

ISSUE #01 | 8/9 AUGUST 2025



PRE VIEW MAG

YOUR FRIDAY GUIDE TO ALL
OF THE WEEKEND ACTION

IT'S GO
TIME!

PREMIER
DIVISION
SOUTH

PREMIER
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CENTRAL

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CENTRAL

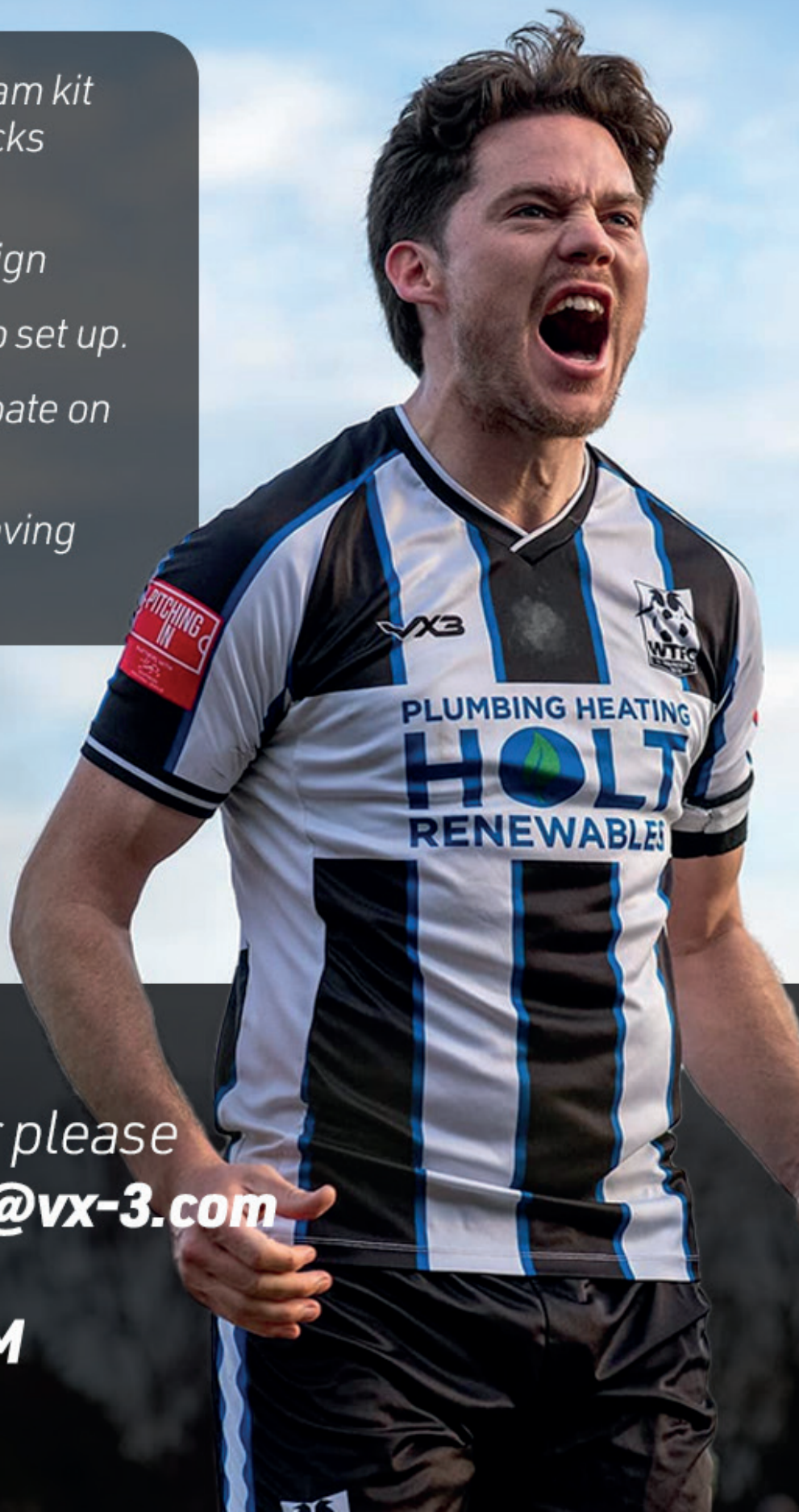
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THE ACTION STARTS HERE

I would like to welcome you all to another football season. I am sure we all hope that this coming season is as exciting as the last one.

