off against Worcester City in the cup in the wake of several unconvincing performances in goal. His season seemed to turn on a brilliant save on his return to the first-team against Preston North End and his confidence grew from then on.

Commanding in the air from crosses and capable of making wonderful reaction saves, Burge will only get better with more experience. Many fans will remain unconvinced with Burge and there may be some logic in bringing in someone to challenge for his spot next season but he deserves to start as first-choice.

Score: 6/10



Reice Charles-Cook

Apps (Goals): 0(0)

League: 0(0)

First Appearance:

n/a

Last Appearance:

n/a

Immediately loaned out to Nuneaton in order to pick up first-team experience, Reice Charles-Cook was definitely signed with one eye on the future, possibly as an insurance option if Lee Burge failed to establish himself. Charles-Cook was recalled from Nuneaton as part of our goalkeeping crisis back in November and he has remained second/third choice ever since.

After making several eye-catching performances with Nuneaton, Charles-Cook was handed a one-year contract extension. Lee Burge's end of season form has meant that Charles-Cook is unlikely to force his way into the team and will probably look for another loan move next season.

Score: n/a



Jamie Jones

Apps (Goals): 4(0)

League: 4(0)

First Appearance:

Yeovil Town 24/01/15

Last Appearance:

Sheffield United 21/02/15

A solid presence between the sticks, Jamie Jones was brought in by Pressley after the departure of Ryan Allsop left us short in goal ahead of the crucial Yeovil game back in January. Jamie Jones's main quality that he brought to the team was his audible communication to his defence rather than any incredible shot-stopping ability.

The traditional thinking would have been to keep an experienced professional in goal with the club in a relegation battle. Jones' departure though allowed Lee Burge to show what he really do in goal and it probably was for the best that we gave minutes to a player we owned rather than another loanee..

Score: 5/10



Jordan Clarke

Apps (Goals): 14(1)

League: 11(1)

First Appearance:

Bradford City 09/08/14

Last Appearance:

Bristol City 18/10/14

It was with a tinge of sadness that Jordan Clarke left Coventry City back in January. Whilst he was error prone, Clarke was, on his day, one of the classiest defenders in the division. The way he transformed himself into a centre-back last season after being transfer-listed was a credit to his professionalism and determination.

Jordan Clarke never really got a run as first-choice right-back, having been deployed in a wing-back role at the start of this season that he was not really suited to. Since joining Scunthorpe, it has been a reportedly mixed spell at Glanford Park but he is capable of doing a lot better.

Score: 5/10



Ryan Haynes

Apps (Goals): 30(1)

League: 25(1)

First Appearance:

Cardiff City 13/08/14

Last Appearance:

Leyton Orient 01/04/15

Ryan Haynes was the breakout star of the first few months of the season for Coventry City. An assist coming off the bench in a League Cup tie in Cardiff demonstrated his natural fit for the wing-back role in Pressley's 5-3-2 system. Haynes' intelligent cut-back for the winning goal in the homecoming game against Gillingham demonstrated that his game was about more than just lung-busting runs.

His form tailed off as the season wore on, however his defensive game seemed to improve whilst his attacking sparkle died out. That experience of losing his place should be good for him but he now has to win it back next season.

Score: 6/10



Seb Hines

Apps (Goals): 9(0)

League: 9(0)

First Appearance:

Gillingham 05/09/14

Last Appearance:

Peterborough United 25/10/14

Seb Hines showed himself to be a classy presence at the back during his time with Coventry City but was not really what we needed for him at the time. He stepped into the team following Reda Johnson's red card/injury in September-October and played in one of the meekest Coventry City teams for some time.

We needed a leader at the back and unfortunately Seb Hines was just not that type of personality. Whilst he had moments when he oozed class, he could also be accused of being out-muscled and making some sloppy mistakes at times. Hines will not remember his time at the club with any fondness, he is now playing with Kaka in MLS.

Score: 4/10



Reda Johnson

Apps (Goals): 22(6)

League: 20(5)

First Appearance:

Bradford City 09/08/14

Last Appearance:

Crawley Town 03/05/15

A few dominant displays at the start and end of the season should not obscure what a let down it is for the club that Reda Johnson has spent most of the season injured rather than playing football. When he is fit, his force of personality makes such a difference for a team that often lacks character.

Johnson's brute force is his main attribute but there have been signs that his forcefulness can border on recklessness creating unnecessary danger for the team. Johnson's time at the club will be remembered fondly but he is perhaps someone who has benefited from being absent during long spells when the team was playing poorly.

Score: 6/10



Aaron Martin

Apps (Goals): 28(0)

League: 27(0)

First Appearance:

Leyton Orient 01/11/14

Last Appearance:

Crawley Town 03/05/15

Largely a steady player at the back, Aaron Martin has made some poor errors towards the end of the season which has made many Coventry City fans lose confidence in him. Martin generally does the basics very well but it is hard to tell whether he is a bad ball-player or just takes zero risks when he boots the ball into the stands at the earliest opportunity.

He has put in some very good performances at times and it will be about finding consistency next season for him to earn a starting spot. Tony Mowbray has made it very clear what he needs to do to improve and he may be someone who will look a lot better next season as a result.

Score: 5/10



Matthew Pennington

Apps (Goals): 25(0)

League: 24(0)

First Appearance:

Walsall 29/11/14

Last Appearance:

Crewe Alexandra 25/04/15

Initially brought in as cover at right-back after injuries to Jordan Willis and Aaron Phillips, Matthew Pennington proved very early on that he is no right-back at all. Completely unrecognisable as a centre-back where he is calm and can snuff out danger with ease.

As a young defender, he has made mistakes along the way which have proven costly to the team. The question is whether you want a loan player getting opportunities to make mistakes rather than home-grown ones, the answer probably not. It would be nice to us benefit from those lessons learned with his return next season but his departure could finally allow Jordan Willis to develop.

Score: 6/10



Aaron Phillips

Apps (Goals): 22(2)

League: 19(0)

First Appearance:

Swindon Town 30/08/14

Last Appearance:

Crewe Alexandra 25/04/15

This should have been the season where Aaron Phillips established himself as first-choice right-back but it has never really happened for him. Injuries have made it a stop-start season for Phillips and there are signs that a lack of consistency in being selected has made it hard for him to produce a level of consistency in his performances.

For someone who is still rated highly at this football club, he needs to nail down a starting spot sometime next season in order to have a future here. The timing of his tackling can be impeccable and he is decent enough going forward. Next season could be pretty important for his career at the club.

Score: 5/10



Danny Pugh

Apps (Goals): 7(0)

League: 5(0)

First Appearance:

Bradford City 09/08/14

Last Appearance:

Bristol City 18/10/14

There is not a great deal to say about Danny Pugh after a meagre seven appearances for the club since joining in the summer. He did record two assists on his debut against Bradford City but his subsequent performances were not great, albeit that he did not look a natural presence at left wing-back.

He can hardly be blamed for his bad luck with injuries ending his season in October. His experience would have made a massive difference after Ryan Haynes' form dipped mid-season. It forced us to take a gamble on a player from non-league in Chris Stokes which could have had disastrous consequences..

Score: 4/10



Chris Stokes

Apps (Goals): 16(1)

League: 16(1)

First Appearance:

Sheffield United 21/03/15

Last Appearance:

Crawley Town 03/05/15

Most fans like to see their club take a gamble on players from the lower divisions so Chris Stokes' signing was seen as a positive change from the 'has-beens' that we mostly signed this season. Stokes' fitness levels held him back in his first few appearances, his performances dipping noticeably after the half-hour mark.

Someone who tried his hardest to improve his game and was successful in doing so as the season wore on, Stokes has done himself proud during his time here. It still feels that he is slightly short on quality to be the calibre of player we would want to see here next season. Chris Stokes leaves Coventry City with his head held high.

Score: 6/10



Andy Webster

Apps (Goals): 34(0)

League: 30(0)

First Appearance:

Bradford City 09/08/14

Last Appearance:

Crawley Town 03/05/15

When the team is not playing well, fans will always single out players for particular criticism. The concept that Andy Webster was somehow only being picked because he was 'friends' with Steven Pressley was ludicrous but it seemed credible to many who had written-off Pressley's reign. Webster has made mistakes this season but no more than his team-mates in defence.

Despite being a calm presence at the back and one of the few players who took the responsibility to be vocal on the pitch, age has caught up with Webster with many of his mistakes coming from being too far up the pitch to recover with his slowing pace.

Score: 5/10



Jordan Willis

Apps (Goals): 40(0)

League: 34(0)

First Appearance:

Bradford City 09/08/14

Last Appearance:

Crawley Town 03/05/15

This was Jordan Willis' first full season as a first-choice player at the club and it has been a campaign of ups and downs. Willis can excel defensively with his reading of the game but has been bullied physically on several occasions this season. At right-back, Willis lacks the courage in his convictions going forward and it tells with his poor crossing.

With time, Willis could develop into a solid right-back but he will surely be hoping for more time next season at centre-back. The difference in defensive performance of the team in the final weeks of the season with and without Willis was marked, a sign of his growing importance.

Score: 6/10



Al Bangura

Apps (Goals): 0(0)

League: 0(0)

First Appearance:

n/a

Last Appearance:

n/a

Signed as cover after impressing on trial with the club, Al Bangura will be frustrated that in his big chance to get back into professional football, he was never called upon. Perhaps his signing came as a result of Tony Mowbray not really knowing players like Conor Thomas and Jack Finch all too well, Bangura's inability to get into the squad being a sign that Thomas and Finch have pleasantly surprised Mowbray.

Having followed his story at Watford and his battle against deportation back to Sierra Leone, I will be interested to see where Bangura goes to next. Without having seen him play, it is hard to judge what level that might be at.

Score: n/a



Adam Barton

Apps (Goals): 30(0)

League: 27(0)

First Appearance:

Bristol City 18/10/14

Last Appearance:

Crawley Town 03/05/15

Adam Barton looked to be heading for the exit door after being frozen out of the squad by Steven Pressley in the summer. Few Coventry City fans would have had any problems with that decision as Barton failed to match his ability on the ball with making telling contributions to games. However, Barton acquitted himself well in the under-21 team and won a place back in the squad by the end of October.

Despite some decent performances for Barton this season, it has become apparent that he lacks the mental edge to impose himself on games. Somewhat unfairly maligned as a sideways passing midfielder, few will miss him.

Score: 5/10



Mohamed Coulibaly

Apps (Goals): 6(0)

League: 4(0)

First Appearance:

Wycombe Wanderers 02/09/14

Last Appearance:

Bristol City 18/10/14

Two things hindered the ability of Mohamed Coulibaly to make an impact at this club, the first was missing the first month of the season through injury and the second was Pressley's move to the 5-3-2 system which had no place for a winger like Coulibaly. Starting just two of his six appearances at the club, Coulibaly was relegated to the role of impact substitute.

His early cameos were very promising as his pace and trickery gave us some oomph towards the end of lifeless displays. It soon became apparat there was no end product to his excitement and he was ditched fairly quickly.

Score: 4/10



Billy Daniels

Apps (Goals): 4(0)

League: 2(0)

First Appearance:

Cardiff City 13/08/14

Last Appearance:

Wycombe Wanderers 02/09/14

Billy Daniels never really kicked on from a those two goals he scored in the 5-4 win over Bristol City in our first game at Sixfields. Played as a wide player, Daniels never really learned how to be effective there. In the middle his passing ability was found wanting. As a striker, he was not strong or prolific enough.

With barely a handful of appearances under his belt this season, Daniels had to leave the club in order to further his career. After scoring on his debut at Notts County, his career at Meadow Lane has followed a familiar path of struggling to nail down a position and sliding out of contention for the starting 11.

Score: 4/10



Jack Finch

Apps (Goals): 21(0)

League: 16(0)

First Appearance:

Cardiff City 13/08/14

Last Appearance:

MK 'Dons' 28/02/15

Versatile enough to play either as a centre-back or in midfield, Jack Finch has moved from unknown youth-teamer into first-team squad member this season and he should be pretty proud of his progress. Finch is very assured with his technical ability and has started to develop a little physical edge to his game with experience.

Taken out of the limelight after a possible over-use at the half-way stage this season, Jack Finch has yet to show Tony Mowbray would he can do at first-team level. Disappointingly, some fans have read into some quiet performances in a poor team this season as reason to write him off. Finch has time to prove them wrong.

Score: 5/10



John Fleck

Apps (Goals): 48(0)

League: 44(0)

First Appearance:

Bradford City 09/08/14

Last Appearance:

Crawley Town 03/05/15

John Fleck's inability to turn his technical ability and fleeting moments of decisiveness into consistent, dominant performances is beyond frustrating. Fleck has been first-choice for the entirety of the season but has only assisted goals in three games and scored in none. Someone with his talent should be doing much more.

Fleck is first-choice at this football club because players of his natural talent are rare at this level of football and his quality is clearly there. What is lacking is that mental toughness to take games by the scruff of the neck and decide them in his favour. Part of the reason why we struggled was his passiveness in important games.

Score: 6/10



James Maddison

Apps (Goals): 17(2)

League: 11(2)

First Appearance:

Cardiff City 13/08/14

Last Appearance:

Crawley Town 03/05/15

The secret cannot be contained much longer, James Maddison is a special talent and perhaps already far too good to playing in the third-tier of English football. His ability with the ball at his feet is such that it looks to be an extension of his foot. His awareness of where to be on the pitch to hurt opposing sides is preternatural. Lumpen defenders cannot get close to his slight frame.

The biggest worry with Maddison is that he could leave us before we see what he really can do as a first-choice player. At his age, it is probably too much pressure to build the team around him but if he is around he will make a massive difference next season.

Score: 6/10



Jim O'Brien

Apps (Goals): 48(6)

League: 44(6)

First Appearance:

Bradford City 09/08/14

Last Appearance:

Crawley Town 03/05/15

Jim O'Brien is arguably our player of the season, leading the charts in scoring and creating goals. However he has been a frustrating player to watch for most of the season and arguably somebody who hid from proceedings between November and the end of January in a phase of the season which saw us end up in a relegation scrap.

O'Brien is at his best when he does not have too much time or space on the ball and is forced to play on instinct. When he has time to pick a cross or a pass, his technique is surprisingly poor. Still, he has been a decisive player for us at times and should have the ability to go on and have a much more productive season next time around.

Score: 6/10



Sanmi Odelusi

Apps (Goals): 14(3)

League: 14(3)

First Appearance:

Rochdale 31/01/15

Last Appearance:

Crewe Alexandra 25/04/15

Steven Pressley might be feeling that had Sanmi Odelusi not been injured for a month after scoring arguably goal of the season on his debut against Rochdale, he might have still been in the job here. Odelusi's pace, trickery and the desire to try something different made a big difference immediately to a team that was slow and low on ideas.

