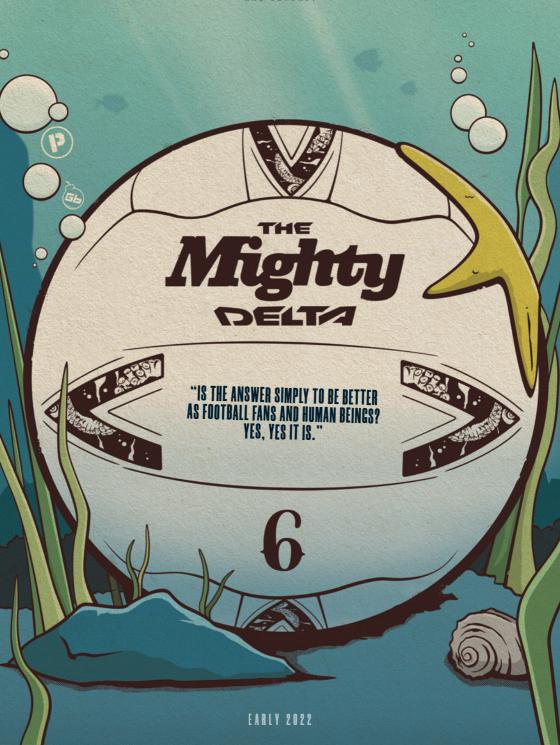
A FANZINE FOCUSED ON THE TOP FOUR TIERS OF ENGLISH FOOTBALL, AND BEYOND.



## WELCOME

Happy New Year to you all and welcome to our sixth edition of 'The Mighty Delta' - prepare for fireworks!

As I write, the Third Round of the FA Cup beckons and the magic of the cup has hopefully soaked into this issue.

The competition may have lost its lustre for the big boys, but for every amateur footballer down to Tier IO of the pyramid, the chance to make it to the last 64 clubs in the country and potentially draw the Premier League champions, or the current FA Cup holders, still exists - and that is undoubtedly special.

For Delta Six, we chatted to non-league goal machine Kabongo Tshimanga who will line up against the likes of Thiago Silva when Chesterfield take on European champions Chelsea at Stamford Bridge in this season's Third Round.

That in itself is an incredible story. Were the Spireites to win, Kabongo and co would rightly take their place among the celebrated giantkillers of the past - two of whom we also interview within these very pages!

Lennie Dennis was part of the Sutton United team that humbled First Division Coventry City in the Third Round back in 1989, just two years after the Sky Blues had memorably won the competition, while Rory McArdle was integral to Bradford City's stunning 4-2 win over Chelsea at the same stage back in 2015.

Both Lennie and Rory were kind enough to talk us through their experiences, and you can vicariously relive the joy of a genuine cup upset in this edition's two 'Giant Killers' features, which contain a few top tips for Kabongo ahead of Chesterfield's big day out!

The cup theme may be strong with this particular issue, but there's plenty more to get excited about, including an exclusive interview with League Two hotshot Dominic Telford - who starts the year with the best minutes-per-goal ratio of any player in the top four tiers!

Here's to a fantastic 2022; hope you enjoy the mag,











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## DIARY OF A SECRET AGENT

Words by Stephen Gillett

Let me introduce myself. I'm writing this incognito, but every covert operative needs a codename (and it's important for football agents to be on first name terms). So, you can call me Bruce.

I work for a football management company headed by one of the world's 'super-agents'.

Our agency closes hundreds of multi-million pound deals each year and we're always in the thick of the action every transfer window.

I'm chucking you a curve ball of sorts in Episode Five of my regular Delta column, as it's time to chat about the stellar work we (well, some of us) do for those who sometimes scapegoat us in the press: managers.

#### Not all agents dig the dugout

There are two distinct schools of agents when it comes to managers: those who represent them and those who don't.

I can name you some huge agencies that won't touch managers with a barge pole. Their view is that running a stable of managers alongside a portfolio of players is asking for trouble, plain and simple.

These non-believers do have a point, as the shadow of potential conflict looms large when you choose to represent both managers and players. Spengler, Venkman and Stantz famously spoke of the catastrophic consequences of crossing streams - and the same principle applies here, as handling the heavily-charged hopes of the head honcho and his henchmen can be explosive.

A manager wants what's best for the manager; a player wants what's best for the player...and an agent representing both parties may not be in a position to satisfy either.

For example, when a manager you represent doesn't want to pick a player who is also on your books...whose side are you on? It's a tight spot to be in



Despite these potential complexities, the opposite view is taken by other agencies who contend that with managers on your books, it becomes much easier to attract players and stimulate symbiotic transfer activity.

One very well-known agency represents an impressive number of Premier League managers and that's actually one of their selling points when they pitch players.

They say "We've got most of the top flight managers on our side, so we have got the right ins and contacts to make deals happen". And they're not wrong

A pragmatist at heart, I'm tirmly between the two camps, I'm wary of the potential pitfalls, but maintain a select band of managerial clients. You know it makes sense, Rodders!

#### Players are your eyes and ears

In terms of identifying top managerial talent, your prime source of intel comes from players. You'll hear good things about coaches doing well at lower league clubs, or at academy level, and there will be a buzz about the way they approach their football.

Players will say things like "when so-and-so comes over from the '23s and puts on a session everyone loves it, it's miles better than the first team staff" and, from then on, you keep an eye out for that manager's progress.

Don't get me wrong, some players will tell you their manager's great one minute, but terrible the next - especially if they've been dropped - so you need to know who to listen to.





#### Firing time

Perhaps the most distasteful part of the whole managerial merry-go-round is the brouhaha before a coach is actually sacked.

Obviously your ears prick up when a manager's struggling for results, but I won't normally contact anyone until a vacancy actually exists. It can easily leak back to people and tarnish your reputation. Not that that stops plenty of agencies aggressively targeting clubs where managers are under pressure.

A lot of out-of-work managers also crawl out of the woodwork when a club's set to make a change - you'll sometimes see them watching from the director's box, which leaves a bad taste for me.

#### Cheap chairmen can be costly

When a club does swing the axe, owners often make the mistake of pursuing the cheapest available option which is normally the wrong call.

Perhaps the best recent example of the miserly approach backfiring is the Antonio Conte situation at Spurs.

Fresh from Serie A success with Inter and a proven Premier League operator, Conte was always the right man for the job and Tottenham's preferred candidate in the first place... but Daniel Levy didn't want to stump up the lira.

Spurs eventually took Nuno from Wolves, which never looked a good fit, and when that didn't work out, Levy and Spurs had to cough up £14 million in severance cash on top of paying Conte what he wanted. Crazy, really.

#### Hiring time

Nowadays some clubs, including Stoke and Brighton, use external recruitment companies to manage the process of finding a new manager.

These specialists handle the entire interview process and also crunch numbers and statistics behind the scenes to limit the risks of appointing a dud. I believe Graham Potter was recruited in this manner by the Seagulls and it is becoming more and more common practice.

In terms of the interviews themselves, they range from relaxed chats by a swimming pool in the Algarve to formal powerpoint presentations in the boardroom. You do occasionally hear about clubs asking candidates to do rather odd things though.

For example, a current Premier League manager crashed and burned in a role play when interviewing for the hotseat at another top flight club.

#### "YOUR CAPTAIN'S LATE ON YOUR FIRST DAY... WHAT DO YOU DO?"

The manager was asked what he would do if, on his first day on the job, his captain and best player was late for training. He replied that he would emphasise the importance of senior players setting standards etc.

The interviewer followed up by asking what the candidate would do if his captain was again late on his second day to which the manager said he would reinforce the same message.

You've guessed it...the interviewer duly asked what approach the manager would take if it happened a third time.

Slightly flummoxed, the manager said he would

probably then take disciplinary action and fine the player - at which point the interviewer rebuked the candidate for effectively ostracising his captain and best player just three days into a new job!!

#### The Two Commandments

The golden rule when negotiating a manager's contract is to get two things absolutely right: the severance pay and the compensation package if another club comes callina.

Fairly recently, a manager I look after was sacked from his job in the Championship and his contract stipulated that he receive 12 months' full pay - and having that cushion is so important for managers who may have to bide their time for further opportunities.

#### Ones to watch

In terms of up-and-coming managers with star potential, I'd probably highlight Ryan Lowe at Preston, Liam Manning at MK Dons and Russell Martin at Swansea.

Everyone speaks highly of Ryan and he's obviously worked his way up to the Championship after a couple of League Two promotions and an impressive job at Plymouth. Liam's made a good start at MK Dons, and Russell has won a lot of plaudits for his style of play at MK and now Swansea - though I think his win percentage is going to need to improve with the Swans.

A little further down the pyramid, James Rowe at Chesterfield has really impressed me. He thinks outside of the box and looks like he could go a long way.







Humans aren't great at listening. When you hear someone speak for a few minutes and try to repeat exactly what was said, you'll probably find that you've missed a word, even swapped some around. Not because you didn't listen, it's just how the brain works, we're not natural listeners.

But football fans have the unique ability to remember commentary from decades ago as if Martin Tyler was screaming Agüero's name into your ear drum at this very moment.