The standards in all four divisions seem to increase from year to year.

This time around the two Premier Divisions are looking to be very competitive. Those clubs who lost out in the play-off together with the clubs relegated from The National League and clubs promoted from Step 4 with ambition for a back-to-back promotion will lead to some very enticing encounters.

At Step 4 there are several clubs who are looking to bounce back after relegation or continue their move up the football pyramid. We welcome clubs who are new to the league, especially those who have reached Step 4 for the first time.

Although we start our League programme on 9 August, due to fixture congestion later in the season, several of our clubs played their first fixture in The Emirates FA Cup last weekend.

Football in the National League System is becoming more and more popular, offering great entertainment in the local community at affordable prices.

I hope that supporters, club volunteers, players and officials enjoy the new season and may the best teams win.

Kind Regards,

David

David Martin
Chair, The Southern League



“Football in the National League System is becoming more and more popular, offering great entertainment in the local community at affordable prices...”



SCORE PREDICTOR

Throughout the 2025/26 season we are going to pit the players against the media and supporters in our score prediction competition.

The rules are simple; each week we select a game at random from each of our four divisions and then invite representatives to make their predictions. It's three points for getting the score correct, one point for getting the right result and nothing an incorrect score/result.

To take part, email:
news@southern-football-league.co.uk

First up, we have experienced Stamford AFC man, Elliott Durrell, who takes on Jon and Rich from Peacocks Radio, and Dorchester Town fan, Chris Blake.

WEEK ONE	Elliott Durrell	Jon & Rich	Chris Blake
Weymouth v Evesham United	3-0	2-0	2-0
Real Bedford v Spalding United	1-3	1-1	1-1
Winchester City v Hartpury	2-1	2-1	1-1
Hadley v Hitchin Town	1-1	0-3	2-2
LEADER BOARD	Score Correct	Result Correct	Points
Media	0	0	0
Player	0	0	0
Supporters	0	0	0

THE FINAL STANDINGS 2024-25



Premier Division South

#	Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
1	Merthyr Town (C)	42	14	6	1	58	17	13	4	4	47	29	60	91
2	AFC Totton (P)	42	15	6	0	51	16	10	7	4	34	19	50	88
3	Walton & Hersham	42	13	7	1	50	26	11	4	6	40	28	36	83
4	Gloucester City	42	14	5	2	53	22	7	9	5	28	31	28	77
5	Dorchester Town	42	14	5	2	46	21	5	13	3	29	27	27	75
6	Havant & Waterlooville	42	14	4	3	54	18	7	7	7	30	31	35	74
7	Hungerford Town	42	10	5	6	37	24	6	6	9	26	31	8	59
8	Hanwell Town	42	7	9	5	28	24	8	4	9	30	38	-4	58
9	Taunton Town	42	6	11	4	38	30	7	7	7	26	28	6	57
10	Wimborne Town	42	11	5	5	29	22	4	7	10	20	34	-7	57
11	Sholing	42	8	5	8	30	29	6	5	10	29	39	-9	52
12	Gosport Borough	42	7	5	9	31	32	6	7	8	22	29	-8	51
13	Plymouth Parkway	42	8	3	10	38	36	6	5	10	25	41	-14	50
14	Poole Town	42	9	4	8	24	22	4	6	11	24	40	-14	49
15	Basingstoke Town	42	6	6	9	26	28	5	9	7	36	36	-3	48
16	Chertsey Town	42	6	4	11	36	40	8	1	12	31	42	-15	47
17	Tiverton Town	42	8	6	7	23	28	4	5	12	16	43	-32	47
18	Bracknell Town	42	6	7	8	32	34	5	6	10	25	38	-15	46
19	Winchester City	42	4	6	11	25	40	8	4	9	29	34	-20	46
20	Swindon Supermarine	42	7	7	7	31	29	5	1	15	29	49	-18	44
21	Frome Town	42	3	6	12	22	32	6	7	8	17	28	-21	40
22	Marlow	42	3	4	14	23	45	2	2	17	22	70	-70	21

Weekend Action

Basingstoke Town v Wimborne Town
Berkhamsted v Bracknell Town
Farnham Town v Hungerford Town
Gloucester City v Gosport Borough
Havant & Waterlooville v Taunton Town
Poole Town v Hanwell Town
Tiverton Town v Chertsey Town
Uxbridge v Dorchester Town
Walton & Hersham v Plymouth Parkway
Weymouth v Evesham United
Yate Town v Sholing