His performances have dipped after an initial bright start as Adam Barton moved ahead of him in the pecking order which is a pretty big indictment on Odelusi's contribution to the team. Those first few performances though did provide the uplift that the team needed at the time.

Score: 6/10



Danny Swanson

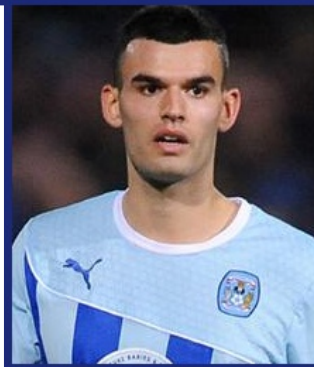
Apps (Goals): 18(0)
League: 15(0)

First Appearance:
Bradford City 09/08/14
Last Appearance:
Gillingham 17/01/15

I imagine that Danny Swanson will be feeling peeved that he never really got the chance to show what he can do at Coventry City. One of the brighter players in the opening month of the season, Swanson was supposed to provide the 'X factor' that the departed Franck Moussa could produce. Swanson was never given the opportunity to put a run of games together and became a peripheral figure.

A loan spell at St Johnstone has demonstrated that Swanson is a player that Mowbray should look at over the summer, especially as he has another year on his contract. The few chances he has been given he has probably gone missing a bit too often, Swanson's future is in the balance.

Score: 5/10



Conor Thomas

Apps (Goals): 19(0)
League: 16(0)

First Appearance:
Bradford City 09/08/14
Last Appearance:
Gillingham 17/01/15

Conor Thomas must be feeling quite disappointed about the season he has just had. His form towards the end of the previous campaign had dropped off quite badly and he has never returned to that level he showed during our amazing run under Pressley in 13/14. A combination of injury and seemingly falling entirely out of favour has left his future place in the squad under doubt.

The hope for Thomas next season is that Mowbray has been pleasantly surprised by his ability. With a strong pre-season under his belt, there is no reason why he could not reclaim his first-team spot, particularly as the squad lacks that forceful presence in midfield he can be.

Score: 4/10



Blair Turgott

Apps (Goals): 3(1)
League: 3(1)

First Appearance:
Barnsley 03/03/15
Last Appearance:
Leyton Orient 01/04/15

Signed, but not given a chance until the final month of the season, Blair Turgott has shown some genuine ability and commitment when handed the opportunity here. His breakthrough moment came against Peterborough where he chased every lost cause and capped off a mad-cap performance with a well-taken goal.

It seems almost certain now that Turgott will leave the club as Tony Mowbray has rarely included him on the bench during his time in charge. There must be something going on on the training ground that we as fans have not seen and we will have to trust that Mowbray's decision on him is justifiable..

Score: 5/10



Grant Ward

Apps (Goals): 11(0)
League: 11(0)

First Appearance:
Chesterfield 14/03/15
Last Appearance:
Crawley Town 03/05/15

Grant Ward has had an excellent loan spell at this football club and his quality and dynamism in midfield added quality to the team at a key point in the season. The decision to sign a small, ball-playing midfielder when we already had several and were in a relegation scrap was more than a little odd but his arrival did coincide with an up-turn in form.

Ward's passing ability is assured but he also has the capability to drift past players in the centre and is a decent set-piece taker. It seems unlikely that he will return here as he will now be looking to take a move to a higher level.

Score: 7/10



Luke Williams

Apps (Goals): 5(0)
League: 5(0)

First Appearance:
Preston North End 07/02/15
Last Appearance:
Port Vale 07/03/15

A frustrating signing, not because of a lack of ability or even application, just that he was utilised so horribly during his time here. Clearly no left-winger, Luke Williams could only show flickers of the ability he has due to being in an area of the pitch he was not comfortable in.

What was stranger still was that the team lacked that creative presence in the final third that Williams might have been able to provide had he been utilised correctly. A spell at Scunthorpe where he played centrally showed what the club was missing out on. Williams has been seen as another disappointing loan signing, do not be surprised to see him excel elsewhere next season.

Score: 4/10



Simeon Jackson

Apps (Goals): 30(3)
League: 28(3)

First Appearance:
Barnsley 19/08/14
Last Appearance:
Oldham Athletic 14/04/15

A major disappointment this season has been Simeon Jackson's ability to justify the reputation he arrived with with performances on the pitch. Being regularly deployed as the deeper striker rather than off the shoulder of the last defender did not help, but it does not fully explain his poor scoring record at the club.

Jackson's turn of pace seems to have completely deserted him and, after a decent start, his ability to take chances that fell at his feet. By the end of the season, Jackson was taking too many chances before shooting, a sign of a lack of confidence. His career is on a downward spiral, he will have to pick it up away from Coventry City.

Score: 4/10



Gary Madine

Apps (Goals): 13(4)
League: 11(3)

First Appearance:
Leyton Orient 01/11/14
Last Appearance:
Yeovil Town 24/01/15

The debate over Gary Madine is whether he was a good player in a bad team or simply nowhere near as good as people expected him to be. Arriving as a big-name and expensive signing, Madine was supposed to be the presence in the team to finally exorcise the ghost of Leon Clarke. A meagre goal return and a missed penalty on his final appearance will colour what was a mixed spell.

Too much responsibility was placed on Madine to create his own chances as well as provide link-up play for the team. Someone who clearly hated to play that kind of role, it was noticeable how much the team improved without him..

Score: 5/10



Josh McQuoid

Apps (Goals): 19(5)
League: 14(3)

First Appearance:
Bradford City 09/08/14
Last Appearance:
Fleetwood Town 20/12/14

Off to a bad start to his Coventry City career by taking a month to decide whether he even wanted to be here or not, Josh McQuoid never really convinced fans that he was worth the rigmarole of getting him here. For a player of such limited technical and physical attributes, a return of five goals in 19 appearances is fairly respectable.

A player who does not seem entirely sure what his role in a team is, it is the least surprising thing in the world to see that he failed to get on the pitch back at Premier League promotion-chasing Bournemouth. Now a free agent, it will be indicative of Pressley's inability to spot talent were he to drop into League Two.

Score: 5/10



Shaun Miller

Apps (Goals): 12(2)

League: 11(1)

First Appearance:

Bradford City 09/08/14

Last Appearance:

Gillingham 17/01/15

Based on the glimpses that most have got of Shaun Miller during his early season cameos, he deserved to get more time on the pitch than he was given under Pressley. Someone who played with urgency and the directness to move the ball closer towards goal, for whatever reason, Miller was not handed the opportunities that other players have been given for doing much less.

Two fairly nondescript loan spells though maybe suggests that there was something both managers saw in him that saw him rated so lowly. It is something of a mystery why he was never given a fair crack at the whip but his wider career record suggest there is a reason.

Score: 4/10



Frank Nouble

Apps (Goals): 34(7)

League: 31(6)

First Appearance:

Gillingham 05/09/14

Last Appearance:

Crawley Town 03/05/15

In a season of frustrating players, Frank Nouble has topped the chart. With talent and physicality the envy of most strikers in this decision, Nouble's inability to use his gifts on a consistent basis has been painful to watch for most of the season. For those long spells where he does nothing in games, Nouble will all-of-a-sudden switch on and provide a goal and assist out of nowhere.

The problem is that those moments have been too few and far between to justify the long spells of nothingness. Frank Nouble is in danger of wasting his career away through failing to play to his strengths. My worry that he will turn it on somewhere else has lessened with each game.

Score: 5/10



Nick Proschwitz

Apps (Goals): 9(1)

League: 9(1)

First Appearance:

MK 'Dons' 28/02/15

Last Appearance:

Crawley Town 03/05/15

Nick Proschwitz came very close to becoming the villain whose missed penalty turned a final-day relegation battle against us. Fortunately for him, that miss was not as costly as it could have been but it did only serve to mark what has been a frustrating spell at Coventry City for him.

Had he been able to convert the simple chances that he often found himself having, we would probably be worrying about whether he could sign him permanently. After an injury to Dominic Samuel, Proschwitz did step up with some committed performances but he was also shockingly poor in the air given his height. Another signing who fell just short of being good enough for us.

Score: 5/10



Dominic Samuel

Apps (Goals): 13(6)

League: 13(6)

First Appearance:

Rochdale 31/01/15

Last Appearance:

Leyton Orient 01/04/15

The signing of the season and the only striker we have signed since the departures of Callum Wilson and Leon Clarke that would have given them a run for their money. Samuel's finishing ability and pace gave the team a cutting edge that they did not have otherwise, giving us the lift to keep our heads above water in the final months of the season.

What is scary to consider is just how comfortably we may have ended the season had Marvin Bartley of Leyton Orient cynically taken him out at the start of April. There were several games in that last month where a better finisher would have made all the difference.

Score: 7/10



George Thomas

Apps (Goals): 7(0)

League: 6(0)

First Appearance:

Exeter City 07/10/14

Last Appearance:

Leyton Orient 01/04/15

Although his debut for the club came back in January of 2014, it was only really this season where George Thomas showed Coventry City fans what he was all about and why people at the club are so excited by him. Primarily an orthodox, nippy striker, Thomas has shown that he is technically solid enough to drop into midfield or play out wide. His urgency to link with other players has seen him make some impressive cameos towards the end of the season.

I can imagine his main disappointment will be not scoring his first goal, particularly in that big game against Orient. It is only matter of time, the future is bright for him.

Score: 5/10



Marcus Tudgay

Apps (Goals): 23(4)

League: 22(4)

First Appearance:

Bradford City 09/08/14

Last Appearance:

Crawley Town 03/05/15

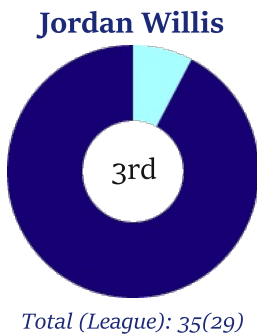
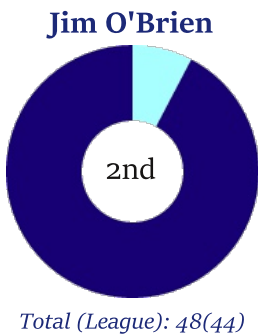
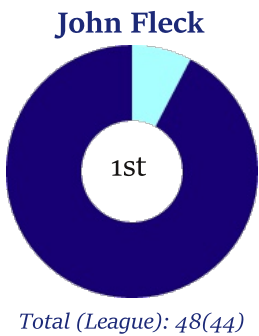
For much of the first-half of the season, Marcus Tudgay was little more than a walking joke for Coventry City fans. A not particularly strong centre-forward who was not quick or a decent finisher, it was hard to figure out what he offered the team. Tudgay's work-rate came to the fore as he made more of an impression in the final months of the season.

He gave the team a reliable presence in the opposing half as he battled to make sure that balls sent towards him stuck. It was his goal on the final day of the season that reversed a dire looking situation. Tudgay dug this team out of a hole on several occasions this season.

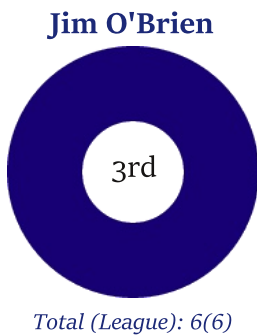
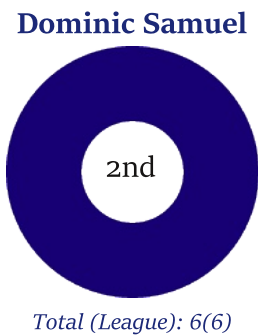
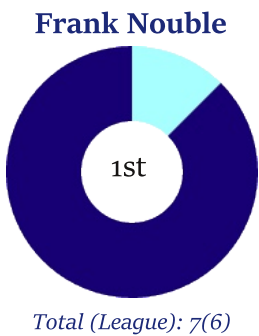
Score: 5/10

Key Stats

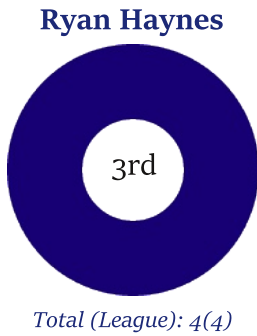
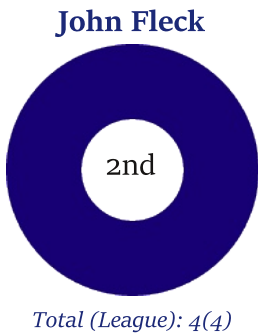
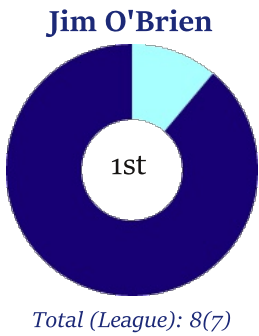
Appearances