Obviously, there's nothing like being in the stadium yourself. But at home or the pub, we rely on the commentator to keep us on the edge of our seats. A great commentary call makes an unforgettable moment even more special, yet commentators don't always get their due.

The Mighty Delta spoke with probably the most qualified man in the world to talk about what makes commentary great, Michael Schiavello. Many may know 'The 'Voice' from his play-by-play commentary of combat sports, especially mixed-martial arts where he is currently the lead commentator for ONE Championship.

Schiavello began his career commentating on soccer in Australia as a teenager and it's still his favourite sport. He's a self-confessed 'sports commentary nerd' and has written one of the few books on the subject – The Commentators: IOO Years of Sports Commentary – with contributions from commentators of various sports, including football.

"As a commentator, you have to be the puppeteer, pulling the heartstrings of the audience – telling them why they need to get emotionally invested," Schiavello told us. "If they don't have the

information at their disposal and the storytelling, how can they?"

An audience doesn't always know if it's a player's debut, if someone is returning from a lengthy layoff, or scoring against their old team. It's the commentator's job to implant that information without detracting from what's happening on the pitch.

"I look at soccer and Martin Tyler is just the doyen of commentary. He's been doing it for so long, and is still going strong.

"Not only is Martin good at playby-play and obviously knows what's going on in the field, but when there is a break or a lull, he will tell us a snippet of a story, of a player, of a situation. He'll do it in a style that straightaway creates an emotional attachment..."

"It never feels like Martin is saying something just for the sake of speaking, or adding fluff to a broadcast."
He sprinkles in these amazing observations, and we as an audience are spellbound because he adds to the drama, the story, and the

But of course, there are all kinds of commentators. In his book, Schiavello talks about Víctor Hugo Morales' commentary for Maradona's goal of the century against England.

spectacle."

"This guy is giving us hyperbolic, over-the-top, crazy, meltdown excitement, which is the complete antithesis to Martin Tyler's style but it works.

"Because when Maradona scores the goal of the century, it's not as if Morales is telling us the technical detail...he's building up to this massive crescendo, this outpouring of emotion that is just second to none. Passion is probably the thing that makes a commentator great. It's hard to enjoy something when you're hearing someone talk unenthusiastically about it. Gary Neville is a good example

"That also grips us emotionally

and tugs on our heartstrings

and we, like Morales, want

to cry and thank god

for Maradona.







Chelsea against Barcelona.

"I get a lot of young people

saying to me, I want to be a

commentator, what do I need?

Do I need a good voice? Do I need to be well researched?... I say no, above all you need passion and enthusiasm. If vou don't have passion and enthusiasm, pack up now as you

Someone who is perhaps a mix of Tyler's more conventional style and a more passionate approach is Peter Drury, who Schiavello considers the best football commentator in the world right now. Barcelona's unforgettable capitulation to Roma in 2018 is some of Drury's best work.

"He was in the moment, completely immersed. And truth be told, he said in the

book, he was buying himself time until he could identify who the goal scorer actually was. To be able to do that, obviously not scripted, it's the work of a genius, the work of a poet laureate in modern form. What guys like Shakespeare were doing hundreds of years ago, we're hearing Peter Drury do it on live television in modern times."

> Of course, 'The Voice' has his own favourite commentary moment: Alan Parry's famous call of Roberto Baaaio's goal against Czechoslovakia in the 1990 World Cup. In fact, it's

'starburst memory' - one of those times when you can visualise exactly what you were doing at that time.

"Alan Parry, 1990 World Cup, 15-years old, four in the morning, watching with my Dad. I remember outside the house every morning at around the same time a car would drive up the street and backfire. I remember drinking coffee with a big dollop of full cream and sugar; Mum and Dad's good couches that only special visitors could sit on - we were watching it off those couches.

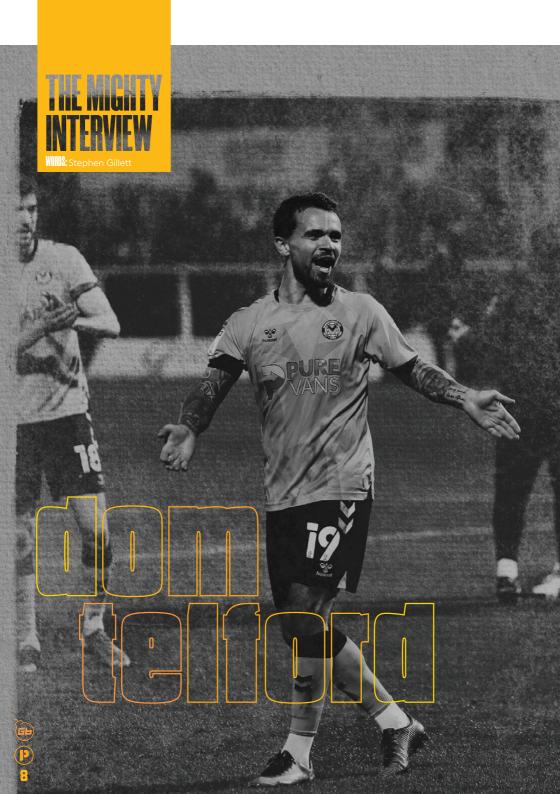
"I remember not only because Baggio's goal was superb, but because Alan Parry's commentary is etched into my memory. I have this beautiful starburst memory of the whole scenario...even though it was 31 years ago, it's still fresh in my memory. I can walk you through it like walking through a picture.

"From the time Baggio and Giannini play that one-two in the centre of the pitch and Baggio decides to ao on his slalomina run, all Alan Parry says is the same two words repeated three times, and each time he says it with increasing pitch, with a difference of intonation, he's rising, it's a slow, beautiful build to a crescendo. as he says 'oh yes', then he goes 'oh yes!', and then he goes 'OH YES!' and the ball goes in the net. All he's done while Baggio has run half the field is say two words, three times. That's incredible in itself. And then he goes 'what a goal by Baggio!'. Boom.

"They cut to a shot of the flags waving in the Stadio Olimpico, and he lets it sit, lets it pause, and then he gives a headline statement that this is 'the goal all of Italy wanted to see, the man they wanted in the Italian team has delivered the goods in spectacular style."

We have all had similar experiences. Each generation with different goals, different commentators, but a similar 'starburst memory' engraved forever in our minds. That's what makes great, unforgettable commentary - something that stays with us forever and deserves far greater appreciation.





A trawl of the key statistics across the top four tiers at the start of 2022 would definitely have flagged up Dominic Telford's name - the forward top of the League Two goal charts with 16 strikes for Newport County. However, the extent of Telford's prolific form was perhaps not immediately apparent at first glance. It's only when you divide the number of times the 24-year,old has rippled the back of the net by the minutes he has been on a football pitch that you realise just how sizzling his red-hot form has been. At the time of writing in early January, there are only three players across 'The 92' (with 5+ league goals) scoring at a rate quicker than a league goal every IOO minutes: Aleksander Mitrovic (87 minutes), Max Watters (97 minutes)...and Telford, the most prolific of the lot with a goal on average every 75 minutes. Telford's 16 strikes in the fourth tier have been notched in just 1207 minutes over 15 games - not at all shabby for a player who was on Newport's transfer list this summer! scorina aoals.

In our latest 'Mighty Interview', we chatted with the bubbly Burnley-born frontman about his career to date, and his 'obsession' with

During our conversation, a clear picture emerges of a player reaping the rewards of hours of hard graft across spells at Blackpool. Stoke, Bristol Rovers, Bury and Plymouth, prior to his current stint in south Wales.

Telford's hunger to score goals traces right back to his first as a professional for Blackpool in 2014/15.

Back then, the Seasiders were on the verge of tumbling down the leagues after their memorable Premier League adventures under Ian Holloway. However, Telford soaked in

every minute of his time at Bloomfield Road although it was anything but glamorous.

"Looking back, it was an unbelievable time for me, as I ended up making my debut in the Championship.

"As a scholar coming through, there was none of the luxury that some lads have now comina through at bigger clubs. We didn't have much equipment, or many footballs, and we were getting changed in a Portakabin, so it was stripped right back to basics.

"I made my debut in the first game of the (2014/15) season - Nottingham Forest away, with 30,000 there - and, when I came on for the final few minutes. I don't think I've ever been so scared in my life!

"I then scored on my home debut against Rotherham. If I could have pitched a tent on the pitch that night, I'd have done it. It has to be my most memorable goal - even watching it back now, I can still feel some of the emotions."

Blackpool were relegated to League One after finishing bottom of the Championship, but Telford was on the up - as Premier League Stoke signed the striker, with a view to developing him in their Under-21s.

Signed by Mark Hughes, Telford admits he learnt a huge amount from the stellar attacking talents - such as Bojan, Arnautovic, Crouch and Shagiri - who were on the Potters' books, but he reserves special praise for their then youth coach Glyn Hodges.

"It was a great opportunity and there was a pathway for me. Stoke were doing unbelievably in the Premier League, but there were voung players coming through.

"I'd grown up watching a lot of them play, and the next minute I was training alongside them. It was bonkers.

