

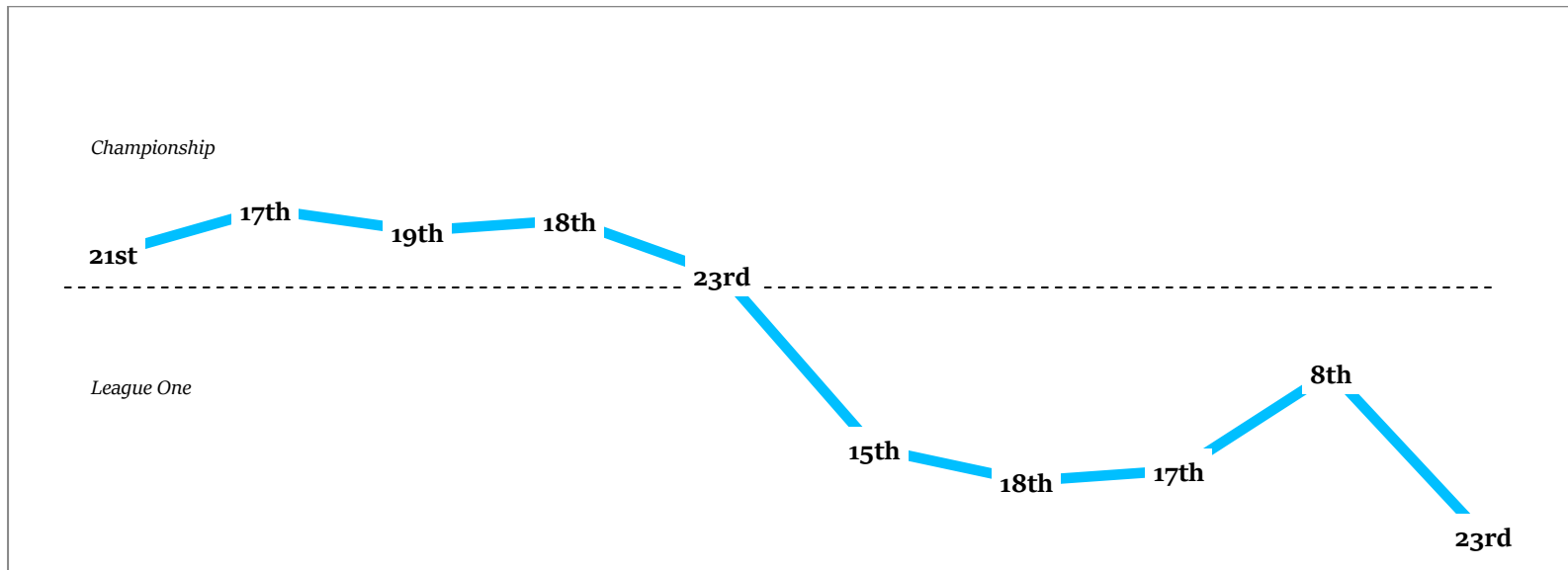


**The Sideways Sammy
Season Preview
2017/18**

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The Last 10 Seasons



Manager	Games	Wins	Draws	Defeats	Win%
Iain Dowie	49	20	8	21	40.8
Chris Coleman	117	34	47	36	29.1
Aidy Boothroyd	39	12	8	19	30.8
Mark Robins	45	22	7	16	48.9
Steven Pressley	100	32	30	38	32.0
Tony Mowbray	76	26	24	26	34.2
Mark Venus	18	8	2	8	44.4
Russell Slade	16	3	5	8	18.8

Season	Top Scorer	Goals
2007-08	Michael Mifsud	17
2008-09	Clinton Morrison	12
2009-10	Clinton Morrison	11
2010-11	Marlon King	13
2011-12	Lukas Jutkiewicz	9
2012-13	David McGoldrick	18
2013-14	Callum Wilson	22
2014-15	Frank Nouble, Jim O'Brien & Dominic Samuel	6
2015-16	Adam Armstrong	20
2016-17	George Thomas	5



Looking Ahead To A New Season

Looking back at it, last season was pretty mad.

12 months of nearly wall-to-wall, unadulterated craziness – four different managers, even more different players used, abysmal defeats, the very occasional good performance, pitch invasions for both good and bad reasons, protests, media bans, the training ground being listed for housing development, reading 'Club Statements' with my hands in front of my eyes, relegation, yet also one of the best days in the club's recent history.

In amongst that, there are so many reasons to give up on supporting Coventry City, somehow though, towards the end of the season there was also just enough to re-energise your love for this club all over again. Looking ahead to the new season though,

probably the most compelling reason that I cannot wait for it all to start over again is realising just how boring life without football is.

What other hobby subjects you to such highs and lows? It's not just over the course of a season, but within each game that you're on an emotional rollercoaster.

The home game against Gillingham back in February was a prime example of this for me. In what was ultimately a fairly meaningless game where it was already too late to save the season, we went 2-0 up fairly early on and, all of a sudden, I started to feel a lot genuinely positive about everything – maybe Kevin Foley could play in central midfield, maybe Russell Slade did know what he was doing, maybe we could put together the ten-game winning run required to give us a

chance of staying up.

Soon after half-time, Gillingham pulled a goal back and it was back on the emotional rollercoaster again. Those final 45 minutes of the game felt at least two or three times longer than the first 45. My heart was racing, I was basically rocking on my seat every time the ball was pumped forward, I felt almost physically sick because of a bunch of blokes kicking a football. Then the final whistle blew, that angst instantly washed away from me, and I felt like I had made good use of my Saturday afternoon.

As silly as it is to invest so much of your emotional energy into a hobby that you have very little control over, I wouldn't have it any other way. The defeats are hard to take, but there's always a win, a brilliant goal, a fantastic run of form around the corner to keep you going – and it never stops. Even the most masterfully-made, expertly-written film is unable to provide that, that's why I keep on supporting Coventry City, in spite of every reason not to.

The wonderful thing about the new season is that the slate is wiped clean and we don't have to carry anything over from last year to hinder this campaign – except of course that we're now playing in a lower division. The slate for us is extra clean considering the squad turnover this summer – of the starting XI against Oxford in the Checkatrade Trophy final, just four are likely to start against Notts County on the opening game of this season.

While such a change to the team was probably unavoidable following relegation given the need to not only get rid of those that most contributed to it and the reality that some of our best players would prefer not to play in League Two, it is sad that we're not building the team around the heroes of that afternoon back in April. We won that tournament around a core of young, homegrown talent who clearly loved playing for the club, we're now moving on very quickly to building a more experienced side

with less of a connection to Coventry City. It's hard not to wonder whether it will feel quite the same winning promotion with a bunch of hired guns than it would have been with the balletic Cian Harries and the committed Dion Kelly-Evans in defence, Bigi and Ben Stevenson running the midfield and George Thomas scoring the goals.

While it's not what I wanted to see, going with the hired guns approach certainly gives me more confidence heading into the new season. Given that many of us reasonably expected for the playing budget to be massively cut, any player of any value sold-off, and for this season to be about another set of anonymous cast-offs and loan players playing at a near-empty Ricoh Arena, to have signed a number of proven and experienced players that most clubs at League Two level, and some in League One, would have wanted provides the belief that everyone at the club views promotion as a realistic ambition.

Without getting into the meat of this preview, there is not only no reason that we can't win promotion because the season is yet to start and anything can happen, but I would argue that our status as one of the promotion favourites is justified based on the calibre of our new signings and how strong other squads in this division appear to be.

Aside from integrating a new squad very quickly, the largest obstacle between us and challenging for promotion is how we deal with being the favourites in most of our games, especially at the Ricoh Arena. Whether League Two is as physical and long-ball as many are expecting it to be remains to be seen, but I think it's reasonable to anticipate that a lot of clubs at this level of football are going to view Coventry City as a major scalp and a trip to the Ricoh Arena as a big day out – it happened in League One, even last season.

It may not be as simple as possibly having one of the division's better squads on paper, having to deal every week with being the

favourites in games changes what is required of us in each game. We're going to have to know how to break teams that sit back against us down, how to win games after falling behind we're going to have to deal with rapid counter-attacks, time-wasting, niggly fouls, while also being able to do some of those things ourselves.

Of course, these will be challenges that other clubs will have to face too, and which team is perceived to be the favourite changes based on how the season unfolds. It is the challenge that any successful side has to face.

It would be odd to feel fully confident about your team heading into the new season, but not only is it exciting that football is back, it's also especially exciting because we are preparing for a season where we're expected to challenge for promotion.

I'm excited to watch Coventry City play in League Two, which is something I did not expect to be writing back in February.



**Club-By-Club
Previews**



Accrington Stanley

Last Season: 13th in League Two

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	Aaron	Chapman	27	15	0
DF	Omar	Beckles	25	41	3
DF	Janoi	Donacien	23	35	1
DF	Mark	Hughes	30	36	2
DF	Reagan	Ogle	18	1	0
DF	Matty	Pearson	24	43	8
DF	Ben	Richards-Everton	25	6	0
MF	Scott	Brown	32	28	0
MF	Jordan	Clark	23	42	1
MF	Seamus	Conneely	29	38	1
MF	Mekhi	Leacock	20	5	0
MF	Liam	Nolan	22	39	6
MF	Erico	Sousa	22	4	0
FW	Jonathan	Edwards	20	10	1
FW	Kayden	Jackson	23	20	1
FW	Billy	Kee	26	39	13
FW	Sean	McConville	28	41	5

Squad Size

17

Ave Age

25.1

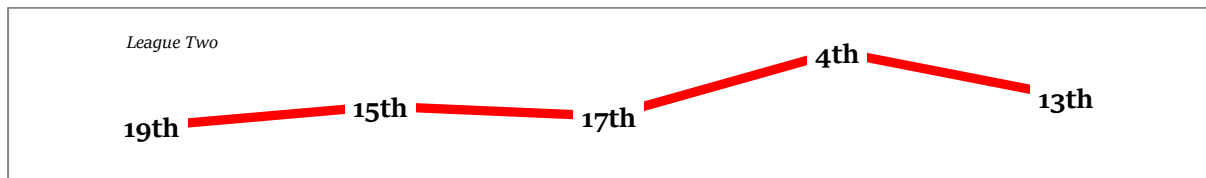
Apps 16/17

443

Goals 16/17

42

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

John Coleman - The man who led Accrington into the Football League in his previous spell at the club returned two-and-a-half seasons ago and has restored a sense of identity to the club. Has a remarkable knack of getting teams to not only over-perform on limited resources but to play genuinely good football, Accrington are in safe hands under his management.

One To Watch:

Billy Kee - Struggled to make the step up to League One level in a recent spell at Scunthorpe, but has been an absolutely pivotal player for Accrington over the past few seasons. A stocky striker with good penalty area instincts, Kee's ability to link the attack and bring others into play have made him central to Stanley's attacking threat.

Overview:

Ever since John Coleman's return to Accrington around two-and-a-half seasons ago, the side have consistently over-performed compared to their level of resources. A hard-working side capable of playing some excellent football, Accrington have been the nightmare team for many fans of League Two clubs with lofty ambitions and

much bigger budgets.

The loss of star forward Shay McCartan to Bradford City this summer is a blow, but one that it appears that Stanley should be able to absorb. With the more experienced forwards Billy Kee and Sean McConville having been retained, along with the key defensive players Seamus Conneely, Omar Beckles and Matty Pearson, the squad turnover this summer has been nowhere near as high as it was before a disjointed previous campaign.

As would be expected for a club with such limited resources, few of the summer arrivals boast particularly proven records. The likes of Kayden Jackson, Mekhi Leacock and Erico Sousa add attacking pace, but it looks to be a case of relying on the core of last season's team.

A lack of a reliable goalkeeper is probably the biggest concern, along with having a fairly small squad. They are one of many play-off outsiders, but it seems most likely that it will be a mid-table season at the Crown Ground.

Prediction: 14th



Barnet

Last Season: 15th in League Two

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	Craig	Ross	27	22	0
GK	Jamie	Stephens	23	18	0
DF	Ricardo	Almeida Santos	22	16	2
DF	Richard	Brindley	24	41	1
DF	Charlie	Clough	26	43	5
DF	Elliot	Johnson	23	36	0
DF	Michael	Nelson	37	43	1
DF	Harry	Taylor	20	25	0
DF	David	Tutonda	21	7	1
DF	Mauro	Vilhete	24	40	3
MF	Ruben	Bover	25	14	0
MF	Jamal	Campbell-Ryce	34	32	1
MF	Wesley	Fonguck	20	6	0
MF	Nana	Kyei	19	12	0
MF	Fumnaya	Shomotun	20	6	0
MF	Dan	Sweeney	23	27	2
MF	Jack	Taylor	19	20	0
MF	Ryan	Watson	24	19	1
MF	Curtis	Weston	30	40	6
FW	John	Akinde	28	46	26
FW	Simeon	Akinola	25	44	7
FW	Jean-Louis	Akpa Akpro	32	36	3
FW	Justin	Amaluzor	20	15	0
FW	Shaq	Coulthirst	22	36	7
FW	Alex	Nicholls	29	26	2

Squad Size

25

Ave Age

25.1

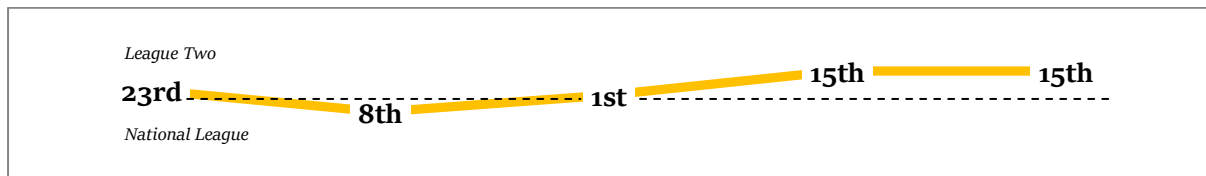
Apps 16/17

670

Goals 16/17

68

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

Rossi Eames - Had two successful caretaker spells last season before being made permanent first-team coach over the summer. A young and innovative manager looking to make the most of Barnet's increasingly productive academy.

One To Watch:

John Akinde - Since signing for Barnet over three years ago, Akinde has been a revelation in front of goal, firing them out of non-league and helping them comfortably establish themselves back in the Football League. Powerfully built and deadly from the penalty spot, Akinde is a pure lower-league goal machine - even if he's not the most active of players outside the penalty area.

Overview:

Barnet will be looking for stability this campaign, having gone through three different managerial spells last season before settling back on the second of those three over the summer, Rossi Eames.

With a number of youth products on the verge of breaking into the first-team, along with having made some big personnel changes in January, this

summer has seen Barnet focus more on the players they have on the books, rather than looking to source fancy new additions in the hunt for a top seven spot.

Importantly, star striker John Akinde looks set for another season at The Hive having been their top scorer in each of the past three seasons. Manager Rossi Eames will be seeking to make Akinde the focal point of a pacey, high-pressing style of play this season, with Jean-Louis Akpa Akpro, Shaq Coulthirst and a smattering of rapid-heeled youngsters looking to supply Akinde's bullets and possibly benefit from the attention Akinde's presence in the box draws from defenders.

The addition of Shaq Coulthirst from Peterborough could prove crucial for Barnet in having a striker capable of taking the goalscoring burden off Akinde. With an exciting young manager and several young talents possibly on the verge of breakthrough seasons, Barnet could surprise many by challenging closely for the top seven.

