

# PITCHING IN SOUTHERN LEAGUE



## SATURDAY EVENING E-NEWSPAPER

Saturday 26 April 2025

# DAY OF DESTINY

### PLAY OFF SEMI-FINALS | 30.04.2025

**Premier South:** AFC Totton v Dorchester Town |  
Walton & Hersham v Gloucester City

**Premier Central:** Kettering Town v Harborough  
Town | AFC Telford United v Halesowen Town

**Division One South:** Evesham United v  
Exmouth Town | Bishops Cleeve v Malvern Town

**Division One Central:** Berkhamsted v Hadley |  
Flackwell Heath v Barton Rovers

The final day of the regular season saw various matters settled across our four divisions.

In the Pitching In Southern League Premier South, Dorchester Town confirmed the final play-off place as they chalked up a dramatic 2-1 win at Hungerford Town in a game which saw them come from behind to snatch a stoppage time winner. They pipped Havant & Waterlooville whose 2-0 victory over Wimborne Town was not enough. The final two relegation places were taken by Swindon Supermarine, who lost 4-1 at Walton & Hersham, and Winchester City, who dropped into the bottom four after they were held at home to Taunton Town and Tiverton Town beat Marlow 3-2.

Over in the Pitching In Southern League Premier Central, Bedford Town took the title and a second successive promotion after beating Stourbridge 2-0. Congratulations to all involved!

The remaining play-off place went to Harborough Town who had an emphatic 5-1 away win at AFC Sudbury. It was a bad day for Barwell as not only did they lose 7-1 at home to Spalding United, it also confirmed their relegation alongside Biggleswade Town, Hitchin Town and Lowestoft Town.

The second title of the day still up for grabs went to Yate Town as they claimed the Pitching In Southern League Division One South crown following a hard-earned 1-0 victory over Didcot Town. Congratulations to all involved!

The remaining two play-off spots were taken by Malvern Town, who came from behind to beat Willand Rovers 4-1, and Exmouth Town, who nicked it ahead of Mousehole, thanks to a 4-0 away triumph at Larkhall Athletic. Meanwhile Mousehole draw 2-2 at Melksham Town thanks to a stoppage time leveller but it was not enough.

At the bottom, Helston Athletic had their relegation place confirmed following a 2-2 draw with Bristol Manor Farm. In the Pitching In Southern League Division One Central, Hadley had their play-off spot rubber stamped even though they lost to a stoppage time goal at Leighton Town.

The drama came at the bottom where a 3-1 come-from-behind victory by Leverstock Green at AFC Dunstable saw them escape relegation at the expense of Kings Langley, who did not play today. They are relegated alongside North Leigh and Kidlington.

All play-off semi-final games across each of our four divisions will take place on Wednesday evening.

## REPORTS FROM ALL GAMES | STATS | FEATURES



# Ever thought of volunteering to help your local football club?

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# PITCHING IN SOUTHERN LEAGUE PREMIER SOUTH

## Basingstoke Town 4 Merthyr Town 0

A big goal from Liam Ferdinand put the home side in front with 18 minutes on the clock and then George Reid doubled the lead as half-time loomed.

Reid then notched as third goal for his side with 20 minutes to go before Ferdinand rounded things off as the home side secured their status with a commanding victory over the champions.

## Frome Town 0 AFC Totton 4

The visitors took the lead when Ethan Taylor was able to beat the 'keeper in the 11th minute and just a couple of minutes later, Tom Blair doubled the lead.

Another from Taylor extended the away team's lead with less than 20 minutes played and it wasn't long before Blair claimed a second of the afternoon to make it 4-0.

## Gloucester City 2 Gosport Borough 2

The hosts wasted little time in taking the lead as Harry Burns found the net within the opening two minutes.

An own goal from Joe Morrison soon doubled the home team's advantage but the visitors were able to pull one back from Asher Yearwood with just over ten minutes to go until the break.

It was Yearwood who levelled things up as the clock ticked down in the second period as honours ended even.

## Hanwell Town 2 Plymouth Parkway 1

The visitors went ahead just before the half-hour mark when Liam Oakes got the final touch.

A well-taken leveller arrived on 65 minutes as Dan Carr drove home and then Joe Wilson applied a neat finish to give the hosts a 2-1 win.