"Bojan was angelic on the ball, I could have sat and watched him all day long, but, when it came to finishing, Peter Crouch stood out.

"Everyone looks at him and thinks he was just good in the air, but I'll always remember one session when I crossed a ball head high and he volleyed it so sweetly into the top corner. The next cross, I did exactly the same thing...and so did he. He was a natural finisher.

"I learnt a lot from Glyn (Hodges), who was the Under-23s coach. Some of the goals I score now are down to good habits I learnt back then."



#### "All those sacrifices that people haven't seen, are now paying off"

After two years in Stoke's youth ranks, Telford was restless for game time at senior level.

A loan move to Bristol Rovers ensued and, although he was hungry for more action than he saw, Telford's development was aided by goalscoring legend Marcus Stewart, who was The Gas' assistant manager.

"I loved it at Bristol Rovers, it's a massive club and the fans were great. I didn't get as much game time as I wanted, but it was a great experience.

"Marcus (Stewart) spent so much time with me. I was frustrated because I wanted more game time, but Marcus told me that I was putting the time on the training pitch, not for this Saturday, or next, but for two years down the line when it was second nature for me to keep hitting the back of the net.

"Going from Stoke where some of the wages were ridiculous to a club where people had mortgages to pay, and where win bonuses went a long way, was good for me in a competitive sense."

The next chapter in Telford's career was a unique and poignant one, as he signed for Bury in 2018/19.

Under the guidance of the rookie management team of Ryan Lowe and Steven Schumacher, the Shakers gloriously won promotion from League Two despite players going months without being paid - only for Bury to be expelled from the EFL ahead of the following campaign.

Telford scored 14 goals in 48 games in his one season at Gigg Lane, earning the nickname 'Mr Checkatrade' for his exploits in the EFL Trophy, and he loved his time there despite the club's plight.

"Everyone I keep in touch with who was there, has good memories of that time.

"We didn't get paid from February to the end of the season and everyone was skint - the players, the management, the chefs, everyone - but it was more than football in many ways.

"It was about what it meant to the people behind the scenes and the fans.

"It was an amazing, but sad time. It was a great club and hopefully they are on their way back up."

Telford followed manager Lowe to Plymouth Argyle for the 2019/20 campaign, which saw the duo achieve a second successive League Two promotion, as the Pilgrims finished third to go up automatically.

Telford has nothing but praise for new Preston boss Lowe, and believes "one million percent" that his managerial future is bright.

"Ryan (Lowe) and Schuey (Schumacher) were brilliant with me.

"I'd play a game on a Saturday and then on the Monday we'd go through my clips from start to finish and Ryan would ask why I did certain things. He'd always give his opinion, good or bad.

"Ryan's very much at the beginning of his coaching career, but he is reaping the rewards of his hard work and it would not surprise me at all if he continues to fly up the leagues."

Telford's path diverged from Plymouth's, however, and the 24-year-old moved to Newport County in the January transfer window in 2020.

It has not always been smooth sailing in south Wales for the forward, who admits he took time to settle.

"I struggled with injuries at Plymouth, which knocks your confidence physically, and it just didn't happen for me there.

"It didn't happen straight away either under the old manager at Newport (Michael Flynn) and I found myself on the transfer list in the summer.

"It was sink or swim really. I came in every day smiling and tried to turn things around by working hard. Since the new manager (James Rowberry) has come in, he hasn't changed anything dramatically - but my form has just clicked."

It most certainly has: Telford currently top of the League Two goal charts and in the richest form of his career.

Sticking the ball in the net is universally regarded as the hardest, and most valuable, skill in football, so what's been Telford's secret formula this season?







# GIART KILLERS

interview/words by Stephen Gillett

The magic of the FA Cup has undoubtedly faded over the past 20 years or so, but England's premier cup competition still offers clubs from further down the food chain a tantalising shot at glory.

Every lower league player dreams of humbling a top flight behemoth and joining heroes such as Ronnie Radford, lan Porterfield, Lawrie Sanchez and Mickey Thomas in the rich canon of FA Cup folklore.

For most, it remains a dream, but a select few have lived the fairytale - and in Issue Six of the Delta, we spoke with giant killers from this century, and the last, to relive the magic of a genuine cup upset.

Lennie Dennis led the line for Sutton United in their famous FA Cup win over Coventry City back in 1989, while defender Rory McArdle claimed numerous Premier League scalps during some heady days at Bradford City.

We asked both Lennie and Rory (see pages 26/27) to talk us through their famous exploits...

Lennie Dennis | Striker Sutton United 2-1 Coventry City 7 January 1989, FA Cup Third Round

#### THE BUILD UP

We played Aylesbury in Round Two, and won I-O, and I scored. I was on a roll back then, scoring a lot of goals. We had such a good team that was creating a lot of chances for me.

After we beat Aylesbury, we watched the draw in the bar. I was just buzzing that we were in the Third Round and I didn't care who we got, I just wanted us to be at home, as I knew we'd have a good chance there.

When Coventry came out, my first thought was about meeting Cyrille Regis because he was the main reason



I wanted to do well in football. He was my role model and hero, and I was so excited.

It was a lot different back then and we all had jobs. I was a technician, Tony (Rains, Sutton's captain) was in insurance, Matt (Hanlan, who scored their winner v Coventry) was a bricklayer.

We weren't really nervous beforehand. We had taken Middlesbrough to a replay in the Third Round the previous season, and really should have beaten them at home, so that gave us confidence.

We also had some really good players. My strike partner Paul McKinnon had played at Blackburn, and Paul Rogers in midfield had been the best player on the pitch in our two games against Boro.

We also had Mickey Stephens out wide. To this day, I still can't understand how he wasn't ever a professional. What a player! He wasn't the quickest, but he was the Zinedine Zidane of non-league. He always looked like he had half an hour on the ball.

The good thing about the team back then was that we got on really well. I've played in teams that are a bit clique-y, but we were a family.

The manager Barrie Williams was unbelievable, if it wasn't for him I wouldn't have enjoyed the career I did. He helped develop me and I actually earned an international cap for Jamaica that season.

Before the game we didn't prepare any differently apart from doing a training session for the TV.

On the morning of the game, we went to the Rec next to the ground to practise set-pieces, but none of them were coming off so Barrie ended the session early! >>>







>>> The first thing I did when the Coventry players arrived was look for Cyrille Regis! I saw him in the middle of the pitch with all their players and I wondered whether I should go over and tell him he was my boyhood hero. I didn't want him to think I was in awe of him, though, so I blanked them. I'll always remember Tony, the captain, saying 'Let's go', as we walked into the changing room.

I also remember Steve Sedgeley (Coventry midfielder) walking across the pitch and calling out 'This place is a sh\*thole'. We just looked at each other and thought 'They don't fancy this at all'.

#### THE GAME

Soon after kick-off, I got clattered by their beast of a defender Brian Kilcline, but Coventry didn't impose themselves on us in the early stages. They looked quite nervous and we were knocking it around and playing some good football. We weren't cloggers, but we also didn't give them any time on the ball.

Before we took the lead, I actually had a half chance to score. We had a header palmed out and I tried to get to the loose ball, but it just ran out of play and I was only able to leather it into a greenhouse outside the ground!

From the corner, we scored. Mickey (Stephens) knocked in a lovely corner, Nigel (Golley) flicked it on and Tony (Rains) scored with a powerful header. It was a good goal straight off the training ground.

At half-time, Barrie said he was really proud and that we were deservedly winning. He told us to keep our heads up even if they scored, and we were confident. We were more than matching what would nowadays be a Premier League team.

Early in the second-half, they scored through (Dave) Phillips - who with Mickey Bennett was one of the only Coventry players who looked up for it - but our heads didn't go down. We expected them to kick on and find another gear, but they didn't. David Speedie seemed too busy trying to get into a battle with

Nigel. Speedie wasn't as fast as he had been at Chelsea, so he was trying to impose himself. Nigel<sup>2</sup> who we called 'Mad Dog' - loved the physical side of the game though (he wore a gumshield!), so Speedie played right into his hands.

Within ten minutes of their equaliser, we scored the winner from another corner. This time, we worked it short, me and Vernon (Pratt) ran across the goalie and Matty (Hanlan) knocked it home from inside the six yard box. I was actually really happy for Matt, as he'd been getting quite a bit of stick from fans in games leading up to the Coventry one.

The last 15 minutes were a bit of an onslaught. Cyrille Regis nearly scored - his shot hit our keeper Trevor on the shoulder and then hit the post - and then our big escape came when Kilcline looped a header onto the bar.

Jonesy (Robyn Jones) then somehow headed it back onto our bar and then Sedgeley swiped at it and hit the post. When we looked at their players after that, they looked beaten, like they felt they just weren't going to score.

When the whistle went, everyone went crazy. We were all a bit in disbelief, looking at each other thinking 'That's not right is it? We've actually won!'

All the fans were on the pitch, but I was looking around for Cyrille Regis. The Coventry players had all run off to the changing rooms, though, so I never did get to shake his hand - it wasn't really the right time to go and introduce myself with their manager screaming his head off at them!