Prediction: 9th



Cambridge United

Last Season: 11th in League Two

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	David	Forde	37	46	0
GK	Dimitar	Mitov	20	0	0
DF	Jake	Carroll	26	41	0
DF	Leon	Davies	17	5	0
DF	Brad	Halliday	22	30	1
DF	Leon	Legge	32	44	6
DF	Mark	Roberts	33	27	2
DF	Greg	Taylor	27	36	2
MF	Luke	Berry	25	45	17
MF	Gary	Deegan	29	40	0
MF	Harrison	Dunk	26	38	2
MF	Medy	Elito	27	23	5
MF	Paul	Lewis	22	35	6
MF	George	Maris	21	23	4
MF	Piero	Mingoia	25	40	5
MF	Liam	O'Neil	24	30	3
MF	Emmanuel	Osadebe	20	24	1
FW	David	Amoo	26	25	1
FW	Ade	Azeez	23	38	2
FW	Jabo	Ibehre	34	37	12
FW	Uche	Ikpeazu	22	29	6
FW	Adam	McGurk	28	15	0

Squad Size

22

Ave Age

26.2

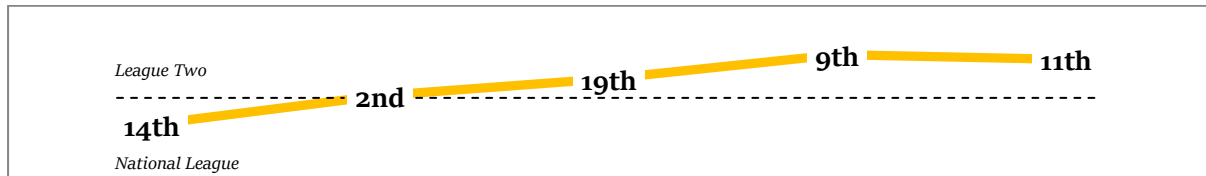
Apps 16/17

671

Goals 16/17

75

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

Shaun Derry - Viewed as one of the brighter young managerial prospects in England but endured a difficult last season at the Abbey Stadium.

Inconsistency dogged their play-off bid, with criticism from fans over negative tactics and inconsistent team selections.

One To Watch:

Luke Berry - Having netted an incredible 17 goals last season from midfield, Luke Berry has drawn admiring glances from teams higher up the football pyramid. An energetic and technically imperious midfielder who operates best when freed from defensive responsibility.

Overview:

A reshuffle behind-the-scenes at Cambridge United this summer has seen manager Shaun Derry relieved from the responsibility of making signings after an underwhelming previous season where Cambridge struggled for consistency despite some strong runs of form.

Whether letting Derry focus purely on style of play and team selection is a good thing remains to be seen. The former Notts County manager came under

intense scrutiny from fans for his style of play and team selection and will have to start the season strongly to convince that he's learned from his mistakes.

The loss of star goalkeeper Will Norris to Wolves is a blow, with his shot-stopping ability last season helping Cambridge towards a respectable mid-table finish. However, ex-Charlton youngster Dimitar Mitov has impressed in pre-season, and the experienced David Forde has also been brought in to challenge him. Elsewhere, the pace of David Amoo and Ade Azeez should add a dimension to Cambridge's attack, along with the physical threat of Uche Ikpeazu and former Carlisle star Jabo Ibehre.

Although star player Luke Berry could well leave before the end of the summer transfer window, Cambridge have a strong enough squad to reach the play-offs. However, Shaun Derry hasn't convinced as a manager in his short career thus far and his side appear fairly reliant on Berry for a spark in the final third. This may not be a particularly memorable season for Cambridge United.

Prediction: 13th



Carlisle United

Last Season: 5th in League Two

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	Morgan	Bacon	19	0	0
GK	Jack	Bonham	23	1	0
DF	Mark	Ellis	28	24	2
DF	Danny	Grainger	31	31	6
DF	Tom	Miller	27	41	0
DF	Tom	Parkes	25	41	1
MF	Nicky	Adams	30	42	3
MF	Jamie	Devitt	27	35	0
MF	Kelvin	Etuhu	29	20	2
MF	Mike	Jones	30	28	0
MF	Luke	Joyce	30	45	1
MF	Jason	Kennedy	30	27	9
MF	Reggie	Lambe	26	38	6
MF	Gary	Liddle	31	47	2
MF	Samir	Nabi	20	2	0
MF	John	O'Sullivan	23	36	2
FW	Richie	Bennett	26	44	15
FW	Hallam	Hope	23	33	3
FW	Shaun	Miler	29	30	4

Squad Size

19

Ave Age

27.1

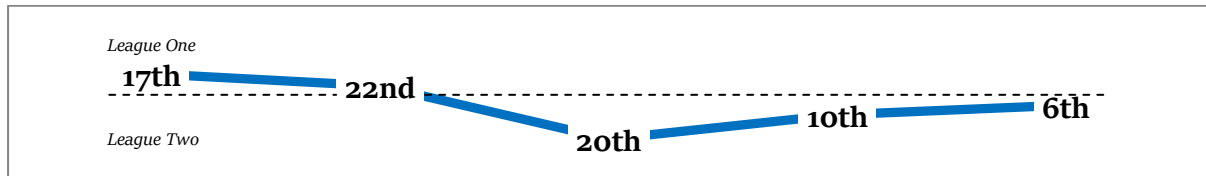
Apps 16/17

565

Goals 16/17

56

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

Keith Curle - A manager who seems better at motivating a set of players over a short-term period rather than over the course of full season, Curle has enjoyed a relatively sustained period of success during his time in charge of the club, improving the team with each season under his management.

One To Watch:

Nicky Adams - A serial promotion winner at League Two level, Adams is a dynamic winger/attacking-midfielder with the quality to be playing at League One level. Carries the ball forward with reliability and directness, while possessing good delivery in open play and set-pieces, Adams will continue to torment League Two defences this season.

Overview:

It has been a frustrating 2017 for Carlisle United fans. Having squandered an automatic promotion spot, they were eliminated in the play-off semi-finals, and have seen key players leave in the form of Charlie Wyke in January, along with Mark Gillespie and Jabo Ibehre this summer. With transfer activity having been slow and drawn-out, there is pessimism at Brunton Park heading into

the new campaign.

Nonetheless, Carlisle still have a fairly strong, albeit small, squad for this level of football. Attacking midfielder Nicky Adams is one of the best players at this level, while the likes of Jason Kennedy, Mike Jones, Gary Liddle, and summer signing Kelvin Etuhu have proven to be very strong performers at this level over the past few seasons.

It's a case of whether Shaun Miller and Hallam Hope in attack can find goals easier to come by than they did last season and whether manager Keith Curle can organise the defence better than he has over the past few years where open-scoring games at both ends of the pitch have been a common sight for Carlisle fans.

With Curle a manager who can turn on his players during a poor run of form, there is the potential for things to implode at Carlisle were they to start the season poorly. The squad is too strong to find itself in relegation danger, but is in need of two or three key players to look capable of matching last season's top seven finish.

Prediction: 15th



Cheltenham Town

Last Season: 21st in League Two

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	Jon	Flatt	22	21	0
GK	Rhys	Lovett	20	0	0
DF	Will	Boyle	21	32	2
DF	Jordan	Cranston	23	38	0
DF	Aaron	Downes	32	20	1
DF	Jordon	Forster	23	16	0
DF	Jamie	Grimes	26	46	3
DF	Daniel	O'Shaughnessy	22	27	3
MF	Nigel	Atangana	27	29	0
MF	Kevin	Dawson	27	39	2
MF	Harry	Pell	25	42	7
MF	Kyle	Storer	30	23	0
MF	Carl	Winchester	24	29	2
FW	Mohamed	Eisa	22	-	-
FW	Dan	Holman	27	24	1
FW	Jerrell	Sellars	22	0	0
FW	Danny	Wright	32	41	9

Squad Size

17

Ave Age

25.5

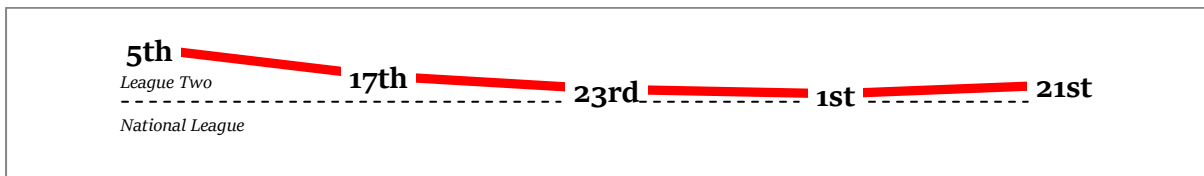
Apps 16/17

427

Goals 16/17

30

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

Gary Johnson - A vastly experienced manager who has operated at all levels in the Football League to varying levels of success. His teams tend to vary between two extremes of form, but are generally very well-organised and highly-motivated.

One To Watch:

Harry Pell - A tall, box-to-box presence in the middle of the park who came to the fore towards the second half of last season when stripped of the captaincy. One of the few players from the National League title-winning season that took the step up with a degree of comfort.

Overview:

Memories of winning the National League title at a canter two seasons ago already appear to be a distant memory for Cheltenham Town fans. Too few of the key players during that memorable season proved capable of the step up, forcing Gary Johnson into a frantic mid-season squad re-shuffle to eke out the vital points required for survival.

Further changes have been made over the summer, but it's apparent already that Cheltenham are gearing up for another difficult season where they'll

have to scrape out results whenever they can get them. Former Yeovil midfielder Kevin Dawson is probably the stand-out signing, having been key under Johnson during Yeovil's recent promotion to the Championship, but has struggled with injuries in recent years.

Johnson will be looking towards Dawson, along with Harry Pell and Kyle Storer in midfield, to provide the leadership and energy in the centre of the park to frustrate opponents and protect a relatively youthful defence. Pacey young forwards Jerrell Sellars and Mohamed Eisa will be looking to support target-man Danny Wright in attack, although both are relative newcomers at Football League level.

With Gary Johnson in charge, there is always the potential for Cheltenham to massively over-perform if the dynamic of the team is right. However, with a fairly small squad and few match-winners in those ranks, it seems far likelier that Cheltenham will be battling to avoid a return to the National League.

Prediction: 24th



Chesterfield

Last Season: 24th in League One

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	Joe	Anyon	30	8	0
GK	Tommy	Lee	31	0	0
DF	Brad	Barry	22	23	1
DF	Jerome	Binnom-Williams	22	10	0
DF	Ian	Evatt	35	30	2
DF	Sam	Hird	29	35	1
DF	Laurence	Maguire	20	16	0
DF	Paul	McGinn	26	18	1
DF	Scott	Wiseman	31	24	2
MF	Connor	Dimaio	21	23	0
MF	Dion	Donohue	23	37	1
MF	Jak	McCourt	22	26	1
MF	Reece	Mitchell	21	28	2
MF	Louis	Reed	20	0	0
MF	Joe	Rowley	18	7	1
MF	Jordan	Sinnott	23	33	7
FW	Delial	Brewster	19	3	0
FW	Kristian	Dennis	27	35	8
FW	Ricky	German	18	7	0
FW	Chris	O'Grady	31	26	1
FW	Gozie	Ugwu	24	43	17

Squad Size

21

Ave Age

25.0

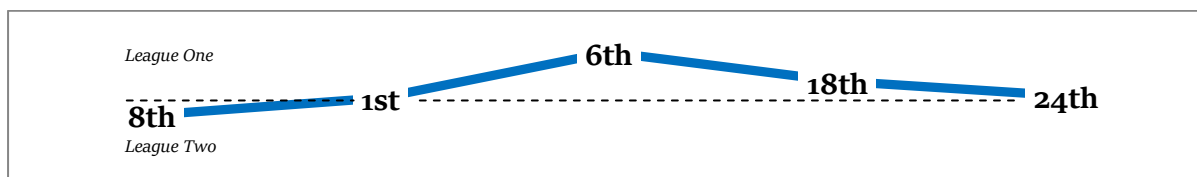
Apps 16/17

432

Goals 16/17

45

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

Gary Caldwell - On the one hand, he's a young manager with a league title already on his CV, on the other, his poor signings and overly ambitious attempts to play passing football saw Chesterfield finish rock bottom in League One last season. Lucky to still be in the job, he needs to prove this season he's more than a one season wonder.

One To Watch:

Chris O'Grady - Chesterfield's major summer signing, having played most of the past few seasons at Championship level. A physical, intelligent and experienced centre-forward who operates well with his back to goal, will be a crucial pivot point in attack for an otherwise youthful Chesterfield side.

Overview:

There are parallels between Chesterfield this season and Doncaster last time out. Having stuck with the manager who effectively got them relegated, they backed that person then to make sweeping personnel changes in an attempt to bounce back. It was a formula that worked well for Doncaster, but it remains to be seen whether it will hold true for Chesterfield.

Gary Caldwell's reign at the Proact Stadium has been nothing short of disastrous thus far, failing to make any kind of positive impact as they sunk meekly into League Two. However, he has been able to make some positive and eye-catching additions to a squad in need of a shake-up, offering hope that a squad more suited to his style of play will yield better results.

Not only have some enterprising younger players been brought in, such as Sheffield United's gifted midfielder Louis Reed and National League goal machine Gozie Ugwu, but Caldwell has added some crucial experience to the squad via Scott Wiseman in defence and Chris O'Grady in attack. There is also much excitement around homegrown youngster Joe Rowley in midfield who was blooded by Caldwell last season.

With a young and fairly intriguing squad allied with a few key experienced campaigners, Chesterfield seem well set-up to challenge for automatic promotion. However, I'm still to be convinced by Gary Caldwell as a manager, which is why I've knocked them down into the play-offs in my predictions.

Prediction: 5th



Colchester United

Last Season: 8th in League Two

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	Dillon	Barnes	21	0	0
GK	Rene	Gilmartin	30	0	0
GK	Sam	Walker	25	46	0
DF	Tom	Eastman	25	35	3
DF	Ryan	Jackson	27	34	1
DF	Cameron	James	19	14	0
DF	Frankie	Kent	21	13	0
DF	Lewis	Kinsella	22	13	0
DF	Cole	Kpekawa	21	7	0
DF	Luke	Prosser	29	14	0
DF	Kane	Vincent-Young	21	18	0
DF	Alex	Wynter	23	15	0
MF	Ben	Dickenson	24	36	12
MF	Tom	Lapslie	21	37	0
MF	Doug	Loft	30	8	0
MF	Sean	Murray	23	34	1
MF	Tommy	O'Sullivan	22	3	0
MF	Craig	Slater	23	28	3
MF	Sammie	Szmodics	21	19	5
MF	Drey	Wright	22	42	2
FW	Kurtis	Guthrie	24	33	12
FW	Denny	Johnstone	22	28	2
FW	Mikael	Mandron	22	31	10

Squad Size

23

Ave Age

23.9

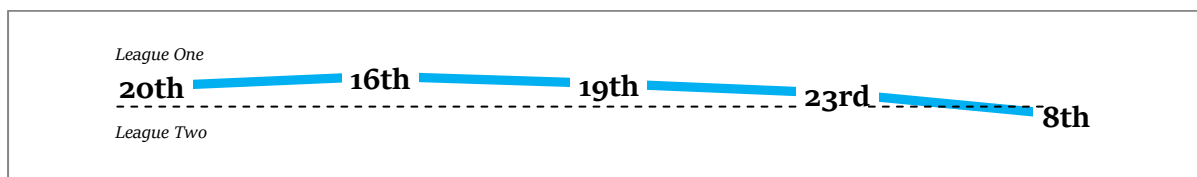
Apps 16/17

508

Goals 16/17

51

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

John McGreal - Part of a continuation of the club's policy of promoting managers from within, but has proven to be far more competent and pragmatic than his predecessors, building a more defensively robust and physically competitive Colchester United outfit than in their League One days.

One To Watch:

Craig Slater - The Scottish central midfielder impressed last season with his ability to both control games with his passing and work-rate without the ball. A groin injury robbed Colchester of a key player towards the end of last season, but, fully-fit, Slater is a classy midfielder fully capable of stepping up a level or two.

Overview:

It was a nightmare succession of injuries that curtailed Colchester's promotion bid last season, although they did end up mightily close in the final weeks of the campaign. However, with a number of young players having been blooded as a result of those injuries, Colchester head into the new campaign with plenty of strength and quality in their ranks.

The main concern will be how the loss of

Chris Porter to Crewe Alexandra is dealt with. The experienced centre-forward played a crucial role last season as the focal point in attack, not only laying on chances for his younger, quicker teammates, but getting among the goals himself. Colchester's attacking threat has been further hamstrung by the losses loan star Tariqe Fosu and the injured Ben Dickenson.

Nonetheless, there are more reasons to be optimistic than not for Colchester fans. A fairly young, but talented defence benefited from picking up first-team experience last season, Craig Slater and Tom Lapslie can control games at this level from central midfield, while Kurtis Guthrie in attack is a potential shout for top-scorer in the division if he can stay fit.

Were it not for the loss of key attacking players, Colchester would be among my favourites for automatic promotion. As it stands, the squad looks slightly weaker than last season's, but if they can avoid another injury crisis, they should finish higher.