## Havant & Waterlooville 2 Wimborne Town 0

As has been a regular occurrence all season, Ryan Seager got his name on the scoresheet with the opening goal on the quarter-hour mark.

Seager then weighed in with a second just past the half-hour mark to put his side in command and they were able to see the victory out but it just wasn't enough to see them into the play-off places.





# PITCHING IN SOUTHERN LEAGUE PREMIER SOUTH

## Hungerford Town 1 Dorchester Town 2

There were five minutes to go until the interval when Curtis Angell sprinkled some magic for the home team as he gave them the lead.

So often the saviour this season, Olaf Konzela rustled up a leveller for the away team midway through the second half.

The home side were reduced to ten men late in the game when defender, Max Ram, saw red for two bookings and the visitors took full advantage as Will Spetch grabbed a dramatic winner deep into stoppage time.

## Poole Town 3 Chertsey Town 1

Just before the 20-minute mark, Ezio Touray popped up to give the hosts the lead and then a Reuben Collins own goal increased their lead.

A goal for Luke Robertson saw the visitors reduce the arrears with 20 minutes to go only for Christos Batzelis to restore the home team's two-goal lead as they secured their place at this level for next season.

## Sholing 2 Bracknell Town 1

The visitors went in front within the opening exchanges through Seb Bowerman, however parity was restored a few minutes into the second period when Michael Folivi added another goal to his impressive tally this season.

A late penalty from Folivi gave the hosts the lead here and it was to prove to be the winning goal.

## Tiverton Town 3 Marlow 2

The breakthrough came on the half-hour mark as Matt Britton gave the home team the lead.

The visitors found the net through leading scorer, Naheer Nawaf, to level the scores before Charlie Cummins restored the hosts' advantage with less than 15 minutes to go.

A goal from Daniel Koita put the home side in command for the closing minutes and even though Stefan Brown pulled one back, they were able to hold on to secure the win and their place at this level.

## Walton & Hersham 4 Swindon Supermarine 1

A penalty gave the home side the lead on 20 minutes as Dawid Rogalski stepped up to find the net.

On 66 minutes, Kai Jennings doubled the lead for the hosts as the visitors' hopes of avoiding the drop started to reduce with every passing minute. Olly Mehew gave hope for the away team when he pulled a goal back on 77 minutes but Mason Obeng and Ralph Vigrass sealed the win for the hosts late on to condemn the visitors to relegation.

## Winchester City 1 Taunton Town 1

A purposeful start from the home team yielded an early goal from Tom Wright but it wasn't long before parity was restored as Jayden Nielsen found the net.

In the end, the draw saw the home team fall into the relegation zone.





# PITCHING IN SOUTHERN LEAGUE PREMIER CENTRAL

## AFC Sudbury 1 Harborough Town 5

It was lucky 13th minute for the visitors as Ben Stephens put them ahead and then Connor Kennedy doubled the lead soon afterwards to make it a dream start.

On the half-hour mark, Josh Walsh weighed in with a third goal to put the visitors firmly in the driving seat for that last remaining play-off spot.

The hosts pulled one back late on through Marcel Lewis from the penalty spot, but Jutorre Burgess and then Ben Starkie rounded off the scoring for the away team who claimed the last remaining play-off place in emphatic fashion.

## AFC Telford United 1 Royston Town 1

The opening exchanges saw Kian Harness break free to give the visitors the lead and they were good value for their lead until Orrin Pendley made it 1-1 after the break as honours ended even here.

## Alvechurch 3 Lowestoft Town 2

A goal by Joao Soares Rangel gave the advantage to the away side on 33 minutes but it was cancelled out in first half stoppage time by Shay Willock.

The opening exchanges of the second period saw Kieran Wakefield give the hosts the lead but the visitors soon hit back through Joe Duffy.

Wakefield put the home team back in front with 20 minutes to go and this is how it remained.



## Barwell 1 Spalding United 7

The hosts fell behind on 33 minutes when James Clifton was able to find the net before the same player doubled the lead soon afterwards.

The second half was just a minute old when Jack Roberts added to the lead before a fourth goal arrived from Liam Moore just before the hour.