#### THE AFTERMATH

(Sutton lost 8-O to Norwich in the Fourth Road)

Our hopes were high going into the game, but Norwich didn't get the memo!

To this day, I haven't watched that game. I remember that Paul Rogers had a good game, but as a team we were awful.

The ironic thing was that before the match, Barrie had been telling us how good their centre forward Robert Rosario was.

When we found out Rosario was injured, we thought we had a good chance...but then his replacement Malcolm Allen came in and scored four goals!

#### "I ALSO REMEMBER STEVE SEDGELEY WALKING ACROSS THE PITCH AND CALLING OUT 'THIS PLACE IS A SH\*THOLE"

Afterwards, in the changing room Barrie joked that maybe it would have been better if Rosario had played.

It was an unbelievable experience, though. The Norwich fans cheered us onto the pitch and their players gave us a guard of honour.

Norwich were another level. They were a little nervy at the start, but once they took the lead after about 15 minutes they were very good. I remember thinking 'So, this is what Premier League level is like'.

Looking back now, I am so proud just to be attached to Sutton during that time. If someone asks me who is my favourite club out of those I played for, it's always Sutton. I just feel lucky that I joined them at that time. I'm still in touch with Robyn Jones, Rainsy and Mickey Stephens and also in contact with a lot of Sutton supporters too.

It's so good to see them in League Two now. Everything is so different from our day, so professional. The players all look like proper athletes, while - back in our day - we were all shapes and sizes!

#### MORE GIANT KILLING ON PAGE 26







## **MAKING FRIENDS**

Interview/words by Richard Cole

The inaugural edition of the Fenix Trophy kicked off in September 2021, a continental competition that is non-professional football's answer to the commerciality of the Champions League.
The tournament is a vibrant mix of historic and modern clubs that represent different approaches to football.

Perhaps the most famous club involved is FC United of Manchester, who play in the Northern Premier League – the seventh tier of the football pyramid. The Manchester club has felt a buzz from the idea of 'European aways' and midweek games under the lights.

On the announcement regarding the club's participation, manager Neil Reynolds said: "my excitement levels have gone through the roof and I know this will be an experience of a lifetime for all involved. It will be tremendous to see the FC fans in Europe..."

That's exactly what the tournament is about: fans, clubs, and players from across the continent getting together in the spirit of friendship instead of the ultra-competitive, big-money nature of UEFA's competitions.

FC United are playing in a group of four with Brera Calcio of Milan in Italy's seventh tier, AKS ZŁY from Poland's seventh tier, and former Dutch champions AFC DWS of Amsterdam, who are in their country's sixth tier. As of now, FC United currently top the group having won their first two games.

The two teams that qualify from that group after home and away fixtures will face one of the teams from the other group that includes Italian sixth-tier club Lodigiani Calcio 1972 - a team born from AS Lodigiani, which produced the likes of Francesco Totti. As well as Prague Raptors, a team made up of expats in the Czech capital that play in the seventh tier: the fan-owned club of Germany's seventh tier, HFC Falke of Hambura: and CD Cuenca-Mestallistes, who are the oldest amateur club in Spain (currently in the seventh tier).

With a global pandemic to deal with, it might seem like the worst possible time to create an international football tournament, but the newly-created Fenix Trophy looks to propose a positive alternative to UEFA and the European Super League. The Mighty Delta talked with one of the tournament's founders, Leonardo Aleotti, about where such a radical idea came from.

Leonardo is the club manager of Brera Calcio, a team established in 2000 that has donned the mantle of 'the third Milan team'. As a club, Brera have been involved in several positive initiatives in the past. Back in 2008, Brera let fans manage the team, supporters could go online and select a defender, midfielder, and forward they wanted to see on the team sheet. Another project saw the club establish a team called FreeOpera Brera made up of detainees from Opera prison a few miles south of the city.

"Due to the lockdowns, we hadn't been playing for two years basically. We would think up projects... So we said, 'OK, what's missing to be like AC Milan and Inter Milan?' We figured out it was European football.

"Of course, we couldn't pick clubs on a table basis because we wouldn't be in it and there's already a competition based on that – it should be about something else. We started looking at non-professional clubs all over Europe."

There's a lot of overlap in the broader visions of the teams chosen - they embrace a football club's role in its community and how it can be a force for positive social change. The Fenix Trophy also aims to bring people together.

"For example, Bayern Munich go to Barcelona, the players fly in, get on the pitch, and then fly out. The only contact they have with the other team is that 90 minutes and they're not always particularly friendly. There's no kind of community building, and of course, nothing with the fans. In professional football. it's normal

MAKING FRIENDS

NOT MILLIONAIRES

## NOT MILLIONAIRES

 they're doing their job, it's not something they're doing for fun. In non-professional football it's fun, it's not something players should approach as a job.

"For some of the players, it might be the first and only time they travel abroad to play a game. That gives them the feeling of being a professional player, they're going to another country, to the pitch in the evening. And you want to take advantage of it all, not just a game and then you go to bed. We really want to have an experience that is long-lasting in everyone's memory for the fans, players, and managers of both clubs."

The 'Fenix' in Fenix Trophy is also an acronym for the overarching vision of the competition. Friendly, European, Non-Professional, Innovative, and Xenial – a word that derives from Ancient Greek that describes the hospitality between host and guest, especially from different cultures.

Leonardo explains what they mean by Xenial, "the hosting club is accepting this small community, the travelling club brings about 22-25 people. It's something that should be done in a careful way. When we organised this competition, we wanted to have communities together."

The logistics are split between the two teams. The travelling teams organise their own transport there and back. They're then picked up from the airport or train station by

their opponents, who also arrange a hotel for them. After the game, the home team organises the dinner. It's a moment in which the tension of the game is forgotten and both teams can relax. There's even time for some sightseeing, the day after Brera played in Poland one of the members of AKS ZŁY's staff took the entire team on a tour of the city.

"This is exactly how it should be, the main sentiment is the friendship between the clubs. We want to give a positive attitude, it needs to carry a positive message in general."

The Fenix Trophy isn't an anti-Champions League though, it's a vision of how football can be.

"We should create our own way – not do what they do. They're in a different environment to us, they have literally billions... Football is based on something that is pure and genuine."

Of course, COVID-19 has been a big problem and by the time the tournament was being planned playing non-professional football was out of the question. The games have been organised to primarily run in the warmer months and avoid any future issues.

"It didn't work perfectly...we still have some leftover games that we didn't play. But with all the COVID passes, it's really easy to travel. It turns out it's easier than we thought. Right now, we can go pretty much everywhere, We're almost on time

with the schedule until the finals in June...

"It would have been easier to start in August, but because the players aren't professionals they might not be back from their holidays."

The final will be played in Rimini, a small seaside city on Italy's Adriatic coast not far from San Marino. It's a place known for its beaches and for being the birthplace of Federico Fellini.

"In the beginning, we thought to play the finals home and away. Then we figured out it's not a great idea economically and that's it's nicer to get everyone together on the final weekend and have a bit of a celebration.

We want it to be the main event that weekend; in Milan you have tonnes of events every weekend. The same for all the other club's cities, so we needed to find a small, medium-sized town that's nice – Rimini's on the seaside – where we'd be the centre of attention."

So, after the final in Rimini what will happen next for the Fenix Trophy? Leonardo feels that expanding the movement is more of a priority than the tournament itself, "the Fenix Trophy should be the crown jewel of the movement, but it should stand for all the positive messages of nonprofessional football."



#### by Edward Walker (@TheMatchdayMan) The Premier League is home to some of the world's most famous football teams and iconic stadiums. The likes of Old Trafford, Anfield and Stamford Bridge are football grounds that many fans journey from afar to visit. Take a step or two down the ladder, though, and there are a host of other fantastic stadiums to discover. They may not have the prestige of some of their top flight counterparts, but they've plenty to commend them; whether it be their practical designs or the cracking atmospheres they generate. The next destination on our EFL road trip is...Luton! Luton Town Perhaps the best word to and the Luton-Dunstable it is not fully covered by the describe Kenilworth Road to Busway passing by to the roof overhead. The opposite a visitor would be infamous, south on lower ground. side of the ground in contrast consists entirely of executive though its regulars will certainly tell you otherwise. The whole football ground boxes and making use of the has a feel of how things once narrow path right outside the The home of Luton Town were for many professional stand and between houses is since 1905, Kenilworth Road clubs up and down the something that has become has admittedly gained a country. Supporting pillars a rarity in the upper levels of

are present regularly and that

can leave the view restricted

in places for all but those

Stand does make use of

right at the very front. The

lower enclosure of the Main

backless benches and part of

English stadia.

Kenilworth Road's defining

feature, for away supporters

at least, is its Oak Road End.

With terraced houses located

right in front of the stand,



reputation among away

supporters for its outdated

look and design. The 10,356

capacity stadium is tightly

packed into the residential area surrounding it, and in

turn has both Hatters Way





MIGHTY DELTA **ALEX LAWES PRESENTS** 30¢ JAN 2022 **EUROPE'S** 

#### THE COVERAGE OF THE PREMIER LEAGUE HAS ALWAYS BEEN HYPERBOLIC TO THE POINT OF TEDIUM AND YET, PARADOXICALLY, INFURIATION.