Prediction: 6th



Crawley Town

Last Season: 19th in League Two

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	Yusuf	Mersin	22	8	0
GK	Glenn	Morris	33	39	0
DF	Chris	Arthur	27	13	0
DF	Andre	Blackman	26	32	0
DF	Mark	Connolly	25	41	3
DF	Cedric	Evina	25	16	0
DF	Addison	Garnett	20	2	0
DF	Josh	Lelan	22	13	0
DF	Joe	McNerney	27	34	3
DF	Josh	Yorwerth	22	21	3
DF	Lewis	Young	27	43	0
MF	Enzio	Boldewijn	24	46	5
MF	Dannie	Bulman	38	38	0
MF	Billy	Clifford	24	36	0
MF	Dean	Cox	30	26	3
MF	Kaby	Djalo	25	28	1
MF	Dennon	Lewis	20	27	3
MF	Josh	Payne	26	32	1
MF	Mark	Randall	27	25	1
MF	Jordan	Roberts	23	23	3
MF	Moussa	Sanoh	22	26	5
MF	Jimmy	Smith	30	46	7
MF	Aryan	Tajbakhsh	26	15	2
FW	Panutsche	Camara	20	15	4
FW	Matt	Harrold	33	10	0
FW	Thomas	Verheydt	25	38	11

Squad Size

26

Ave Age

26.3

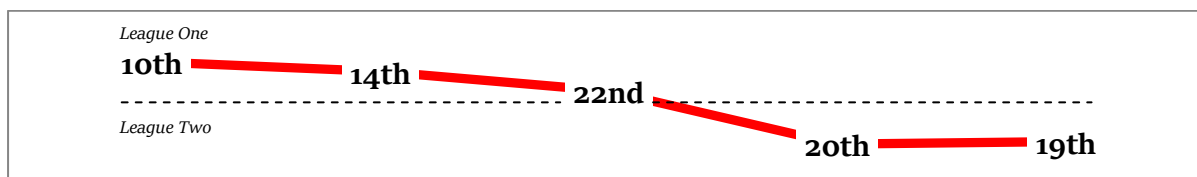
Apps 16/17

693

Goals 16/17

55

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

Harry Kewell - A surprise appointment for Crawley, not only because of his international reputation from his playing days, but also because of his previous managerial experience - with Watford's under-23 side - ended with him sacked after a series of very heavy defeats.

One To Watch:

Dean Cox - A few seasons ago Cox was one of the best players in League One and it was a significant coup for Crawley to land his services when released by Leyton Orient last season. An energetic and skilful wide player/attacking midfielder with great set-piece delivery, the main stand-out player in this Crawley squad.

Overview:

Crawley Town were once the precocious upstarts in the Football League, but they have reclaimed some notoriety via the summer appointment of Harry Kewell as manager. The ex-Leeds and Liverpool winger is a curious appointment, having never come across as the managerial type as a player and struggling badly while in charge of Watford's under-23 side.

Although it would be wrong to read too much into youth results, there are further warning signs at Crawley this summer with the sale of star striker James Collins to Luton and the addition of a number of untested players at Football League level.

While winger Enzo Boldwijn proved to be a hit last season, his Dutch compatriots Moussa Sanoh and Thomas Verheydt are a further venture down a path trod recently by Port Vale and Notts County. A lot seems dependent on Dean Cox recapturing the form he had at Leyton Orient, with the majority of the rest of Crawley's squad, aside from winger Jordan Roberts, looking distinctly average for this level.

It appears that Crawley are playing a high stakes game this season, which could potentially make them surprise packages but seems likelier to backfire. Harry Kewell is going to have to galvanise a strong team spirit in order to avoid what looks set to be a relegation battle, although they may just have the quality to stay up.

Prediction: 22nd



Crewe Alexandra

Last Season: 17th in League Two

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	Ben	Garratt	23	46	0
GK	Dave	Richards	23	0	0
DF	Zoumana	Bakayoko	31	40	0
DF	Perry	Ng	21	16	0
DF	Eddie	Nolan	29	3	0
DF	Harry	Pickering	18	1	0
DF	George	Ray	23	23	1
DF	Michael	Raynes	29	41	2
MF	Callum	Ainley	19	27	1
MF	George	Cooper	20	46	9
MF	Oliver	Finney	19	1	0
MF	James	Jones	21	45	10
MF	Charlie	Kirk	19	22	0
MF	Tom	Lowery	19	7	0
MF	Brad	Walker	22	20	1
MF	Ryan	Wintle	20	17	1
FW	Jordan	Bowery	26	37	3
FW	Chris	Dagnall	31	41	14
FW	Chris	Porter	33	38	16
FW	Dan	Udoh	20	13	0

Squad Size

20

Ave Age

23.8

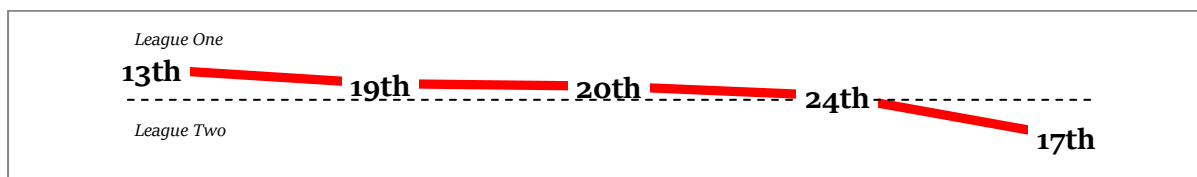
Apps 16/17

484

Goals 16/17

58

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

David Artell - Stepped up to the manager's role after the departure of the highly-unpopular Steve Davis mid-season and did enough to keep Crewe in League Two. Seems to be more driven and single-minded than his predecessor, but is yet to be tested over the course of a full season.

One To Watch:

George Cooper - Looked set to be Crewe's next big star a couple of seasons ago before seeing his career stall under former manager Steve Davis. A direct and skilful wide player, lethal from set-pieces, who boasts a real cutting edge to his game and could be one of the division's star players.

Overview:

After years of negativity under Steve Davis, Crewe fans couldn't be happier that they're heading into a new season with a different manager in charge. Not only that, but after adding some important experience to the squad over the summer, there is further optimism that new manager David Artell will make Crewe a more exciting team to watch battling at the top end of the division.

The standout signing looks to be that of

former Colchester forward Chris Porter. Having played as the attacking fulcrum in a young side, Porter seems ideally suited to playing in a Crewe side with plenty of exciting young talents ready for breakthrough seasons.

While box-to-box midfielder James Jones broke through last season by getting into double figures for goals, forward George Cooper could benefit the most from Chris Porter's presence in attack - not forgetting the more experienced forwards Jordan Bowery and Chris Dagnall. With Ben Garratt in goal, and the centre-back pairing of George Ray and the experienced Michael Raynes, there are the ingredients of an exciting, promotion-chasing side in place.

There is the expectation now that Crewe will at least challenge for the top seven, the question is whether David Artell can produce the goods as a manager heading into his first full season in charge. Signs thus far are positive, Crewe could be one of the more entertaining teams to watch at this level this season.

Prediction: 7th



Exeter City

Last Season: 5th in League Two

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	James	Hamon	22	1	0
GK	Christy	Pym	22	28	0
DF	Troy	Archibald-Henville	28	3	0
DF	Troy	Brown	26	30	2
DF	Luke	Croll	22	18	0
DF	Jordan	Moore-Taylor	23	42	5
DF	Dean	Moxey	31	19	0
DF	Pierce	Sweeney	22	29	0
DF	Jordan	Tillson	24	20	0
DF	Craig	Woodman	34	33	0
MF	Ryan	Harley	32	31	5
MF	Lee	Holmes	30	16	5
MF	Lloyd	James	29	43	1
MF	Jake	Taylor	25	43	4
MF	David	Wheeler	26	38	17
FW	Matt	Jay	21	2	0
FW	Liam	McAlinden	23	32	5
FW	Reuben	Reid	29	36	13
FW	Robbie	Simpson	32	26	1

Squad Size

19

Ave Age

26.9

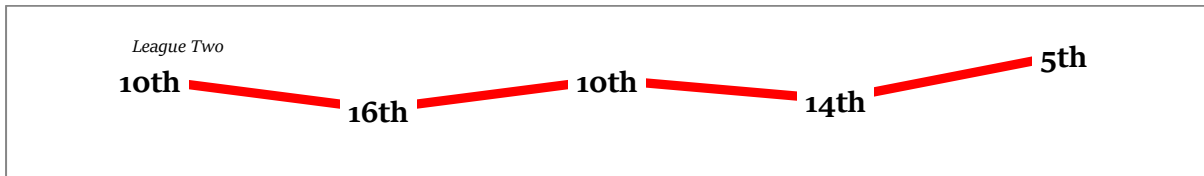
Apps 16/17

490

Goals 16/17

58

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

Paul Tisdale - The second longest-serving manager in English football but looked to be running out of steam at Exeter during a difficult start to last season. Stuck to his principles in playing attractive football and promoting young talent, which saw Exeter surge into the play-offs, before losing narrowly out to Blackpool in the final.

One To Watch:

David Wheeler - With Ollie Watkins having left the club this summer, greater attacking burden rests on wide-man David Wheeler. A skilful and direct winger who notched 17 goals last season, Wheeler has already attracted admiring glances from a higher level and could be another key player on their way out of the club this summer.

Overview:

There is a positive feeling around Exeter City again following last season's top seven finish. Manager Paul Tisdale looked set to be hounded out of the club by fans demanding something more than pretty football and selling star players to richer clubs, which made the trip to Wembley crucial in restoring faith in their long-serving manager.

However, failing to edge past into the third-tier was always going to prove to be a missed opportunity for a club with one of League Two's smaller budgets. Star forward Ollie Watkins was sold to Brentford over the summer, while the useful, but inconsistent, winger Joel Grant departed for local rivals Plymouth.

As ever for Paul Tisdale, the job is to evolve the team, incorporating young players from the academy and other club's cast-offs. The return of left-back Dean Moxey to the club provides some cause for positivity, as does the continued presence of the reliable Reuben Reid in attack, but it still feels as if Exeter have been significantly weakened over the summer.

A lot depends on whether Exeter hold onto winger David Wheeler, but with Tisdale in charge, there should be enough about this side to avoid a massive drop-off in league finish from last season. A mid-table season looks on the cards, but one where Exeter are likely to start slow and improve as the campaign progresses.

Prediction: 12th



Forest Green Rovers

Last Season: 3th in National League

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	Bradley	Collins	20	0	0
GK	Harry	Pickering	19	0	0
GK	Sam	Russell	34	46	0
DF	Dale	Bennett	27	42	2
DF	Lee	Collins	28	37	0
DF	Callum	Evans	21	5	0
DF	Jack	Fitzwater	19	0	0
DF	Scott	Laird	29	29	1
DF	Manny	Monthe	22	33	5
DF	Aarran	Racine	25	19	1
DF	Dan	Wishart	25	38	1
MF	Reece	Brown	21	10	0
MF	Charlie	Cooper	20	26	0
MF	Keanu	Marsh-Brown	25	33	10
MF	Liam	Noble	26	40	7
MF	Fabien	Robert	28	23	3
MF	Jordan	Simpson	18	0	0
MF	Rob	Sinclair	27	19	0
MF	Drissa	Traore	25	30	0
FW	Omar	Bugiel	20	16	5
FW	Christian	Doidge	24	41	25
FW	Luke	James	22	24	0
FW	Shamir	Mullings	23	36	13
FW	Rhys	Murphy	26	37	8

Squad Size

24

Ave Age

24.5

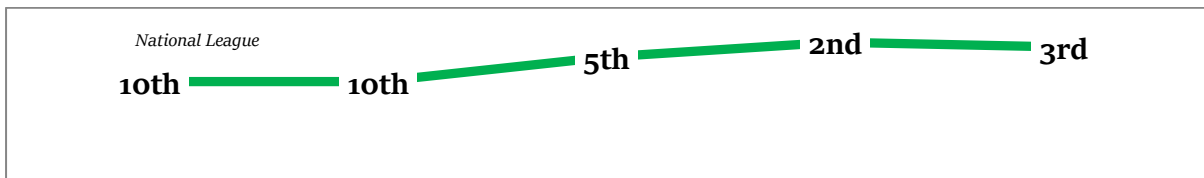
Apps 16/17

584

Goals 16/17

81

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

Mark Cooper - Has had a mixed managerial career between National League and Championship level, but seems to have implemented an attractive playing style with an emphasis on young and dynamic players during his time at Forest Green Rovers.

One To Watch:

Christian Doidge - After a fairly unremarkable spell at this level with Dagenham, Christian Doidge returns to the Football League looking like a player capable of being one of the division's star strikers. Tall, mobile and an excellent finisher, Doidge looks set for a big impact this season and to draw admiring glances from clubs at a much higher level.

Overview:

For those unfamiliar with non-league football, Forest Green Rovers follow the line of succession of Crawley Town and Fleetwood Town in being small-town clubs bankrolled by a rich owner. Promotion to the Football League was long overdue and owner Dale Vince is keen not to wait around for promotion from League Two.

It places a lot of pressure on manager

Mark Cooper, who at times appeared to struggle under the weight of expectation during his side's promotion-winning campaign. Cooper can be a prickly character at times and prone to turning on individuals when the chips are down, which could make things hard for him against, in theory, tougher opposition this season.

Transfer business has been solid, if not spectacular for a club of seemingly bountiful resources. Ex-Scunthorpe left-back Scott Laird is the stand-out addition of an otherwise fairly young and unproven set of signings. However, striker Christian Doidge and winger Keanu Marsh-Brown could emerge as star players at Football League level if they can repeat their form from last season.

The expectation from the second the final whistle blew in their play-off win at Wembley was that they'd challenge for promotion in League Two, however, it's been an oddly understated summer for such a typically boisterous club. Consolidation in the Football League looks to be on the cards, although that may not be what the club's owner is seemingly demanding.

Prediction: 11th



Grimsby Town

Last Season: 14th in League Two

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	Ben	Killip	21	0	0
GK	James	McKeown	28	39	0
DF	Nathan	Clarke	33	18	0
DF	Danny	Collins	37	36	2
DF	Ben	Davies	36	25	1
DF	Paul	Dixon	30	17	0
DF	Zak	Mills	25	30	0
DF	Karleigh	Osborne	29	2	0
MF	James	Berrett	28	19	2
MF	Tom	Bolarinwa	27	34	2
MF	Chris	Clements	27	36	7
MF	Siriki	Dembele	20	0	0
MF	Sam	Kelly	23	21	0
MF	Sean	McAllister	30	3	0
MF	Jamey	Osborne	25	41	4
MF	Mitch	Rose	23	30	2
MF	Luke	Summerfield	29	41	1
FW	Akwasi	Asante	24	31	12
FW	Harry	Cardwell	20	0	0
FW	Sam	Jones	26	18	7
FW	Scott	Vernon	33	28	3

Squad Size

21

Ave Age

27.8

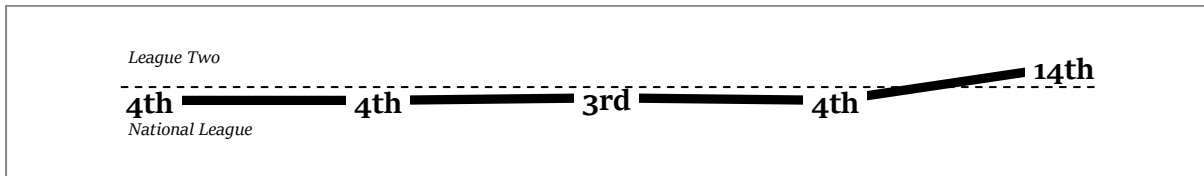
Apps 16/17

469

Goals 16/17

43

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

Russell Slade - Has a point to prove upon his return to Grimsby after two disastrous managerial spells last season with Charlton and Coventry City. A manager probably better suited to managing clubs with lesser expectations where his defensive tactics and focus on effort over skill make his teams hard to beat.

One To Watch:

Sam Jones - An energetic goal-scoring attacking midfielder brought to the club from Gateshead in non-league in January. Came to life towards the end of the season and looks like someone who could develop into a real asset for the club over the coming season.