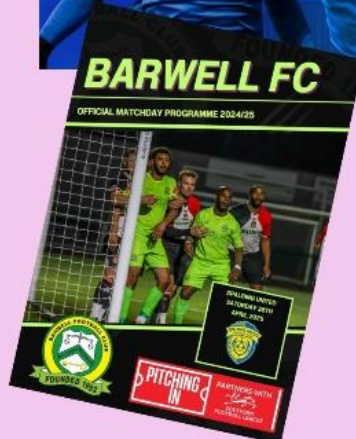
Jason Law added a fifth and then Clifton complete his hat-trick for the sixth and although Prince Mancinelli pulled one back a minute later, Roberts rounded off the scoring with a seventh.

Despite the big win, it was not enough to see the visitors make the play-offs as the hosts were relegated.

## Bedford Town 2 Stourbridge 0

13 was certainly a lucky number for the title-chasing hosts as that's when they were able to take the lead here through Ryan Blake.

A goal from Jack Davies with quarter-of-an-hour to go pushed the title closer to the hosts' grasp and they were able to see the remainder of the game out to secure top spot. Congratulations to all involved at the club.





# PITCHING IN SOUTHERN LEAGUE PREMIER CENTRAL

## **Bromsgrove Sporting 2 Bishop's Stortford 3**

It was first blood to the visitors as Harry Forde gave them the lead in the second minute, but in the latter stages of the opening period, the in-form James Meddows equalised.

Right on the stroke of half-time, Theo Robinson was able to put the hosts ahead and then midway through the second period, Luka Chalwell restored parity once more.

The visitors took the lead again through Rashawn Scott as the home team's day got worse when skipper, Reece King, was dismissed late on.

## **Kettering Town 2 Banbury United 2**

A goal from Dan Jarvis against his former club gave the visitors the lead, but it was soon cancelled out by Jamar Loza. It was Loza who turned the scoreline on its head in the lead-up to half-time, but then Tai Fleming made it 2-2 on 84 minutes and that's how it remained as the hosts now prepare for the play-offs.

## **Leiston 2 Biggleswade Town 3**

The visitors started well and were rewarded with an early goal from Marcus Gouldbourne but parity was restored on the quarter-hour mark thanks to George Quantrell.

A goal from Keon Lewis-Burgess on the 40-minute mark put the away team back in front but a leveller arrived from Ben Fowkes before the break.

The pendulum swung back in favour of the visitors when Obidinma Onyeagwara gave them a 3-2 lead and they were able to hold on to pick up a winning end to what has been a tough campaign.



## **Redditch United 4 Hitchin Town 0**

The hosts broke the deadlock on 11 minutes through Cyrus Babaie-Gumbs and it wasn't long before Ryan Boothe added another to settle any nerves. As the opening period went on, Dexter Dudley-Toole conjured up a third goal for the rampant home side.

The second half started in a similar vein as Babaie-Gumbs added a fourth goal as the visitors' day went from bad to worse with Bradley Dixon-Smith being red-carded.

The home sides were able to complete a deserved victory to secure their status at this level for another season.

## **St Ives Town 2 Stratford Town 2**

There was another goal towards the tally for Charlie Williams as his spot-kick opened the scoring for the visitors.

Williams weighed in with his second soon after the restart before Amir Hadi reduced the arrears with just over ten minutes remaining.

A late penalty from Will Glennon levelled the scores and that's how it ended, with the spoils shared.

## **Stamford 2 Halesowen Town 2**

There were just a couple of minutes on the clock when James Blunden fired home for the hosts, but that was cancelled out when Conor Tee levelled in the 12th minute.

This lively encounter went back in favour of the home team on the quarter-hour mark as Charlie Marzano put them ahead once more. Matters were levelled up once more just past the hour-mark when Jamie Willets found the net and it ended with a point apiece.





# PITCHING IN SOUTHERN LEAGUE DIVISION ONE SOUTH

## **Bemerton Heath Harlequins 4 Cinderford Town 1**

The visitors went ahead midway through the first half with a goal from Jackson Hundt but it was cancelled out by a Brad Waters penalty on the half-hour mark. A red card for Ronan Clancy and Dale Evans on the stroke of half-time left both teams facing the second half with ten men. The home side went ahead early in the second period through George Higgins and then Oliver Balmer extended the lead. Despite a late fourth goal from Joe Smith, the win was not enough to give the hosts a play-off place as they fell just short.