Division One South

#	Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
1	Yate Town (C)	42	13	6	2	34	19	13	4	4	38	19	34	88
2	Evesham United (P)	42	15	2	4	41	20	10	5	6	25	16	30	82
3	Bishops Cleeve	42	13	5	3	47	18	11	1	9	29	16	42	78
4	Malvern Town	42	14	4	3	57	28	7	8	6	38	33	34	75
5	Exmouth Town	42	11	4	6	36	21	11	4	6	33	18	30	74
6	Mousehole	42	15	2	4	50	19	5	9	7	31	35	28	72
7	Bemerton Heath Harlequins	42	14	5	2	50	22	7	4	10	29	36	21	72
8	Melksham Town	42	12	3	6	40	22	6	8	7	32	31	18	63
9	Falmouth Town	42	8	6	7	28	23	8	2	11	32	37	1	58
10	Bideford AFC	42	10	5	6	30	24	5	8	8	34	41	-1	58
11	Didcot Town	42	11	6	4	28	20	4	6	11	27	43	-8	57
12	Bristol Manor Farm	42	7	8	6	33	30	6	8	7	40	40	3	55
13	Westbury United	42	8	6	7	33	28	7	4	10	25	29	1	55
14	Bashley	42	8	7	6	30	31	6	6	9	23	34	-12	55
15	Willand Rovers	42	9	6	6	35	24	4	7	10	26	38	-1	52
16	Tavistock AFC	42	8	3	10	28	25	6	5	10	27	33	-3	49*
17	Shaftesbury	42	9	5	7	41	39	4	3	14	22	45	-22	46
18	Larkhall Athletic	42	7	8	6	37	37	4	2	15	19	42	-23	43
19	Helston Athletic	42	6	8	7	34	43	4	3	14	20	57	-46	41
20	Thatcham Town	42	10	3	8	29	31	0	6	15	17	47	-32	39
21	Cribbs	42	3	4	14	17	40	6	2	13	18	46	-51	33
22	Cinderford Town	42	3	3	15	27	50	5	4	12	29	49	-43	31

* Tavistock AFC had 1 point deducted for fielding an ineligible player

Weekend Action

Bideford AFC v Westbury United
Bishops Cleeve v Larkhall Athletic
Bristol Manor Farm v Willand Rovers
Brixham AFC v Shaftesbury
Falmouth Town v Bashley
Frome Town v Tavistock AFC
Malvern Town v Mousehole
Melksham Town v Sporting Club Inkberrow
Portishead Town v Didcot Town
Swindon Supermarine v Exmouth Town
Winchester City v Hartpury

Premier Division Central

#	Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
1	Bedford Town (C)	42	14	3	4	46	31	11	4	6	33	27	21	82
2	Kettering Town	42	12	7	2	42	21	10	4	7	31	23	29	77
3	AFC Telford United (P)	42	13	6	2	50	26	6	11	4	32	34	22	74
4	Halesowen Town	42	13	4	4	36	25	8	7	6	28	20	19	74
5	Harborough Town	42	12	2	7	31	18	8	9	4	33	23	23	71
6	Stamford	42	12	4	5	33	24	8	5	8	20	27	2	69
7	Spalding United	42	12	4	5	35	23	8	4	9	35	31	16	68
8	Stratford Town	42	9	8	4	34	18	9	5	7	27	26	17	67
9	Stourbridge	42	8	7	6	25	21	10	2	9	35	29	10	63
10	Leiston	42	9	5	7	33	30	7	7	7	23	28	-2	60
11	Royston Town	42	9	8	4	28	24	5	7	9	23	25	2	57
12	Banbury United	42	8	8	5	18	13	6	7	8	22	27	0	57
13	Alvechurch	42	10	3	8	26	22	6	5	10	23	24	3	56
14	Bromsgrove Sporting	42	7	3	11	30	29	8	3	10	27	32	-4	51
15	Bishop's Stortford	42	8	4	9	27	27	6	5	10	23	33	-10	51
16	St Ives Town	42	8	5	8	36	32	5	6	10	22	28	-2	50
17	AFC Sudbury	42	7	8	6	30	22	6	3	12	22	35	-5	50
18	Redditch United	42	7	8	6	30	26	6	2	13	20	32	-8	49
19	Barwell	42	9	2	10	34	38	4	5	12	22	37	-19	46
20	Lowestoft Town	42	6	4	11	23	42	4	3	14	32	64	-51	37
21	Hitchin Town	42	6	4	11	27	37	2	6	13	25	45	-30	34
22	Biggleswade Town	42	2	8	11	18	35	3	5	13	26	42	-33	28

