

MOLTEN SPARTAN SOUTH MIDLANDS FOOTBALL LEAGUE

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There were three hat tricks to get the New year off to a flying start – Oliver Godwin for Beaconsfield SYCOB, Shaun Walker for Aston Clinton, and Craig Hawkes for Kent Athletic.

PREMIER DIVISION ROUND UP

Another New Year and another leader of the Premier Division. **Chalfont St. Peter** sits proudly atop the pile for the first time since the end of August, albeit on goal difference, having beaten **Biggleswade Town** 1-0 at home. On paper this was clearly the match of the day, but in truth it was a relatively poor game, in front of a disappointing crowd of only 71, with neither keeper having to make any real saves. This was the second match in succession that Biggleswade had failed to score, and with leading scorer Dan Heron hamstrung for a few weeks they may have problems in this department. Obviously this was a game neither side wanted to lose, and both sides were grateful to excellent performances from their respective centre backs. Man-mountain Paul Reynolds won everything in the air for the Waders, but quite why Chalfont persisted in slinging high balls up to one of the smallest forward lines in the world will probably remain a mystery, whilst John Carroll was coolness personified at the back for Chalfont. Both sides were guilty of some very wayward finishing, but there was finally a touch of class in the 83rd minute as Bradley Bubb clinically finished off an excellent through ball from Charlie Strutton to seal all three points. **Beaconsfield SYCOB**, who started the day in 6th place, moved up to third with an 8-0 walloping of **Welwyn Garden City**. The goals were fairly evenly spread, with four in each half, and included a hat trick from Oliver Godwin and a brace from Stuart Swift. Singles came from Adrian Sear, Aaron Lennon and Michael Currie. Chalfont and Beaconsfield were the only two of the top 7 sides who won on Saturday, although **Brimdown Rovers** did manage a 0-0 draw away to lowly **London Colney** – a match they would probably have expected to get more from. **Harefield United** will have been disappointed to have lost 3-2 away at **Aylesbury Vale**, particularly having been 2-1 up through Ben Hammond and Michael Livesey with around 28 minutes left. Luke Melisi scored his second of the game in the 81st minute to level the scores, and Paul Talbot notched a disputed (by Harefield) winner with just a minute remaining. The protests of the Harefield bench were long, hard and totally over the top and the reverberations are likely to continue. If goals are your bag, then **Tring Athletic** is the place to go – supporters having now seen 45 in the last 9 home games. Visitors **Hanwell Town** also threw away a lead – they were 1-0 up at half time through Jason Tucker, but Tring missed the opportunity to take a second-minute lead when Hanwell keeper Simeon Charles saved Terry Gibbs penalty kick. Hanwell doubled their lead with the taste of the half time Jaffas still lingering in the mouth, when Dean Scarlett powered in a header, but almost immediately Trevor Gibbs glanced in a long throw to reduce the deficit. Tring then had another penalty awarded, which David Whicker took, and scored to draw level, only to see Scarlett put Hanwell back in front 10 minutes later with a rasping shot. Back came Tring and this time it was Whicker's turn to unleash a fierce drive from some 35 yards out to once again level the scores. With just a minute of normal time remaining, Tring's talismanic boy wonder Andy Humphries popped up with an acrobatic overhead kick to win the game, but there was still time for Hanwell's skipper Warren Williams to be dismissed for a second yellow. **Hertford Town** also lost away on their travels – they went down 1-0 at **Leverstock Green** to a 35 yard blaster from Steve Hawes just before half time. **London Colney's** point gained in their game with **Brimdown Rovers** meant that they creep slowly nearer the two clubs above them – Holmer Green and Ruislip Manor, both of whom lost again. **Holmer Green** went down 3-0 at home to **Langford**, who went into the break 1-0 up thanks to a twice taken penalty, Joe Delaselle making the second one count. Wes Byrne doubled the lead after 65 minutes and Rob Groves wrapped up the win in the 86th

minute. **Ruislip Manor** lost 3-1 away at Kingsbury London Tigers, having taken a first half lead with a 9th minute goal from Daryl Campbell. The Tigers roared back in the second half however, with goals from Hardy Moreiro, Tarik Ellekhusi and Danilson Vicente. **St. Margaretsbury** had a 19th minute goal from Ben Herod to thank for their 1-0 home win over **Biggleswade United**, while **Cockfosters** came back from their visit to **Broxbourne Borough** with a similar result – Dan O'Connor scoring the goal after 32 minutes. The remaining game in this division saw 5 goals at **Colney Heath**, with four of them in the second half. The visitors were **Oxhey Jets**, who took a first half lead through Wayne Gladly and then doubled their advantage in the 65th minute courtesy of Paul Danslow. Colney struck back to level the scores at 2-2 with goals from Greg Deacon and Jake Parratt, only for Danslow to get his second of the match 3 minutes later to make the final score 3-2 to Oxhey Jets.