Overview:

Having consolidated at Football League level last time out, albeit churning through three different managers, Grimsby Town will be seeking a season of stability. With a manager in Russell Slade who is also looking to settle down after a tempestuous previous season, expectations are humble at Blundell Park heading into the new season.

However, the dramatic sacking of Marcus Bignot towards the end of last

season suggested that the outward impression of limited ambition at the club isn't quite true. However, transfer activity thus far suggests that the Grimsby board are demanding improvements without backing a manager that they went out of their way to recruit just a few months ago.

With experience at the back - a 33 year-old Nathan Clarke could partner a 37 year-old Danny Collins - Russell Slade won't be short on leaders, but there appears to be a lack of quality going forward. Sam Jones is probably the one attacking talent of reliable quality in the squad, with a lot resting on Siriki Dembele and Sam Kelly having big seasons out wide and a goalscoring striker to emerge from pretty much nowhere.

Russell Slade tends to do better when he can forge a strong team spirit based on hard work, and he'll need to summon every iota out of a side creaking at the back and appearing to lack quality further forward. This looks set to be a long and hard season at Blundell Park.

Prediction: 20th



Lincoln City

Last Season: 1st in National League

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	Paul	Farman	27	44	0
GK	Josh	Vickers	21	23	0
DF	Lee	Beevers	33	15	0
DF	Sam	Habergham	25	43	3
DF	Callum	Howe	23	23	1
DF	Sean	Long	22	21	0
DF	Jamie	McCombe	34	7	0
DF	Sean	Raggett	24	41	5
DF	Luke	Waterfall	27	44	7
DF	Bradley	Wood	25	34	2
MF	Harry	Anderson	20	27	6
MF	Michael	Bostwick	29	39	3
MF	Josh	Ginnelly	20	22	0
MF	Billy	Knott	24	31	2
MF	Jordan	Maguire-Drew	19	42	14
MF	Elliott	Whitehouse	23	37	10
MF	Alex	Woodyard	24	45	1
FW	Nathan	Arnold	30	45	12
FW	Matt	Green	30	42	10
FW	Ollie	Palmer	25	39	8
FW	Matt	Rhead	33	43	15

Squad Size

21

Ave Age

26.1

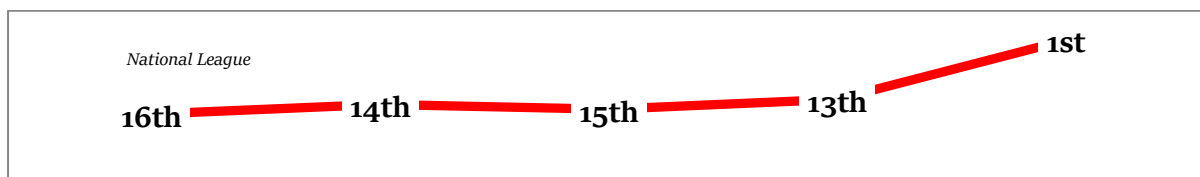
Apps 16/17

707

Goals 16/17

99

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

Danny Cowley – A hard-working, up-and-coming, yet pragmatic manager who has risen up from the very depths of non-league, alongside his brother and assistant/co-manager Nicky. Completely revitalised a Lincoln side in the space of a year that had been languishing in mid-table in the National League.

One To Watch:

Sean Raggett – The dominant centre-back is reportedly being tracked by Championship clubs after his performances in league and cup for Lincoln last season. A tall, yet mobile defender, Raggett provides a dominant presence both in central defence and from set-pieces.

Overview:

There is a sense of momentum perpetuating from Lincoln City heading into last season. Not only did they storm their way to the National League title, but they made it to the FA Cup 6th Round, beating Championship and Premier League sides on the way, have an up-and-coming manager, and have made a number of eye-catching additions to bolster the squad over the summer.

Ex-Peterborough midfielder Michael Bostwick looks like a real coup of a signing, but the Cowley brothers have added strength in depth to Lincoln's attack via the additions of wingers Harry Anderson and Jordan Maguire-Drew, and strikers Matt Green and Ollie Palmer.

Importantly though, Lincoln aren't building a new team from square one, like a number of the other would-be promotion contenders are. Stars from last year's title win in the form of Sean Raggett, Alex Woodyard and Matt Rhead have been retained, and even more crucially, the Cowley brothers remain in charge to provide the organisation and identity of the side.

Having a strong defence and being proficient from set-pieces probably means that Lincoln are about 75% of the way there for a promotion-winning side at this level. With quality added out wide and Matt Green a potential top-scorer at this level, I'm expecting the feel-good factor to continue at Sincil Bank.

Prediction: 3rd



Luton Town

EST

1885

Last Season: 13th in League Two

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	Harry	Isted	20	0	0
GK	James	Shea	26	36	0
GK	Marek	Stech	27	0	0
DF	Scott	Cuthbert	30	38	1
DF	James	Justin	19	29	1
DF	Johnny	Mullins	31	23	0
DF	Dan	Potts	23	23	0
DF	Glen	Rea	22	39	2
DF	Jack	Senior	20	10	0
DF	Alan	Sheehan	30	34	2
MF	Jordan	Cook	27	35	3
MF	Lawson	D'Ath	24	12	0
MF	Luke	Gambin	24	35	5
MF	Olly	Lee	26	33	1
MF	Alan	McCormack	33	11	0
MF	Pelly	Ruddock	24	42	2
MF	Andrew	Shinnie	28	27	1
MF	Jonathan	Smith	30	25	1
MF	Jack	Stacey	21	34	0
FW	James	Collins	26	45	20
FW	Danny	Hylton	28	38	21
FW	Elliot	Lee	22	6	0
FW	Josh	McQuoid	27	19	1
FW	Isaac	Vassell	23	40	8

Squad Size

24

Ave Age

26.0

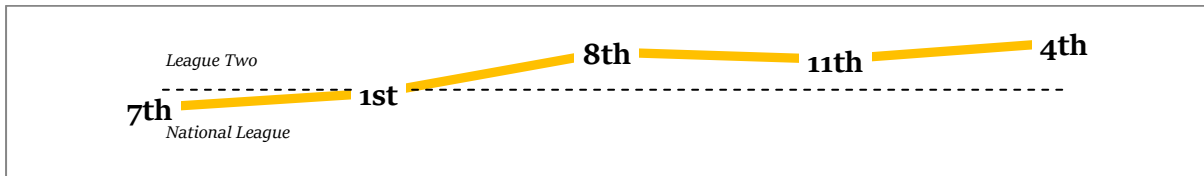
Apps 16/17

634

Goals 16/17

69

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

Nathan Jones – One of the most promising young managers in the Football League due to his strong ideals to play attractive football and motivational skills. Has modernised Luton's squad from their recent non-league days but his teams have tended to struggle on the big occasion.

One To Watch:

Danny Hylton – One of those competitive, hard-working and nasty players that are absolutely vital for a successful side at this level. Hylton loves getting into the faces and under the skin of opposing defenders and fans, and is also one of the most lethal strikers in League Two to boot.

Overview:

Luton Town were unlucky last season to miss out on promotion, either automatically or via the play-offs, but there are no excuses not to challenge for at least a top three place, if not the title outright, this season.

Not only have Luton made some important additions to the squad in the form of goal machine James Collins in attack, Birmingham City's impressive midfielder Andrew Shinnie on loan,

along with ex-Yeovil and Sparta Prague keeper Mark Stech, but they have kept hold of most of their key players, meaning that manager Nathan Jones already has a template to build from.

At times last season, Jones' preferred 4-4-2 diamond system came under scrutiny for lacking bite in the centre of the park – something which has been addressed by the signing of the experienced Alan McCormack – but with Collins arriving to bolster an attack that already boasted the hard-working Danny Hylton and the pacey Isaac Vassell, Jones should have the goals in his side to make his possession-orientated style of play much more effective than it already was.

Luton look to have the ideal blend of a pre-existing squad and style of play, while also having strengthened the squad with several key signings. They have to be considered the favourites for the League Two title, it would almost be difficult for them not to at least finish in the top three with the talent at their disposal.

Prediction: 1st



Mansfield Town

Last Season: 12th in League Two

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	Conrad	Logan	31	24	0
GK	Bobby	Olejnik	30	18	0
DF	Rhys	Bennett	25	46	2
DF	Mal	Benning	23	45	1
DF	Zander	Diamond	31	39	0
DF	Johnny	Hunt	27	40	1
DF	David	Mirfin	32	34	2
DF	Krystian	Pearce	27	41	3
DF	George	Taft	24	13	0
DF	Hayden	White	22	24	1
MF	Paul	Anderson	29	39	6
MF	Will	Atkinson	28	37	4
MF	Joel	Byrom	30	24	0
MF	Paul	Digby	22	4	0
MF	CJ	Hamilton	22	29	0
MF	Alex	MacDonald	27	40	2
MF	Jacob	Mellis	26	35	3
MF	Alfie	Potter	28	33	1
MF	Jack	Thomas	21	11	0
FW	Lee	Angol	23	24	6
FW	Danny	Rose	23	37	9
FW	Jimmy	Spencer	25	25	3
FW	Omari	Sterling-James	23	42	9

Squad Size

23

Ave Age

26.5

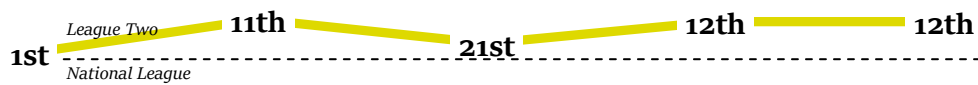
Apps 16/17

704

Goals 16/17

53

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

Steve Evans - A manager who is rarely popular with opposing fans due to his touchline antics and arrogant media comments, however, that fieriness has been a major part of his success as a manager - generally managing clubs with the biggest budgets in their respective divisions has also helped.

One To Watch:

Lee Angol - A tall, yet pacey striker who finished as Peterborough's top-scorer in League One the season before last. Tends not to be heavily involved outside the penalty area, but has all the attributes required to be one of the best strikers in this division this season.

Overview:

If the league was decided on signings alone, then Mansfield Town certainly made most of the early running during a flurry of activity during May and the early weeks of June. No less was expected of a club with promotion ambitions and Steve Evans in charge - it was a similar approach in the transfer market that saw him deliver promotions at Crawley Town and Rotherham United in recent years.

There is a debate to had though whether

Mansfield have added quality rather than simply quantity to their squad. Steve Evans has clearly set about attempting to add experience and physicality to the squad, possibly at the cost of pace and dynamism. A lot is resting on ex-Peterborough striker Lee Angol scoring goals in a manner he's rarely done during his career, and on the temperamental Jacob Mellis finding consistency as the team's playmaker.

What shouldn't be in doubt is the mentality of the side under Steve Evans. As loathsome a personality as he is, he knows how to engender a relentless, cold-eyed, winning focus in his sides. With a squad boasting some physically powerful players all over the pitch, Mansfield will strike fear into the hearts of their opponents, especially at home.

Considering the strength of the squad and the track record of their manager, promotion looks to be the minimum goal for Mansfield this season. They need to find the balance between physicality and skill, but it seems inevitable that at some point they will.

Prediction: 2nd



Morecambe

Last Season: 18th in League Two

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	Danijel	Nizic	22	5	0
GK	Barry	Roche	35	41	0
DF	Patrick	Brough	21	21	0
DF	Luke	Conlan	22	21	0
DF	Mitchell	Lund	20	10	0
DF	Aaron	McGowan	21	30	0
DF	Steven	Old	30	12	1
DF	Dean	Winnard	28	23	0
MF	Andrew	Fleming	29	30	2
MF	Luke	Jordan	18	6	0
MF	Alex	Kenyon	25	19	0
MF	Michael	Rose	35	43	7
MF	Aaron	Wildig	25	28	2
FW	Adam	Campbell	22	29	4
FW	Reece	Deakin	20	8	1
FW	Kevin	Ellison	38	45	8
FW	Vadaine	Oliver	25	37	8
FW	Garry	Thompson	36	42	3
FW	Rhys	Turner	22	30	2

Squad Size

19

Ave Age

26.5

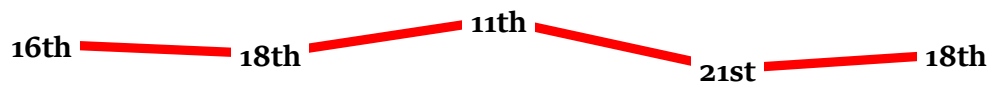
Apps 16/17

480

Goals 16/17

38

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

Jim Bentley - On one of the smallest budgets in the Football League, Jim Bentley continues to perform miracles in keeping Morecambe in this division. Tends to produce high-scoring teams who flit in and out of form, typically starting the season well but petering out as the campaign progresses.

One To Watch:

Michael Rose - A vastly experienced defensive midfielder who can also operate at left-back, Rose's delivery from set-pieces, both direct and indirect, provide a major part of Morecambe's attacking threat.

Overview:

Faced with extinction last season following a too good to be true Brazilian takeover, Morecambe did well to rally at key stages of the season in order to avoid a relegation battle entirely. Despite off-the-pitch matters appearing to have settled down somewhat, Morecambe face the task they perennially face at this level, staying up.

With the long-serving Jim Bentley in charge, Morecambe appear to be in safe hands. A manager fully aware of the need to create a strong mentality and

organisation when faced with clubs of higher resources. Despite losing key defender Ryan Edwards and the bright Paul Mullin in attack, Morecambe fans will be fairly confident they can take those losses in their stride.

As continually seems to be the case at a club where high-scoring games are not rare, the squad is top-loaded with strikers. Ex-Newcastle United youngster Adam Campbell adds a level of pace alongside the more physical Vadaine Oliver and the returning hero Garry Thompson. Thompson's return adds to the club stalwarts already in place in the form of Barry Roche in goal, Andrew Fleming in midfield and Kevin Ellison in attack - a lack of identity won't be a problem at the Globe Arena.

Nonetheless, Morecambe have a small squad, reliant on several key players over the age of 30, which is likely to creak over the course of a long season. They should have enough about them to survive yet again, but anything above lower mid-table will be seen as a bonus.

Prediction: 19th



Newport County

Last Season: 22nd in League Two

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	James	Bittner	35	2	0
GK	Joe	Day	27	45	0
DF	Jazzi	Barnum-Bobb	21	26	1
DF	Scot	Bennett	26	39	0
DF	Dan	Butler	22	40	3
DF	Mickey	Demetriou	27	17	4
DF	Mark	O'Brien	24	25	1
DF	David	Pipe	33	30	0
DF	Jamie	Turley	27	6	1
MF	Matt	Dolan	24	38	4
MF	Joss	Labadie	26	19	3
MF	Tom	Owen-Evans	20	27	2
MF	Lamar	Reynolds	22	-	-
MF	Sean	Rigg	28	34	6
MF	Ben	Tozer	27	23	1
MF	Robbie	Willmott	27	40	3
FW	Marlon	Jackson	26	22	0
FW	Shawn	McCoulsky	20	28	15
FW	Frank	Nouble	26	17	1
FW	Aaron	Williams	23	37	10

Squad Size

20

Ave Age

26.1

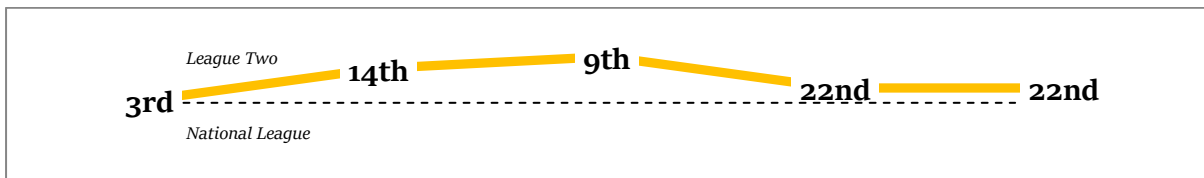
Apps 16/17

515

Goals 16/17

55

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

Mike Flynn - Relegation seemed certain when he took caretaker charge of the team back in March, however a remarkable run of results saw Newport claw back an 11-point deficit to survive on the final day of the season. Already a club legend from his playing days, this season is Flynn's chance to build a team with a real identity.

One To Watch:

Matt Dolan - A deep-lying midfielder who offers quality both from his passing ability and proficiency from set-pieces. Can control games at this level from the base of midfield and should give Newport the ability to build attacks from the back.