Nauseatingly punchy and positive appraisals of moments and matches that can be seen across the world have often been greeted with the 'best league in the world' tag by those that stand to financially benefit from commercial success.

A sanitised 'product' created for the consumer rather than the supporter or the spectator has played a part in creating a disconnect between the truth and the marketing slogans – as well as a disconnect between the working classes and their beloved sport.

And yet, despite years of wasting money in idiocy and gimmicks, the Premier League and its clubs have sharpened up, got smart and are now becoming a behemoth overshadowing the rest of club football.

The Premier League is now the best, the biggest and the greatest club competition in the world...but that's not necessarily a good thing.

## EUROPE BEING CONQUERED

Chelsea won an all-English UEFA Champions League final in May, defeating Manchester City by a goal to nil in Porto. It was the second all-English final in three seasons after Liverpool defeated Tottenham Hotspur by two goals to nil.

A remarkable and unique point about the all-English finals was the fact it was four different teams. Spain have had a couple of all-Spanish finals in the last decade but those featured the same teams in both occasions: Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid.

In 2018, England hadn't had a UEFA Champions League finalist in six years. Since then, however, five of the eight finalists have been English.

Between 2013 and 2016, English football didn't have a single UEFA Europa League finalist, but now they have had finalists in six straight seasons.

2019 was all-English in the UCL and the UEL finals. And if Arsenal had defeated eventual champions Villarreal last season, there would have been another all-English UEL final, alongside the Chelsea-Manchester City UCL final.

This success can be dismissed as similar to that of the late noughties and early-2010s and, therefore, not necessarily relevant to the notion and argument that English football is getting to a stage where dominance of European football is a simple formality due to its resources.

The difference with the noughties and this recent era of relative dominance would be the 'way' in which sides are reaching success. In the 2000s and 2010s, English sides relied on huge moments. There was something epic and story-like about the way in which Chelsea won on penalties in 2012 and Liverpool's famous Anfield nights in 2005 and 2007 are emblematic of 'something else'.

There was an open goal, too, with European football suffering a lull. Bayern Munich were mis-managed and losing the Bundesliga title on a few occasions, Italian football was recovering from the Calciopoli scandal, and in Spain, Barca were







# "THE DIFFERENCE WITH THE NOUGHTIES AND THIS RECENT ERA OF RELATIVE DOMINANCE WOULD BE THE 'WAY' IN WHICH SIDES ARE REACHING SUCCESS"

in transition whilst Madrid were replacing one failing Galacticos project with another. Consequently, pragmatic and defensive managers such as Rafa Benitez and Jose Mourinho took advantage of the chaos, alongside the stability and experience that Sir Alex Ferguson and Arsene Wenger offered.

There was a sense that English football had stood still and triumphed, whilst the rest of Europe regressed.

The seminal shift came when English clubs appointed the best managers in the game. Pep Guardiola, Jurgen Klopp, Mauricio Pochettino, Thomas Tuchel. The current landscape of football tactics was moulded and modernised by those men – the same four men who have managed England's UEFA Champions League finalists since 2018.

This time, English football has moved forward whilst the rest of Europe has stood still and, in some instances, once again gone backwards.

No doubt, football is cyclical. Things, in the future, will continue to change and evolve. The issue this time, though, is it appears to be right at the very beginning of a potentially long and daunting cycle.

## ASTRONOMICAL SPENDING SPREES

Last summer, English clubs spent well over a billion pounds in the transfer window for the sixth successive season. No other league in the world is yet to come close to spending nine figures on transfers – especially last summer

It is estimated that the Premier League spent over £1.15 billion in the summer of 2021 – this with the effects of a global pandemic and squeezed transfer market. It has previously been up towards £1.4 billion and above.

In contrast, there was a tightening of belts in Europe's four other highest ranked leagues. Belts that were already extremely tight in comparison to the Premier League. The Bundesliga dropped short of £400 million, La Liga spent below £300 million, Ligue I spend around £330 million, whilst Serie A were short of £500 million.

This isn't a one-off. This is a recurrent theme over the past few years and it is causing what could be a potentially irreparable imbalance in European football.

In the summer of 2021, despite football club owners – particularly in England – pleading poverty due to the pandemic, two of the top seven most expensive transfers of all time took place in the Premier League. Jack Grealish became the first £IOO million footballer to transfer to an English club whilst Romelu Lukaku joined Chelsea for a reported £97.5 million.

Of the top 25 transfers in history, ten of them are English clubs. That isn't necessarily a dominant amount. Of the top 50, though, 24 are arrivals in





England. There are six English clubs that feature in the top 50, alongside one Chinese, two French, three Italian, three Spanish and one German.

#### TRICKLING DOWN

That level of depth in spending is not just replicated across England's so-called 'big six' but it is also represented lower down the league and even into the second division.

There are three clubs in the Championship that have spent well over £100 million in transfer fees on their current squad. This is not just a new thing across Europe, but a major change in English football, due to the revenue from the Championship's TV deal.

For example, when Bolton Wanderers were relegated from the Premier League in 2012, their starting XI on the final day of the season cost them around £10.5 million. Bolton are a useful case study because the Trotters were considered relatively lavish spenders given their means and resources, and financial issues did hit extremely badly in the mid-to-late 2010s.

There were lots of reasons why Bolton entered a downward spiral that saw them, until this season, competing down in League Two. Most have nothing to do with their Premier League spending, but undoubtedly the hangover from that era did linger and have an impact. The Trotters perhaps offer the worst example of that epoch of spending and how clubs could hit the wall without Premier League revenue and status.

In contrast, last season's 18th placed side, Fulham, had a final day starting XI that cost just short of £60 million (which ironically contained Tim Ream who also featured in Bolton's relegated 'Class of 2012').

The financial might in the Premier League, regardless of the status of club or length of time spent in the top-flight, has dramatically inflated to a point whereby clubs like Crystal Palace have more margin in their budget than Barcelona.

The ESL (European Super League) was lambasted by supporters throughout the country and the continent. It was a narcissistic and blatant attempted coup upon a sport founded upon diametrically opposed principles.

However, it would be naïve to believe that it came from nowhere and its banishment came without a price; there is a reason the six English clubs were the first to walk away – and it wasn't out of respect for the traditions of the sport, just fear for their investment and brand.

The ESL in its European Super League format may have faded away, for now, but the English Super League is only just beginning... will it hold true to the principles that saw the proposed summer breakaway collapse?

"IT WOULD
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## FOOTY

Snacks are an important part of the matchday experience and while sometimes they're brilliant, other times they're not fit for dogs to eat. Footy Scran is a Twitter account dedicated to showcasing the culinary delights and abominations submitted by fans from the UK and beyond.

Footy Scran now has over IOO,OOO followers from around the world, so The Mighty Delta talked with Tom Sibley – the man behind the account – to find out how the idea came about and to highlight his own favourite football fodder.

#### TMD: What gave you the idea to start the page?

FS: The account was created after I saw the Merthyr Town chips, sausages and curry sauce in a cob (see page 25). I initially saw photos of it and it popped into my head that there must be some other ridiculous food creations at other football grounds too. So, I started to do my research and quickly found out there is so much good scran at different football grounds and that I should be the one to showcase it.

#### TMD: Did you expect to get so many followers so quickly?

FS: I didn't expect to get this many followers at all. I actually started Footy Scran at the start

## SCRAN

of the first lockdown and it reached around 3,000 followers in 2 months but due to there being no sporting events the content ran dry and I deleted the account.

Once football started again the idea came to mind to start the account again and it blew up massively, which really wasn't expected – we've now just hit IOO,OOO followers within two months.

#### TMD: What's your personal best/worst food experience at a ground?

FS: Funnily enough, my experiences with food at football aren't great as I support a Premier League club and the food on offer at the majority of grounds is boring, bland and overpriced.

I do once remember Nottingham Forest a few years ago, where the only thing they had in the away end was sausage rolls. Great variety.

### TMD: What's best at a game: cheap food that's 'alright' or something more expensive that's actually good?

F5: I think that's totally down to the consumer. It varies from person to person regarding their needs, you might get some people who are happy spending more for good quality food as it's part of the whole matchday experience for them whereas others may be happy with a rock hard pie or cold burger after five or six pints, haha.

For me though, I'm happy paying that bit extra to ensure the quality especially if it's something unique to a club or not served anywhere else.

#### TMD: What food would you prefer to see being served at a game?

F5: Personally, I always go with a burger because (even though many clubs seem to mess it up) it's hard to get wrong. Bun, two beef patties and a few cheese slices, it really does the job.



#### FOOTY SCRAN'S TOP 3

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## MERTHYR TOWN 1 × CHIPS, SAUSAGES AND CURRY SAUCE IN A COB

This is really what started Footy Scran so I have a lot to thank for it, it's so unique and different to anything else and looks great, I really need to try it as the reviews are good and it seems a fan favourite.