Weekend Action

AFC Sudbury v Redditch United
Barwell v St Ives Town
Bromsgrove Sporting v Bishop's Stortford
Harborough Town v Needham Market
Leiston v Halesowen Town
Real Bedford v Spalding United
Royston Town v Kettering Town
Stamford v Alvechurch
Stourbridge v Bury Town
Stratford Town v Banbury United
Worcester City v Quorn

Division One Central

#	Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
1	Real Bedford (C)	40	15	4	1	77	22	18	1	1	52	11	96	104
2	Berkhamsted (P)	40	14	4	2	45	18	13	4	3	49	29	47	89
3	Flackwell Heath	40	14	3	3	46	16	12	3	5	43	29	44	84
4	Barton Rovers	40	13	5	2	37	19	9	6	5	35	28	25	77
5	Hadley	40	15	2	3	45	16	7	7	6	36	33	32	75
6	Thame United	40	11	3	6	48	28	11	3	6	29	30	19	72
7	Leighton Town	40	11	4	5	35	24	7	5	8	28	28	11	63
8	Biggleswade FC	40	9	4	7	33	34	7	6	7	29	38	-10	58
9	Welwyn Garden City	40	9	4	7	28	20	7	5	8	30	33	5	57
10	Ware	40	6	9	5	35	26	7	8	5	28	24	13	56
11	Beaconsfield Town	40	6	5	9	33	35	7	6	7	25	27	-4	50
12	Enfield	40	9	3	8	36	36	3	9	8	25	31	-6	48
13	Hertford Town	40	7	8	5	37	35	5	4	11	22	32	-8	48
14	AFC Dunstable	40	8	5	7	26	25	5	3	12	24	43	-18	47
15	Aylesbury United	40	6	3	11	19	31	8	0	12	27	39	-24	45
16	Northwood	40	7	2	11	30	31	5	2	13	28	48	-21	40
17	Stotfold	40	7	3	10	27	37	4	4	12	25	49	-34	40
18	Leverstock Green	40	5	6	9	20	24	4	6	10	26	39	-17	39
19	Kings Langley	40	4	7	9	33	37	5	4	11	19	27	-12	38
20	Kidlington	40	3	4	13	22	43	4	3	13	17	47	-51	28
21	North Leigh	40	1	3	16	14	49	1	2	17	9	61	-87	11

Weekend Action

AFC Dunstable v Northwood
Aylesbury United v Leverstock Green
Barton Rovers v Marlow
Biggleswade Town v Enfield
Flackwell Heath v London Lions
Hadley v Hitchin Town
Hertford Town v Thame United
Leighton Town v Ware
Milton Keynes Irish v Welwyn Garden City
Rayners Lane v Biggleswade FC
Stotfold v Beaconsfield Town

Featured Match

UXBRIDGE v DORCHESTER TOWN

Which of our new clubs has a former England captain as Chairman? The answer is Uxbridge, who take their place in the Pitching In Southern League Premier South having secured promotion from the Isthmian League South Central via the play-offs at the end of last term.

Which of our new clubs has a former England captain as Chairman? The answer is Uxbridge, who take their place in the Pitching In Southern League Premier South having secured promotion from the Isthmian League South Central via the play-offs at the end of last term.

Mark Bantock was one of the top lawn bowls players in the country, winning a silver medal in the Men's pairs at the 2006 Commonwealth Games and a bronze medal in the lawn bowls competition at the 2010 Commonwealth Games.

Having since retired from the sport, his focus is now firmly fixed on overseeing the progression of a club that has been a big part of his life and that of his family.

"My step dad, Alan Holloway, was Chairman here for 30 years, as part of an association with the club that lasted for half-a-century until he sadly passed away in 2021," Bantock told us. "As a result, the club has been a major part of our lives as a family; I've been attending games since childhood, so it has a very special place in my heart.