DIVISION ONE ROUND UP

The situation at the top of this division is beginning to mirror that of the Premier, although in this case there are 8 teams in contention, covered by just 9 points. As in the Premier Division, the leadership again changed hands as **Hoddesdon Town** went back to the top following their 3-0 win away at McMullen Park against **Bedford FC**. In a feisty first half there were two goals, two bookings and one sending off. Hoddesdon got off to a flying start after only 4 minutes when a cleverly taken free kick found Richard Howard unmarked and he lashed the ball home from 15 yards. It was mostly Hoddesdon and they scored a second goal on 34 minutes after a ball broke loose from midfield and Craig Hinton ran through to chip the ball over the advancing keeper and into the net. Hoddesdon then spoilt their early work when Lee Knight needlessly got himself sent off as he blocked the run of a Bedford forward and, being the last man, he had to go. The second half was mostly one way traffic towards the visitor's goal and Bedford 'scored' but was rightly ruled out for offside. That was as good as it got for Bedford and ten men Hoddesdon seemed content to defend their lead and hit on the break. Just such a break saw Hoddesdon score their third goal right on full time as a free kick from Andy Martin somehow found its way through a sea of legs and into the far corner of the Bedford goal. **Haringey Borough** suffered their first defeat of manager Alan Fenn's 6-game reign and were knocked off their perch at the top as they were beaten 5-3 away to **Stony Stratford Town**, who have moved into second place as a result of their win. Karl Lewis gave Boro a very early lead, but Stony quickly drew level through Gary Hutchinson. Marc Redsull then put the home side in front, only for Boro's Chima Obiji to level the scores right on half time. The second half belonged to Stony Stratford as they ran in three more before Boro's late consolation. **Kentish Town** also dropped a couple of places as they were held to a 0-0 draw away at **Sport London e Benfica**. **Royston Town** continue their Phoenix like rise from the ashes as they moved up into 8th place with a 4-0 home win over **Harpenden Town**, thanks to an OG, and goals from Tom Mullins, Will Toll and Graham Tibbles. **Brache Sparta** arrested their mini slump with a 3-0 home win against **Amptill Town**, with a first half brace from Lee Haywood and a second half goal from Edwin Leslie. **Amersham Town** returned from Cheshunt Reserves with a 2-1 win and their first points since the middle of October. Martin Loakes got them off to the best possible start with a 1st minute goal, and although Robbie Carroll equalised for the home side, Jude Eboji came up with the all important winner early in the second half. This turned out to be another feisty game, particularly in the later stages of the second half, as there were only 18 players left at the end. Four were sent off – 3 from Amersham and one from Cheshunt. There was another very early goal at **Cranfield United**, where Ryan Wiffen's second minute effort gave visitors **Winslow United** a great start. Ryan Lockett brought the home side level after 37 minutes, only for Grant Kaloarcinski to put Winslow back in front a minute later, and Wiffen further increased the lead just as the Jaffa's were being sliced up. Although Lockett pulled one back in the second half, it was not enough and Cranfield drop down to second from bottom. **Sun Postal Sports** continue to hold up the table as they lost 3-1 away to **New Bradwell St. Peter** – a win which pushes the Saints up to 5th place. The home side were two nil up at half time through Rob Mooney and Greg Tite, and Lee Coulter added a third in the second half before John Thornley netted Sun Postal's sole reply. The game at Stratford Fields

between **Buckingham Athletic** and **Bedford Town Reserves** seemed destined for a 0-0 draw; until Andy Bennett's last minute strike saw the home side take all three points and move up two places to tenth.

DIVISION TWO ROUND UP

No change at the top as **Crawley Green** and **Kings Langley** battled to a 0-0 draw. With AFC Dunstable in cup action, **The 61 FC** missed the chance to close the gap on the third place side as they went down 2-1 at home to **Pitstone & Ivinghoe**. The first half was goalless, but James Mountfort gave the visitors the lead 5 minutes after the break, - The 61 FC pulled level ten minutes later through Hayden Wills, but Lawrence Bunker scored Pitstone's winner with 15 minutes remaining. **Aston Clinton** remain in 5th spot after a Shaun Walker hat trick spurred them on to a 3-1 home win over visitors **Totternhoe**, for whom Joe Willmott scored a late consolation. **Risborough Rangers** beat **Mursley United** 2-1 thanks to a 86th minute penalty winner from Robbie Morgan, and **Tring Corinthians** came back from **Caddington** with a 2-1 victory – Corries goals coming from Ashley Higgins and Chris West.