## **Bideford AFC 2 Westbury United 0**

As the half-hour mark approached, Josh Webber gave the home side the lead and that was doubled with just under 20 minutes left on the clock when Jamie Hearsey found the net. It meant that the hosts ended the season in impressive form.



## **Cribbs 0 Bishops Cleeve 2**

The initiative was seized by the visitors early on thanks to a goal from Aaron Evans-Harriott and then the advantage was doubled in the second half by Ethan Dunbar.

It was a deserved victory for the hosts as they prepare for Wednesday's play-off semi-final.

## **Evesham United 1 Bashley 2**

It was advantage to the hosts in the tenth minute as Levi Steele was able to find the net, however, the away team were able to level from the penalty spot through Lewis Ross as the first half went on.

The away team then forged ahead through Scott Bungay and that was to prove to be the winner as the home side suffered the double whammy of losing this game and seeing their title challenge come up just short.

## **Falmouth Town AFC 2 Shaftesbury 1**

The kick-off was delayed here due to the late arrival of the visiting team, but it failed to hold them back as they took the lead through Leighton Thomas as half-time approached.

Leading scorer, Rubin Wilson, was able to get the home side back on level terms before Jack Bray-Evans put the hosts ahead on 77 minutes as they ended their busy schedule of matches with another hard-earned victory.





# PITCHING IN SOUTHERN LEAGUE DIVISION ONE SOUTH

## Helston Athletic 2 Bristol Manor Farm 2

Just past the quarter-hour mark, Rhys Thomas gave the away team the lead, but it was cancelled out on 42 minutes when Jordan Copp converted from the penalty spot for the hosts.

It was Copp who managed to arrest the home side's slide by giving them the lead early in the second half only for an own goal from Callum O'Brien to level it back up at 2-2 on 65 minutes.

It finished with honours even as relegation was confirmed for the hosts as Lee Lashenko oversaw his final game for the visitors after 12 years at the helm.

## Larkhall Athletic 0 Exmouth Town 4

A goal from Ben Steer saw the away team take the lead just past the half-hour mark before Ben Griffith was spot-on with a penalty before the interval to double the advantage.

A second goal from Griffith early in the second period further increased the lead for the visitors as Aaron Denny soon made it 4-0 and the win was enough to see them snatch the final play-off place.



## Malvern Town 4 Willand Rovers 1

An early penalty converted by Douglas Camilo gave the visitors the lead but leading scorer, Jack Watts, levelled matters up five minutes from the interval.

Shortly after his opener, Watts was able to fire his side in front from the penalty spot and then Sam Clark hit another to complete a big turnaround just before the break.

On the hour, Matt Macdonald made it 4-1 for the hosts who were now asking all of the questions and they saw out another solid win to confirm their place in the play-off semi-final on Wednesday evening.

## Melksham Town 2 Mousehole 2

It was unlucky 13th minute for the away team as Jake Andrews put the hosts in front.

The away team were able to get back onto level terms just before the hour-mark through Josh Bernard only for Louis Millard to regain the lead for the home side.

An equaliser from Jack Symons came five minutes into stoppage time at the end but it was not enough for the visitors to hold on to their play-off place.

## Thatcham Town 2 Tavistock AFC 0

With ten minutes to go until the interval, Ben Portbury opened the scoring for the hosts before Christian Johnson doubled the advantage with just over ten minutes to go.

It proved to be a winning end to what has been a tough season for the home team.

## Yate Town 1 Didcot Town 0

There was a big goal from Joe Guest as he led by example to give the title-chasing hosts a 25th minute lead here.

In front of a crowd of over 1,500, they were able to see the victory out to claim the title and we send our congratulations to all at the club.





# PITCHING IN SOUTHERN LEAGUE DIVISION ONE CENTRAL

## AFC Dunstable 1 Leverstock Green 3

Midway through the opening period and the hosts broke the deadlock through Momodou Jallow but it only acted to spur the visitors into action as Kyle Connolly levelled just before the half-hour mark. Just before the break, Rawn Seale was in the right place at the right time to put the away team ahead for the first time. A third goal from Ethan Mooney arrived in the final minute and it confirmed that they had avoided relegation at the expense of Kings Langley, who did not play today.

## Aylesbury United 2 Enfield 2

An early goal from Tom Cove set the home team on their way and it was added to by Kian Henry just before the break. The visitors came out for the second half with determination and were able to pull a goal back through Myles John and then Kieran Southgate equalised with ten minutes to go. A late red card for George Thompson saw the away team end the game with a man less as they held on to secure a point.