"When my step dad passed away, I was asked to take over as Chairman. To be honest, I was reluctant at first but after some persuasion and wise words from my mum, I agreed to give it a go and I have to say that I really enjoy it."

Following a couple of mid-table finishes, the club secured runners-up spot behind runaway leaders, Farnham Town, at the end of last season. It meant that they went into the play-offs and

after overcoming the challenge of Kingstonian on penalties in the semi-final, they went on to beat Hanworth Villa 2-1 in the final to secure their place at Step 3 for the first time.

"Last season was unbelievable," continued Bantock. "To reach this level for the first time in the long history of the club is so special.

"This club has rarely been involved in promotion, or indeed relegation, seasons over the years. On one hand you could say that there has never been that much ambition to progress, but by the same token, the future of the club has never been put at risk, something that has been seen all too often at other clubs.

"Last season, the aim was always to be in and around the play-off mix. Like most, we felt that Farnham Town would win it so it was a case of trying to get into the top five.

"We started slowly, losing our first three games and then drawing the fourth, but we stayed loyal to the manager and it paid off. It was obvious after the first month that a few things needed to change and credit to him, he did it and recruited well to secure a second-place finish.

"To see our attendance record smashed with over 1,500 here for the play-off final made me immensely proud. It was a very emotional day for me and our loyal group of volunteers; even if we had lost the game, I would have still had the same sense of pride at the end.

"We're very much a volunteer-led club, it's who we are and what we pride ourselves on.

"We know that it will be a massive challenge moving into the Southern League at Step 3. As a club we're trying to do things a bit differently; our ethos is that football should be affordable for all and our admission prices will be as cheap as anywhere in the country at this level.

"An adult season-ticket here works out at just £1.79 per game, including pre-season friendlies, and for concessions its 18p per game. I'd be surprised if any other club were doing it any cheaper than that.

"We want to appeal to people and provide entertainment at a price they can afford. Of course, our playing and travelling budget will have to increase and this will be a different challenge for us, but we are determined to embrace it and see where it takes us.

"It's the first time we've ever been here and if we can establish ourselves in the Premier South, it will give us a platform on which to build during the years ahead.

"There will be plenty of ups and downs along the way, we know that, but we're going to enjoy ourselves and give it everything we've got.

"The first challenge is a tough one as Dorchester Town are well-established at this level and are sure to challenge amongst the leading pack again. It will be a good early gauge for us."



Uxbridge celebrate promotion - Image | Uxbridge FC

The Rest of the Action

It was a little too close for comfort last season as Basingstoke Town just avoided the drop. On Saturday they host a Wimborne Town outfit who exceeded expectations following their promotion at the end of the previous campaign. Securing promotion via the play-offs were Berkhamsted and they welcome a much-changed Bracknell Town side.

Romping to promotion last time out were Farnham Town and they will be given a stern first examination in Step 3 with the visit of a Hungerford Town outfit who finished seventh last season. Beaten play-off finalists, Gloucester City, are amongst the fancied teams once more and they start at home against Gosport Borough, who will be looking to improve upon their mid-table berth.

There's an interesting-looking match-up at Havant & Waterlooville where the home side, who just missed out on the play-offs, take on a Taunton Town outfit who have had a solid summer of recruitment. Poole Town are refreshed and recharged for what they hope will be a better season as they entertain a Hanwell Town side who made the top ten last term.

Two teams whose battle against the drop went down to the last day, Tiverton Town and Chertsey Town, lock horns in Devon, whilst Walton & Hersham, who claimed third place last time out, welcome Plymouth Parkway. There's a meeting of two sides who were two levels apart last season as Weymouth, relegated from The National League South, host Division One South play-off winners, Evesham United.



The Farnham Town Management Team with their silverware

Image | Farnham Town FC

Having kept their nerve to lift the Division One South title last season, Yate Town start at home to a Sholing, whose impressive progress in recent seasons sees them eyeing a place in the top half of the table.

There are some mouth-watering match-ups, so make sure you get along to a game!



Mark Bantock

Featured Match

HARBOROUGH TOWN v NEEDHAM MARKET

It's been a summer to remember for Harborough Town. Some strong recruitment, alongside a Spanish pre-season tour, sees the club go into the campaign as one of the favourites for promotion.