#### BIRMINGHAM CITY 1 × CHEESY CHIPS

I loved this post just for how awful it was. The chips looked undercooked and they've just put a cold cheese slice on top, it's not even melted. It's genuinely mind blowing they thought they'd get away with it.

#### LEICESTER CITY 1 × SAUSAGE ROLL

Finally this is one of my favourite posts for obvious reasons. It's an absolute treat, a giant sausage roll filled with red Leicester cheese. It's taking two amazing things and putting them together and then selling it down the football. There's not much more anyone could want.

#### FIND THE BILL AT @FootyScran

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## GIANT

Interview/words by Richard Cole

Harrogate Town defender Rory McArdle was part of the Bradford City team that made a habit of humbling Premier League teams on a regular basis in cup competitions; the defender part of Bantams sides that conquered Chelsea, Arsenal, Aston Villa, Sunderland, and Wigan Athletic. The Mighty Delta talked with the experienced 34-year-old about his serial 'giant-killings'.

"You see the draw and obviously you think 'brilliant' and then you start thinking about it as the game's coming closer. You know it's going to be a tough game. When you get those kinds of ties all you're probably thinking is you don't want to concede too many, you want to make a game of it. In recent ties where teams have put eight, nine past teams...you just don't want to be on the end of that.

"We were lucky in a way that we had some good draws. Obviously, being at home and at the time the pitch wasn't great. We knew how to manage that and especially when the FA Cup starts it's normally about November time, December time, so with the cold weather...I remember for a few of the games the pitch was probably borderline, in terms of whether they should even be played. But we knew those sorts of things were going to add up in our favour."

Rory has fond memories of the day leading up to the giant-killings. It's a total change of scenery for players who don't always get to experience the glitz and glam of the Premier League.

"With Chelsea, the place itself was lovely, the hotel was great. On the morning of the game I remember we went for a walk, as we always do on away games, I think we stayed in Kensington. It's a lovely area, just looking around – some of the houses you see, the cars that are parked on the street, which you would generally see in a garage not just parked on the street. Just all the little things that you don't usually see.

"It does sound a bit daft, but you do notice those things, it's all part of it, and it was important that everyone enjoyed it. I think there were probably a few nerves there and anxiety to get the game started. Once we got to the ground the preparation was still the same as every other game and we had our own game plan."

Before Bradford City played Chelsea at Stamford Bridge in 2015, they had already got to the final of the League Cup as a fourth-tier team in 2013, when some of their scalps included Championship side Watford and Premier League sides Wigan Athletic (who went on to lift the FA Cup that season), Arsenal, and Aston Villa.

Of course, they couldn't keep that run going for the final, but did all that experience help Bradford against Chelsea?

"If only it was that easy. There were probably a few players left who were a part of those League Cup games, and the experiences we had in those games probably did help us at the time.

"I think whatever you do, you try and stay in the game as long as possible and as everybody knows in a one-off game in the cup anything can happen. You've got to have a bit of luck on your side, and we probably had at times, but you watch the game back there are times when we're well in the game, we're on top, we're comfortable... we're away at Chelsea at a time when they were top of the league, I don't think they'd been beaten at home for a while. So at times we probably did ride our luck, but equally, you don't really fluke a full 90 minutes away with a victory like that."







"I remember it being 2-O and thinking here we go, this is going to be backs to the wall – stay in it until half-time and at least we can try to gather our thoughts and regroup. But then came Steady's goal [Jon Stead] right on half-time.

"That's what we were hoping for. If we could just nick one and get back in it at half-time, just calm ourselves down, gather everyone's thoughts again, and have a chat about everything. Fortunately, that's what happened."

Indeed, Bradford scored three more goals without reply in the second half to record a famous 4-2 victory at Stamford Bridge. It was one of only four home defeats all season for the team that would win the Premier League that year. Looking back at the Chelsea team that day, there were a lot of star names.

"Salah played. He started, he went off. Oscar, Drogba, Azpilicueta, and then Hazard and Willian came on I think off the top of my head.

"That was one of the things I said to Darbs [Stephen Darby] who was playing right-back. They were making a change and I was like 'oh, we're alright now, they're making a sub' and then we looked over and that's when Hazard came on and played on his side and I just started laughing at him."

However, Bradford scored twice more after Hazard came on as a substitute to seal a famous victory – cue the celebrations.

"The celebrations after the Chelsea game were brilliant. I think the fact that we'd come from 2-O down, that the scoreline was what it was, and there were about 6,000 Bradford



room, I don't think I've ever seen anything like it to be honest. You can imagine, it was literally like click of a finger, no one's jumping around anymore.

"He shook everyone's hand, said well done to everybody, which I thought was great, he didn't have to do that, I'm sure he was disappointed with the outcome. That will always stick out to me, how you can go from being on such a high to being so respectful. With such a big group, it showed how big of an influence he has on everyone in football."

Unfortunately, Bradford couldn't recreate the amazing cup run of 2013 – it's something that happens very rarely. The Bantams, who were in League One at that point, lost 3-0 to Championship side Reading in the next round. But it's not uncommon for teams

massive and everyone feels great. More often than not when you do get Premier League teams or Championship teams against lower teams they generally come out on top. And it is disappointing because you want to be that team on Match of the Day on Saturday night that has caused that big upset.

"And on that Chelsea game, I think Middlesbrough beat Man City the same day as well. So all the headlines were of our game, their fans were probably not happy with that but there were two massive giant killings that day.

"That's what's great about the cup games. You get some players, managers that try and disrespect it a little bit. But from my personal experiences and players who play at a lower level of

## "WE LOOKED OVER AND THAT'S WHEN HAZARD CAME ON AND PLAYED ON HIS SIDE AND I JUST STARTED LAUGHING AT HIM"

fans behind the goal [added to it]. I don't think anyone could believe what had happened to be honest. The dressing room after was bouncing, as I'm sure everyone can picture it.

"The main thing that stands out in that game is that Mourinho came into the dressing room afterwards. And it was like when you're at school and the headteacher walks in, everyone stopped celebrating – there wasn't a word spoken. The aura he had in the dressing

who have beaten bigger opposition to understandably fail to repeat the achievement again.

"Enjoy it while you can, basically. You see some of the scores in the cup, how different they can be....It's back to reality really. I think it shows how good and how rare the big upsets are. Because when they do happen the occasion's

league football, when you do have those games to get that opportunity, it's massive. It's not something that happens week in, week out to us.

"So if that was to be taken away or they try and nullify it a little bit just to give the higher league clubs that bit more of an advantage, I think it'd be a bit poor. So, fingers crossed the magic of the cup stays as it is."





# TEVENS

Interview by Stephen Gillett

Each issue, Playmaker asks a seasoned pro to pick a '7-a-side' team packed with personality. The only proviso is that they have to have played alongside the wondrous seven at some point in their careers.

Throughout 2021, NO player was involved in more EFL goals than Forest Green's **Jamille Matt** (21 goals and 9 assists in League Two!) and we were delighted to invite the in-form forward to get his thinking cap on for Delta Six.

#### The Bromance Agron Collins

I've always had lots of friends in football, but not had an out-and-out bromance yet! I got on really well on-and-off the pitch with Aaron Collins at Forest Green last season, though, before he moved to Bristol Rovers.

We car shared and were in the same training group when the squad was split because of Covid. We actually started doing pranks on the other groups, which was a laugh: cars got cling-filmed and shoes were going AWOL.

We also struck up a natural understanding on the pitch.

#### The Visionary

#### **Carl Winchester**

There's only one player for this one, and the clue's in his nickname 'Winniesta'!

Carl Winchester was literally the heart and soul of the team at Forest Green last season and he's one of those who can play anywhere: stick him at centre-back and he'll just slot in and still be one of the best players on the park.

He dictated the tempo of games for us in midfield, with and without the ball, and was fantastic at receiving the ball under pressure in tight spaces. He thoroughly earned his move to Sunderland in the summer, and deserves to be playing at a higher level.







#### The Penalty Specialist

Graham Alexander

Although I never actually played with him, I'd have to say my old boss at Fleetwood, Graham Alexander, was the best penalty taker I've ever seen. He obviously had an incredible record from the spot as a player (Ed: he scored 77 penalties with a success rate of over 90%), and when we were practising them in training he'd come over and tell us what we were doing wrong!

He had incredible technique and his accuracy was frightening. He could take them with the inside and outside of his foot, and was able to tuck them into the bottom corner or top bins.

Curtis Nelson

Mark Roberts, my captain at Fleetwood, was a fantastic leader, but I'd have to say Curtis Nelson stood out during my short time at Plymouth. When I joined them on loan, he had already been club captain for a year or two. Even though he was only 23/24 at the time, I could see exactly why he had the armband after just two days of training with him.

Curtis was the first in to training and the last out, he had time for everyone and set really high standards. He'd have a laugh with all the players and staff, but also knew when to be serious and focus, which is a difficult balance to strike. He'd drag the team with him in games by picking the ball up deep and driving forward with it - he really led by example.