## Barton Rovers 2 Northwood 2

The hosts went ahead with six minutes on the clock courtesy of Ryan Neufville but straight away, Devonte Totesaut brought the scores level again.

With around 20 minutes to go, Taylor Rhiney restored the lead for the home side, which was soon cancelled out by Jon-Jo Bates as the clock ticked down.

It finished with the spoils shared as the visitors confirmed their status at this level for next season.

## Beaconsfield Town 0 Ware 3

The away side took the early initiative thanks to Johnny Allotey and then they fashioned a second goal just past the half-hour mark when Gucci Soulya-Osekanongo found the net.

A third goal came on 63 minutes as Allotey notched his second of the afternoon as the away team ended the season with a good away win.

## Hertford Town 1 Berkhamsted 1

The hosts went ahead on 24 minutes thanks to a goal from Finley Lynch but it was cancelled out early in the second half when Matty Bateman was able to add to his tally for the season.

There was no further addition to the scoring as this one finished with honours even.





# PITCHING IN SOUTHERN LEAGUE DIVISION ONE CENTRAL

## Leighton Town 2 Hadley 1

An early goal from Lewis Thorpe saw the home team get their noses in front here, but it was cancelled out by Jordan Edwards on 79 minutes.

There was late drama as Kyal Williams put the hosts back in front in stoppage time but despite the defeat, the visitors took the final play-off place.

## North Leigh 0 Biggleswade FC 2

An eighth minute goal from Jahrel McKoy set the visitors on their way and then Lawrence Marsh doubled the lead.

It ended in victory for the visitors as the home side were unable to build on their victory in the previous game.

## Stotfold 0 Flackwell Heath 1

This game took 70 minutes for the deadlock to be broken when Wiktor Makowski was able to put the away team in front.

In a game of fine margins, the visitors took home all three points as their focus now turns to the play-offs on Wednesday.

## Thame United 1 Real Bedford 2

With 15 minutes on the clock, Dan West found the way to goal to give the home team the lead.

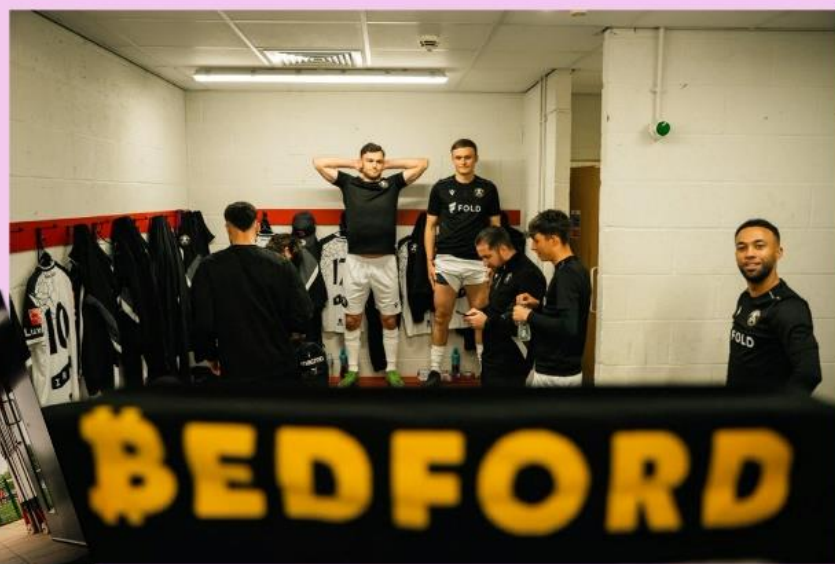
The visitors hit back with just over ten minutes left on the clock when Joey Evans equalised and the same player put the away team ahead with a late penalty.

In the end, the title winners were able to add to their points total as the hosts licked their wounds as they just lost out here and in the race to make the play-offs.

## Welwyn Garden City 3 Kidlington 0

A goal on the quarter-hour mark by Jed Ejayha put the home side in front here and it was added to by Charlie McDonald before the break.

With 86 minutes on the clock, Lewis Jones put further gloss on the scoreline to complete a routine victory for his team.