As part of their Spanish link-up, the club spent time in Madrid where they faced two games – a 3-0 victory over a La Media Inglesa Trialist XI and hard-earned 1-0 triumph over third-tier outfit, AD Alcorcon, at the impressive Estadio Municipal de Santo Domingo.

The stay also included a little bit of warm weather training and plenty of bonding ahead of the new season which gets underway on Saturday with a home game against Needham Market, who are back at this level following a stint in The National League North last term.



Harborough Town's Riley O'Sullivan

"It's been quite a pre-season," said striker, Riley O'Sullivan. "The trip was absolutely amazing. It was so unreal to see people in a different country who were such big fans of the club and the non-League game.

"This club is growing all of the time and it's great to see!

"The bonding was class even though there's a real bond and team ethic already in place here. It helped the newbies settle in quicker, which in turn has helped in our preparations for the season.

"In terms of the preparations, they've gone well. We've put together a competitive squad with good competition for places, which in turn will make us perform better.

"It's a tough League and a tricky start. There are a good number of teams who are in with a chance of being right up there, so we don't take any game lightly and we just face things on a match-by-match basis.

"Personally my aim is to be consistent and contribute to as many goals as I can. There were ups and downs over the course of last season and ultimately we just missed out in the play-offs, so we want to improve on that and another FA Cup run would be nice too!"

For Saturday's opponents, Needham Market, it's a return to this level following a foray into Step 2

"Last season was tough for everyone here," manager, Tom Rothery, told us. "I'm eager to right some of those wrongs and build on the positives.

"The players deserve plenty of credit for the attitude that they have displayed. They gave their all last season and whilst ultimately it wasn't quite enough, they are determined to respond in the right way.

"We've introduced some new bits over pre-season and that alongside the fact that we've had a solid summer of recruitment makes it feel like we are in a good space right now.

"We're going into a tough League. I keep seeing the signings that our rivals are making and thinking to myself; 'wow, they look strong this year'. I've said that a lot; there are going to be plenty of teams who feel that they can be in amongst the leading pack.

"Look, we're under no illusions about the size of the task in hand. Yes, we won the League the last time we were in it, but prior to that we'd never finished higher than ninth at this level, so we're fully aware that to do well we will need to be right at it as well as having that bit of luck on our side too.

"I want us to be competitive; I believe with the squad we have, we should be, so what position or where that takes us I'm not sure as you can only control your team and your efforts. But after last season, I certainly want to see us give the supporters something to be happy about and for them to see a competitive team that is giving it a right go."



Sixways Stadium will grace the Southern League this season

The Rest of the Action

Two teams who found them battling it out at the wrong end of the table last term, AFC Sudbury and Redditch United, go head-to-head with both looking to make winning starts. Having been reprieved from relegation at the end of last season, Barwell start at home against St. Ives Town, whilst Bromsgrove Sporting and Bishop's Cleeve, who both finished on 51 points, lock horns.

After coming so close to promotion in the play-offs last time out, Halesowen Town begin with a long trip over to Leiston. Also making the play-offs was Kettering Town and they start on the road at a Royston Town outfit who had a solid mid-table finish.

Stamford narrowly missed out on the play-offs last season and they get underway against an Alvechurch outfit who themselves will be looking to make an impact in the top half of the table. New-boys, Bury Town, head to a Stourbridge outfit whose ground issues have given them cause for concern as new manager, Darryl Knights, has built a youthful team.

Also new to this level are Real Bedford and their latest chapter begins at home to a Spalding United outfit who ended up just outside the play-off zone and are expected to challenge once more. Two teams who also have their sights set on being in the play-offs mix are Stratford Town and Banbury United, with the away side now under the guidance of Kelvin Langmead, who enjoyed a long career in the professional game.

Finally, history is made as Worcester City make their Southern League return following a 21-year absence, playing at their impressive new home, Sixways Stadium. Their first opponents are Quorn, who came up with them from the Pitching In Northern Premier League Midland Division having romped to the title.

There are some mouth-watering match-ups, so make sure you get along to a game!

Featured Match

PORTISHEAD TOWN v DIDCOT TOWN

Portishead Town arrive in the Pitching In Southern League Division One South on the back of successive title triumphs.

In 2023/24 they romped home in the Western League Division One with 99 points to their name and they followed it up last term by claiming the Premier Division title, scoring an incredible 236 goals along the way across the last two seasons.

On Saturday they get the campaign underway on home soil against Didcot Town.