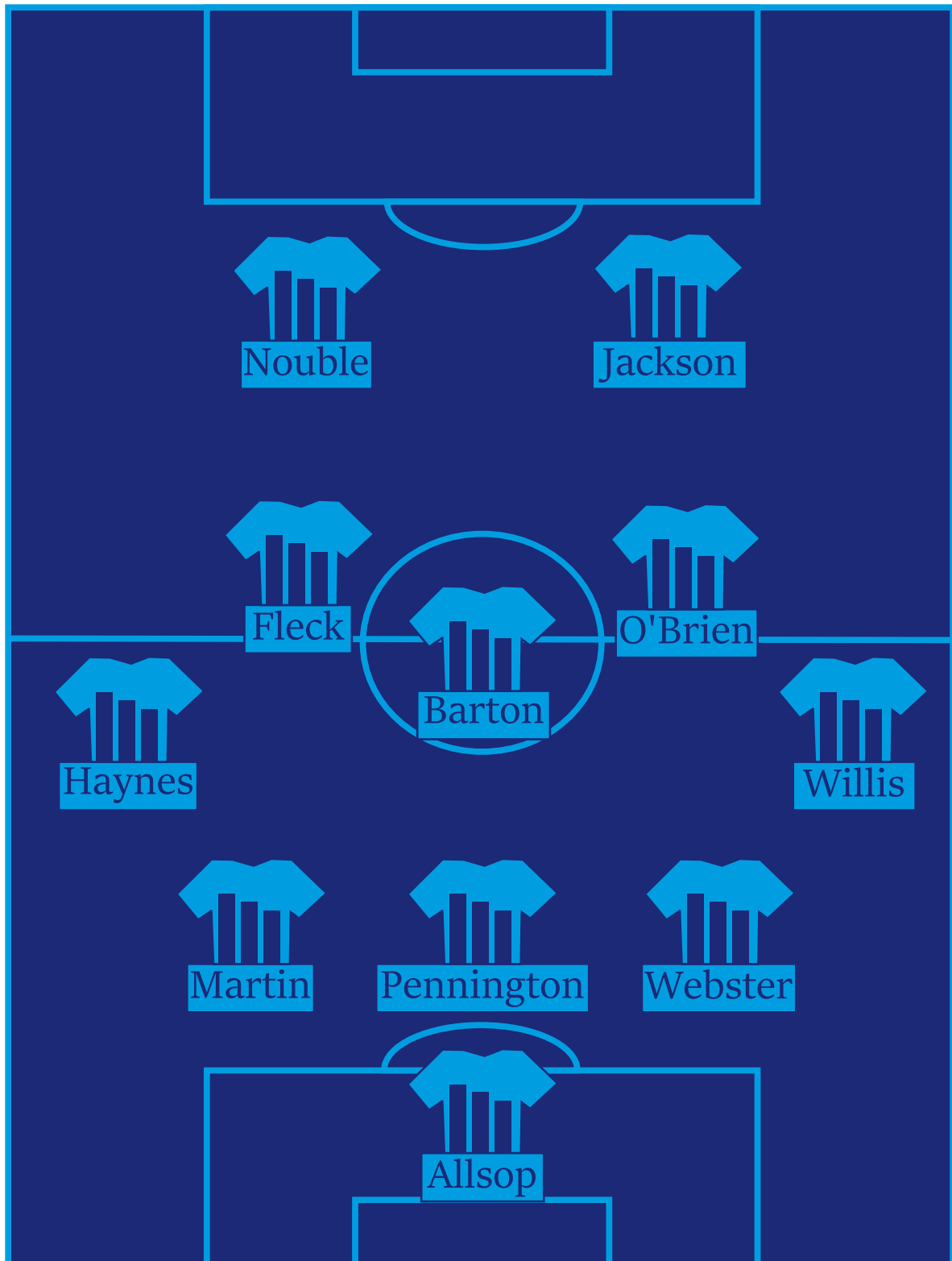
Goals



Assists



Most Used Team



Based on appearances in all competitions



The Story Of The Season

This is the real meat of the season review, the telling of the story of it. I have decided to break this section up into seven sections which I think reflect the various turning points of the campaign.

This is the area of this review where the analysis of what went right and wrong can really happen. Re-living those highs and lows and trying to remember how they felt is an important part of attempting to move on from this car crash of the season.

Part One focuses on the mood surrounding the club at the very start of the season, the almost forgotten weeks still at Sixfields.

Part Two focuses on that triumphant return, remembering what it felt like to genuinely believe that this club was on the verge of achieving something truly memorable.

Part Three looks at that terrible run of form that proceeded Reda Johnson's red card and injury as the life was slowly sucked out of the club.

Part Four looks back on that remarkable comeback victory over Peterborough in October and the complete inability to kick on from it, culminating in the embarrassing FA Cup defeat to Worcester.

Part Five is that long dull stretch from November to January where we struggled to score and were just generally dull.

Part Six focuses on the end of Steven Pressley's reign and the start of Tony Mowbray's.

The story ends with Part Seven which focuses on the final run-in.

Getting To Grips

9th August 2014 - 19th August 2014

Games Played: 4
Won: 1
Drawn: 1
Lost: 2
Goals Scored: 6
Goals Conceded: 7
League Position: 14th
Players Used: 19



It was a long and tedious summer for Sky Blues fans, especially after the previous season petered out in a pitiful manner following the departure of Leon Clarke. The supposedly explosive judicial review that was either going to return the club to Coventry or force SISU's exit ruled against the club's owners but they continued to wrest firm control over the club.

The sideshow of the judicial review seemed to have hindered the club's summer transfer activity, coincidentally or not, the club's first summer signings were made the day after the judgement. The team that had acquitted themselves so well to the club's crisis at the start of the previous season had been dismantled. In Franck Moussa, Cyrus Christie, Joe Murphy, Carl Baker, Leon Clarke and Callum Wilson, the club had lost every single potential match-winner from last season.

Despite all of the reasons to be fearful that this season would see the reality of playing at Northampton really bite, a number of solid replacements had been sourced. Steven Pressley had gone out in search of experienced professionals who could help the team grind out results much more effectively than they had attempted towards the end of the previous season. Reda Johnson added brute force in defence whilst Marcus Tudgay in attack and full-back Danny Pugh offered experienced heads and leadership to the squad. In addition, wingers Jim O'Brien and Danny Swanson were the two signings that offered excitement and creativity to the squad.

For Steven Pressley, this season was a chance to prove that he could mix the idealism that had produced the glorious start to the previous season with the pragmatism that would avoid repeating the resulting slump. This was his first

full summer transfer window without an embargo and with the team beginning the season with 10 points more than they had the last time around, he had more to work with and less pressure to get things right from the off.

This team was going to be set up in a more defensively-minded fashion and would build from the solid base of keeping clean sheets. A 5-3-2 formation had been settled upon in pre-season, where a win over Championship promotion-contenders Watford had shown that this was a formula that could work.

Yet for all the talk of a new start, the opening day trip to Bradford City was very familiar territory to the 'goal fests' of the previous campaign. Twice Bradford took the lead and twice the Sky Blues equalised, both Danny Pugh crosses headed in by Reda Johnson. Bradford exposed the soft underbelly of the side by taking the lead for the third and final time just after the celebrations for Johnson's second goal had subsided.

Next up were Cardiff City in a League Cup tie in front of the Sky TV cameras as another season at Sixfields began. For those who did not travel to Bradford, this would be a chance to see what this new team was like and it was an insipid performance from the Sky Blues. Cardiff, barely needed to get out of first gear thanks to the complete lack of threat and fluency from Coventry City in all areas. Not only was the team clearly still learning to play with each other but looked to be playing in a formation ill-suited to their talents.

The introduction of substitute Ryan Haynes offered some hope, despite the young defender scoring an own goal to hand Cardiff a place in the next round. Haynes dusted himself off and surged down the left wing before laying a brilliant cross into the path of Shaun Miller who swept the ball into the back of the net. Perhaps there was some thinking behind the formation after all.

The first 'home' league game of the season came against Sheffield United, the pre-season favourites for promotion. The Blades, in front of

a passionate away following, dominated long periods of the first half but the game seemed to turn on a brilliant reaction save from loanee keeper Ryan Allsop. From then on, the Sky Blues grew in confidence as Sheffield United were outfought in nearly all areas of the pitch.

It was a performance of effort over quality, summed up by the game's decisive goal. Haynes once again surged down the left, floated a cross into the box which Jim O'Brien scuffed and went in via a heavy deflection off Sheffield United's Bob Harris. The team then dug-in to see out the three points, all 11 players on the pitch that day ran hard yards to ensure victory. A back three of Jordan Willis, Andy Webster and Reda Johnson confidently dealt with everything thrown at them. This was clearly a limited squad but Steven Pressley looked to have found an ethos that could bring the best out of them.

It was early days but the win over such a heavily-fancied team could hopefully act as a template for this team to surpass its expectations. The previous season was about a talented squad expressing itself, the manager seemed to have learned some important lessons from the previous campaign that defensive shape can be an equally effective platform as attacking flair. The performances may be less exciting but that desire to work hard seemed like it would make the team less prone to inconsistency.

The team then improved upon the Sheffield United performance levels with a more convincing display at Sixfields against Barnsley. Josh McQuoid scored an early goal by closing down a Barnsley defender with vigour. Barnsley levelled via a fantastically struck free-kick only for the Sky Blues to regain the lead through Jordan Clarke tucking away a deflection from a set-piece.

All three points would surely have been taken had Ryan Allsop not dropped the ball into his own net after a soft header from Leroy Lita. What followed was largely one-way traffic as Ryan Haynes was once again the most obvious route towards goal for the Sky Blues. Several chances from set-pieces fell just wide and the big

name new signing Simeon Jackson nearly secured the three points towards the end.

To feel aggrieved at not taking three points against a Barnsley side who were potential play-off challengers was a good sign this early in the season, especially with the low expectations heading into it. A solid start to the season but at Sixfields it was always going to be a long, hard slog.

The Grand Return

23rd August 2014 - 5th September 2014

Games Played: 4
Won: 1
Drawn: 3
Lost: 0
Goals Scored: 3
Goals Conceded: 1
League Position: 8th
Players Used: 24



That draw against Barnsley turned out to be the final Coventry City 'home' game at Sixfields as it was announced two days later that the Sky Blues would be back at the Ricoh Arena. It was a day that had seemed unlikely to happen after a year of impasse between SISU and the council. It was finally a proud day to be a Sky Blues fan and it seemed like the best chance the club would ever have of arresting a slump that began with relegation from the Premier League nearly 15 years prior.

This was an opportunity to redefine the personality of this football club, the Ricoh Arena had been a theatre of anxiety for much of its existence, this time the fans were not going to take it for granted. Few other football clubs have had the chance to press the reset button on what it means to support them, this was a unique chance to come together and turn Coventry City into the club we had always wanted it to be.

A trip to Milton Keynes just days after the announcement had fans hopeful that a few positive results in the two weeks until the grand homecoming game against Gillingham could see a team playing with some real momentum behind it. With memories of Chris Maguire's identical free-kicks in front of a bumper away following the previous season, being second-best in a 0-0 draw was not what buoyant Sky Blues fans had in mind. It did preserve the unbeaten run and it was still early in the season.

The following game against a Swindon Town side missing a host of key players was a chance to stick one over on one of our potential promotion rivals. Once again, the Sky Blues produced a rather flat display and were fortunate to take the lead via a long punt forward which Josh McQuoid tucked away almost by accident. Swindon's eventual equaliser via a set-piece was particularly disappointing as it was an area the

team should have been much stronger in with Reda Johnson in the side.

It was a glass half full versus half empty situation, was it better that the team were picking up points despite low-key performances or a worry that we were struggling to raise our game? The 5-3-2 seemed to have improved the defensive side of our game but to the detriment of our attacking play with the team creating few opportunities, especially down the right side with Jordan Clarke a completely unnatural option at wing-back.

The final piece of business before minds could focus solely upon the big homecoming game was a Johnstone's Paint Trophy tie away at Wycombe Wanderers. The competition will always bring memories of the run to the area final that the Sky Blues had during their first campaign in it two seasons ago. The subsequent 3-0 defeat to Crewe in the home leg was yet another scarring performance from the Sky Blues in front of a big crowd at the Ricoh Arena. The JPT will always be viewed with condescension by some but a run in this competition this season was perhaps a great way to exorcise some of those Ricoh Arena demons.

It was another drab performance from the team but one that delivered a positive result. Josh McQuoid scored for the second game running. A counter-attack from the Sky Blues involving Mohamed Coulibaly and Danny Pugh, saw the latter curl a cross into the path of McQuoid who tucked his chance away. In an unremarkable game, the main significance was the sight of nine academy-produced players on the pitch by the end of the game.

With the unbeaten run preserved, attention could now turn fully to the grand homecoming match against Gillingham. Logistically, it was a nightmare to put together in the space of two weeks. A small section of the stadium had been closed on health and safety grounds, leaving the capacity for the game at just over 27,000. Demand for tickets was significant with the club's website paralysed for nearly a week as fans tried to secure their place in Sky Blues

history. The pitch was in poor condition after a gaming convention had been held on it. New licks of paint, cobwebs blown off and some revisiting of familiar routines later, the stage was set for a memorable evening.

Returning to the stadium was a reminder of that electric feeling that came upon viewing the Ricoh Arena back when it had first been constructed. Memories of the cold winter afternoons, the groans at sideways passes, the constant stream of disappointment were cast into the recesses of the mind. Viewing that emerald green(ish) pitch once again on a warm late summer's evening felt more like watching Coventry City at a cup final rather than a run-of-the-mill league game.

The atmosphere was warm and positive with the fans in good voice long before kick-off. The kick-off was delayed 15 minutes due to traffic congestion, which only served to heighten the crescendo of noise as the place finally erupted at the sight of Reda Johnson leading out the Sky Blues.

It was finally happening, it was real, this was Coventry City back home and this time they would be better than ever before. We the fans would do everything we could to help them on their way. This was more than about a game of football, this was a city rediscovering its civic pride and finally realising its potential.

The deep-seated concern about the game though was the sheer number of occasions in the past that the Ricoh Arena had been packed out and the team disappointed. With Gillingham well set-up to soak up pressure and sting us on the counter-attack. It was more important than ever for this team to play up to the occasion, to send a message that this time it really was different.

Around the tenth minute Conor Thomas controlled a ball in midfield that had been sent to him around chest height. The home-grown player laid the ball off simply to Jim O'Brien who slipped his way around a Gillingham defender and moved the ball out wide to the surging Ryan Haynes. A palpable roar of excitement was rising in the crowd.

Haynes got his head down and surged further towards the byline. Instead of aiming a cross hopefully towards the back stick, Haynes paused for thought and cut the ball back to the debutant striker Frank Nouble.

Thanks to some clever play from strike partner Marcus Tudgay in obscuring the vision of Gillingham's former Sky Blues keeper Stephen Bywater, Nouble's tame curling effort rolled into the back of the net.

The stadium erupted with noise, not just at the joy of seeing their formerly exiled team take the lead on their homecoming but the confirmation that Coventry City were finally playing up in front of nearly sold-out stadium. In contrast to previous managers who would have tried to downplay the evening, Steven Pressley was keen for his team to embrace the atmosphere and feed off the energy of the crowd. It may not have been a performance of domination but the Sky Blues were fairly comfortable in their lead for the first-half.

After the restart, Gillingham got more of a handle on the game with the home crowd starting to tense up at the prospect of finally securing a win on such a big day for the club. Several times the ball was flashed in front of the area only for a Gillingham player to pull up just short of delivering a killer blow.

It would have been a more comfortable win had John Fleck's audacious 45-yard lob gone in. The Scottish midfielder, often a source of frustration for not being able to deliver his best on a regular basis, had largely been excellent on the day. That he tried something so ambitious was a sign that he was relishing the opportunity to strut his stuff on the big stage.

The final whistle eventually came with Gillingham failing to grab the goal that they felt they might have deserved. Sky Blues fans were in little mood to sympathise with their opposition the evening belonged to Coventry City. The players and manager were applauded long and hard off the pitch, no-one was in the mood to let this night end before they had fully soaked in

what had just happened.

This felt different to what we are used to seeing from Coventry City. If the return had presented an opportunity to rebuild what it meant to be Coventry City, the passion from the fans and the performance from the players against Gillingham had shown that there was the desire and application to take hold of that opportunity with both hands.