# JOB DONE

It's 12 months since Merthyr Town agonisingly slipped out of the Pitching In Southern League Premier South play-off places on the final day of the season having been part of the leading pack throughout the campaign.

Rather than feel sorry for themselves and take the hangover into this season, they used the obvious disappointment to fuel a title challenge that has seen them lose just four League games, which has included over 100 goals scored and a record-breaking 32-game unbeaten run that stretched from the end of August to the beginning of April.

They held off a brave challenge from AFC Totton to confirm the title with a game to spare following a 3-0 victory over Hungerford Town on Bank Holiday Monday.

"To lead the club to the title is very special," beamed manager, Paul Michael.

"To have achieved it with this special group of players and staff, who have built towards this over three years, is extra special.

"I love watching the way these players play football and I'm delighted that they've been able to achieve the success they deserve.

"Being title winners with Merthyr Town is extra special because of the club's supporters. On Monday there were generations of supporters all celebrating together and to be able to create memories for families, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, husbands and wives, is really what made it so special.

"There were a few defining moments along the way. Noah Smerdon's last minute headed equaliser against Gloucester City was key to keeping the unbeaten run going, Kiban Rai's stunning equaliser against Basingstoke Town similar, but I would have to say the games against AFC Totton were the most defining.

**Last weekend saw Merthyr Town clinch the Pitching In Southern League Premier South title. We sat down with manager, Paul Michael to discuss the season...**



**JUST CHAMPION | Manager, Paul Michael celebrates the title triumph on Monday IMAGE: John Smith**

"In the first game we were in midst of a ridiculously tough set of fixtures against the other top teams but we came through unbeaten and in that home game against AFC Totton; we completely controlled the game and made all the running, in my opinion. I think psychologically the fact that it felt like they were worried far more about us than we were them and that it felt like they had come to survive that evening, that gave us the belief that we were the best team in the division and with it the motivation to kick on. "Then in the return fixture, credit to AFC Totton as they outplayed us, but Ricardo's wonder strike earned us a point and again it felt like after that, with points on the board for us, we were ahead of the game. That run of six wins and on draw (at AFC Totton) from the end of February and throughout March was the time that took us away from our rivals the stags. "It's been such a tough season with so many good teams. I think the top six are as strong as I've seen in a few seasons, there's so many talented players at this level now. There's been great banter between rival sets of supporters but I believe respect too, and that for me typifies the wonder of the Southern League.

"We've received so many kind messages from clubs, supporters and staff from around the league it's been fantastic. I personally have built good relationships with many of the managers at this level I'll miss being able to lean on some of them, share ideas and problem solve, I genuinely wish all the teams the best on the last day and next season.



## MERTHYR TOWN | PAUL MICHAEL

I think the relegation battle typifies the strength of the league this year, it's going to the wire and someone with a points tally that would normally keep you up is going down. I also wish all the teams in the play-offs the best, but I'm so, so glad we're not in them with all the quality in there! "My personal highlight has to be the weekend just gone! Following consecutive defeats for the first time all season, losing at home for the first time all season, the end of the unbeaten run after 32 matches, the feeling of pressure hit us hard in the week leading up to Easter. But, we stuck to our principles, were quite forensic in our analysis, we were clear with the players what needed to change last weekend and the players responded with six points, six goals, two clean sheets and a league title! "The players were bang on in both games and I'm very proud of the work we put in as a staff to prepare the games and the way

the players responded, that's how champions respond to pressure. Then the memories of the celebrations at both games will live long in the memory.

"I knew the potential of this club as soon as I set foot in the place and I'm so proud to have created another special moment for these people who have seen the club through so many tough times. I touched on the emotion that we saw from generations of supporters and that is what fills me with pride.

"Before the game I saw a number of posts about the last time Merthyr won promotion to this kind of level, it was then I realised that we wouldn't just be creating moments for the 3,000 or so that would be there on the day but for their children and grandchildren in the future to say, "my dad" or "my grandmother was at that game". There are also many supporters that are no longer with us that we know would be looking down with pride too and that was another aspect of the day not lost on our supporters, friends and families. I hope this is just the beginning of the special times we can create together.

"Now the preparations start for Step 2 and it's all very exciting. It's going to be a huge challenge with some of the resources and established clubs at that level but we're looking forward to it, and we quite like upsetting the odds as shown in us being 33-1 at the start of the season for the title, so let's see what we can do! Let's go on an adventure!"