"I'm really looking forward to the season ahead," said skipper, Kyle Egan, who celebrates two years at the club this month. "We've had a lot of success in recent seasons and we're determined to continue that and not just be there to make up the numbers.

"The past two seasons have seen us make plenty of memories and it only makes us even more determined to create more at this level.

"Our preparations have been ideal; we've had a lot of games which have given the new lads the opportunity to integrate into the team. There's a lot of positivity around the place as we look to build on the momentum that we have built up.

"Pre-season saw us come up against a good mix of different opponents, each of whom have presented us with different challenges that will stand us in good stead for what lies ahead in Division One South.

"Personally I'm feeling good and ready to go. I've enjoyed the hard work and I'm feeling sharp as a result.

"Everything I've heard suggests that this is a very demanding division. The pace will be faster than we have been used to and ultimately there will be better players up against us, which makes for an exciting content.

"We're under no illusions that we are going to have to be right at it every week, but we've brought in some experience at this level, which will help our cause no end and we're excited by the challenge.

"There's a good mix of experienced heads and emerging talent here. The set-up at the club is incredible and our fan base provides us with outstanding backing week in, week out, something that will be so important over the course of the campaign.

"We want to be pushing for a third straight promotion. As I say,



Portishead Town celebrate

Image | Portishead Town FC



SC Inkberrow will make history on Saturday- Image | @pjddy1

The Rest of the Action

Having ended last season strongly to finish just inside the top ten, Bideford AFC get things underway at home to Westbury United. Meanwhile, Bishops Cleeve, who finally made the play-offs after a couple of near-misses, host Larkhall Athletic having strengthened well over the summer. There will be a completely new-look side taking the field for Bristol Manor Farm when they host Willand Rovers.

Making their Step 4 debut are Brixham AFC and they do it on home soil against Shaftesbury, who were in their shoes this time last year. Falmouth Town had a solid first season back at this level last term as they made it just inside the top ten and now they hope to use it as a platform to move forward. They host Bashley on the opening day.

Back at this level following a season in the Premier South are Frome Town and they kick off at home to Tavistock AFC. Last season's beaten play-off finalists, Malvern Town, welcome a Mousehole outfit who agonisingly missed out on the play-offs last season having been within the top five for most of last term.

History is also being made at Melksham Town as Sporting Club Inkberrow, another of the clubs who have rapidly climbed the levels, play their first-ever Southern League fixture. One of the fancied sides this season are Swindon Supermarine, who have completely revamped their team in the wake of relegation, and they host an Exmouth Town outfit who defied the odds to make the play-offs last time out.

Finally, two new teams at this level go head-to-head as Winchester City, relegated from the Premier South, host Hartpury who have come up from the Hellenic League, but have seen the Head Coach that oversaw their success step down over the summer.

There are some mouth-watering match-ups, so make sure you get along to a game!

we're not just here to make up the numbers; we have to set our sights high and I will be doing everything I can to provide goals and assists to help us get towards where we want to be."

Providing the first opposition of the season will be Didcot Town, where manager, Jamie Heapy, is ready to roll his sleeves up to build on their mid-table berth last time out.

"Looking at the League, it's going to be stronger than last season," he admitted to us. "The likes of Winchester City, Swindon Supermarine and Frome Town will all be looking to go straight back up. Then you have Bishops Cleeve, Malvern Town, Melksham Town, Mousehole plus a few others who will all be pushing for the play-offs, alongside the new teams coming into the League from Step 5, including Saturday's opponents, Portishead Town, who have built up a winning mentality over the past two seasons.

"It'll be really competitive this season. The goal for us is to aim for the play-offs, but that's going to be a massive challenge. I think realistically if we can improve on last season and finish in the top ten that would be a very good achievement.

"Our cause was helped this year by the core of the squad committing pretty quickly, which was good. On top of that we had our eye on a couple of players to bring in and we managed to get them over the line to strengthen us, so that was positive too.

"We can't wait for things to get underway now. We're looking forward to taking on the challenge that stands before us in Division One South. There will be ups and downs along the way, we know that, but we're ready to face everything head-on, as we always do."

Featured Match

MILTON KEYNES IRISH v WELWYN GARDEN CITY



There's been plenty of summer activity going on at Pavilion Manor Field as Milton Keynes Irish get ready for their first taste of life at Step 4 on Saturday.