A wonderful night to be a Coventry City fan, a rush of adrenaline and emotion that reminded the footballing world, but more importantly us, just exactly how big a club we really are. The idea that we might challenge for promotion this season suddenly did not feel so ridiculous, it felt almost inevitable that evening. We had some momentum behind us, this was our big chance to reverse this long-term decline and apathy.

Back Down To Earth

13th September 2014 - 21st October 2014

Games Played: 9
Won: 2
Drawn: 1
Lost: 6
Goals Scored: 11
Goals Conceded: 18
League Position: 20th
Players Used: 24



Unbeaten in six games and with the season having finally lifted off with the homecoming win over Gillingham, now was the time to set the pace for the rest of the season. After a start to the season featuring games against many of the pre-season promotion contenders, the fixture list had eased up and would surely now allow the Sky Blues to build some further momentum.

A 2-1 win over Yeovil was a bright sign that this team actually had what it takes to live up to their new expectations. Reda Johnson opened the scoring with a powerful header from a corner, the defender continuing to prove himself as a remarkably reliable goal threat. Yeovil managed to equalise through a well-worked goal just after half-time, presenting a challenge to this team's new-found confidence.

Steven Pressley's team passed that challenge with relative ease, Frank Nouble forced Chris

Weale in the Yeovil goal into a sharp save only for Simeon Jackson to pounce on the rebound to regain a lead that was not surrendered this time. The comeback demonstrated the combination of grit and quality that Pressley had built into the team. From a solid base, it was Reda Johnson, Frank Nouble and Simeon Jackson who looked like sprinkling on the quality to make a difference.

There were signs from that Yeovil game that things were not quite as rosy as they looked to be. The attendance of around 27,000 for the Gillingham game had dropped down to 11,000. A combination of lingering resentment towards SISU, complaints about the price of the tickets and the level of football the club was playing at all had a role to play. The Gillingham game was a glimpse into the future, one that could only be realised via consistent winning performances throughout the season.

For the opening 20 minutes of the team's subsequent league fixture away to Scunthorpe, this team looked capable of living up to the standards required to challenge for promotion and keep bums on seats at the Ricoh Arena. The Iron were a demoralised side, heading into the game with their manager Russ Wilcox reportedly one defeat away from the sack. Jackson and Nouble combined expertly for the game's opening goal with the duo looking to have the makings of strike force to be reckoned with at this level.

Everything changed though after Reda Johnson took exception to a challenge from Scunthorpe's Lyle Taylor and pushed his head towards the striker. Whilst the challenge itself may or may not have been worthy of the sending-off, Johnson was reckless and forced the referee into making the decision. A sign that Reda Johnson's force of personality came at a cost.

The way the team subsequently rolled over and allowed Scunthorpe a vital three points also signified just how important Johnson's presence was to the team. Steven Pressley struggled to find the right tactics to overcome the disadvantage of being down to 10 men and Scunthorpe twice exploited the disorganisation to take the lead.

Johnson's replacement in the team Seb Hines was perhaps a better footballer technically but failed to step up and take the responsibility Johnson did. The team did not play all too badly without Johnson in the team but lacked an intangible missing element that saw them out-competed at key moments in games.

First off in the following game away to Rochdale, the defence switched off momentarily which left keeper Ryan Allsop exposed as he gave away a penalty. The response to Rochdale taking the lead was limp with the Sky Blues creating several half-chances but attacking few with conviction.

Back-to-back defeats had sucked the life out of the team heading into the third home game since the return to Coventry against Preston North End. Very quickly it felt like nothing had changed

from the last time we had been at Ricoh Arena, an apathetic home support, a lifeless performance and 90 minutes wasted of the lives of most in the stadium. To have been through so much whilst the club was in exile, it was aggravating that the opportunity had slipped away so quickly.

As the Lilywhites marched onto victory through a penalty scored by Joe Garner, the hope was that the return of Reda Johnson and back-to-back games against relegation battlers would restore confidence. Neither materialised as Johnson's suspension was extended by an injury lay-off and the Sky Blues dropped a further five points in their next two games without in similarly abject fashion as to the prior three.

The team's Johnson-less failings were none more so apparent than in the home game against Crawley Town where Steven Pressley's team raced to a two-goal lead. The first 30 minutes of the game saw Coventry City dominate their inferior opponents and put them to the sword. It was less a case of holding onto the lead but wondering how many more could be scored. Even when Crawley pulled one back, there was little to suggest that the three points were in too much trouble.

Crawley's equaliser came via a hopeful punt forward, the defender falling on his backside in the process and Jordan Willis being beaten in the air far too easily. The covering centre-backs Andy Webster and Seb Hines made a hash themselves of dealing with the danger and Izale McLeod scored an unlikely equaliser for Crawley.

What followed was an abject display of a team simply going through the motions and playing without any sense of urgency as the game petered out. Several players seemed to hide from the action with rarely more than two players standing ahead of the ball when the team was in possession. It was dull to watch and a further reminder that a Saturday afternoon spent at the Ricoh Arena was time and money wasted.

There was brief respite from the misery that the league campaign was growing into via the

Johnstone's Paint Trophy. Steven Pressley named an experimental and young team against Exeter City. Two goals from Aaron Phillips secured a comfortable half-time lead as a nubile Sky Blues team dominated their League Two opponents.

Impressive in particular were Jack Finch playing as a ball-playing centre-half as well as the creative midfield presence of James Maddison and energetic young striker George Thomas. While the present looked gloomy for Coventry City, the future was bright.

Back in league action against Crewe at Gresty Road, the Sky Blues found themselves out-fought by a limited side who knew what was at stake. In possession the team were shockingly one-paced and easy to defend against. Out of it, they could barely deal with the speed with which Crewe counter-attacked on them. A 2-1 defeat followed and the winless run went on.

Heading into the next game against runaway league leaders Bristol City at the Ricoh Arena, the team were beaten before they took to the pitch. Bristol City took a comfortable 2-0 lead just after half-time and despite a wonderful James Maddison assist for Shaun Miller to pull one back, Bristol City scored a third and marched home to victory.

Six league games without a win quickly became seven after a miserable Tuesday night visit to Boundary Park against an Oldham side in red-hot form. Sloppy, indecisive defending saw the Latics blitz their way through our back-line time and again to score three easy goals in the first-half. Once again it was James Maddison who was the one ray of Sky Blue light as he notched his first goal in professional football, a heavily deflected free-kick just before the break.

Oldham though were unruffled by a meek attempt from Coventry City to fight back and eventually sealed an emphatic win with a fourth goal. Seven games without a win had seemingly extinguished hopes of a successful season already and it was in now danger of dragging the campaign into a nightmare. Steven Pressley's reign was at stake but more worryingly, there

was an apathy about the slump, like there was nothing worth fighting for anyway.

It was that familiar sense of disappointment, that inability to build any momentum to reverse this decades-long decline that had returned once again. This time though it felt more terminal than it had ever done before, especially as the club's future just been sold by its council to allow a rugby club from London to move to Coventry. It was a scandal and one that would probably have been greeted with much more anger had it come two or three years earlier.

The Sky Blues were a sinking ship, they did not deserve the chance to own the stadium built for them, Wasps would take much better care of it. There was a weariness to it all, it was no longer surprising to have been lied to once again by one of the parties in this toxic Ricoh Arena dispute. It was impossible to do anything about it the deal, it was agreed and sealed almost as soon as it became public knowledge, not even righteous indignation would have any effect.

Coventry City would have to go on, not as the proud juggernaut that had been welcomed back home less than two months prior but as the weaker, husk of an entity that it now had to become.

A False Dawn

25th October 2014 - 9th November 2014

Games Played: 3
Won: 1
Drawn: 1
Lost: 1
Goals Scored: 6
Goals Conceded: 6
League Position: 19th
Players Used: 19



Whereas last season Steven Pressley could justifiably blame most that went wrong on the pitch on the situation of playing at Sixfields, now the Scot knew that this season he was being judged purely on results. That seven game run without a win in the league had made the team's problems look less like that of bad owners and more about a manager who was running out of ideas and time.

The loss of Reda Johnson, and later Frank Nouble who had began his Coventry City career in excellent form, had left the team bereft of physicality, leadership and character. There was little urgency or conviction with which the team played and when goals were conceded, there was little reaction. Without Johnson and Nouble, the team lacked players willing to take responsibility for the team's performance, they were not stepping up to an increasingly perilous situation.

With Frank Nouble and Reda Johnson returning for the upcoming home game against Peterborough United, one of Pressley's final excuses that he had lost two key players to injury would be put to the test. Put simply, a defeat in this game with Nouble and Johnson back would surely have spelled the end of Pressley's reign at the club.

It was a bold team selection from Pressley who ditched the 5-3-2 formation that he had built this entire season upon in favour of a 4-4-2. The loanee keeper Ryan Allsop was dropped in favour of the home-grown youngster Lee Burge after a series of increasingly unconvincing displays from Allsop. Pressley's was gambling that his boldness would pay off and save his job.

It all looked to have been in vain as Peterborough took a two-goal lead within the opening 45 minutes. The first coming via an error from the

returning Reda Johnson which allowed the visitors to get in behind the defence. The second coming from a bizarre gaffe from the visibly nervous Lee Burge who dropped a floating long-range free-kick from Peterborough's 'Geordie Cristiano Ronaldo' Marcus Maddison into his own net.

In a season where the team had thus far failed to take any points from losing positions, there was little to suggest that this game would be any different. What happened next was one of the most remarkable and impossible to believe comebacks in recent history for the Sky Blues.

The team emerged from the interval possessed with an insatiable desire and urgency to take the ball off their opponents and attack with purpose. Less than five minutes into the second-half Ryan Haynes stormed forward from left-back to smash home John Fleck's pass inside Peterborough's penalty area. Haynes was a driving force once again as he combined with Fleck to lay the ball into the path of Jim O'Brien for the equaliser.

The coup de grace though was Frank Nouble's winner where he bulldozed his way through a shell-shocked Peterborough defence and sent the ball past the keeper. It summed up that second-half performance perfectly, there was no real finesse or skill about the way Nouble beat four defenders, he just had the belief that he could will his way through.

Peterborough's reaction was half-hearted, they clearly had no idea what had just happened to them, in fairness it would have been impossible to see coming. For the Sky Blues and Steven Pressley this seemed vital, not only a victory but won achieved with such self-belief and desire. It rekindled memories of the start to the previous season where a team in Sky Blue chased lost causes and fought until the dying embers of every game.

The following week Pressley decided not to rest on his laurels and add proven names in the form of Aaron Martin and Gary Madine into his squad. Both slotted right into the line-up for the following game against Leyton Orient where Jim

O'Brien gave the Sky Blues a half-time lead. More nervous goalkeeping from Lee Burge allowed Orient to equalise and then to later take the lead. Although O'Brien later came up with a late equaliser, it was a disappointment not to have recorded back-to-back wins.

Still though, a last-minute equaliser was an encouraging sign, showing that this team continued to believe in itself. Had the same situation occurred just two weeks prior, the game would surely have been lost. We could still tell ourselves that we were on an upward curve.

The prospect of an FA Cup tie against non-league Worcester City at home was surely the chance to build some further self-belief. Something did not seem quite right from the very off though, Worcester looked comfortable on the ball whilst the Sky Blues looked to be wading through treacle. The team were set-up far too narrow, failing to stretch and impose ourselves upon our non-league opponents who just about playing the better football.

Coventry City slowly grew into the game with James Maddison in particular a threat with his superior skill and nimble footwork. It was Maddison's academy team-mate Lee Burge though who would prove to be decisive, as he foolishly kicked out at a Worcester City forward who stamped on him whilst the referee was looking away. Not only a red card but a penalty too which was consummately tucked away past the substitute keeper Ryan Allsop.

The game descended into pure farce as Pressley substituted Frank Nouble to the open derision of the crowd, shocked at the decision to leave the team without a physical presence in attack with crosses into the penalty area surely the order of the day. It did not seem to matter though as Reda Johnson and James Maddison had seemed to have taken responsibility for the fight-back, both charging further and further up the pitch.

The irrepressible Maddison won a penalty for the team which centre-back Reda Johnson, who had never taken a penalty in his career, elected himself the taker for. Predictably, Johnson's

effort was poor and it provided Worcester with the belief that it was their day.

As had been the case for much of the season, the reaction to salvaging a result from then on was tame and unconvincing. Worcester doubled their lead thanks to some sloppy defending from a corner. By the end, Reda Johnson had taken the decision to play as a striker and pulled a goal back. It was more desperation than pressure and Worcester duly held out for the biggest results in their history to the joy of a remarkably large travelling contingent.

Just when it looked like the season had turned around for the better, this team shot themselves in the foot. Any sense of momentum was destroyed by another performance lacking in quality and effort. Despite a rousing press conference days after the game where Steven Pressley publicly slated the players' professionalism, it only partially deflected some telling questions about the manager.

The buck for these types of performances has to rest with the man responsible for motivation and strategy, i.e. the manager. For someone who had spent the entirety of his reign at the club defending the players so vehemently in his press conferences, this rant was out of character and perhaps a sign of a fractured relationship with his players.

That speech, the loan players and the sweeping tactical changes were perhaps further indications that Pressley was running out of ideas and his reign was winding down. The victory over Peterborough had bought him some time but the dropped points at Orient and the cup exit were not approached with the intensity you would expect from a team looking to build momentum. Pressley needed to build on that comeback win but found himself quickly back at square one. With the benefit of hindsight, this should have been the juncture from which to part company with him.

There were signs of life just about, enough to convince the board that a re-jig in January would be more constructive than to go through the

turmoil of changing managers. Stability was desperately being searched for at this football club and Steven Pressley was able to ride out and abject few months by virtue of the club's desperation to have a long-term vision in place that Pressley offered.

A stay of execution had seemingly been granted, with few options to change the team until January though, Pressley knew that he had to get results in the interim period or he would not find out whether it was him or the players at fault for the debacle the season was turning out to be. It was clear from Pressley's post-Worcester speech that it was not a calculated move, he would have to work with the players whose professionalism he had questioned or lose his job a few months into a recently-signed four-year contract..

The Moribund Stretch

12th November 2014 - 31st January 2015

Games Played: 14
Won: 4
Drawn: 5
Lost: 5
Goals Scored: 11
Goals Conceded: 14
League Position: 19th
Players Used: 25



In the wake of the Worcester defeat, Steven Pressley promised that certain players will be 'banished from the club'. It meant there would be intense scrutiny on the team selection for the ensuing games as Pressley looked to find the antidote to what sounded like a poisonous environment in the changing room.