Overview:

For most of last season, and almost ever since promotion from the National League, it has felt like Newport County simply aren't set up to be a Football League side. Playing on potato field of a pitch at Rodney Parade with a squad forever in flux, Newport survived last season despite almost every limitation imaginable.

For rookie manager Mike Flynn, survival was an especially impressive feat, but it

would be a bigger achievement to even simply repeat the feat over the course of a full season. Galvanising a squad over a short period is one thing, keeping it going over 20, 30, 40 games is a completely different challenge.

In attempting to avoid the mistakes in recent years at the club of constant player turnover, Flynn has kept most of team that rallied to survival last season in place. Defenders Mark O'Brien, Mickey Demetriou and Ben Tozer will be needed to put their bodies on the line week-in, week-out, while Flynn will be hoping that new signings Matty Dolan in midfield and striker Frank Nouble add a level of technical quality that was missing for large portions of last season.

There is an improved mood around the club following that unlikely survival act, but in the cold light of day, they are still one of the smallest clubs at this level and have one of the weaker squads - particularly in attack. If Mike Flynn can get this side to survive with any degree of comfort, it would be one of the managerial achievements of the season.

Prediction: 20th



Notts County

Last Season: 16th in League Two

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	Adam	Collin	32	43	0
GK	Ross	Fitzsimons	23	41	0
DF	Shaun	Brisley	27	28	2
DF	Carl	Dickinson	30	34	0
DF	Richard	Duffy	31	42	4
DF	Mike	Edwards	37	2	0
DF	Elliott	Hewitt	23	29	2
DF	Haydn	Hollis	24	31	1
DF	Daniel	Jones	30	14	0
DF	Matt	Tootle	26	33	2
MF	Jorge	Grant	22	23	6
MF	Terry	Hawkridge	27	32	3
MF	Robert	Milsom	30	38	0
MF	Michael	O'Connor	29	32	2
MF	Alan	Smith	36	19	0
MF	Curtis	Thompson	23	13	0
MF	Liam	Walker	29	26	15
FW	Lewis	Alessandra	28	46	9
FW	Shola	Ameobi	35	17	4
FW	Jonathan	Forte	31	35	8
FW	Sam	Osborne	17	3	0
FW	Jon	Stead	34	38	14

Squad Size

22

Ave Age

28.9

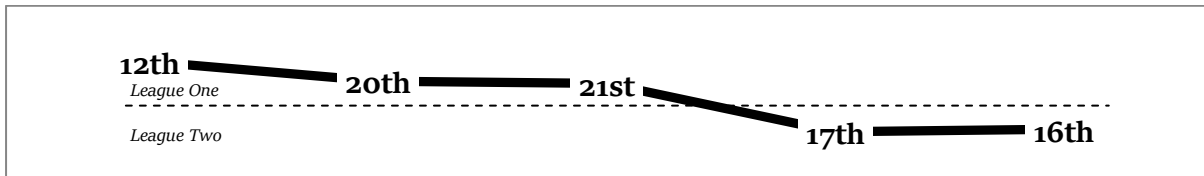
Apps 16/17

619

Goals 16/17

72

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

Kevin Nolan - After a reasonable, but short-lived, managerial stint at Leyton Orient, Kevin Nolan improved his credentials as a manager in turning around a Notts County side in free-fall upon his arrival in January. Prefers to build hard-working, physical and combative sides, similar to his style of play as a footballer.

One To Watch:

Jorge Grant - A loanee from city rivals Nottingham Forest who played a vital role towards the end of last season in turning a demoralised Notts County side around. An energetic, technically accomplished, box-to-box midfielder who has been deployed on the wing by Kevin Nolan and proved to be adept feeding off Shola Ameobi's flick-ons.

Overview:

Notts County have been a tempestuous club in recent years, their last manager to have lasted a full season was Ian McParland back in 08/09. A mid-season takeover though by local businessman Alan Hardy, and the appointment of Kevin Nolan as manager has seemingly put in place a more long-term outlook at the club, although a full season will put this sense of stability to the test.

Summer transfer activity has been relatively circumspect with Nolan seeking quality over quantity after years of squad instability at Meadow Lane. It is an approach that has frustrated fans but has seen key loanee Jorge Grant return to the club, with Lewis Alessandra and Gibraltar international Liam Walker also joining to provide Nolan with quality and depth out wide.

While Notts County should be heading into the new season with momentum from having finished strongly last year, they have a very old squad that could decline as the season progresses. They still need to add a striker who can provide effective back-up for/take the place of Jon Stead, while there are also question marks about their strength in central defence.

Nonetheless, I think Notts County have the look of a side who will challenge for the play-offs. With a fairly inexperienced manager and a squad still in need of a few key additions, they may just fall short in their quest for a top seven spot.

Prediction: 8th



Port Vale

Last Season: 21st in League One

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	Ryan	Boot	22	8	0
GK	Sam	Hornby	22	34	0
GK	Rob	Lainton	27	8	0
DF	Joe	Davis	23	4	0
DF	Gavin	Gunning	26	24	0
DF	Antony	Kay	34	42	0
DF	Graham	Kelly	19	9	0
DF	Kjell	Knops	30	29	0
DF	Nathan	Smith	21	46	4
DF	Lawrie	Wilson	29	18	1
MF	Anthony	de Freitas	23	24	0
MF	Marcus	Harness	21	10	0
MF	Cristian	Montano	25	25	1
MF	Danny	Pugh	34	32	0
MF	Billy	Reeves	20	12	0
MF	Gezim	Shalaj	27	7	0
FW	Tyrone	Barnett	31	36	2
FW	Anton	Forrester	23	21	2
FW	Tom	Pope	31	37	4
FW	Rekeil	Pyke	19	15	0
FW	Dan	Turner	19	17	0

Squad Size

21

Ave Age

25.6

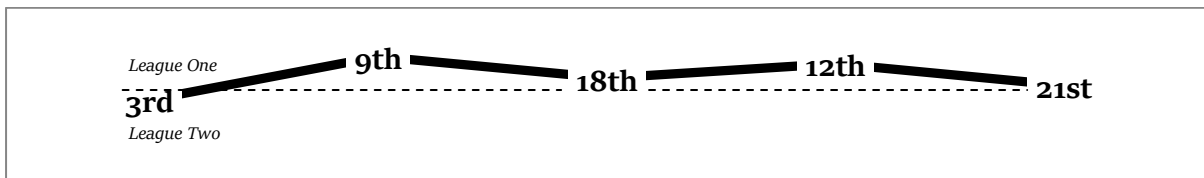
Apps 16/17

458

Goals 16/17

14

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

Michael Brown - Was thrown in at the deep end to keep in his first managerial job after a gamble on Bruno Ribeiro failed. Quickly brought organisation to a big playing squad, but failed to resolve issues away from home in time enough to keep Vale in League One.

One To Watch:

Nathan Smith - A classy centre-back who excelled last season despite Port Vale's relegation from League One. Not the most dominant of defenders, but is quietly commanding due to his excellent positional sense. Likely to end up in the Championship at some point this season or next.

Overview:

It's a case of picking up the pieces after a costly experiment on a foreign squad and manager last season proved a busted flush at Vale Park. The club has been put up for sale over the summer and rookie manager Michael Brown is attempting to build an almost entirely new side from cast-offs and loanees from other clubs.

It's perhaps harsh to describe the likes of Antony Kay, Lawrie Wilson and Tom Pope as cast-offs, but Port Vale's recruitment this summer has appeared

somewhat chaotic from an outside perspective. However, a similar approach from Brown over the second half of last season - witnessing Andre Bikey and Chris Eagles rock up at Vale Park - almost secured survival in League One, suggesting that there is possibly a method to the madness.

Despite being one of the clubs relegated from the division above, Port Vale probably enter the new campaign with the lowest expectations out of the four. A steady season in mid-table while Michael Brown learns the ropes as a manager, along with the club finding a new owner, would probably be seen as a reasonable achievement given the instability at the club over the past year.

With Nathan Smith at the back and the addition of a few important experienced campaigners, Vale should avoid the worst-case scenario of finding themselves in a relegation battle. However, it's hard to see where the goals are coming from in this team which is why it looks set to be an underwhelming and frustrating season back at League Two level for Port Vale.

Prediction: 16th



Stevenage

Last Season: 10th in League Two

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	Chris	Day	42	11	0
GK	Joe	Fryer	21	14	0
GK	Jamie	Jones	28	36	0
GK	Callum	Preston	21	1	0
DF	Fraser	Franks	26	41	3
DF	Ronnie	Henry	33	33	0
DF	Joe	Martin	27	23	1
DF	Terence	Vancooten	19	0	0
DF	Luke	Wilkinson	26	40	4
MF	Harry	Beautyman	25	21	3
MF	Tom	Conlon	21	4	0
MF	James	Ferry	20	0	0
MF	Dale	Gorman	21	25	1
MF	Ben	Kennedy	20	36	8
MF	Jack	King	32	38	3
MF	Tom	Pett	25	40	6
MF	Blair	Turgott	23	43	12
MF	Chris	Whelpdale	28	17	1
FW	Matt	Godden	26	38	20
FW	Rowan	Liburd	24	21	1
FW	Danny	Newton	26	39	28
FW	Alex	Samuel	21	18	2

Squad Size

22

Ave Age

25.7

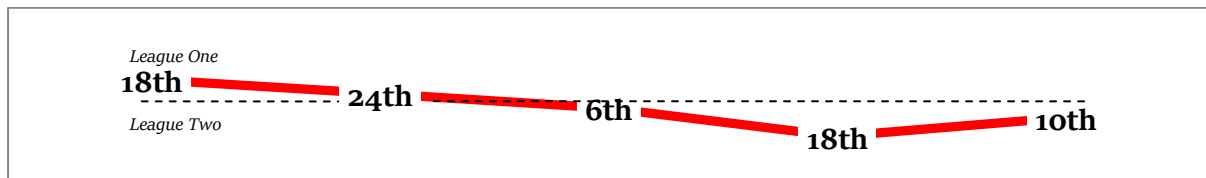
Apps 16/17

539

Goals 16/17

93

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

Darren Sarll - Started last season as barely a household name in his own house but ended looking like one of the more promising young managers in the Football League, despite a late drop-off in form. An organised manager and an excellent motivator, Sarll made Stevenage much greater than the sum of their parts last season.

One To Watch:

Matt Godden - An inspired addition over the summer from then-National League South side Ebbsfleet United. A pure out-and-out poacher whose 20 goals last season were central to Stevenage's surprisingly good campaign last time out.

Overview:

Stevenage will have been bitterly disappointed not to have finished in the play-offs last season, having been in a position to trouble the automatic places in March before collapsing in the final weeks. Nonetheless, Darren Sarll proved himself as a manager during his first full season in charge, demonstrating that Stevenage can be a stable Football League club without Graham Westley.

Stevenage were a solid, fairly no-

nonsense side last season, elevated by the wing play of Tom Pett and Jobi McAnuff, along with exciting attacking midfielder Ben Kennedy and goal machine Matt Godden. While McAnuff has departed, Tom Pett is on the transfer list and mild speculation links Godden away, the additions of winger Blair Turgott, the industrious Harry Beautyman and the prolific Danny Newton possibly mitigate those losses.

While Stevenage appear to be a club on the up, the perception of them having had a good season is based on one really good run lasting nine games before they collapsed following an injury to their star striker Matt Godden. It was a run that belied Sarll's inexperience as a manager, and there have to be concerns about whether he can restore that form after making some big changes to the squad this summer.

Others who know a lot more about League Two than me think Stevenage can trouble the play-off spots again this season. However, for the reasons stated above, I think this could be a tough season for them ending in a lower mid-table finish.

Prediction: 17th



Swindon Town

Last Season: 22nd in League One

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	Will	Henry	19	3	0
GK	Lawrence	Vigouroux	24	43	0
DF	Dion	Conroy	21	29	0
DF	Chris	Hussey	28	7	0
DF	Olly	Lancashire	28	16	1
DF	Ben	Purkiss	33	32	0
DF	Chris	Robertson	30	13	1
MF	James	Brophy	23	30	0
MF	James	Dunne	27	33	1
MF	John	Goddard	24	42	3
MF	Ellis	Iandolo	20	10	0
MF	Amine	Linganzi	27	19	1
MF	Donal	McDermott	27	17	1
MF	Tom	Smith	19	18	1
MF	Jesse	Starkey	21	1	0
MF	Conor	Thomas	23	33	1
FW	Paul	Mullin	22	40	8
FW	Luke	Norris	24	39	4
FW	Harry	Smith	22	9	1

Squad Size

19

Ave Age

24.8

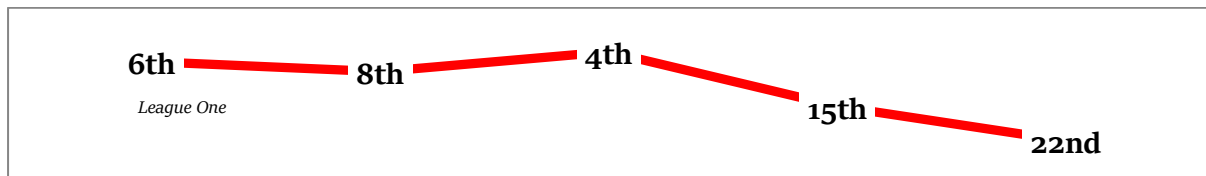
Apps 16/17

434

Goals 16/17

23

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

David Flitcroft – A manager with a mixed track record, who has a habit of producing sides that go on either extended winning or losing runs. Nonetheless, Flitcroft’s appointment this summer signals a significant change in approach by the club this season.

One To Watch:

Dion Conroy – An ex-Chelsea youngster who impressed during the first half of last season on loan at Aldershot in the National League and in flashes after joining Swindon in January. A ball-playing defender with a level of sturdiness to his game, he could become a real asset for Swindon over the course of the season.

Overview:

The appointment of David Flitcroft as manager this summer and the arrival of a raft of physical and experienced grafters has signalled a sea change at Swindon Town last summer. A move that has been welcomed by home fans who grew disillusioned at a model at Swindon where there was too much focus on selling players for a profit than there was on moving up the divisions.

Whether the shift in emphasis at the

County Ground will be a successful one hinges on the managerial ability of David Flitcroft. The former Bury and Barnsley manager has built an almost entirely new side over the summer, which has inevitably seen quantity valued over quality in some areas of the pitch.

James Dunne and Amine Linganzi should provide stiffen Swindon’s midfield, freeing the likes of Conor Thomas and John Goddard to play more expansive roles. Chris Robertson and Ben Purkiss supply experience at the back but aren’t exactly the most mobile of defenders. The giant Harry Smith in attack should benefit from Chris Hussey’s deliveries from the left wing, but it remains to be seen whether any of Swindon’s attacking options are a reliable goal threat.

While Swindon seem better equipped for League Two than they would have been under the previous model, I’m not sure Flitcroft has sourced the quality across the pitch required to challenge for the play-offs. A season of transition appears to be on the cards, but one that should result in a top-half finish.

Prediction: 10th



Wycombe Wanderers

Last Season: 9th in League Two

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	Scott	Brown	32	27	0
GK	Barry	Richardson	48	0	0
DF	Will	De Havilland	22	16	0
DF	Adam	El-Abd	32	28	2
DF	Michael	Harriman	24	38	0
DF	Joe	Jacobson	30	39	3
DF	Sido	Jombati	30	25	2
DF	Max	Muller	23	9	0
DF	Danny	Rowe	21	21	0
DF	Anthony	Stewart	24	31	1
MF	Marcus	Bean	33	19	0
MF	Matt	Bloomfield	33	33	5
MF	Paris	Cowan-Hall	26	28	4
MF	Nick	Freeman	21	17	0
MF	Dominic	Gape	22	32	1
MF	Luke	O'Nien	22	31	3
MF	Sam	Saunders	33	25	1
FW	Adebayo	Akinfenwa	35	42	12
FW	Paul	Hayes	33	23	3
FW	Scott	Kashket	21	21	10
FW	Dayle	Southwell	23	15	1
FW	Nathan	Tyson	35	17	0

Squad Size

22

Ave Age

28.9

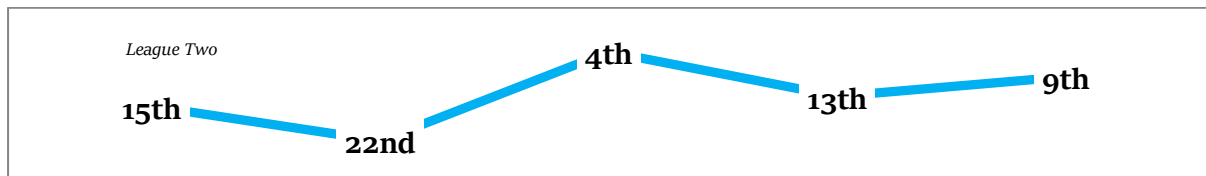
Apps 16/17

537

Goals 16/17

48

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

Gareth Ainsworth - One of the longer-serving managers in the lower leagues and has consistently had Wycombe Wanderers challenging on the verges of the play-offs in League Two. However, he has drawn criticism from both opposing and his own fans for his direct and cynical style of football.