# NEWS ROUND-UP

## NEWS | STEP 3 PLAY-OFF SEMI-FINALS AND FINAL TO BE LIVE STREAMED

The semi-finals and finals of all Step 3 Southern League, Isthmian League and Northern Premier League Play-Offs will be live streamed for the first time this season. This is part of a proposed collaboration between the Trident leagues and Ireland-based ClubberTV, the live streaming platform that gives subscribers access to exclusive live and on-demand sports coverage in Ireland.

By partnering with the Trident leagues, ClubberTV gains a foothold in the UK streaming market, whilst the Leagues tap into a new income source by rolling out streaming of selected fixtures across the four Step 3 divisions from next season. The viability of the wider project is currently being assessed.

For the Play-Offs, a one-off fee of just £10.99, will enable subscribers to view all the semi-finals and finals from this season's Step 3 Play-Offs between Tuesday 29th April and Monday 5th May.

In a joint statement, the chairs of the three leagues, Mark Harris, David Martin, and Nick Robinson said: "We are working with ClubberTV to assess the viability of live streaming selected Pitching In Step 3 fixtures from next season.

"Streaming the Play-Offs gives both ourselves and ClubberTV an ideal opportunity to show that the audience is there, and that the logistics involved work. If so, we hope to conclude negotiations with ClubberTV ahead of next season."

The move coincides with the completion of DAZN's second season as the National League's live streaming partner.

Jimmy Doyle the CEO of ClubberTV said: "We are thrilled to enter the UK market in partnership with the Pitching In Trident leagues. We are delighted to have the opportunity to showcase these games at scale to fans at home in the UK and those abroad.

"We see this as a logical extension of the great work we have been doing in the Irish market and look forward to bringing live and on demand access to UK football fans everywhere. Be sure to check us out on all the usual socials - @clubberfootball - for action clips and updates."

Find out more information and how to access the live stream via: [clubbertv.co.uk](http://clubbertv.co.uk)

## HALESOWEN TOWN | WINNING SMILE

A little bit of history was made on Bank Holiday Monday when Daniel Platt broke the goalkeeping appearance record at Halesowen Town.

The popular custodian chalked up his 336th outing in the I-I Pitching In Southern League Premier Central draw with AFC Telford United to beat a record that had stood for almost 40 years.

"I am extremely proud to have broken the record," he told us. "This club means so much to me; it has 150 years of history behind it, so for me to break a club record here is incredible and extremely humbling.

"As it was getting closer, you start to think am I going to do it, but it was amazing to get it over the line and in a game with such a big crowd too."

Platt has painful memories of his early days at the club almost a decade ago.

"I remember having a good pre-season in 2015 and was going to start the first League game of the season as first choice," he recalled. "But then in the final pre-season game I had four teeth knocked out and so I had to miss the game.

"That really was the catalyst for my affinity to the club, though, because the fans rallied around to raise funds to help pay for the teeth that I had lost. Things like that you don't forget; to do that for a new player meant a lot to me.

"There have been so many happy memories over the years; the play-off game two seasons ago quickly springs to mind for obvious reasons. We were such a close-knit team and to achieve promotion together was really special.

"We have the chance to do something similar this season and we're really looking forward to what lies ahead over these next few weeks.

"As a team we've made massive progression this season. The Gaffer has done an amazing job to build a strong team and in my opinion, the squad is now the best it's been all season.

"We're in great form going into the play-offs and whilst we have kicked ourselves about the points we've dropped which mean we're now just out of the title race, it will all be forgotten if we can go up via the play-off route and that's where our focus is.

"On a personal note, it's been pretty much how I've done it throughout my career. I'm a steady-eddy type of goalkeeper with no fuss, just trying to perform seven out of ten in each and every game. I am happy with the way I have performed this season with as little mistakes as possible.

"I can't wait to get stuck into the play-offs. We've got as good a chance as anyone; we've been solid defensively and we've got players higher up the pitch who can effect games in key moments, but, as everyone knows, anything can happen in the play-offs.

"Hopefully it will be our year and with the support that we have, it would be a great way to end the season, so bring it on!

"This has been another competitive season in the Premier Central. There's been no stand-out team and those in the bottom half of the table have been so much better than previously. The standard has improved massively over the past few seasons and that is testament to this level and how much more professional it has become.