BEDS SENIOR TROPHY QUARTER FINALS

Three of the four Quarter Finals involved a SSMFL club, and all three progressed safely through to the Semi-Finals. There were goals galore at **Kent Athletic** where the home side had an emphatic 7-3 win over Kempston Town, including a Craig Hawkes hat trick, whilst **Arlesey Athletic** ran in 5 without reply in their away tie at Sharnbrook. **AFC Dunstable** completed the trio of successes with a 3-1 home win against Meltis Corinthians – no doubt giving Eric Harrison another severe headache in the process! At least they are away in their Semi final to Arlesey Athletic, whilst Kent Athletic are at home to Caldecote.

MANAGERIAL CHANGE –SORT OF!

It's all as you were at Cockfosters FC, where David Craig has been re-appointed as First Team manager. Mark Standen, who took over the reins when David Craig stepped down recently, has reverted to his previous role of Assistant manager.

LEAGUE CHALLENGE TROPHY QUARTER FINALS

This week sees 3 of the Challenge Trophy Quarter Finals being played, with Beaconsfield SYCOB awaiting the winners of the delayed Brimsdown Rovers v Welwyn Garden City third round tie. Two games are being played on Tuesday night – the all-Premier Division clash between Kingsbury London Tigers and Leverstock Green whilst a tasty tie is anticipated at Chalfont St. Peter, where Stony Stratford Town, currently second in Division One, visit the new Premier Division leaders. Stony Stratford reached the Final of this competition last season, and will looking go one better this year. The third game being played on Saturday sees The 61FC from Division Two host struggling Premier Division side Holmer Green. Interestingly, Holmer, in 1999 against Waltham Abbey and Stony Stratford, are the only two teams from outside the Premier Division to have reached the Final since the South Midlands and Spartan Leagues merged back in 1997. Those of you with longish memories, or those that still have a memory, will recall that the Final traditionally always used to be a two legged affair, played on Good Friday and Easter Monday. It is only in the last few years that it has become a single game at a neutral venue.

STEP 5 PROMOTION APPLICANTS / CANDIDATES

Nationally, a total of 67 clubs currently at Step 5 level have applied to be considered for promotion to Step 4 should they finish in the requisite promotion position and fulfil all the relevant ground

grading criteria. Within the Spartan South Midlands League, there are 7 applicants who, coincidentally, currently fill the top 7 spots in the league. The seven clubs are Beaconsfield SYCOB, Biggleswade Town, Brimsdown Rovers, Chalfont St. Peter, Hanwell Town, Harefield United and Hertford Town. As has been mentioned before, this is one of the closest title races for some time, with only 6 points currently covering these top seven clubs. I took the opportunity to look around at the other Step5 leagues in the southern half of the country and there is only one other league where it is so close at the top and that is the United Counties League, where 6 points also cover 7 clubs. However, only 3 clubs within the League have applied for promotion and only two of these are in the top seven. Neither of the top two, Stotfold or Boston Town has applied. In the Combined Counties League, Merstham FC lead Camberley by 15 points, whilst in the Hellenic League Almondsbury Town has a 6 point cushion over second placed North Leigh. Early front runners Flackwell Heath, who chose the Hellenic when they were relegated last season, have dropped back to 6th place, some 13 points off the leaders. Down in the west country, last years FA Vase winners Truro City seem a shoo-in for their second successive promotion, being 8 points clear of Corsham Town in the Western league In the Kent Premier league, VCD Athletic are 7 points clear of Thamesmead Town whilst in the Essex Senior league, 6 points cover just two teams, leaders Enfield and second place Barkingside.

TITTLE-TATTLE

The much travelled prolific goal scorer Mickey Swaysland, who joined Leverstock Green at the beginning of this season and became their leading goalscorer in the league, has obviously got the wanderlust again, and has just signed for Beaconsfield SYCOB. The Rams are clearly girding their loins for a promotion push and have also recently signed old boy Steve Dell from Farnborough Town. Dell, who has also led a nomadic existence, was with Beaconsfield before signing for Wycombe Wanderers in Aug 2003. Green moved swiftly for a replacement and signed Matt Wardle from Welwyn Garden City. Wardle previously played at Leverstock some 3 years ago.

Rumour has it that referee Stewart Beardon is now driving a little MG sports car, and is picking up fellow refereeing colleagues (!) with the hood down. He also produces a flimsy little hat to keep the heads warm of his slightly more follically-challenged colleagues. This little snippet comes courtesy of Dave Carman, and he should know!

Most club officials will be used to having their usual crowds swollen by visiting ground hoppers, whose identities are usually given away by the fact they are carrying plastic supermarket bags, tucking into any available hamburgers or hot dogs, and closely perusing train and bus time tables. On New Years Day, Mursley United were visited by two such ground hoppers – the only difference being that these were German ground hoppers! The fact that they were eating Bratwurst and holding Lufthansa timetables gave them away.

Many thanks to our contributors - please keep all news /views / items of interest coming to billscholes@hotmail.co.uk

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