One To Watch:

Sam Saunders - A technically gifted winger with excellent set-piece delivery, Sam Saunders' mid-season arrival from Brentford was something of a coup for Wycombe. Has struggled to carve a niche for himself within Gareth Ainsworth's tactics but is someone who the manager needs to get the best out of if Wycombe are to do well this season.

Overview:

There's a sense at Adams Park of things growing slightly stale under the reign of Gareth Ainsworth. Taking the play-off race to the final day of last season perhaps papered over some of the cracks of a side overly reliant on the long ball and specifically the battering ram role that the veteran Adebayo Akinfenwa plays as their main attacking threat.

With several useful, more technically

intricate players in the side - such as Scott Kashket, Sam Saunders and Paris Cowan-Hall - Ainsworth has had the option of changing things up, but has struggled to evolve his style of play to incorporate these kinds of players.

The summer signings of the experienced Adam El-Abd in defence and Nathan Tyson in attack doesn't signal that we're going to see anything vastly different from Wycombe this season. In losing two of last season's best performers in Jamal Blackman in goal and Aaron Pierre in central defence, this could be a difficult season if the likes of Akinfenwa and Paul Hayes in attack start showing their age.

If Wycombe can evolve, there's no reason why they can't challenge for the play-offs. However, losing two key defensive players and the reliance on veterans is likely to yield a lower mid-table season for the Chairboys.

Prediction: 18th



Yeovil Town

Last Season: 20th in League Two

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	Artur	Krysiak	27	41	0
GK	Jonny	Maddison	22	5	0
DF	Daniel	Alfei	25	18	0
DF	Keston	Davies	20	22	0
DF	Ryan	Dickson	30	34	0
DF	Tom	James	21	2	0
DF	Bevis	Mugabi	22	31	1
DF	Nathan	Smith	30	34	2
DF	Omar	Sowunmi	21	11	0
DF	Stephane	Zubar	30	-	-
MF	James	Bailey	29	12	0
MF	Rhys	Browne	21	22	2
MF	Jake	Gray	21	19	1
MF	Otis	Khan	21	29	6
MF	Alefe	Santos	22	4	0
MF	Connor	Smith	24	25	1
FW	Olufela	Olomola	19	0	0
FW	Francois	Zoko	33	35	8

Squad Size

18

Ave Age

25.0

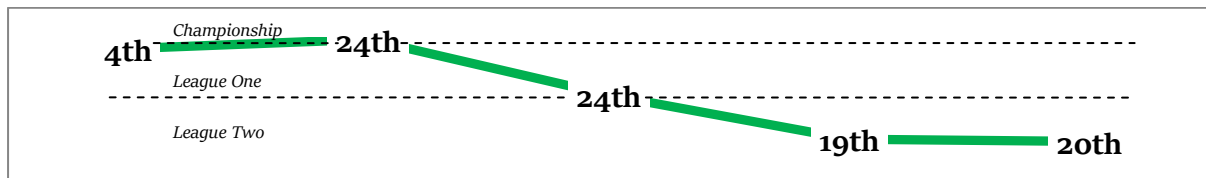
Apps 16/17

344

Goals 16/17

21

Last Five Seasons



Manager:

Darren Way - Just about achieved par for the course for Yeovil last season in keeping them up relatively comfortably. However, a poor run of form towards the end of the campaign, especially in front of goal, has raised alarm bells of potential struggles ahead for Way.

One To Watch:

Otis Khan - The former Sheffield United youngster made his big break into senior football last season, scoring a respectable six goals from out wide before ending his season prematurely with an injury. An industrious and pacey wide man, Yeovil have done well to tie him down to a two-year contract over the summer.

Overview:

Just four years ago, Yeovil Town were looking ahead to their first ever season in the Championship, something that's easy to forget nowadays after the Somerset club failed to secure any lasting legacy from their year in the second-flight and have plummeted quickly into perennial League Two strugglers.

It's been another summer of huge squad turnover at Huish Park, with manager

Darren Way once again relying on trialists and loanees in the vain hope of unearthing the one or two diamonds in the rough that could elevate Yeovil away from looks set to be another long and hard season of battling against the drop to non-league.

The pacey winger Rhys Browne, the more technical Jake Gray, and the intriguing Southampton loanee striker Olufela Olomola could supply Yeovil with the attacking quality to catch opposition teams cold in the opening months of the season - adding to Francois Zoko and Otis Khan who were already at the club. Elsewhere though, Yeovil look short in numbers and quality, especially after losing key centre-back Alex Lacey to Gillingham.

Unless Darren Way has pulled some rabbits out the hat with his transfer activity, Yeovil look one of the weaker sides in the division. The poor form towards the end of last season suggested that Way wasn't quite sure what he wanted from his side. If that continues into the new season, Yeovil could be relegated with barely a whimper.

Prediction: 23rd



The Squad

First-Team Squad

Position	First Name	Surname	Age	Apps 16/17	Goals 16/17
GK	Lee	Burge	24	33	0
GK	Reice	Charles-Cook	23	15	0
GK	Liam	O'Brien	25	0	0
DF	Jack	Grimmer	23	24	0
DF	Ryan	Haynes	21	19	0
DF	Dominic	Hyam	21	3	0
DF	Dion	Kelly-Evans	20	25	0
DF	Rod	McDonald	25	7	0
DF	Chris	Stokes	26	7	0
DF	Jordan	Turnbull	22	36	0
DF	Jordan	Willis	22	36	3
MF	Michael	Doyle	35	46	1
MF	Liam	Kelly	27	21	4
MF	Kyel	Reid	29	29	2
MF	Ben	Stevenson	20	28	2
MF	Peter	Vincenti	31	14	1
FW	Stuart	Beavon	33	24	2
FW	Maxime	Biamou	26	39	10
FW	Jodi	Jones	19	34	1
FW	Marc	McNulty	24	18	1
FW	Kwame	Thomas	21	14	3

Squad Size

21

Ave Age

25.2

Apps 16/17

472

Goals 16/17

30

Lee Burge

Pos: GK

Age: 24

Club Apps(Goals): 60(o)

1

Has seemingly been backed by Robins this season to be the number one goalkeeper, however, Lee Burge is need of a big season to win over his doubters in the stands. At times, an excellent shot-stopper who can command his area with authority, Burge appears at times not to believe in his own ability, which can lead to nervy and error-strewn performances. Burge showed enough towards the end of last season that he could grow into being our number one keeper for years to come.

Reice Charles-Cook

Pos: GK

Age: 23

Club Apps(Goals): 52(o)

23

Seems to have regressed dramatically over the past 12 months. Having once been one of the cockiest and most assured presences in goal seen at the club for a long time, Reice Charles-Cook cost the team on too many occasions last season to be trusted. He looked a shadow of his former self during the few opportunities he has had back in goal recently, and if he doesn't find a new club before the end of the transfer window, he will be set for a full season in the cold.

Liam O'Brien

Pos: GK

Age: 25

Club Apps(Goals): 0(o)

13

O'Brien has clearly been brought in this season by Mark Robins to challenge Lee Burge for the starting spot in goal. A vocal presence in goal with a powerful kick, O'Brien has looked solid in pre-season without being overly tested. If he is to usurp Lee Burge's spot in goal this season, it seems that he'll need to first impress in the cup games. However, there must be a reason he's failed to command a starting role at his other clubs, and it may prove to be a misjudgement not to recruit a more proven back-up keeper.

Jack Grimmer

Pos: RB

Age: 23

Club Apps(Goals): 0(o)

2

At a good age and with experience of promotion at this level, Jack Grimmer looks to be one of the better signings that we've made. Primarily an attacking right-back, Mark Robins will have to make sure that there is adequate cover for when he makes his forward raids. The indications from pre-season are that Grimmer will be an important player for us this campaign, although his final ball seems to be a weakness in his game. It is a concern though that Grimmer is another fairly young defender on our books.

Ryan Haynes

Pos: LB

Age: 21

Club Apps(Goals): 57(1)

24

Has had to wait a while for another chance at first-team level, but Haynes demonstrated his potential with some improved performances towards the end of last season. An attacking full-back who's not scared to either get to the by-line or take an attempt on goal himself, Haynes still needs to work on his defending where he can get caught out positionally from time-to-time. An injury in pre-season threatens to make it another long wait for a run in the side if Chris Stokes impresses.

Dominic Hyam

Pos: CB

Age: 21

Club Apps(Goals): 0(0)

15

Signed seemingly as a back-up player, Dominic Hyam is an unknown quantity heading into the new season. A young defender with experience out on loan at non-league and League Two level, albeit without particularly catching the eye. With Jordan Willis and Rod McDonald looking like the preferred centre-back pairing, and another defender still to be recruited, it is likely that we'll only see Hyam play in the cup games over the opening months of the season.

Dion Kelly-Evans

Pos: RB

Age: 20

Club Apps(Goals): 26(0)

20

Despite seemingly not being rated by any of our managers last season, Dion Kelly-Evans' work-rate and commitment to the cause saw him establish himself in the first-team squad. An industrious right-back who still needs to make improvements both defensively and going forwards, Kelly-Evans' progress this season seems like it will be stunted by Jack Grimmer's signing. Kelly-Evans will seemingly have to move mountains once again to earn a regular place in the starting line-up.

Rod McDonald

Pos: CB/LB

Age: 25

Club Apps(Goals): 0(0)

5

Having played a useful, if not exactly central, role during Northampton Town's promotion from this level two seasons ago, Rod McDonald seems like he'll have to step up into a leadership role for us this season. Has looked a solid and fairly no-nonsense presence at centre-back in pre-season, McDonald looks set to be the muscle in central defence alongside the more mobile Jordan Willis. McDonald's form this season could be one of the biggest tests of Robins' summer recruitment.

Chris Stokes

Pos: LB/CB Age: 26

Club Apps(Goals): 52(3)

3

Having only returned to semi-fitness towards the end of last season, Chris Stokes is making up for last time this year. A solid full-back defensively but one who appears to lack confidence going forward, Stokes has an opportunity to edge ahead of Ryan Haynes in the left-back pecking order due to an injury to the latter in pre-season. A player who seems ideally suited to League Two football, if we are to win promotion, Stokes will have to add another dimension to his game at full-back.

Jordan Turnbull

Pos: CB/LB Age: 22

Club Apps(Goals): 35(0)

25

At the time of writing, Turnbull appears to be set to activate a clause in his contract to leave the club. The former Southampton youngster was one of the bigger culprits in our relegation last year, but improved as the campaign progressed. A composed centre-back on the ball who needs to learn how to dominate his opponents more consistently, it is arguable whether his departure would be a major loss were despite his technical ability.

Jordan Willis

Pos: CB/RB Age: 22

Club Apps(Goals): 106(3)

4

It still feels like we're waiting for Jordan Willis to establish a role for himself in the side, after 106 appearances dating back to our time in the Championship. Robins has seemingly decided that Willis will be a centre-back for us this season, which means that he'll have to become a more aggressive and physical player than he has tended to be in his career. Arguably someone who should be far too good for League Two level, this season will be a real test of everything Willis has learned in his career thus far.

Michael Doyle

Pos: CM Age: 35

Club Apps(Goals): 264(22)

8

Despite his advancing years, Michael Doyle's signing was a statement of our ambitions this season. Having played an important role as the midfield enforcer for Portsmouth in their promotion last season, Doyle will be expected to be our primary leader this season. Turning 36 just days into the new season, there have to be question marks as to whether Doyle will last another season as a first-choice player. He'll have to be managed carefully to ensure we get everything we can out of him while he lasts.

Liam Kelly

Pos: CM

Age: 27

Club Apps(Goals): 0(0)

6

Having supplied a presence in midfield at Oldham in League One recently, and as well at Leyton Orient at this level last season, Liam Kelly's arrival this summer adds a vital component to this squad in the centre of the park. Although primarily a holding midfielder player, Kelly's range of passing and ability to finish moves off could make him the player Robins builds his team around. An injury-hit campaign last year is a potential concern heading into this season for Kelly.

Kyel Reid

Pos: LM

Age: 29

Club Apps(Goals): 29(2)

32

Has reportedly asked to leave the club and has had little involvement in pre-season, getting Kyel Reid off the books with enough time to replace him before the end of the transfer window could be critical in adding some much-needed creativity and goals from out wide. Reid endured a difficult season last time out, either failing to get into the side or not being properly deployed as an out-and-out winger. He is someone who should be a force in League Two, but it appears he no longer wants to play for us.

Ben Stevenson

Pos: CM

Age: 20

Club Apps(Goals): 28(2)

31

A pure class act in the centre of the pitch, Ben Stevenson could be forgiven for feeling slightly annoyed that Robins hasn't seemingly backed him to play a starting role in the side from day one of this season. Not only a wonderful passer of the ball, Stevenson's positional intelligence mark him out as a player with a big future ahead of him. Unless he makes the move to a bigger club that he was rumoured to be on the verge of back in January, it appears Stevenson will have to wait his turn to earn a starting spot.

Peter Vincenti

Pos: CM/AM/RM Age: 31

Club Apps(Goals): 0(0)

7

A key player for Rochdale as a goal-scoring midfielder whose height made him a useful presence as an auxiliary forward. After an injury-hit previous campaign, Vincenti will be looking this season to make up for lost time with us. An experienced and physical player with previous experience at this level, Vincenti should prove to be an asset for us in a number of positions. However, it's a case of hoping that he won't be suffering any long-term repercussions of that injury.

Stuart Beavon

Pos: ST

Age: 33

Club Apps(Goals): 14(2)

16

Despite failing to deliver the goals we needed after his January arrival, Beavon's work-rate and surprising level of physicality for a player of his stature saw him impress most Sky Blues fans. Handed a two-year contract this summer, Robins seemingly thinks that he has a key role to play as a leader of this side. Beavon could prove crucial in allowing Marc McNulty to get into goalscoring positions, although it would be helpful if Beavon too stepped up to the mark in front of goal.

Maxime Biamou

Pos: ST

Age: 26

Club Apps(Goals): 0(0)

9

Is making a big step-up from part-time football with Sutton United last season where he played an important role as a fairly mobile target-man for the National League side as they made the Fifth Round of the FA Cup. Along with Beavon, Biamou's role in the side will seemingly be to open up the space for McNulty, a record of 10 goals in the league last season is respectable but indicates that he isn't an out-and-out goalscorer and could drop out of the side if Robins finds one before the end of the window.

Jodi Jones

Pos: AM/RM/LM

Age: 19 Club Apps(Goals): 40(1)

11

Clearly a player of immense skill, Jodi Jones needs to add a final product to his game if his career isn't to stall this season. Has a tendency towards tunnel vision when in the final third and lacks conviction when cutting inside to shoot. With there being a clear need for a creative presence from wide areas in this side who can also add goals, Jones could prove to be a key player for us this season if he adds some of those missing elements to his game.

Marc McNulty

Pos: ST/AM

Age: 24

Club Apps(Goals): 0(0)

10

The marquee signing of the summer, given the interest there was in his services from other clubs. A penalty-area striker who can seemingly also operate just behind a lone forward, Robins is clearly looking towards McNulty to be our main goalscorer this season. Impressed in flashes at Sheffield United and enjoyed a more consistent run in front of goal while with Portsmouth two seasons ago, which admittedly is relatively little to go off when looking at someone to score the goals to get us out of this league.