Pitch renovation works have taken place so that the surface is ready to grace the Pitching In Southern League Division One Central this season.

The club only celebrated its fifth birthday recently, formed as a result of three local clubs amalgamating, but so much progress has been made since then, culminating in Spartan South Midlands League Premier Division title success at the end of last term.

It was a campaign which saw them lose just one of their 34

League games, scoring 101 goals in the process, 12 months after narrowly missing out on promotion via the play-offs.

"We had a very good season," said manager, Terry Shrieves, with a smile. "The League campaign went just as we hoped that it would, whilst we also won a few games in the FA Cup to have a bit of a run in that competition.

"I am so proud of what the players and staff have achieved; coming so close to promotion during the previous campaign, it would have been easy for heads to drop, but they used the disappointment as motivation this time around and we were worthy title winners in the end.

"To go through a season with just one League defeat is a fantastic achievement at any level because it shows consistency, determination and the right attitude.

"Of course, we're expecting a tough introduction to life at this level. It's a big step up but we know a bit about a few of the teams that we will face having come up against them in friendlies and FA Cup games over recent seasons.

"Our initial aim is to consolidate and establish ourselves as a Step 4 club. It's a challenge that we will face head-on, we're looking forward to it and being able to build on the momentum that we have.

"I expect everyone to work hard and give everything they've got in matches and training. I want players here who play for the team, not themselves; we've worked hard over the last few years to build a solid unit where each player knows their roles and responsibilities to the team and that will not change.

"I have no set way of playing; we're open-minded and try to set up the team to suit the players' strengths.



MK Irish manager Terry Shrieves



"Hopefully we can hit the ground running at the weekend. It'll be a challenging start against a top ten team who are sure to be up there again, but we're looking forward to it and we're proud to be here!"

Meanwhile, opposing manager, Marc Weatherstone, is expecting a sleepless night this evening.

"I'm like a kid at Christmas right now," he told us. "I've been counting down the days until the start of the season for weeks now... people say that the break between the end of the season and start of the new one is getting shorter, but I disagree, it's far too long!"

"I'm happy with the players that I have been able to retain and those who I've recruited. This time is always difficult to get everyone together with holidays, injuries and things like that, but when we've got a full squad to choose from, we'll be strong.

"Results over pre-season have not been great, probably because of the reasons that I have just mentioned, but the main focus has been to get minutes into legs, build up fitness levels and work on our style of play, both defensively and offensively.

"We're going into a strong League this year, with the relegated teams only adding to the strength and I've no doubt that they'll be right up there. There are also some clubs with nice budgets to work with too, so it's going to be tough, but we'll be ready to compete.

"First and foremost we want to be able to improve upon last season's showing, where we finished just inside the top ten with 57 points. If we can beat that tally then that will be progress and that's all I can ask for."

The Rest of the Action

An impressive end to the season saw Northwood escape from relegation danger and they will be looking to pick up where they left off as they travel to a young AFC Dunstable outfit who are also setting their sights on ongoing progression. Two teams who found themselves in the lower half of the table were Aylesbury United and Leverstock Green, they meet at the weekend as they look to start the campaign on the right foot.

There will be an intriguing encounter at Barton Rovers as the hosts, who made the play-offs last term, welcome a newly-relegated Marlow outfit who have ambitions of bouncing back at the first attempt. Joining them in relegation were Biggleswade Town and they are back at this level with the visit of Enfield.

Having impressed in their first season at this level, Flackwell Heath, host new-boys London Lions, whilst Hadley, who got into the play-offs last time around, welcome a Hitchin Town outfit who finally succumbed to the drop last season but have put together a strong-looking team over the summer. Hertford Town will be hoping for better this season as they get the action underway at home to a Thame United outfit who just missed out on a top-five finish.

Another fancied outfit this season are Leighton Town. They had a great run during the course of last term which took them from the lower reaches of the table to the verge of the play-off places. They host a Ware side who secured tenth spot last term, whilst new-boys, Rayners Lane, aim to make an impact and they



Rayners Lane manager Scott Patmore

start life with us at home to Biggleswade FC. The remaining game sees Stotfold, now under new management, begin their fresh chapter against a Beaconsfield Town side who are also hoping to be able to make an impact this time out.

There are some mouth-watering match-ups, so make sure you get along to a game!

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