The lechnician Graham Carey

When I arrived at Plymouth, I hadn't heard too much about Graham, but he was an outstanding player. I always thought he was best as a creative number IO, and some of the goals he scored and the assists he made were outrageous.

If he was on your side in training, you were on to a winner. He was so

intelligent with a wonderful left foot and great technique. I moved on to Blackpool and will always remember him scoring a goal against us where the ball dropped over his shoulder out wide and he just buried it in the top corner.

He left Plymouth to join CSKA Sofia in the end, but I'd have loved to have seen him in the Championship. I should mention Forest Green defender Kane Wilson quickly, as he's ridiculous at nutmegging players. All the best if you're IVI against him!

#### The Underrated Ben Stevenson

Ben's one of the nicest, quietest lads you could ever meet. He comes in and does his work every day with zero fuss, but he's played every game so far this season and been very important for us.

He hasn't got the goals and assist stats that some other midfielders have, so he may go under the radar in terms of headlines. He's got so much in his locker, though. He's technically good, strong in the air and does a bit of everything. He's also good for a one liner; he doesn't say too much, but when he does it's normally funny!

#### The Galactico

#### **Bright Osayi-Samuel**

I always remember doing running drills with Bright, back in the days when I was quicker than I am now, and he'd fly out in front.

I'd bust a gut to catch him and then kick to overtake him... but he'd immediately open up and go three or four yards ahead of me again! It was really impressive, as well as seriously annoying!

Although he had the skill to match his speed, Bright had areas of his game to polish at Blackpool, which he has done at QPR and now at Fenerbahce. He has always been one to stay late at training to improve his game and I believe he is destined to play in the Premier League.





## MASTERCLASS

Fans love to chew the cud on how the beautiful game should be played, but it's time to find out what the pros think... For Delta Six, we spoke to

Gillingham's Vadaine Oliver reaardina modern day taraet men. aerial duels versus Virail Van Diik and whether the art of heading has a future in football...

#### Were you always a centre forward?

No. I started as a striker at Sheffield Wednesday. but I went into central midfield, and then had a spell as a defender. When I was about 16, I went back up front and I didn't look back.

#### What did you learn from your time as a defender that you can now exploit?

It is hard to defend good movement, and I found it a nightmare to play against nippy forwards who were constantly on the move.

Earlier in my career, I'd charge into the box and wait at the back post shouting 'Hang it back stick!', but I've learned that - being so good in the air - it's a waste if I arrive too early.

#### Which strikers were your childhood heroes?

Brazilian Ronaldo and Thierry Henry were my two idols. I loved Didier Drogba as well.

I like to watch strikers who are a bit more like me in style; the big, powerful strikers like Drogba and Zlatan.

Funnily enough, I watched a clip of Henry before the Sheffield Wednesday match I recently scored in, and he spoke about making keepers 'freeze' in I v Is. He said keepers would stop as soon as strikers looked at them.

I was like "Flipping heck!" and then obviously in the Wednesday game, I went through I v I, looked up, everything slowed down and I picked my corner!

#### Which coaches have influenced you the most? Colin West, Keith Curle and Ned Kelly improved

me massively during my time at Northampton. Mentally, in terms of focusing on my role, and how to get the best out of myself.

The gaffer (Steve Evans) has topped that up and given me tips. He tells me "Don't stop moving and you'll be a nightmare" and he's right: as soon as you stop moving, you're easy to defend.

#### Is the target man still an important part of the game?

Yes, although the game has changed. You don't see many forwards nowadays rooted to the spot for teams to play into. Big lumps primarily there to ruffle a few feathers.

During my time at places like Morecambe, my coaches did want me to do that...but if you only class yourself as a 'target man', you jeopardise your chances of scoring goals.

For Gillingham, I'd class myself now as a centreforward. I am the focus for our attacking play, but also score goals and provide for others.

The game is moving on and the modern centreforward has to run, close down, score goals, provide assists - you don't see one trick ponies anvmore.

#### Do you prefer playing against two centre-backs in a back four, or three centre-backs in a five?

It's always better playing against a two, although it depends obviously how your team is set up. Against a three, there's always that extra man as cover.

You can isolate one of a back three and get some joy out wide, but I want to be in central areas to score goals.

#### You top the stats across the top four divisions for aerials won...what's your secret?

I've always had a leap. but it's all about timina and hanging in the air without those you may win a few headers, but you can't be dominant.



#### How do opponents try to combat your aerial strength?

This season, we've noticed a lot of teams setting up differently against us.

Defensive midfielders will stand in my path; full-backs will mark me to allow their centre-half to attack the ball. Sometimes I'll have three players on me...! That's three players out of the game, but it requires us to adapt what we do.

It's part of the thrill. For me, teams changing the way they play against us is a compliment.

#### How do you defeat a block?

Knowing it's coming helps, but the big thing is to get referees onside, and make sure they notice. There is only so much you can do.

Nowadays, it's not even one block, it's two...a full-back and a defensive midfielder before you can even challenge the centre-half.

Your starting point is important. For goals kicks, I will always start deeper than everyone, in an offside position, and then I'll leap earlier and hang there to win the first flick.

### How important is goalkeeper distribution? Who have been the best keepers you've played with on the deck?

It's huge. If he's struggling to make the halfway line with goal kicks, or shanking the ball everywhere and making it difficult to read, it makes my job harder.

If a keeper's bang on, I'll get him to stick it on the centre-back's head every time - and then go and leap over him! I'll win 99% of my headers that way.

In terms of the best I've played with, I'd say David Cornell at Northampton, who is now at Peterborough. His kicking was a joke; I could have held a 50p in my hands and he'd kick it out.

#### How important are good set-piece routines?

At Northampton, set-pieces were Keith Curle's thing. Every Friday we'd practise them and then every weekend we'd score from one.

We had Nicky Adams on them, who was one of the best crossers of a ball I've ever played with, and players like Charlie Goode, Jordan Turnbull and Scott Wharton - centre-backs who all scored five or more league goals.

Set-plays were a huge weapon for us and a big part of why we got promoted from League Two (in 2019/20).



#### Who's been the most aerially dominant centrehalf you've played against?

There's only one that sticks out.

Nine out of IO times, I know I'm going to have the beating of whoever I'm up against, but Virgil Van Dijk was another level.

I played him in a behind-closed-doors game for Crewe against Celtic.

I'd never heard of him before, but aside from Adebayo Akinfenwa, he was one of the strongest guys I've ever faced. He was a monster, really strong and quick.

He had more than that, though. I went to press him at one stage just inside our half; he'd got the ball out of his feet and I was pressing him from behind. I've no idea what possessed him, but he just smacked it from there and I've never seen a ball struck so true in my entire life - from there it went dead straight and smashed against our crossbar! I genuinely couldn't believe it.

It wasn't long after that he went to Southampton, and I said to myself 'I knew that guy would end up in the Prem!'

Do you have concerns about the emerging data regarding the harmful effects of heading? Do you think football will soon have to change? I definitely see football changing. I don't know how it will be done, but it's a matter of time.

I'm not going to change my game at this point, but I've been heading a ball since joining Sheffield Wednesday back when I was 8/9 and there is a fear it could affect you later.

I think new rules will come in soon that cut down the amount of heading, especially for kids. A lot of mini-games have an 'under head height' rule anyway, so that could be an option. Left protest

Watch No.

4-1-4-1 Weak right Press high

28hal mak





## For Delta Six's gallery of iconic moments, we recruited sports photographer Robbie Stephenson and tasked him to find his all-time favourite football snaps...

Going outside a stadium ahead of kick off is always a good idea, you just never know who or what you might stumble across. On this particular occasion it was a supporter outside The John Smith's Stadium, ahead of Huddersfield Town v Fulham, having a cheeky smoke before heading into the stadium, I was stood at the bottom of a hill leading up to a car park and used the floodlight from the stadium to silhouette the gentleman. What I love about this is if you look closely you can see the smoke leaving his mouth on what was a pretty chilly night in Yorkshire.





Fans are great, they bring the colour and the noise to football and that was exactly what the Aberdeen fans brought to Burnley for their Europa League qualifying tie at Turf Moor. The Dons fans turned out in huge number to Lancashire and I've never seen the cricket club next door be so full. It was a beautiful carnage and these two seemed to be having a great time.



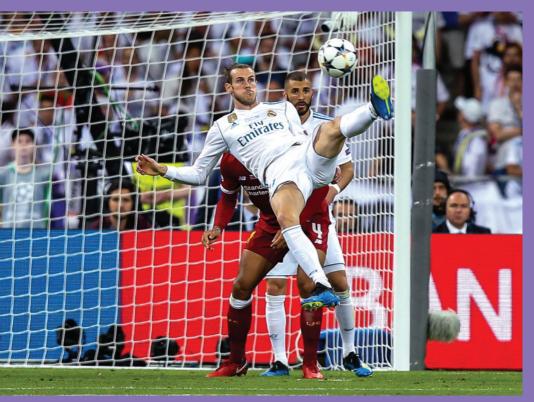


Pitch invaders aren't anything new but it's always a bit funnier when it's an animal! This black cat caused a bit of disruption during Everton v Wolves in the Premier League, doing the best part of a lap of the Goodison Park pitch before running off, much to everyone's amusement.