Pressley had to find a core of players he could trust otherwise he would have been thrown under the bus by those he had criticised. The time between the middle of November and January though would provide Pressley the opportunity to figure out what exactly was needed from the re-opening of the transfer market. That was assuming he could find a system that worked and pick up results in the interim period.

With success in the league looking increasingly unlikely, the following game in the Johnstone's

Paint Trophy was starting to take on the importance of 'saving our season'. League Two Plymouth Argyle were eventually shrugged off at the Ricoh Arena via Gary Madine's first goal since re-joining on loan and a George Weah-esque run and finish from Frank Nouble in the second-half.

Shaun Derry's Notts County, whose goalkeeper Roy Carroll played his second game in 48 hours, were next up. A dull game of football was only enlivened by Notts County's cynical game-spoiling tactics, in particular via Carroll who feigned injury to stop the game for five minutes in an attempt to get Aaron Phillips sent off. Notts' cynical approach paid off as they took advantage of an Andy Webster slip to score the game's only goal as they snuffed out what little threat we possessed in attack.

The pressure was growing even further on Pressley ahead of a trip to Colchester with the

Sky Blues still without an away win all season. Yet the team found a new level of defensive solidity with Reda Johnson moved to left-back and Ryan Haynes shunted forward to the left-wing. Gary Madine's scruffy finish sealed an important three points to allow Pressley to feel as if he had found a new formula.

That defensive tightness was then replicated at home against Walsall but this time without the lucky break at the other end that had won the Colchester game. The defensive focus was understandable but it left the team living in hope that Madine would make something of the desperate long punts sent towards him. This was not the manner of performance expected after Pressley's explosive post-Worcester speech but the team were slowly starting to pick up results.

The drabness of those performances suggested that success had already been written-off for the season. The arrival of Wasps and their boisterous re-branding of the Ricoh Arena was making it an especially apathetic time to follow Coventry City. The Johnstone's Paint Trophy continued to offer the only hope of achieving anything this season but in our way were the runaway league leaders Bristol City.

Steve Cotterill's team were once again a class above Coventry City, asserting their physical dominance with two headed goals. The team's one hope to salvage anything from the season was extinguished with a whimper, in much the same manner as they had surrendered points for much of the season. The rest of the season promised to be long and grinding.

The dullness of performances was the continuance of a deliberate tactic from Pressley who believed his team could win games when they took the lead. That was none more the case than at Port Vale where despite being the inferior side, Reda Johnson headed in a looping cross to give the Sky Blues that vital lead they were hoping for. With the game in its dying embers, Gary Madine scored another scruffy goal to seal the win.

Somehow this team had scraped its way to back-

to-back away wins bringing reminders of Mark Robins' Coventry City side who were dull to watch at home but excellent on their travels. If the Steven Pressley's team could replicate the stunning form over Christmas that Robins managed in his short stint in charge, maybe the season was not so dead after all.

The last game before Christmas was against a limited Fleetwood side and an opportunity to begin this season-saving run of form. An unfortunate own goal from one of the most loathed players from a large section of the support, 'Pressley's mate' Andy Webster, handed Fleetwood early in the game. For a Sky Blues side lacking in creativity, scoring even the one goal to avoid defeat was going to be an uphill task.

The ensuing 70 minutes were as dull as anything served up at the Ricoh Arena that season with Fleetwood happy defending and the Sky Blues uncomfortable having to attack. Despite plenty of shooting, few convincing chances were created. An equaliser came almost at random as one of many punts towards Gary Madine finally came off and Simeon Jackson pounced on the rebound. Perhaps that partnership would finally be something to build on.

Another dismal performance to follow that laid to rest another hope of having something to build upon for the rest of the season. This time it was a shocking away performance against a Doncaster side who had failed to win at home since the opening day of the say. Poor defending from a set-piece gave Donny an early lead. The game descended quickly into farce with James Maddison booked for diving and later sent-off, followed by Adam Barton soon after. Donny sauntered to victory following a second goal.

That defeat and poor performance changed the perception of the post-Worcester form from solid to poor. The lack of ambition going forward in particular was putting pressure on Steven Pressley, even more than the poor results were. Another defeat over the Christmas period may have even been enough to have seen Pressley sacked.

It was a bold line-up selected by the Scot for the following game against Chesterfield, three out-and-out strikers in the form of Gary Madine, Frank Nouble and Simeon Jackson were all named together in the starting 11. Although it turned out to be a standard 4-4-2 with Nouble on the left, the move allowed Nouble to create danger whilst having two strikers waiting in the box. Nouble thought he had won a penalty but the referee decided eventually that the foul had occurred just outside the area.

Chesterfield seemed happy with the point and despite some new-found attacking impetus, there was little by way of chances for the Sky Blues to win it. Fans left the dull 0-0 frustrated, with their team having mustered just one goal at home in four league games and without a home win in two months.

But January had arrived which meant that Pressley had succeeded in his short-term goal and could start to make swingeing changes to the squad. The sense of a new beginning was heightened with a 2-0 away win at Walsall featuring the previously frozen-out Marcus Tudgay and a youthful backline of Aaron Phillips, Jordan Willis, Matthew Pennington and Ryan Haynes. Maybe this was something tangible to build on.

Ahead of a game in front of the Sky cameras against Swindon, both Aaron Martin and Frank Nouble were secured on permanent deals after reasonably successful loans in the first half of the season. Gary Madine's loan was extended by a further month as negotiations for a permanent deal continued. Josh McQuoid joined Mohamed Coulibaly in returning to Bournemouth after a largely unimpressive loan stint.

The Swindon game though was another step backwards for the Sky Blues as the visitors confidently strode to a 3-0 win with little resistance from the home team. The game exposed the parlous state the club was in to a national audience with protests against SISU taking place inside the stadium whilst the team put in yet another home performance lacking in character, fight and application.

The team now had to get a result in the following away game at Gillingham to avoid getting dragged into the relegation battle. Danny Swanson won a penalty in the first-half which Gary Madine converted as Steven Pressley looked set to win a crucial three points for his reign.

Gillingham found a deserved equaliser late on and the game was then decided by a controversial penalty decision so poor that even the home fans were shocked to have seen it given. Cody McDonald, a player binned from Coventry City by Steven Pressley 18 months ago, converted the spot kick and then Gillingham completed a rousing comeback with a third goal.

Despite the unfortunate circumstances of the defeat, it was becoming clear that Pressley's negative tactics were having little impact upon actually getting results. It started to look more like the team had taken results over the past few months by virtue of other teams' failings rather than by what this team was doing in particular. The team was inviting pressure on itself and hoping that the opposition would not be good enough to score.

The much-improved loanee goalkeeper Ryan Allsop was allowed to return to his parent club Bournemouth in the week leading up to a now crucial clash against Yeovil. Just two days before the game, Preston loanee Jamie Jones was drafted in on a short-term deal. For all the talk of there being a new strategy to the recruitment, emergency loan deals were still an important element in assembling competitive matchday squads.

The Sky Blues spurned the chance to give themselves a little breathing space from the relegation battle in the Yeovil game after Gary Madine missed a penalty in his final appearance for the club. The 0-0 draw put the team in the midst of the relegation battle with performances doing little to suggest that the team could win games when under pressure.

Madine's departure after the Yeovil game gave Pressley some wriggle room in the transfer market to make changes to the squad. Striker

Dominic Samuel and winger Sanmi Odelusi arrived on loan from Reading and Bolton respectively. More loan deals and two players lacking in experience, it seemed as if the club did not quite realise the gravity of the situation developing, taking the risk that somehow Pressley would stumble upon a formula that worked to the degree that he found in the team that had begun the previous season at Sixfields.

Samuel and Odelusi though were excellent on their debuts against Rochdale back at the Ricoh Arena. The run of one goal in five home league games was ended as Samuel emphatically opened the scoring from a rebounded Jim O'Brien effort. The Sky Blues struggled to control the tempo of the game as Rochdale found an equaliser fairly easily.

Just before the break, it was Odelusi's turn to demonstrate his abilities. After receiving the ball from Frank Nouble, Odelusi shifted his way past two defenders and curled in a beautiful goal of the season contender from the edge of the area.

With Pressley looking forward to a vital three points ahead of a difficult month of February featuring away games against Sheffield United and Preston with home games against an in-form Scunthorpe and MK 'Dons'. That old fragility at the back told as Coventry City, with Reda Johnson having limped off the pitch at half-time, failed to defend a corner and Rochdale's Calvin Andrew headed home to make it 2-2.

The next month would be 'do or die' for Steven Pressley, his relationship with the fans was at rock bottom with his post-match interviews summarily dismissed as the ramblings of a man living in a world of his own delusions. After months of looking for the right formula with this team, Pressley had still not found anything that could stick. It seemed that Pressley was being allowed to amble on as an economic decision by a set of owners wary of terminating a recently-signed four-year contract than by any great belief that Pressley would genuinely be able to turn things around..

The Changing Of The Guards

7th February 2015 - 7th March 2015

Games Played: 6
Won: 1
Drawn: 2
Lost: 3
Goals Scored: 7
Goals Conceded: 9
League Position: 20th
Players Used: 22



Entering into a difficult run of fixtures in February in indifferent form, the Sky Blues needed to produce something remarkable to avoid getting dragged into the relegation zone. Despite the perilous position the team were in, there was little indication that Steven Pressley's position was under threat. There were echoes of the club's previous relegation season where a manager who had long since run out of ideas was allowed to carry on through neglect rather than faith from the board.

That sense of abandonment seemed to have been confirmed by Lee Burge's return in goal for an away game against Preston with the emergency loanee keeper Jamie Jones ineligible to play against his parent club, evidence of a lack of forward planning. Last seen trudging off the pitch after his red card against Worcester, Lee Burge had plenty to prove and very little faith in him from the fans.

Preston's opener in that game, Kevin Davies's first goal in nearly 50 games, was the product of more indecisive keeping from Burge who flapped at a cross to allow Davies in to score. It belied on overall quite decent performance from the Sky Blues who had chances to take at least a point from a fairly even contest against a side in contention for promotion.

The defeat put pressure on a Tuesday night home game against Scunthorpe, particularly so as it featured Steven Pressley's predecessor Mark Robins and two players unceremoniously discarded by Pressley in the form of Gary McSheffrey and Jordan Clarke. Scunthorpe's goal on the night came in controversial circumstances with ex-Sky Blue hero Gary McSheffrey appearing to dive to win a free-kick against his home town club, which he then dispatched expertly.

Despite a last-gasp equaliser scored by Marcus Tudgay, the atmosphere at the game was toxic. Many had already lost faith in Pressley and they were no restless for his removal from the job. Despite the hostile atmosphere, the players put in a rather bold performance and held onto possession fairly comfortably, albeit in fairly comfortable areas for the Scunthorpe defence. Marcus Tudgay's well-taken finish was celebrated only by the players who were later booed off the pitch as reward for their endeavours.

Fans were made to wait anxiously for nearly two weeks due to the Valentine's Day fixture against Bradford City being postponed as a result of the Bantams' progress in the FA Cup. Results may have largely gone in favour of the Sky Blues over that period of time but it did little to assuage fears that the team were on a hiding to nothing ahead of a trip to Sheffield United, a team that usually excel in handing Coventry City chastening reminders of their inadequacies.

Yet once again Pressley's charges put in another committed display, taking advantage of a red card handed to Sheffield United's Jose Baxter and took the lead just before half-time through Dominic Samuel. With memories of the collapse at Gillingham still fresh, the one goal lead and man advantage did not quite feel like the margin of comfort it may have been for other clubs. Dominic Samuel's second goal of the afternoon just after the break appeared to have calmed things down.

With 15 minutes remaining, Steven Pressley's team were comfortable and were knocking the ball around with confidence. The inexperience and brittle confidence of the team were shown as the nerves began to jangle with sloppy errors slowly creeping in. Duly enough, Sheffield United sparked full-on panic amongst the Sky Blues with the famously agricultural Michael Doyle putting his former club to the sword by chipping in a goal to reduce the Blades' arrears. Almost directly from the resulting kick-off Sheffield United found an equaliser and could have made things even more embarrassing for Pressley had they gone on and won the game as the

momentum was suggesting.

It was another utter capitulation and one that saw the Sky Blues drop into the bottom four for the first time all season. For all of the negativity that the situation inevitably set in, there was still very little indication that Steven Pressley's position was under any kind of pressure. It was seen as either the sign of a deep commitment to managerial stability or simply the board baulking at the cost of sacking a manager a few months into a four-year contract. What most agreed upon was that it would have taken something more dramatic than a draw against Sheffield United for Pressley to be sacked.

It was a complete shock then to read the fairly brisk statement released by the club at around 10am the Monday after the Sheffield United game that confirmed Pressley's sacking. An optimist could have argued that the Scot's reign still had legs in it. Sacking Pressley displayed just how serious the board were about avoiding relegation at a time that many were starting to believe that they were not.

The process of appointing Pressley's replacement was set to be brisk with the team entering into a period of seven games in four weeks. Whoever was coming in would need to have an instant impact, especially so given that the team went managerless into a fixture against a free-scoring MK 'Dons' side at the Ricoh Arena. The new manager would surely have to start their reign lifting the confidence of a team in the bottom four and winless for eight games.

Karl Robinson's side must have been expecting an easy ride but were caught cold by a Coventry City side fired up under Pressley's loyal assistant Neil MacFarlane. The Sky Blues fired a warning shot as Marcus Tudgay chipped a 35-yard pass through to Dominic Samuel who should have scored the opening goal in the eighth minute. No matter, as Forest Green loanee left-back Chris Stokes headed in the resulting corner to give Coventry City a surprise early lead.

Samuel then made amends for his earlier miss by finishing expertly from a wonderfully time

through-ball from John Fleck. The following 70 minutes were one way traffic as MK 'Dons' found their tempo and dictated proceedings. Popular former Sky Blue Carl Baker set up a goal to reduce City's lead just after half-time, sparking fears of collapses in the vein of the recent Sheffield United and Gillingham games. The commanding and assured performance of the returning Lee Burge in goal gave the defence the composure to see out an impressive win.

A massive three points and with ex-West Brom and Celtic boss Tony Mowbray agreeing to take the reigns until the end of the season, things were looking on the up. With Mowbray watching from the stands the Tuesday night after the MK 'Dons' win, the Sky Blues produced a tepid display against Barnsley, conceded a sloppy goal and left Oakwell empty-handed.

The first taste of Spring sunshine greeted Tony Mowbray at the Ricoh Arena for his first game in charge. In his early interviews, the new manager promised attacking football from his team and seemed to offer the assurance that despite his contract only running until the end of the season, he was very much here for the long-term.