Kwame Thomas

Pos: ST

Age: 21

Club Apps(Goals): 14(3)



Kwame Thomas is a player who could prove a useful squad member, but has a number of rough edges in his game that need to be rounded off. Appears to lack tactical discipline and physical co-ordination, Thomas had a knack of unsettling opponents last season by being somewhat unpredictable. His three goals last season exemplified some predatory instincts in the penalty area, but is going to have to make great strides to earn further first-team opportunities.

Chris Camwell

Pos: LB

Age: 18

Club Apps(Goals): 1(0)

34

An important member of the under-18s last year who went on to make his debut on the final day of last season. A physical left-back who is reportedly an excellent set-piece taker, Camwell was strongly linked with a move to Stoke this summer. Although it ultimately didn't materialise, Camwell committing himself to the club suggests that he expects a pathway to first-team football over the course of the campaign – although he'll be frustrated that Darragh Leahy has been more involved in pre-season.

Darragh Leahy

Pos: CB/LB

Age: 19

Club Apps(Goals): 0(0)

27

Although seemingly a more natural centre-back, Darragh Leahy has enjoyed several first-team opportunities this season at left-back. A youth international with the Republic of Ireland who was signed with a promising reputation a few seasons ago, Leahy could be set to make his full debut this season given that both Ryan Haynes and Chris Stokes have struggled for fitness over pre-season. However, he has looked exposed at times and may not quite be ready for first-team football.

Devon Kelly-Evans

Pos: AM/LM

Age: 20

Club Apps(Goals): 0(0)

22

Following an impressive loan spell with Nuneaton in the National League North last season, Devon Kelly-Evans has made a decent impression with the first-team this pre-season. A more naturally attacking player than his twin brother Dion, Devon has struggled at times to find his strongest position, and has played pretty much every outfield position apart from centre-back at youth-level. With a need for creative wide players in the first-team, there could be an opening for him this season.

Callum Maycock

Pos: CM/CB

Age: 20

Club Apps(Goals): 3(0)

28

Made a handful of appearances under Mark Venus last season where he looked comfortable at first-team level, Callum Maycock has been an important presence at the base of midfield at youth level in recent years. Possessing an excellent range of passing and probably already physically strong enough to cope with League Two football, Maycock could have a role to play at first-team level this season if opportunities are handed his way – although Jordan Shipley appears to be slightly ahead of him in Robins' thoughts.

Jordan Shipley

Pos: CM

Age: 19

Club Apps(Goals): 1(0)

26

Made his first-team debut late in the Walsall game towards the end of the season, Jordan Shipley looked far from out of place. A tall and technically-composed midfielder who is more box-to-box than Callum Maycock, who appears to be his direct competition for further opportunities at first-team level. Shipley has tended to be preferred to Maycock as the fourth-choice central midfielder in pre-season, however, both could fall further away from first-team football if Robins signs a more experienced option.

Jordan Ponticelli

Pos: ST

Age: 19

Club Apps(Goals): 0(0)

38

A goal machine at under-18 level last season, Ponticelli has attracted calls from fans for an opportunity at first-team level – despite failing to establish himself at under-23 level. Has enhanced his burgeoning reputation in pre-season by scoring in the friendly against Valenciennes with a typical poacher's effort, this could be a big year for the young striker. Still needs to round off his game at under-23 level, but could prove a valuable option to have in the squad if we struggle for goals this season.

Stats

Squad Size

21



Against Rest of League

Average Age

25.2



Against Rest of League

Apps from 2017/18

472



Against Rest of League

Goals from 2017/18

30



Against Rest of League

**Managerial Reign
Length**

**4.8
Months**



Against Rest of League

Player Turnover

19



Against Rest of League

Pre-Season Round-Up

Sutton United (a) Score: 1-0 (Moorhouse)



With two different XIs used in each half, the game was more a fitness exercise than a game of football, resulting in a largely dull contest. Liam O'Brien and Dominic Hyam looked solid at the back during a first-half where the Sky Blues were on the back foot. There was an improvement in the second-half, which resulted in trialist Greg Moorhouse, from Glenavon, netting the winning goal late on.

Valenciennes

Score: 2-3 (McNulty, Ponticelli)



A difficult game against a team from the French second-tier, the game was level at half-time after Marc McNulty scored from the penalty spot. An improved second-half performance saw Jordan Ponticelli put the Sky Blues ahead via a predatory effort in the penalty area. However, a Dominic Hyam error saw Valenciennes level via an own goal and then an excellent finish from Loic Nestor for the French side decide the game in the final ten minutes.

Barnsley (a)

Score: 1-3 (Beavon)



The Sky Blues were outclassed from the first minute to the last against Championship opposition at Oakwell. Barnsley took a 2-0 lead into half-time via Stevie Mallan and Stefan Payne, and were only briefly troubled in the second-half when Stuart Beavon pulled a goal back, Tom Bradshaw added a third soon after, sealing a comfortable victory for the Tykes. Few came out of the game with particular credit, although Rod McDonald in defence seemingly had an okay game despite the three goals conceded.

MK Dons (n)

Score: 2-0 (McNulty x2)



A much-improved Sky Blues performance raised hopes that this new team was starting to gel. With Liam Kelly pulling strings in the centre of the park, Mark Robins' side enjoyed the best of the play against a subdued MK Dons side in Nuneaton. Both goals came from the spot, with Liam Kelly fouled for the first penalty and McNulty himself brought to the ground for the second. In addition to Kelly and McNulty, there were impressive performances from Maxime Biamou and Devon Kelly-Evans.

Liverpool XI (n)

Score: 0-0



After naming what looked to be close to his first-choice side against a young Liverpool side boasting few recognisable names, Mark Robins will have been frustrated at a lack of cutting edge in attack. Despite generally being in control of the game, with Liam Kelly pulling the strings in central midfield, poor decisions in the final third saw the Sky Blues waste some promising situations. With Marc McNulty struggling to get into good positions, it was a performance that raised concerns heading into the new season.

Nuneaton Town (a)

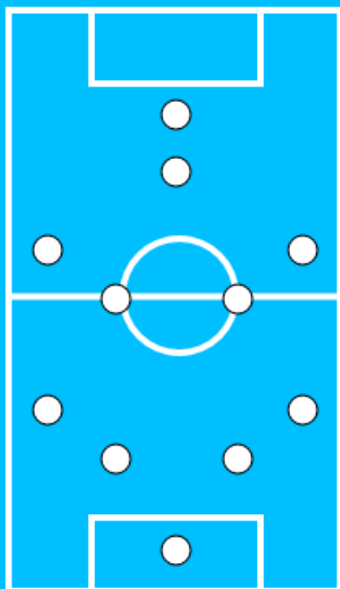
Score: 2-1 (Beavon, Jones)



A much-changed side from the Liverpool game a day earlier looked disjointed in the opening exchanges against Nuneaton, with the hosts looking likelier to score. However, Jodi Jones supplied some of the creativity missing from the previous day's performance, sending in a cross for Stuart Beavon to open the score. A young Sky Blues side looked set to be punished for a not finishing the game off, when Nuneaton levelled late on, however, Jones once again stepped up to the mark by scoring the winning goal.

Possible Tactics

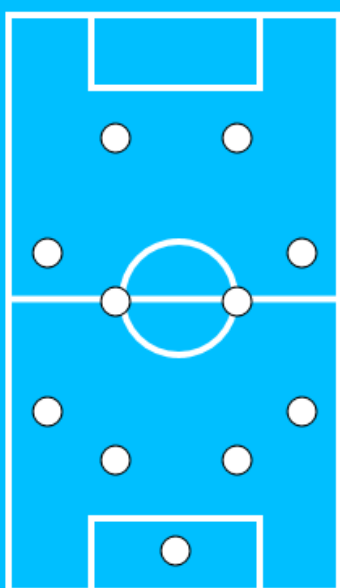
4-4-1-1



Seemingly Mark Robins' preferred formation, based on his first spell at the club and the shape he settled on towards the end of last season. It's a well-balanced formation that offers the defensive solidity of having two banks of four, but also dynamism in the partnerships and overloads on the opposition that the shape easily engenders.

However, this is essentially a formation with a lone striker, which requires having other players in the side who can take the burden of goalscoring away from one player. The combination of Marc McNulty and Stuart Beavon in those two main attacking positions looks crucial, but the partnerships in central defence and central midfield will determine just how solid we are, as well as our ability to control games in the centre of the pitch.

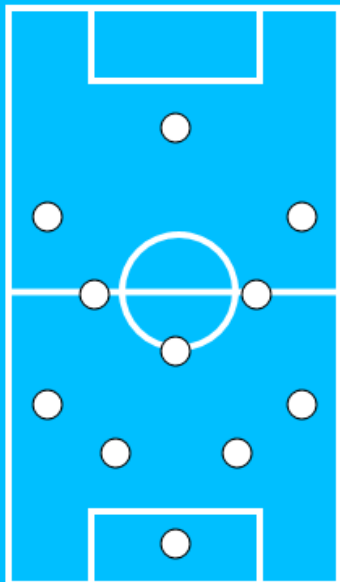
4-4-2



While there isn't exactly a world of difference between a 4-4-2 and a 4-4-1-1, it does potentially offer a greater attacking threat, albeit at the cost of losing some stability in the centre of the pitch. Given the nature of the season ahead of us, it is inevitable that Robins will have to risk solidity at times in order to be able to chase games that threaten to get away from us.

The mobility and technical ability of the central midfielders in this formation will be important. If they can control games and create chances without that attacking midfielder just ahead of them, then we don't lose as much defensive stability in a 4-4-2 compared to a 4-4-1-1. Additionally, the defenders lose an extra level of protection with the team in a less naturally compact shape, especially if Jack Grimmer and Ryan Haynes go raiding forward from full-back.

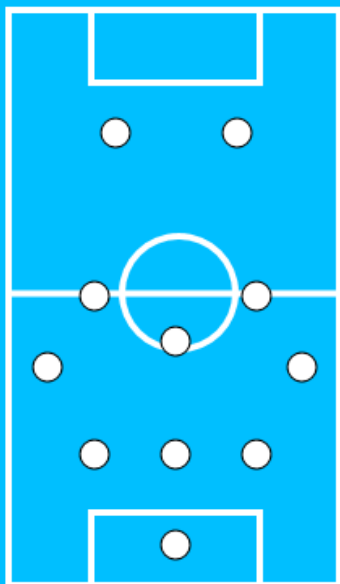
4-5-1



With midfield options of Ben Stevenson, Michael Doyle and Liam Kelly, it feels somewhat wasteful to have to leave one of those on the bench to play either of the first two formations. Playing a 4-5-1, or 4-3-3, formation allows us to get the most out of three of the better players in the squad.

However, it comes at the cost of potentially dulling our attacking threat. Marc McNulty isn't a striker who appears particularly capable of playing as a lone striker, so he would either have to adapt his game or be pigeon-holed into a wide position. Additionally, the formation requires the wide players to be able to create and take chances, and I'm not sure whether Jodi Jones and Peter Vincenti could be relied upon to do that - although the overlapping runs of Haynes and Grimmer from full-back could help them out in that regard.

3-5-2



Although we've been here before with three-man defences and it never quite seems to work out for us, a 3-5-2 formation could well play to some of the strengths in the squad. It allows us to play a midfield trio of Kelly, Stevenson and Doyle, gives Marc McNulty a strike partner to work alongside, provides Willis and McDonald an additional defensive colleague, and allows Haynes and Grimmer to drive forward with more abandon than in a back four.

3-5-2 requires dynamism in midfield and wing-back to work effectively. If the wing-backs can't beat a defender, there's almost no point in playing the system. If the midfielders can't link with the attack, then the forward become isolated. Haynes and Grimmer should be suited to the wing-back roles, while Jodi Jones or Peter Vincenti could be deployed as a number 10 to add further creativity to the system.

Key Player – Marc McNulty



Position

Striker/Attacking Midfielder

Career Stats - Apps(Goals)

2009-2014 Livingston - 96(41)

2014-2017 Sheffield United - 40(10)

2015-2016 Portsmouth (Loan) - 27(10)

2016-2017 Bradford City (Loan) - 15(1)

Although George Thomas eventually came to life towards the end of last season, we never really had that feeling entering a match of confidence that if we created two or three good chances there was a player in the team who could take them.

The signing of Marc McNulty this summer is clearly Mark Robins' attempt to source that confidence. A quick and technically-adept striker with some predatory penalty area goals on his CV, McNulty has the appearance of a player who could challenge for the division's golden boot.

Although he has yet to have even a 10-goal season in England, McNulty showed in flashes at Sheffield United and on a more consistent basis while on loan Portsmouth two seasons ago that he has the ability to be one of the leading strikers at League Two level.

Given that Mark Robins generally likes to play a 4-4-1-1 system and has struggled in the past to get the best out of out-and-out goalscorers, McNulty's ability to operate slightly deeper than an orthodox centre-forward could set him up well to flourish under Robins' tactical set-up. Strikers like Stuart Beavon and Maxime Biamou are clearly in the squad to do the hard-running for McNulty and allow him to get into goalscoring positions.

Not only is McNulty likely to be one of the higher-earners in the squad, but Robins has clearly invested a lot of his preparations ahead of the new season in McNulty being the club's main goalscorer. McNulty's form could well be the crucial factor in how successful this season is for us.

Key Player – Lee Burge



Position

Goalkeeper

Career Stats - Apps(Goals)

2010-Present Coventry City - 60(0)

2013 Nuneaton Town (Loan) - 17(0)

It feels like in every season preview I've written about the goalkeeping situation having yet to be resolved, but this year there looks to have been a more decisive swing towards Lee Burge over Reice Charles-Cook.

12 months ago, Reice Charles-Cook was not only the first-choice goalkeeper but looking like someone who was a few good months away from earning a move to the Championship. It was hard to see Burge ever getting another chance to prove himself.

However, Charles-Cook took some big steps backward last season, allowing Lee Burge to the opening to grasp what was probably his last chance to assert himself as the club's number one goalkeeper. Whereas Charles-Cook is capable of the spectacular but guilty of complacency with the routine, Burge is a more reliable but less spectacular option in goal.

Burge has made few truly costly errors over the past year, but at times appears nervous and uncertain, which spreads nerves and uncertainty into his defence. With a relatively young back-line ahead of him heading into the new season, Burge has got to do more than avoid making mistakes, he's got to be one of the leaders of the defence.

While Liam O'Brien has been brought in to challenge Burge, it says a lot that Robins not only handed a new deal to Burge but didn't sign someone more experienced and proven. It's not certain that Lee Burge will be our number one goalkeeper in 12 months', or even three months' time, but it's clearly the expectation from the manager that he will be. Burge has to repay that faith by continuing to improve his game and presence in goal.

Key Player – Liam Kelly



Position

Central Midfielder

Career Stats - Apps(Goals)

2009-2013 Kilmarnock - 100(15)

2013-2014 Bristol City - 21(0)

2014-2016 Oldham Athletic - 78(7)

2016-2017 Leyton Orient - 21(4)

In a handful of performances towards the end of last season, Gael Bigirimana looked like becoming the beating heart of our midfield. More than just a good passer of the ball and committed in the tackle, Bigi looked a to have that almost ineffable aura of being presence in the centre of the park that team-mates could turn to and opponents couldn't get close to

Whether Bigirimana could have taken further steps and gone on to be that kind of player on a regular basis, we will never know, following his decision to sign for Motherwell. Instead, Robins brought in a player few Coventry City fans seem to know much about, but is arguably a more proven, and better, midfielder.

When Liam Kelly first came through at Kilmarnock, he was looking like a really big talent, before a move to Bristol City didn't quite work out. Nonetheless, Kelly rebuilt his career with Oldham in League One, where he was consistently excellent and authoritative in the centre of the pitch.

While his move to Leyton Orient was a misstep in his career, his goal record in an injury and suspension-affected season for someone who is primarily a deep-lying midfielder should give an indication of what Kelly supplies to the team. Not only can he screen the defence and move the ball up the pitch but he's adept at timing his runs into the box to finish moves off – almost everything you could ask for in a midfielder.

Whether it's Michael Doyle or Ben Stevenson alongside him, Liam Kelly is a signing that instantly makes us a better team and provides the presence in the centre of the pitch that all good teams need.