A lot of Sports Photography is about capturing THE moment of a game. This particular moment is one of the greatest goals ever scored in a Champions League Final. From a technical point of view this isn't maybe one of the better photographs I've taken, with a messy background and a heavy crop. But the focus on Gareth Bale's face, the shape of his body the and the ball having just left his foot destined for the back of the net all make this one of my all time favourite pictures I've ever taken.



I love a celebration in sport, if I come away from a game and not got the picture of joy after a goal has been scored I always feel a bit flat. This one is right up there as one of the best celebrations I've taken. It was the winning goal for Bristol City against Sheffield United and also the completion of Andi Weimann's hat-trick, I just love the pandemonium of the team as they don't seem to know how to react but Weimann looks like a man in full control of the situation.





Nahonjo Ishimanga

National League hotshot Kabongo Tshimanga has scored more league goals from 2018/19 (79 and counting...) than any player across the top six tiers of English football, vindicating his decision to leave MK Dons five seasons ago in search of regular game time.

Playmaker caught up with the on-fire Chesterfield frontman to discuss his form, why he chose to drop down the leagues...and how excited he is to face the European champions in January.





#### 8th January. Stamford Bridge. FA Cup Third Round. Chelsea v Chesterfield. How does that sound?

Good obviously! Before the draw was made, we'd have been happy to draw a Championship team, but we ended up with the European champions - so that'il do! It's a great chance for us as a team, and individually, to show what we can do.

#### Where were you for the draw? What was your reaction like?

I was actually at home in my flat watching the draw on my own. When the balls came out and they said Chesterfield were playing Chelsea, it took a second to sink in.

Next thing I knew, my phone was pinging with loads of people wishing me luck and asking for tickets. Chesterfield fans were on Twitter looking at the likely match-ups, and when my name came up, I was against Thiago Silva, which was weird!

## They're obviously European champions with Euro and World Cup winners in their ranks, but who are the Chelsea players you're particularly looking forward to facing?

Let's see who they play, but obviously if Lukaku plays up front then being on the same pitch as him will be a massive thing.

Everyone always talks about how good Kanté is, and a lot of the young talents like Callum Hudson-Odoi, so there are plenty really. We know whoever plays, it will be a big test for us.

#### How do you think you can potentially cause the likes of Rudiger, Christensen and Thiago Silva problems?

Although the opponent will be a different sort of test, we always do our homework before games. I'll also make sure I watch videos etc of their defenders to study their

strengths and weaknesses. In games against that sort of quality, small details can make a bia difference.

#### What did the manager say to the squad after the draw?

The following day when we came into training, we were all obviously buzzing, looking forward to the game. He knows it'll be hard, but he wants us to focus on the next game.

Being top of the table in the National League, the priority is to maintain our form and keep winning between now and the Chelsea game.

#### Would you rather face Chelsea at full strength...or would you prefer to play their second string?

I want the likes of Thiago Silva and Kanté to play. The way I look at it, I want to hopefully one day play at that level, so I want to go and test myself against the best players in the world.

To play someone like Thiago Silva - with the career he has had - will be the biggest challenge in my career so far, and it can only help me develop and give me an idea of what it takes to play at that level.

As players, we have that belief in our dressing room that we can show up and have a really good game. We'll try to take away that fear factor, give it our all, and see where that takes us.

#### Well, good luck in that one! You've scored nearly 8O league goals from 2O18/19, that's some going. What's the secret to your goal scoring form?

I'm around a very good team with quite a few players who shouldn't really be playing at this level. Having good players around you obviously makes it easier, and they have massively contributed to the number of goals I've been scoring.

We've got plenty of players who are good enough to play in the EFL, but - for one reason or another - they are currently at Chesterfield.

#### Is this the best form of your career?

Possibly, although when I was at Oxford City, and was moved from a winger to striker, I had similar numbers in terms of the goals I was scoring. This is definitely the best start to a season that I have had so far in my career, though.

#### Does scoring goals just feel easy at the moment?

No, I wouldn't say that! One thing I've realised is that the expectations of my club have changed.

During my two seasons at Boreham Wood, it always felt like a bonus to be in and around the top three in the league, whereas at Chesterfield, we have a big following home and away, and that extra expectation brings more responsibility.

Playing in front of nearly 6,000 at home for Chesterfield is a big difference, and that support has given me a really big boost to go out and perform.

## Is there a fear factor for your opponents now with you scoring so many goals?

This is my third season at this level, and I think there is an element of me gaining a reputation for my goalscoring.

I look at the players at the top: the Harry Kanes, the Agueros, Messis and Ronaldos and I see what they are doing every week and I'm trying to replicate what they do, in terms of numbers, at this level.

Why not? Why shouldn't I try and hit the same numbers at my

level? Hopefully, in the process, I will gain the confidence and self belief to allow me to do it at a higher level.

#### Have teams started to dish out any special treatment?

More so now. Actually over the past few games, I remember Solihull Moor away recently, there have been some rash tackles on me.

Having been around the level a while, there can be an element of intimidation used by some teams. I can't complain, I just need to get on with my game.

#### What's been your most memorable goal?

I love the scruffy goals, as they are the easiest! You just need to make sure you're switched on to tap those home.

I do like longer distance strikes too, though. Probably my favourite goal this season is the one I scored against Boreham Wood: particularly as some of my old team-mates were giving me some stick beforehand - it was really nice to put one away against them!

### How do you look back on your time at MK Dons, and how it ended?

I enjoyed my time at MK. I had a coach there Dan Micciche (who later became their senior manager) who developed me a lot from Under-I3 to Under-I6s.

There were a lot of ups and downs, as I wanted to play more regularly in the first team.

When I first broke into the first team, the club had just been promoted into the Championship where we had a tough time.

At the very start of my youth career we had Patrick Bamford and Benik Afobe up front, but after they left we went down a different direction, in terms

of the style of forwards we brought in - they didn't have the same impact, so I thought the manager might give me a chance.

As a young player you perhaps don't appreciate the pressure on senior players and managers to deliver results, and what it takes to do that. You just want to play.

What a lot of people don't realise is that MK did offer me a new deal, but I felt it was the right time to move on and get game time.

## Speaking of Bamford, did you see an England player in the making when he was at MK Dons?

I wouldn't have said so, as there were a lot of players around his age playing in the Championship at the time.

Having seen him progress step-by-step, doing so well in the Championship and then obviously in the Premier League, I take inspiration from how well he has done.

#### MK Dons loaned you for a spell in Iceland with Thrötter, how was that?

I went there in May thinking the weather would be ok, but it was literally freezing still! It was a good experience though.

The level was roughly equivalent to League Two I'd say, with three of the teams a cut above everyone else.

I went there with Callum Brittain (now at Barnsley), which made it more enjoyable.

#### Do you feel stepping down into the National League has made you a better player?

Absolutely. I was never given the opportunity at MK, but I have always backed my ability to score goals.

It was a big decision to move down a couple of levels, but now I am showing people what I can do and hopefully I can be back in the EFL scoring goals soon.

#### Just how competitive is the National League?

This league is so tough, and obviously what doesn't help is that only one goes up automatically.

There are a lot of big clubs, like Stockport and Wrexham, who are all competing for that one spot.

Wrexham's takeover has made it even more competitive. They have players like Paul Mullin and Ben Tozer who were some of the best in League Two last season.

Consistency is key if you are going to win this league...

#### Your former Boreham Wood team-mate Sorba Thomas is doing fantastically in the Championship with Huddersfield, is it nice to see him doing so well?

Definitely. He is a close friend of mine and I have been to watch a few of his games.

It's been a massive move for him and I don't think people understand how hard he has had to work to get where he is today - going from the National League to the Championship, and international football, he has done everyone proud.

He is showing that the gap between the leagues isn't that big, and his progress helps give myself and other young players that self belief that it is possible to stamp your authority on a higher level of football.

You were born in Cameroon, your Dad is Congolese and you've played for England C? Where do your allegiances lie? I'd have to side with the Congo. Hopefully one day I can put a shirt on for them.



## Dave Flanagar's FOOTBALL ART-A-SIDE

Flipping the age-old formula, we asked illustrator Dave Flanagan who would turn out for his ultimate football artist five-a-side team...



and, like me he's something new. His work is always fresh and has favourite pieces

<<<



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#### THE DIRECTORY

Patience is right up there when it comes to virtues and resolving to have more of it in 2022 was very noble of everyone at the Delta - but unfortunately it had already snapped by January 3rd when deadlines loomed, submissions were late and computers said "No".

Fighting off the festive flubbiness that had infiltrated our very souls, the Playmaker posse of Stevo, DanO, Ricko and Alex - (whose name stubbornly refuses an addended 'o') eventually clicked into gear and the legends at the Graphic Bomb exploded into life. Delta Six was reborn and the result is another fantastic fanzine that we're all mighty proud of.

Previous issues have had the odd advert or a glossy stat to fill a page or two, but Delta Six is packed to the rafters...and for that we'd like to thank a long list of people. Please give the following a follow:

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