An attacking 4-3-3 formation was utilised for the home game against Port Vale, spearheaded by an attacking trident of Frank Nouble, Dominic Samuel and Marcus Tudgay. It was Jim O'Brien in midfield though who opened the scoring with a well-placed effort from just outside the area. The fear and self-doubt that the team had played under over the past few months under Pressley seemed to have washed away within an instant. For 20 to 30 minutes, the Sky Blues were playing all the football and had a dazed Port Vale side under control.

A break in play around the half-hour mark turned the momentum of the game around with Coventry City visibly tiring. Port Vale levelled via Tom Pope after the defence failed to deal with a cross into the penalty area. The curse of the ex-player struck again with Mark Marshall tearing left-back Chris Stokes to shreds before finishing at the near post.

That freedom of the opening period of the game was never recaptured for the rest of proceedings from the home team. Port Vale looked the better side for having taken the lead, there were few signs that any City fightback was set to happen. Sanmi Odelusi's equaliser for Coventry City came from almost nowhere as he tucked away coolly following a powerful Frank Nouble forward charge.

Port Vale found a winner in an utterly frustrating circumstances from a Sky Blues perspective. The defence handed Port Vale's set-piece specialist Michael O'Connor two chances to take a direct free-kick from near enough the exact same spot on the pitch just minutes apart. After sending his first just off-target, O'Connor emphatically struck home his second attempt to another jubilant away following at the Ricoh Arena to victory.

Another capitulation and another sign that this team was lacking those all-important qualities of character and fight in what was now an increasingly desperate battle against the drop. With teams below and around Coventry City picking up points, the hard luck stories would have to end. This team would have to discover its first consistent streak of form in nearly six months just to keep their heads above water.

It would be sink or swim for Tony Mowbray, someone who has generally been an idealist as a manager, he would now have to find a way of getting results fast or risk going down in infamy as the man who relegated Coventry City to League Two. As Mark Clemitt, reporting for the Football League Show, repeatedly asked him just why he had taken this job, after witnessing that defeat, Mowbray would have been wondering just what he had gotten himself into.

The Run-In

10th March 2015 - 3rd May 2015

Games Played: 12
Won: 5
Drawn: 4
Lost: 3
Goals Scored: 13
Goals Conceded: 12
League Position: 17th
Players Used: 22



Mowbray and the team had the chance to put the shocking display against Port Vale down to bad experience with a home game against Bradford City the following Tuesday. After witnessing the team struggle to play an intricate style of football in his first match, Mowbray went for a more basic approach with a 4-4-2 featuring Tudgay and Nouble as a physical attacking duo.

After a shockingly low quality first-half from a Coventry City side lacking confidence and a fatigued Bradford City side, the Sky Blues somehow took the lead heading into the interval. Following two fairly shocking misses from Frank Nouble and Marcus Tudgay, the former made amends by latching onto Aaron Phillips' cross to hand the Sky Blues a slender advantage.

Despite the lead, Mowbray made the stunning tactical decision to put four out-and-out strikers on the pitch in the second-half. It was a move

that would have been hailed as tactical genius had it paid off but as in life, the separation between genius and lunacy was thin. Another direct free-kick conceded by the Sky Blues, another goal scored by the opposition. Mowbray still had the chance to look like a genius before the night was out but the German striker Nick Proschwitz produced a shocking miss at the death.

A 1-1 draw was not a terrible result but Mowbray's reign needed an early win to give the team and the fans belief that they could pull away from the relegation scrap. On paper, back-to-back away games against top-half Chesterfield and Fleetwood did not offer much hope. Yet the loan signing of Spurs midfielder Grant Ward worked a treat as he played a significant role in a nervy 3-2 win against Chesterfield on his debut and then helped the team dominate in a 2-0 victory against Fleetwood.

Confidence was suddenly through the roof as the team headed into a home game against Doncaster Rovers on the club's annual Legends' Day. Optimism was in the air as it finally seemed like this team was dragging itself away from the drop-zone in much the same manner as Mark Robins' team was able to do two seasons prior. That optimism looked to be well-placed as Dominic Samuel produced another cool finish after being played through expertly by Jim O'Brien for a very early opening goal.

The second-half though continued the worrying trend of self-inflicted capitulation at the Ricoh Arena. Doncaster midfielder Richie Wellens bullied his way through the Sky Blues defence to equalise and ex-Sky Blues academy striker Jonson Clarke-Harris pounced on a Lee Burge parry for the lead. Once again, there was simply no fightback from Coventry City as they accepted defeat meekly. A dreadful second-half performance was summed up as Aaron Martin failed to shepherd the ball out of play to allow forward Curtis Main to tee up Harry Forrester for a third Doncaster goal.

Two steps forward and one step back, it was another confidence-sapping defeat which made upcoming fixtures in April and May against relegation rivals Leyton Orient, Notts County, Colchester United, Crewe Alexandra and Crawley Town all the more crucial. Somewhat fortuitously before that tough run, Coventry City faced a Peterborough United side who offered little threat to a Sky Blues defence very low on confidence. The late introduction of Blair Turgott tipped the game in City's favour and the winger got his just rewards for an energetic display with the winning goal.

It was a simple performance where the defence made sure they did not hold onto the ball for too long and won their individual battles. Confidence was back again heading into a clash against Leyton Orient, another opportunity to pull clear of danger ahead of that massive run-in. Despite numerous chances to win it, City's defence again conspired to present the away team with a soft goal and Orient were handed three points they were delighted to get.

Even worse than the defeat was the loss of star striker Dominic Samuel to injury after he was crudely hacked down by Orient's Marvin Bartley. Out of the forward options Mowbray had available, Samuel was the only player who looked composed in front of goal. It left the inconsistent Frank Nouble, the disappointing Simeon Jackson and the forgotten Nick Proschwitz with the responsibility to shoot the Sky Blues to survival.

Samuel's absence was keenly felt in the Easter Monday clash with Notts County. Proschwitz and Jackson started the game to the little effect and it was effete midfielder Adam Barton who had the big chance to win the game, only to head the ball tamely into the hands of Roy Carroll. It was a chance spurned to strike a blow against a relegation rival, the lack of goals only served to raise the fear factor heading into the next game at home to an in-form Colchester United.

There was a boost heading into this third consecutive relegation crunch match in the form of Reda Johnson's return to the team. The influential defender had been absent since the 2-2 draw with Rochdale back in January, a period in which indecisive defending had undone the Sky Blues far too often. Johnson was excellent upon his return, shutting off Colchester's main attacking outlet Chris Porter and providing his usual menacing presence from set-pieces. It was Jim O'Brien though who scored the winning goal as he tucked away a Chris Stokes cut-back in the first-half.

An upcoming clash with 'nothing to play for' Oldham Athletic would have all but secured survival with a win. Tony Mowbray's methods seemed to finally be seeping in as the team dominated much of the game with control of the ball and some excellent off-the-ball movement to pin Oldham back in their own penalty. As was the case so often this season, a momentary lapse in concentration at the back let the opposition score far too easily. This time Jim O'Brien and Grant Ward switched off as Oldham worked a short free-kick routine to score from their first of only two attacks that game.

As the second-half wore on, the fans at the Ricoh

Arena backed their team in a manner that had not been known since the homecoming match back in September. Raucous 'Sky Blue Army' cheers rolling across the stadium like claps of thunder but it looked to be of little avail as Oldham attempted to run the clock down. The returning hero Reda Johnson though came up with a vital equaliser in stoppage time to give the Sky Blues something from an utterly dominant display.

Heading into an away trip to Ashton Gate to face a Bristol City side who had just sealed promotion with a 6-0 away win at Bradford City, it felt like the Sky Blues would have to take points out of their two subsequent fixtures. This team continued to baffle, containing Bristol City to zero shots on target in an assured defensive performance where they could and perhaps should have nicked the win on the counter attack.

That point looked to have secured survival and the final home game of the season against Crewe was an opportunity to build some optimism for next season in front of a bumper home crowd of just over 14,000. A bright start though belied an eventually ludicrous spectacle where several players failed to show up or committed sloppy defensive errors or did both to allow the away team an easy win. Twice the defence completely switched-off with Crewe only too happy to be obliging recipients of our charity.

In a similar manner to the scarring JPT defeat two years prior, Crewe's third was almost inevitable when it came on another precise counter-attack. A consolation goal from Nick Proschwitz was too little, too late. Yet another farcical home defeat was the final confirmation to many Sky Blues fans that this team failed to realise just how much of an underachievement a relegation battle in League One for Coventry City is. The Sky Blues did not so much flirt with relegation as they did buy it dinner and invite back home for coffee.

The final game of the season came away to a Crawley side who also needed points for survival. Having spent the vast majority of the season outside of the bottom four, relegation on the final

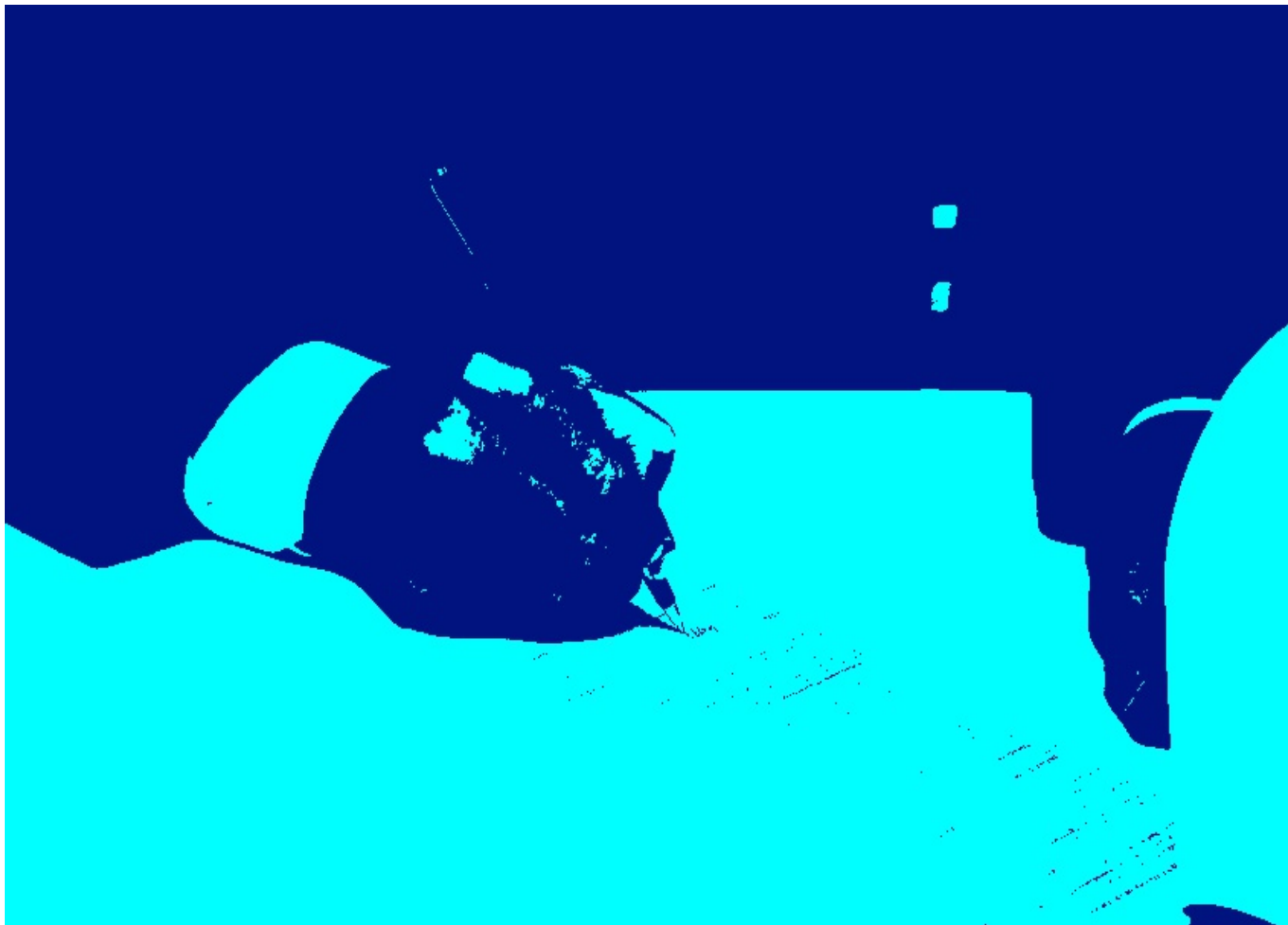
day was unthinkable yet a gloomy prospect. It was set to be a battle of who wanted it most, many feared that this team did not have the desire to pull through this battle.

Surprisingly, the Sky Blues started the game in positive fashion and created the best of the opportunities in the first-half. Marcus Tudgay's return to the team after an injury lay-off provided the team with nous up front. The forward won a penalty and the chance to secure safety. Once again though such an opportunity was spurned, this time by the maligned loan striker Nick Proschwitz.

That moment looked to be the final turning-point for the worse as Crawley took the lead just after half-time via a well-taken Mathias Pogba header. A goal from Notts County in their game against Gillingham left the Sky Blues hanging above the precipice. Tudgay once again dug the team out of a hole as he headed in Jim O'Brien's cross to set the team on course for the point required to guarantee safety. It was then left for teen prodigy James Maddison to end the season on a high note with the winning goal right at the death.

Survival had finally been secured but there was little cause for celebration in the end, rightfully so. Not only had this Coventry City team failed to take advantage of the momentum of the club's return to the city but it took until the final day of the season to even ensure League One status. In the end that was all that mattered, but there was a clear recognition from everyone involved at the club that much better was needed next season.

This was a season where the team seemed hell-bent on setting new standards for capitulation, mental weakness and failing to seize upon opportunities. Memories of the club's decline from the Premier League to Championship strugglers have felt prominent this season. During that period, we slowly accepted lower standards from our team and we soon became perennial relegation contenders. A similar scenario is unacceptable at League One level for this football club and it was with an empty feeling rather than triumphance with which a dismal campaign ended on.



Who To Keep

A balance needs to be found between improving the squad and ensuring there some semblance of consistency between this season and next season. Certain players from within the squad certainly have the capability to step up if they were in the right environment. It is about making sure there are higher standards for performances set.

Tony Mowbray will know he has have a fair bit of room for manoeuvre with the sheer number of loan players and those on short-term contracts within the squad. In contrast to the past few seasons where players on longer-term deals clearly had no future at the club, the manager can be fairly decisive in who they decide will and will not be part of their team.