"I think the fans can see that too and that's why the numbers attending games at this level are increasing all of the time. It's great to see.

"I'm really enjoying my football and I just want to do that for as long as I can at the highest level possible."

An away trip to play-off hopefuls, Stamford AFC, brought the regular season to a close earlier today for Platt and his team-mates.



## INFLUENCER

We find out which players most influenced our Pitching In Southern League stars...

### SPIKE WEAVER (CRIBBS) > MARCUS RASHFORD

I grew up watching Marcus Rashford when he came through at United, so he's always been my favourite player in football.





## NORTH LEIGH | THE WAIT IS OVER

Easter Monday and throughout our four divisions, titles were being won, play-off places were being secured and relegation battles fought.

Away from all of the drama there was a no less significant result being secured as North Leigh, whose relegation fate from the Pitching In Southern League Division One Central was sealed weeks ago, secured only their second win of the season at the 39th attempt.

It was back at the beginning of October when they last tasted victory, courtesy of a 3-2 home triumph over Leverstock Green, and their long wait for another success finally came to an end on Monday when goals from Samuel Olawale and Pelumi Maxwell saw them come from behind to beat Kidlington, who themselves have already been relegated, 2-1.

Olawale has scored three of North Leigh's four goals over the past month and has emerged as a shining light in what has been a tough season for the club.

"Securing the win on Monday has given us a significant boost," Olawale told us. "It was a performance that we can build on and has provided much-needed confidence throughout the group.

"On a personal level, it was nice to add another goal to my tally and contribute to our second half comeback to pick up the victory, which has been a long time coming.

"Since I've joined the club, the determination and resilience of the players and supporters has been exceptional. It's through adversity that you find your true character and the atmosphere around the place has remained positive and hopeful.

"I've been able to settle in quickly because of this and make the transition into what is a higher level than I have been used to. Goals always help when coming into a new environment and I am pleased to have three to my name.

"The hope now is that I can build on this momentum for the final game of the season on Saturday and we can end with another positive result."

A home game against Biggleswade FC rounded the campaign off today.



## STOURBRIDGE | SPRING IN THEIR STEP

As we enter the final weekend of the season, Stourbridge will have a say in the destiny of the Pitching In Southern League Premier Central title this afternoon as they head to Bedford Town. The Glassboys have an extra spring in their step with the news earlier this week that following discussions between the FA and Southern League, they will be allowed to remain at their War Memorial Ground home next season despite extensive structural work being required. They also headed to Bedfordshire on the back of four wins from their last five outings, including a three-game winning streak.

"Whilst we are disappointed that we've just fallen short of making the play-offs, there is a lot for us to be positive about," said striker, Ethan Freemantle, who bagged a brace in their 4-2 Bank Holiday Monday victory over Bromsgrove Sporting having recently passed through the 50-appearance mark for the club. "There has been uncertainty hanging over us with the ground situation, but that has now been lifted and we're ending the season in some good form, particularly at home.

"I've never had a season where our away form has been up in the top two or three in the League but at home it's been the opposite. A fan asked me why that was recently and I really don't know, I just can't put my finger on it.

"However, we've ended the season five unbeaten at home so that's another positive to take with us into the summer and hopefully we can go out with another good performance at the weekend in what is going to be a big occasion as our hosts look to clinch the title.

"There will be envy for us going there, but it will only act to inspire us even more for next season and it would be nice to think that this time next year we could be in a similar position to Bedford Town.

"We've shown glimpses of what we are capable of throughout the season; it was always going to be a campaign of ups and downs given the number of new faces that all came in around the same time during the summer.

"We've grown together and, like the rest of the lads, I am eager to improve my consistency next season as we look to put smiles on the faces of our fans, who it has to be said, have been superb all season.

"This has been the first season since 2018/19 that we've been able to break through the 60-point barrier so, again, that's a plus point.

"We'll be looking to give a good account of ourselves on Saturday and end on a high."

## NEXT WEEK | SEASON REVIEW / PLAY-OFF FINAL PREVIEW ONLINE MAGAZINE

Look out for our special Online Magazine, which will be available as a free download next weekend, and will feature a review of the Southern League season alongside an in-depth preview of all four play-off finals, including interviews with those at the very heart of the action.



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