Mark Robins



Career History - Win Percentage

2007-2009 Rotherham United - 43%

2009-2011 Barnsley - 32%

2012-2013 Coventry City - 52%

2013-2014 Huddersfield Town - 34%

2014-2016 Scunthorpe United - 32%

2017-Present Coventry City - 42 %

Overall - 38%

Mark Robins' return to the club back in March had been made with this season in mind. Importantly though, the improved form in the league and especially that victory at Wembley were vital first steps towards Robins' vision of rebuilding the club, even if the majority of players who played in those games have either left the club or are on their way out. Even the most ardent of Sky Blues' fans were sick of the sight of their own club back in March, but Robins gave us all a reason to fall back in love with our club again.

However, as soon as we kick-off against Notts County on the opening day of the season, that's when the decision to entrust Mark Robins as the chief custodian at such a crucial juncture in the club's history will truly be put to the test. As bad as being in League Two currently is for the club, an extended spell would be disastrous given the parlous and precarious state the club is in off-the-pitch.

The signings that Robins has made this summer suggests that he has been given one of the bigger budgets to work with in this division, and I think it's reasonable to conclude that he won't have a similar luxury were we to fall short of promotion this season. Unless the ownership of the club changes hands in the near future, it could be quite a while before we have as good an opportunity as this to win promotion.

If we are to judge Robins' ability to deliver on promotion based on his two spells at the club, then you would have to feel fairly confident that he could do so. In both spells

he has been able to restore confidence to teams at rock-bottom mainly by instilling a coherent structure and style of play that players have found it easy to adhere to, and in his first spell, by making one or two really good signings that instantly improved the team.

While it appears to be an approach that is best-suited to turning teams struggling for form around very quickly, those qualities should be helpful in dealing with one or two bad results over the course of a long season. After the few bad results that we had in Robins' first spell at the club, he was able most of the time to make a tweak or two in the next game to get the team back to winning ways.

Additionally, Robins was very adept at identifying how to partner players up on the pitch to make the best use of their complementary qualities. That team he built during his first stint was packed full of partnerships – Blair Adams and Gary McSheffrey on the left, Carl Baker and Cyrus Christie on the right, Steven Jennings and James Bailey in central midfield – and it clearly gave those players confidence knowing that they had a team-mate as a reference point on the pitch. Similarly, we started to see partnerships develop towards the end of last season, even if time constraints and injuries meant they never really got the chance to fully develop.

With almost a whole new team to work with this season, Mark Robins is a manager that I feel I can trust to figure out which players work well together and eventually use that kind of logic to put together a coherent side out of the set of players he has given himself to work with.

Furthermore, the canny eye that Robins displayed in the transfer market during his first spell with us – chiefly, in bringing in James Bailey and Franck Moussa when he first arrived, and Blair Adams later on – indicates that he is someone who can be trusted to put together an almost entirely new team. Our last two managers who had time to build their own squads – Tony Mowbray and Steven Pressley – struggled when they had to make changes in bulk.

While we are yet to see how this new team will do together, Mark Robins' swiftness in the transfer market this summer indicates that he has a clear idea of what he wants from this team. While I would imagine that the signings of Michael Doyle, Marc McNulty and Liam Kelly were near the top of Robins' list, others like Rod McDonald, Liam O'Brien and Peter Vincenti suggest to me that Robins was looking at filling specific roles in the squad and was able to move on from his preferred targets in the knowledge that those further down his list would still be able to do a similar job.

It is only my presumption, and I could be completely wrong, but there is also a risk that moving on so quickly from preferred targets means that Robins has brought in quantity over quality. With such a big rebuild required this summer, it was probably a more pressing need to get bodies through the door, but the swiftness of our moves in the summer transfer market has raised expectations both from fans and outside observers, which heaps further pressure on this team to win promotion this season.

If we are to judge Robins' ability to deliver a promotion-winning side based

on his time at his other clubs, then you would probably have to conclude that he isn't capable of producing a consistent winning side. In each of his previous jobs his teams have failed to maintain runs of form over a sustained period. His reputation is of being a short-term fix, just another face off the managerial merry-go-round.

It seems as if the rigidity and pragmatism of Robins' style has held his teams back. The structure that works so well to right a sinking ship, doesn't work so well when his teams are expected to go out and win games. Mark Robins' teams tend to sit in well-organised banks of four and look to hit teams on the counter-attack, which means they can be starved of an attacking threat when teams deny them space to break into.

That combination play that Robins is so good at instilling can also come a cropper against teams sitting back against us. It was something that we saw in his first spell with us in those final two games. By working the ball out wide, getting the full-back to make an overlapping run, the main source of creativity if it's not on the counter-attack is crosses into the box, with a lone frontman it can be easy for that striker to be marked out of the game and for the team to lose any attacking threat at all.

Although that is a symptom of a team doing well and facing teams sitting back against them, the problem seems to be that Robins struggles to move on from his preferred approach. We saw at times towards the end of last season that he was unwilling to risk losing a game 2-0 in order to salvage a point, in a promotion-winning season, it is important at some stage to be able to win at least a handful

of games after falling behind.

A more specific concern heading into this season was Robins' management of Paddy Madden at Scunthorpe. Madden, probably the best penalty-area striker in League One, was regularly deployed on the right-wing because Robins was unwilling to alter his tactics to accommodate an out-and-out goal poacher. With Marc McNulty a similar striker, and the only player in our squad who looks capable of getting into double figures this season, I am concerned that Robins isn't the man to get the best out of our star attacking player.

In Robins' defence, he has rarely been in jobs where he's been expected to build a promotion-winning side, which could mean that I'm judging him based on a different set of criteria to what he'll face with us this season. Given his reputation away from Coventry City, this is probably the only place he was going to get this kind of opportunity, and that could well bring out of him a determination to prove he's more than just another face off the managerial merry-go-round.

It's important though to highlight that if Robins does build a team here that can sustain a promotion push over the course of a season, he'll have achieved something that he hasn't achieved anywhere else. Even in his most successful stint at another club, Rotherham, he left just a few months into a season where his side looked like challenging for promotion.

Maybe Robins is one of those managers who just clicks at a certain club and that club for him is Coventry City. Maybe Coventry City really does run in Mark Robins' blood.

The image features a vertical rectangular background with a color gradient from light blue at the top to a darker blue at the bottom. The background is composed of a mosaic of irregular, overlapping polygonal shapes. In the center of the image is a large white circle. Inside this circle, the word "Predictions" is written in a bold, blue, sans-serif font.

Predictions

League Two

1	Luton Town
2	Mansfield Town
3	Lincoln City
4	Coventry City
5	Chesterfield
6	Colchester United
7	Crewe Alexandra
8	Notts County
9	Barnet
10	Swindon Town
11	Forest Green Rovers
12	Exeter City
13	Cambridge United
14	Accrington Stanley
15	Carlisle United
16	Port Vale
17	Stevenage
18	Wycombe Wanderers
19	Morecambe
20	Newport County
21	Grimsby Town
22	Crawley Town
23	Yeovil Town
24	Cheltenham Town

Luton and Mansfield as a top two is a fairly risk-averse pick. Both appear to be the two clubs with the biggest budgets, and best squads, heading into the season. Luton are slightly ahead of Mansfield in my books because they look to have a more prolific strike force after signing James Collins, to add to the likes of Danny Hylton and Isaac Vassell.

Lincoln City are my tip to complete the automatic promotion places. National League champions tend to go well in League Two the following season, and the feel-good factor

around the club, along with a strong defence and proficiency from set-pieces seems a promotion-winning combination.

I have Chesterfield, Colchester and Crewe making up the play-off places. All three are relatively young squads with fairly inexperienced managers, but each have some exciting young players that could make each of them some of the more entertaining teams to watch this season.

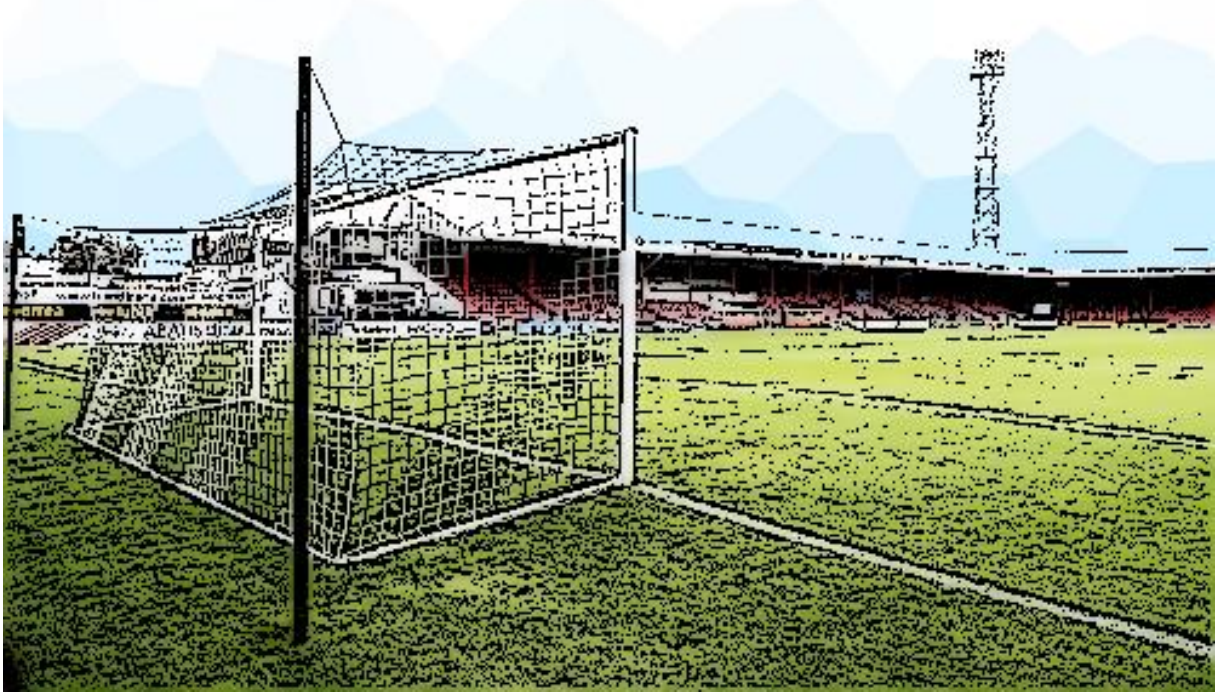
I can foresee Barnet, Notts County, Swindon and Forest Green in the play-off race too, but falling short. With Cambridge and Accrington Stanley possibly in the mix too, but looking like more outside bets to me.

This is a fairly even division overall, which is why although I have Carlisle, Port Vale, Stevenage and even Wycombe further down the table, there are all fairly well-equipped clubs to challenge for the play-offs, it's only doubts against each of their managers that has me feeling less positive about them than other clubs.

The bottom six teams are the ones where I'm finding it difficult to gauge what they're about. Morecambe and Newport have some spirit and should avoid relegation battles, although both have fairly poor squads on paper.

Grimsby look set for a tough season after failing to strengthen a fairly ordinary squad over the summer. Crawley have taken a gamble on Harry Kewell and a number of foreign players that seems to have disaster written all over it – although they do have Dean Cox.

With two of the smallest squads and few particularly outstanding players, Yeovil and Cheltenham each look like going down.



How Will We Do?

Almost every Coventry City fan should know by now that dropping into a lower division is a step into the unknown. It's not as simple as feeling that some of your players that could do a job in one division should be much better at a lower level, it takes time to figure out what is required to get results and thus there is an extent to which teams already at that level have an advantage over us in the opening weeks and months of the season.

Casting my mind back to when we were relegated to League One, I remember being shocked at not only the low standards of other teams, but of ourselves too. Maybe it was because we were being managed by Andy Thorn and Richard Shaw at the time, but it seemed as if we could barely string more than a few passes together, and our opponents were

only marginally better.

Even when Mark Robins came in and improved things that season, it still felt as if we were a side bereft of technical quality getting away with it because we were playing terrible teams. The difference between League One and the Championship felt like an increasing chasm as the season progressed. It was a feeling that only increased with each season in League One.

However, one of the more positive things to come out of dropping to a lower level was that we saw players we didn't really expect much of come to life. Carl Baker was probably the prime example; a player who most would have been happy to see the back of at the start of that season, Baker became a fans' favourite over the

course of that season with some fantastic goals.

While we will probably all be telling each other during the opening weeks of the season that League Two is an abysmal division with tiny clubs and it's a disgrace that a club like Coventry City descended to this level, if we are to be successful, we are going to have to learn to play a lower quality of football well, and there will be a few players in this squad who'll surprise us by emerging as star performers.

There is a difference between now and our time in League One though, we seem to be better equipped to challenge for promotion than we did five seasons ago. We seem to have a manager in charge who seems to know what he wants from his new signings, rather than one who gave Kevin Malaga a three-year contract and played Billy Daniels as a holding-midfielder on the opening day of the season. We should gel as a team quicker than we did in League One because there shouldn't be as much time wasted figuring out our strongest XI and what formation to play them in.

Going through the squad position-by-position, we look especially strong in central midfield. Liam Kelly and Michael Doyle are our two most experienced and proven signings and seem like a ready-made partnership capable of screening the defence and giving us a platform to control games. We also have Ben Stevenson, who oddly doesn't appear to be in Robins' strongest XI heading into the season, who could form a partnership with Liam Kelly that wouldn't be out of place towards the top end of League One. With Callum Maycock and Jordan Shipley as back-up, we should be okay for cover in central midfield, but Robins may still

want another, more experienced body in there.

In attack, Marc McNulty is this summer's most important signing as he will be expected to be our main goalscorer. There is a concern that if Robins doesn't find a role in his tactics that gets the best out of McNulty, we don't have enough goalscorers elsewhere who can compensate. Stuart Beavon is someone who seems to be an excellent finisher but doesn't get into good positions enough of the time to be a reliable goalscorer, and he's also struggled for fitness since his arrival in January. With Maxime Biamou and Kwame Thomas both unknown quantities, there is probably a need to find another goalscorer before the end of the transfer window – if not as a striker, then from out wide.

Peter Vincenti could be someone to answer the call to take the goalscoring burden off of Marc McNulty, but I am a little concerned that he spent most of last season out injured and is the wrong side of 30. With Kyel Reid looking to be on his way out of the club, and not a reliable goal threat anyway, we could do with Jodi Jones adding a final product to his game this season. After a disappointing last season, many seem to have written Jones off, but he could be this season's Carl Baker if something clicks for him.

The most concerning area of the team is probably in defence, where we appear to lack both experience and physicality. While Rod McDonald seems to have looked solid in pre-season, it remains to be seen whether he's the type of centre-back who'll bring the best out of Jordan Willis. With Jordan Turnbull likely to leave before the end of the transfer window, Mark Robins will surely be

looking to sign that experienced and dominant centre-back that is not only missing from the squad currently, but that we lacked last season too.

While I think we're much stronger at full-back than central defence, Ryan Haynes and Jack Grimmer are both very attacking and youthful, options on either side and could only serve to make things more difficult for our centre-backs if they attack with too much abandon. Chris Stokes is likely to prove a useful option, but it is something of a quandary to solve for Mark Robins in how to make use of Stokes' sturdiness while also getting the best out of Ryan Haynes. It would be a waste for either to not be a regular, which could see Stokes deployed at centre-back, or Haynes converted into a winger, or maybe even a switch to a three-man defensive formation.

Finally, in goal, while Lee Burge appears to have steadily improved his game over the past year, it's hard to be fully confident that he's going to be the solid presence in goal that we need him to be. Liam O'Brien has seemingly been brought in to challenge Burge for the starting spot, but the arrival of someone who has been back-up at each of his previous clubs suggests that Burge has been backed to be number one. It's a call that Robins has to get right, otherwise this season could be much more difficult than expected.

While it seems that I'm being a little harsh while running through the squad, I think that's a natural tendency heading into a new season in a division I've yet to experience as a fan and with an almost entirely new team. We won't know how this team blends together and how individual players will do until the season gets underway.

Nonetheless, I would hope that this season preview has proved helpful in providing an educated guess of how I think we can do. While there are some doubts about this squad and manager, comparing our strength on paper versus the rest of division, I think it's fair to conclude that it would be a failure not to finish at least in the top seven this season.