A chance for a fresh start is upon us but it is important that we take some things from this season, otherwise it truly have been a pointless exercise to watch this group of players amble

around a football pitch every weekend for the past nine months next season.

This is something that every Coventry City fan will have their own opinion on and it is clear from what I have read and heard from others so far that there is little consensus on who exactly should stay. The task for Tony Mowbray is approaching his appraisal of the squad not only based on what they have already done but with a vision for how they fit in a plan for next season.

This section then is essentially who I think will stay or be let go and which positions we will be looking to sign players for next season.

Goalkeepers

There are some who still doubt whether Lee Burge has the capability to become a top goalkeeper at this level and an unconvincing display in the final home game against Crewe could count against him.

Perhaps a more experienced keeper would be helpful to offer Burge guidance through what could be another long and difficult campaign for him but the youngster has earned the chance to begin next season as number one. The decision to

bring in Ryan Allsop last summer has only denied more time that could have been used to test Burge more thoroughly.

Burge's current back-up Reice Charles-Cook could probably do with a loan or permanent move elsewhere. Despite impressing on loan at Nuneaton earlier in the season, Lee Burge's emergence has surely put paid to his ambitions of a long-term future with this club.

Defenders

Ideally, Aaron Phillips would be the first-choice right-back for next season. His performance in that home defeat to Crewe at the end of the season may have raised doubts about both the attacking and defensive side to his game. Phillips may have done little wrong beforehand but if we are ambitious for at least the top-six, he will have to make massive strides in the summer to nail down that starting spot. Providing Jordan Willis is not thought of as a long-term option at right-back, a more experienced player in that spot looks likely to be on the shopping list.

Chris Stokes may have acquitted himself well after stepping up from non-league football this season but there are some areas of his game where sheer effort cannot make up for. Stokes' chances of winning a permanent contract are also diminished by the need to develop the home-grown talent of Ryan Haynes. With Haynes still learning and Danny Pugh having been injured for most of this season, an experienced full-back on the left-side too is looking to be another area for the summer recruitment drive.

It will be interesting to see what is made of the situation at centre-back. Andy Webster is almost certain to leave at the end of his contract. There is a decision to be made over Reda Johnson's future, personally I do not think he is quite able to justify his shocking injury record but it seems like he may well stay provided other clubs do not show an interest in him. Nobody is really sure

what Jordan Willis' best position is. Matthew Pennington could be brought back, it depends upon deciding Willis is best at right-back and whether another club moves in for the Everton youngster. Aaron Martin is under contract for next season but will really have to fight for a starting spot after some poor performances towards the end of the season. There could be an all-new centre-back pairing next season or we could stick with what he have.

Midfielders

A major problem area this season has been finding that balance in midfield. The arrival of Grant Ward on loan added quality to the centre of the park without addressing the physicality deficit in that area of the pitch. Ward is unlikely to return as he looks set to move onto better things at a higher level. It could leave us potentially starting next season with a midfield three of John Fleck, Adam Barton and Jim O'Brien, which I can imagine few are keen on seeing.

With Barton's contract set to expire, it feels like we have just about seen enough of him to know that he is unlikely to push on much further. He may have done fairly well this season in winning his place in the team back but in failing to score a goal or provide an assist, it is hard to justify keeping him around. John Fleck and Jim O'Brien are both under contract next season and will probably remain first-choice. That tough, competitive midfielder that has eluded us of late needs to be found.

It is a role that could possibly be fulfilled by either Conor Thomas or Jack Finch were they to have a big pre-season. Jack Finch is still young and should not really be burdened with that responsibility but some game time will do him good, particularly if he can win over a small section of fans who have already written him off. Conor Thomas has to establish his place in the team next season or leave the club, although conceivably a decision may have already been made to move him on to pastures new. Whatever decision is made on Finch and Thomas, it would still probably require an experienced head to be brought into our central midfield options.

Wingers Sanmi Odelusi and Blair Turgott are unlikely to be retained for differing reasons. Odelusi struggled to replicate some impressive early performances, getting worse as the season progressed. Turgott, in his brief appearances for the team, has been the type of energetic and direct winger that we lacked this season but there is clearly something that the fans do not

see off the pitch which has meant he has barely been included on the bench during his time here.

Danny Swanson is under contract for next season and could be someone to take a look at upon his return from his loan spell in Scotland. At times this season Swanson has been impressive with his skill on the ball but too often finds himself in areas where he is not dangerous to the opposition. A few goals whilst with St Johnstone though have shown that he can make the kind of telling contributions that he has failed to produce thus far with us.

Finally, James Maddison is getting closer to the point where it would be churlish to hold him back. Talk of building a team around him is premature, particularly as it feels that at any time a top club could recognise his talents and make us an offer that cannot be refused. I imagine we will be able to keep him which means we will be able to take in at least one full season of his supreme talent.

Strikers

Despite finishing the season as the top-scorer (in all competitions) few would be sad to see the back of Frank Nouble. All the talent and physicality a League One striker could wish for and the complete unwillingness to harness those gifts. Over the course of the season it has become increasingly apparent that Nouble mainly frustrates. Another year of waiting for those brief moments of quality would agonise me.

Simeon Jackson has been a disappointment of a higher magnitude and must surely be on his way out of the club. A player clearly on the decline in his career having lost his turn of pace and confidence in front of goal. Shaun Miller was never given the same opportunities as Jackson but his failure to score whilst on loan at both Crawley and York suggests that he probably would not have taken them.

Marcus Tudgay's future hangs in the balance with his contract set to expire in the summer. Not a natural goalscorer, but he has shown the kind of hard-working, grafting qualities you need in your squad in this division. Maybe not as a starter but it would not be a terrible thing to see Marcus Tudgay back next season.

George Thomas is another young player who could make a bigger contribution next season after some impressive cameo appearances. The youngster was unfortunate not to score against Leyton Orient in his last appearance. His impressive scoring record at youth-level suggests that he will eventually score goals for his football club.

To Keep

- Lee Burge
- Reice Charles-Cook
- Ryan Haynes
- Aaron Martin
- Aaron Phillips
- Jordan Willis
- Jack Finch
- John Fleck
- James Maddison
- Jim O'Brien
- Danny Swanson
- Conor Thomas
- George Thomas
- Marcus Tudgay

To Let Go

- Reda Johnson
- Danny Pugh
- Chris Stokes
- Andy Webster
- Al Bangura
- Adam Barton
- Sanmi Odelusi
- Blair Turgott
- Simeon Jackson
- Frank Nouble
- Nick Proschwitz



Steven Pressley

Whatever you make of how Steven Pressley went about his job this season, one thing is for certain, he kept us afloat during a perilous time for the football club. Without his ideas and enthusiasm in his first few months in charge, we would surely have been relegated last season which could have been it for this football club.

As the constraints came off his job over the course of this season, Pressley came up increasingly short. Losing all of his match-winners from last season cannot have been easy but with the resources he had available to him, adequate replacements should have been found. Pressley's shocking record when it came to signing players left him facing an uphill battle.

The departure of Leon Clarke and the situation of playing at Sixfields last season wore Pressley down. Having attacked that season with panache, losing the key player in his system saw things

come a cropper. Towards the end of that Sixfields season, Pressley started playing incredibly turgid defensive football to overcome the team's shortcomings going forward.

With the memory of getting found out for playing overly attacking football in mind, Pressley continued down that path of pragmatism as he faced up to another season in exile. That decision to part ways from his attacking philosophy was a crucial turning-point in his reign. Without the nous to play a truly effective defensive style of football, the team often had to hope both that the opposition would be useless in attack and then that something scrappy could be nicked at the other end.

The balance was never found between the ability to keep clean sheets and the swift attacking football that he initially brought to the club. The team lost an identity to fall back upon when

things were not going well. One week the focus would be on keeping clean sheets, which strangled the attack. The next week the focus would be on scoring goals, leaving the defence exposed.

Pressley was never a good manager at coping when things did not go according to plan. The lack of points taken from losing positions this season was endemic of this inability to think on the fly. The team had a habit of turning bad situations in games into truly awful ones, such as the sending-off of Reda Johnson in the game against Scunthorpe in September quickly turning into a defeat and then seven league games without a win.

Another area where Pressley began to fall short was his inability to improve the game of his players. It was crucial for someone with his shocking record in the transfer market to ensure that he got the very best of the players that were available to him. Callum Wilson proved to be the one exceptional player who improved under Pressley. In particular, John Fleck and Conor Thomas have gone backwards over the course of this season from the players they were when Leon Clarke was playing in front of them.

By the time he departed, the team were sadly only heading in one direction. The surrender of the two-goal lead against Sheffield United was endemic of the mental weakness that had developed in the squad by the time of his exit. With the majority of the fan-base having completely turned against him and no style of football to fall back on, there was nothing that he had left to offer the club by the very end.

It is an unfortunate end to a managerial reign that had offered genuine hope at times of being something truly special. Pressley had a genuine 'project' at this club at the start to play attacking football with young home-grown players and there were times when that looked close to coming off. In comparison with Mark Robins' time at the club, it seems that football management can follow the *Dark Knight* maxim of either leaving the hero or sticking around long enough to become the villain.

Football is a cruel business and there is little room for sentimentality when things are not working. For the most part, everyone involved at Coventry City wanted Steven Pressley to be here for the long-term. Pressley was unable to produce a team that could consistently get results and ultimately goodwill could only stretch so far with relegation to League Two on the line.

What Pressley will be disappointed about is that there were signs of improvement towards the end of his reign. In particular, his final few signings of Dominic Samuel, Sanmi Odelusi, Blair Turgott and even Luke Williams improved the squad and hinted at a return to that faith in young players that he had begun his reign with. The tough run of fixtures whilst the new signings were bedding into the squad did not help but those players injected the new energy into a lifeless squad that helped keep us up.

It all goes back to that inability to pick up results on a consistent basis. Had the team not struggled to score between November and January, he would still be in the job. Had the team taken the opportunities to beat Gillingham and Yeovil away, he would still be in the job. Had the team's form not dived off a cliff after Reda Johnson's red card against Scunthorpe, he would still be in the job. Yet when so many of those big moments go against you, it stops being bad luck and starts looking like bad management.

Steven Pressley will have learned from his time here that you are never going to have a specific set of circumstances for too long. You have to adapt and be willing to work with what is left to you. It is about making sure that when things are bad, they are not for too long. Whilst there were reasons to keep him on by the time of his departure, it was getting harder and harder to believe that he was not only capable of keeping us up but also of taking us beyond that and fulfilling the true potential of this football club.



Tony Mowbray

Steven Pressley was sacked and the board appointed the best candidate for the job in Tony Mowbray, a man of experience and of similar but more steadfast footballing principles than Pressley. His appointment was a wake-up call to remind fans of the club we can be, the initial short-term contract though was a reminder of the club we currently are.

During a period of time when was fans, we were believing the utmost worst about everything associated with our football club. From having the worst owners who were letting the team wither away through underinvestment to having a manager who had run out of ideas being allowed to remain in situ. Combined with the whole Wasps fiasco, it felt at the time that this football club was scaling back into something paler than before.

The appointment of Tony Mowbray blew a lot of

the assumptions that we held about the current state of this football club completely out of the water. It was a drastic decision to get rid of Steven Pressley after a point at Bramall Lane. To then go out and bring in someone of Tony Mowbray's standing of the game was a shock to many.

That sense of positive surprise though has been tinged by that short-term contract handed to him. It felt paradoxical for the club to be saying that they believed in Tony Mowbray so much but also that they did not want to take a risk on the assumption that we could get relegated. From a rational perspective it was an act of educated risk-taking with a fail-safe option were it not to work out. From an emotional perspective, there was always that anxiety that the club only had things in place until the end of the season.

In the situation we were in, every defeat

provoked fears of falling into League Two, aided and abetted by a manager and a group of players who were not invested in survival. Ever win though would provoke the fear that Tony Mowbray was using this club as a springboard to revitalise what was a sullied reputation after failures with Celtic and Middlesbrough.

Now that he has finally committed to this football club, some of that anxiety goes away. Mowbray must have been given assurances that he would be given the resources to achieve exactly what he wants to achieve here. We can get back to the business of accepting that Coventry City is a big club, especially at League One level.

Moving onto what we have seen so far, it has been something of a mixed bag but with the very obvious caveat for any judgement being that this has not been 'Tony Mowbray's Coventry City' thus far. Overall though, there is the sense that he knows just exactly what he is trying to achieve and has been close to doing so at times with a set of players he probably would not have picked to help him in his goals himself.

The brief moments of brilliant football under Tony Mowbray have been a joy to watch. The first 20 minutes of his first game against Port Vale were jaw-dropping for me, seeing the team move the ball around with such ease and to see players such as Jim O'Brien and John Fleck so improved was remarkable given that he had only had two full training sessions at that point.

The most complete performance we have had under Mowbray has been that performance against Oldham. Had it not been for an utterly stupid, sloppy goal to concede early in the game, it would have been a real statement victory for Tony Mowbray's short tenure. The dominance of possession was good to see but the movement off-the-ball in attack was amazing for a front four of Adam Barton, Jim O'Brien, Frank Nouble and Nick Proschwitz.

In a short time, he has clearly given certain players the confidence that they had been missing for much of the season. Jim O'Brien and John Fleck have both looked much more like the

players we thought they were during Tony Mowbray's short reign thus far. Adam Barton has been transformed into a much more dynamic and attacking player that many assumed he was capable of being. The way Mowbray has overseen Chris Stokes' transformation into a capable presence at left-back speaks volumes of his ability to manage his players on a personal level.

The most encouraging thing about Tony Mowbray's time at the club has been that he has gone out and taken results when the team needed them. Mowbray arrived at this club with a reputation for being an idealist and early on he constantly seemed to aim swipes at other managers for the quality of their football. But Mowbray was actually capable of being pragmatic enough to scrape results by coaching the team to focus on doing the basics well.

The win over Peterborough at London Road was a prime example of this ability to get the result when it mattered. Aaron Martin and Chris Stokes spent the entire game in defence focusing on not making errors and winning their individual battles after both had been guilty of some shocking errors the previous week against Doncaster. It was a combination of man management and keeping things simple that got the result, something that should augur well next season.

There are a few reasons to be concerned, chief among which being the terrible home form during his reign. Winning just one of seven home games is not good enough, especially as we ended up playing into the opposition's hands during many of those games. There was a tendency to overplay things, especially by depending on our limited full-backs to supply the width and crossing into the box for the team. When that inevitably failed, we were left open to the counter and were regularly punished.

Mowbray's substitutions also leave a lot to be desired. It seems at times he has named certain players in the team purely so they can be substituted later on, Adam Barton being the chief victim of this approach. Additionally, there have also been some pretty gaping holes on the bench

where we has regularly failed to name either a striker or central midfielder amongst the substitutes.

Against Leyton Orient, Mowbray was completely outwitted by the tactical switch from the opposition manager which turned the momentum of the game. The team had dominated that start of the second-half but once again lacked a telling contribution in the final third. Orient brought on an extra man in midfield to negate our dominance of that area, they then took the lead after errors from Aaron Martin and Matthew Pennington. By way of riposte, Mowbray decided to bring-on a left-back in Ryan Haynes in place of a winger in Sanmi Odelusi, with Orient having no particular threat down the right side of the pitch.

Even though Mowbray has shown the ability to change things up when the situation has demanded thus far, his time at West Brom and Middlesbrough suggest there is a stubbornness about him. The home defeat against Crewe was maybe a hint of this, the team failed to change their style after Crewe scored and the opposition merely continued to punish the same weaknesses.

Maybe that is being slightly too harsh, it has been a small set of fixtures to judge him on and he has not been able to work with players that he has chosen to work with. There is plenty of room for manoeuvre in the summer with much of the squad out of contract, if he can find players who offer greater penetration and are better able to take chances, those above mentioned failings will be less exposed.

Keeping Tony Mowbray around at this football club is a statement of intent, both he and the owners must believe that there is the potential here to reverse our fortunes. Over the course of our decline we slowly accepted lower and lower standards from both players and managers. There were rare moments of folly but it never felt like we have been as serious as we are now about reversing our fortunes. Mowbray's presence is a sign of ambition from this football club, hopefully that is something fans who have

floated away from regularly attending games will recognise.

Before our main hope of success was blind luck, hoping to be one of those teams that randomly puts together a run of form at the end of the season. Rarely before have I had this much faith that the manager of this club truly knows what he is doing and I am already looking forward to seeing what kind of team Tony Mowbray puts together.

The hard work starts from here but it is good to know we are in safe hands.

Player of the Season

With the most assists and as joint top-scorer and appearance maker in the league, Jim O'Brien is the outstanding candidate for player of the season out of all 37 players used this season. O'Brien has at times this season looked a class apart from this division which is something that cannot be said for the vast majority of others currently under contract.

In a terrible season though, O'Brien has played as big a part as any in our struggles and has to come in for his share of the blame. There was a period in the middle of the season in particular when O'Brien was doing very little for the team when they needed a big performer the most. O'Brien's work-rate can be counter-productive at times as he tries to be all things to all people and ends up providing very little. The defensive side of his game in particular is pretty poor for someone who models himself on hard work. Additionally, he can struggle to hurt teams with the ball when given time and space.

Those doubts around O'Brien leave the conversation for player of the year wide open. John Fleck, who matched O'Brien's appearance record, may have won player of the season from the players but his form has been a major disappointment this season. Fleck is up there with some of the most egregious players this season for hiding in games when it mattered most. Much more was expected from him.

As top-scorer Frank Nouble has to be included as part of the conversation. However Nouble's inconsistency has really let him down after a bright start. When Dominic Samuel picked up a season-ending injury at the start of April, we needed Nouble to step up and fire us to safety. That pressure did little to raise Nouble's game and we were somewhat lucky in the end to squeeze a few goals from other areas to eventually survive.

Reda Johnson's performances this season have been amongst the best in the entire team when

he had been fit and he is the only true on-the-pitch leader in the squad. The penalty incident against Worcester and his getting sent-off against Scunthorpe suggest that there is a core of recklessness associated with his bold approach to his game. His injury record and those few doubts make it hard to put a genuine case forward for Reda Johnson to be player of the season.

Loanee Everton defender Matthew Pennington has impressed many since joining on loan in November and deserves to be part of the conversation. Pennington but has been part of one too many calamitous defensive performances to convince that he has not culpable in at least some small degree. A classy player but with Jordan Willis another option for his position and Aaron Martin unconvincing, he was probably required to be much closer the finished article.

Dominic Samuel has been my favourite player to watch this season though, his pace, finishing ability and purposefulness are a quality that has not been present from others this season. We were fortunate his injury did not completely kill off our season, unfortunately for Samuel it leaves him short of being here long enough to be in contention for player of the season.

By process of elimination, the award has to be given to Jim O'Brien. His form may have dipped to a pretty low level in the middle of the season but he has shown more moments of quality than most this season. As part of possibly a better team overall next season, we should see much more of the best from Jim O'Brien.



Jim O'Brien

Sideways Sammy Player of the Season 2014/15

Young Player of the Season

At the half-way point of the season, Ryan Haynes looked nailed on to claim this award. A loss of form and an extended spell out of the team, which was probably for the best, has left it wide open for the rest of our young players to claim.

Haynes though does deserve recognition for his form at the start of the season. He laid down a marker for what he could do by first by creating a goal just minutes after scoring an own goal in the League Cup game against Cardiff City. More memorably, it was his presence of mind to cut the ball back to Frank Nouble after surging forward in the Gillingham homecoming match that will go down in Coventry City folklore.

As much as Haynes looked a shoe-in for this award at the half-way stage, Lee Burge was assumed to have blown his one big chance of establishing himself in the team. Some nervous performances and a silly red card picked up in the cup exit to Worcester City suggested he did not have what it took to handle the pressure of being the number one goalkeeper. His form since returning to the team has been remarkable, particularly the confidence he has shown in his ability to command his penalty area. To recover from such a low early on in your career speaks volumes about Burge's mental strength and will help him improve further over time.

Jordan Willis is also in contention, although as someone who has been involved with the first-team for two full seasons now it is starting to feel odd to describe him as a 'young' player. Willis' form has suffered dips this season but the difference in defensive performance from the team when he did not play against Crewe, versus against Bristol City was remarkable. It would have been nice to see him play more at centre-back as his inability to cross effectively will hold him back at right-back, but a very solid and assured season from Jordan Willis.

The final genuine contender to mention is James Maddison, already one of the most gifted players

this club has ever produced. His touch and control of the ball are beyond parallel in this squad, he creates and finds pockets of space for himself that few can. As he became more important in the final weeks of the season, it was clear that even the more established players in the squad were looking to him to supply the creativity. His winning goal against Crawley capped off a productive end to the season.

A mention is deserved too for Jack Finch and George Thomas after some promising first-team experiences this year. Finch played the most and was probably overused in the end due to a lack of a combative midfielder in the squad. His technical ability is top-notch and he has the frame to assert himself on midfields, these early experiences are important for his development. George Thomas came so close to scoring his first goal against Orient and one that could have been so decisive. I like his desire and ability to link up with players, the goals are not far away.

As somebody who writes a lot, I like narrative and for me there is no better story this season than Lee Burge's redemption. Making mistakes is an important part of a young player's game, more important though is recovering from those set-backs. Burge may still have plenty to learn but that experience of being a high-profile villain and completely written off by many has given him the motivation to spur himself onto greater heights.



Lee Burge

Sideways Sammy Young Player of the Season 2014/15



League One Review

The Promotion Race

There was a faint hope for a promotion race around the mid-point of the season after Bristol City suffered a small blip in form. The loan signing of Matt Smith from Fulham propelled Bristol City back into gear with Jay Emmanuel-Thomas also stepping up for the Ashton Gate side. Steve Cotterill's team eventually sauntered to the league title whilst their rivals struggled for form slightly towards the business end of the season.

Following a 3-0 win at the Ricoh Arena in January, Swindon looked best placed to join Bristol City in the Championship. Mark Cooper's side played by far the best football but a chronic lack of squad depth saw their form tail off towards the end of the season and fall out of contention for automatic promotion.

Preston North End were the best placed of the three remaining contenders for automatic promotion and had multiple opportunities to

claim a return to the Championship. A poor performance on the final day against relegation-battling Colchester was the final of a number of chances Preston had to claim second spot. Simon Grayson's team were solid but lacked the attacking flair at times to decide tight contests in their favour.

It was left to free-scoring MK 'Dons' to claim the final automatic promotion place. Karl Robinson's side finally found the killer touch in front of goal that their enterprising build-up play deserved. Less prone to shock defeats against sides able to soak up pressure, the goal fests throughout the season were the catharsis to years of playing well but struggling to win consistently

The Play-Offs

With Preston North End and Swindon Town dropping magnanimously into the play-offs after falling short of automatic promotion in the regular season, those other two places were very much up for grabs.

Sheffield United, who for all the money spent this season should have at least joined Bristol City in the top two, struggled to convince for much of the campaign and ambled their way into fourth position. Nigel Clough's intransigence as a manager frustrated many at Bramall Lane. It was the kind of season where Sheffield United beat Premier League Southampton in the League Cup only to lose away to relegated Yeovil in the final weeks of the season.

There looked to have been a race on for the final play-off spot with any team not directly involved in the relegation scrap not far from contention. It was Chesterfield though who found form at the right time of the season to eventually stumble

into sixth-place.

The play-off semi-finals pitted Preston against Chesterfield and Sheffield United against Swindon Town. Preston comfortably won through against Chesterfield over two legs, a woeful goalkeeping performance from emergency loan player Joe Murphy did Preston plenty of favours. Swindon and Sheffield United turned into a farcical tie which ended 7-6 on aggregate in favour of Swindon after a bizarre 5-5 second-leg draw.

The play-off final pits Swindon Town and Preston North End against each other, two teams with markedly different success rates in play-off contests. Swindon have won three out of their past four play-off finals. Preston may feel this is their time, having failed to win promotion in nine out of nine play-offs, manager Simon Grayson is a seasoned pro at winning promotions.

The Relegation Battle

Yeovil Town were relegated with just less than a month remaining, a remarkable fall from grace just two seasons after winning the League One play-off final. The Glovers needed their summer signings to come off and have a strong start to the campaign, neither of which happened. Gary Johnson's sacking should have left enough time to survive but his replacement Terry Skiverton failed to project any confidence to his team, conceding defeat in the relegation battle back in March.

The final-day saw the final three relegation spots 'up for grabs' with six teams capable of going down in the form of Colchester United, Leyton Orient, Crewe Alexandra, Crawley Town, Notts County as well as Coventry City. Colchester claimed a shock win against Preston to secure their safety. Orient failed to beat a heavily-rotated Swindon side, Notts County capitulated in the final minutes against Gillingham and Crawley were beaten by the Sky Blues, sending Orient, County and Crawley into League Two.

Orient's season had been an unmitigated disaster from the very moment that Italian businessman Francesco Becchetti took over the club. County had been in contention for automatic promotion back in November but lost form entirely from that point onwards and were relegated despite a late managerial change at the very end. Crawley Town were always likely to go down this season based on the resources they had available, the appointment of Dean Saunders galvanised the club but it fell short in the end.

The lucky teams in the end were Crewe, Colchester and Coventry City. The latter two will be hoping to use survival as a chance to push on for better next season. Crewe can only hope their bid for survival next season does not go down to the final day.



Closing Thoughts

This has felt like an especially long season this time around. Already, memories of our time at Sixfields are slipping away, starting to feel like some crazy fever dream rather than something that occupied our minds for over a year. At the same time though, that sense of joy and optimism stemming from the return to Coventry has dissipated completely.

Tony Mowbray's appointment as manager and the assurances that he has clearly received to work here longer-term should not obscure entirely what a massive missed opportunity this season was. To have that moment of homecoming is something that few clubs have experienced and when it has happened, e.g. Rotherham United, the opportunity has usually been taken. We on the other hand, have let this chance slip through our fingers rather abjectly.

Instead we have spent much of this season soul-

searching about what it means to be Coventry City, why attendances are so bad, are we even a big club and is there something especially rotten about this football club.

For all the deeper questions, maybe it was down to more tangible things like the infrastructure this season to support success simply not being there. Memories of Sixfields and seven and a half years of disastrous ownership from SISU (and decades beforehand from others too) must have played a massive part in our failure this year. We may just have been rubbish this season but it was a terrible time to be rubbish when this was our best chance to reverse the narrative.

Considering the division we are in and the stature of this football club, it is not hard to believe that we did have the top 6-8 budget that has been oft-repeated by the board. Knowing that could and should have done a lot better this

season is reassuring in a way, particularly with Tony Mowbray staying on next season. It is confirmation really that we should not be sinking any lower and that simply punching our weight next season is likely to restore some pride.

On the other hand, knowing the extent to which we have underachieved only serves to make it even more frustrating that we failed to even have a moderately successful season. It serves to strengthen the idea that Coventry City may just be that one club that never bottoms out.

Things should be different next season and it is important to realise that it does not have to go on like this. The extension of Tony Mowbray's contract and the cheap season tickets are an early sign of intention from this football club to change things for the better.

I have often wondered this and in previous season whether fans of this football club were too jaded to respond to calls for optimism. The bump in attendance for the end of season Crewe game where the team's form was only slightly better than it had been was a positive sign. The atmosphere at the Oldham game when the team were 1-0 down was a positive sign. From the fans perspective, I do not think anyone is in the mood to let the chance for success slip away once again.

Tentative first steps have been made but next season will be all about going out there and doing something on the pitch. The staff, players and fans have talked a very good game throughout the course of this season but have so often failed to produce. Going back to that Crewe game, if do not find the right personalities in the squad, things will only repeat themselves once again.

The worry now is that a slow start will begin a slippery slope back towards apathy. Many are buying season tickets not based upon what they saw this season but on what they expect to see next season. Those who remain loyal right now are impatient for success, not getting off to a strong start, especially at home, will make it an uphill battle next season.

This season the team were able to get away with low standards at times as there were some reasonable excuses about possibly being unprepared for the return, possibly playing on a bad pitch, possibly playing under a bad manager. One-by-one, those excuses are slipping away.

Sky Blues fans are currently of the mindset that last season was not anywhere near good enough and only a concerted push for at least the play-offs will be good enough next season. Already there is pressure on the team to do that, there is potential for next season to be even more frustrating than this one.

Fortunately the task of achieving that rests with Tony Mowbray. In keeping to his initial brief of ensuring survival, he has shown the ability to get results under pressure. It will be a different kind of pressure next season but he has already shown that he can put his experience in the game into practice.

12 months ago we were glad for the season to end and would have been happy if all football ended at that point, things could not get any worse. Now we await the start of next season impatiently, and with the kind of genuine optimism that we have not had for a long time.

Under ordinary circumstances, a club the size of Coventry City with a top 8 budget and a manager of the calibre of Tony Mowbray would be targeting the play-offs. But also under ordinary circumstances, optimism at Coventry City has been swiftly crushed.

It is an alien feeling to look forward to the new season expecting something that could be considered success. However weird it feels, the positivity is a nice alternative to that looming sense of doom usually lingering over us.