

London Owls Newsletter

FEBRUARY 2012

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True Steel!

On the face of it Terry Curran and Chris O'Grady would not appear to have much in common. A mercurial winger always capable of the spectacular, and a hard working centre forward who does best creating space for others.

However, the last time Wednesday and United both found themselves in the third tier Curran was the Owl's hero, netting in both Steel City Derbies – a home win and an away draw. This is a feat which O'Grady has just emulated and after the match he spoke of his "pride in wearing the shirt", something Curran would certainly recognise.



Each of the 36,000 fans who crammed into the Old Lady on Sunday will never forget the occasion. The biggest crowd outside the Premier League this season, Megson kissing his badge in front of the blunts fans, the debut of Antonio and the Sheffield United synchronised diving team all made for a captivating match, if not one for the purists.

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Mark Reynolds - @reyn01ds
Matthew Tumilty - @Matty_Tumilty
Michail Antonio - @Michailantonio
Richard O'Donnell - @RichODonnell23
Ryan Lowe - @rlowe15
Stephen Bywater - @gjones123456789

Wednesday needed the win more and made the positive changes needed to wrestle control of the match in the second half, introducing Jones and Madine.

Despite the incessant cries of "hoof" from the Leppings Lane end, it was the best bit of football of the match which opened up the United defence and lead to the only goal.

After he had nodded home Buxton's delicious cross, O'Grady ran straight for the Wednesday bench. Megson later joked that the site of the "17 stone" centre forward heading towards him at full pelt was frightening, but the gesture of togetherness between players and management staff cannot have been missed by anyone.



No one in Hillsborough had a wider smile than Megson at full time, particularly when Rob Jones hoisted him in the air. Afterwards the Owls' manager reflected that: "I've never experienced beating United as a manager with Wednesday, so this means a whole lot more. No game has ever meant more to me than beating them in a derby. I've been doing this job a long time and I've had some results where looking back they were hugely important. The pressure comes with the expectation of being at such a big club."

We can all agree with that.

Quiz Time

There was a strong performance from the London Owls quiz team at the last league meeting on 16th February. We were able to fill all six places allowed with a line-up of: Paul H, Rich, Jon W, Jon C, Matt and Ian and were rewarded with a third place finish.

In what we can only hope will not be a bad omen for the season, the game was won by Charlton with a team playing in red and white and beginning with "S" (Sunderland) coming in second!

Our next events are the individual home counties quiz competition on Thursday 1st March at the Exmouth Arms on Starscross Street and the Cup Game versus Sunderland on 8th March at the Calthorpe Arms on Grays Inn Road. There is plenty of room for spectators at both.

Travel Update

Please email iancol@clara.co.uk if you are interested in attending any of the forthcoming home or away matches. There may still be room in the car for the game at Rochdale on Saturday – please email for more information.

Here's a bit more advanced notice for our next couple of fixtures:

BOURNEMOUTH home

Sat 10th March

Usual £32, 9.55 and 18:27 train arrangement from St Pancras to Sheffield.

On list so far....

Fred, John, Tom, Alex, Paul , Ian

NOTTS COUNTY away

17th March.

There will be bookings made, probably on the 10.15 outward. The fare will be approx. £30, and return will not be train specific.

Got a story to tell?

We're always on the lookout for new stories for the newsletter, and in particular are hoping to get match reports from every game from a wide variety of fans.

If you have any contributions no matter how big or small please email mattkelcher@gmail.com or tweet @mattkelcher and they will be included in a future newsletter.

Best Photos from Sunday ...



▲ Meggo responds to the Blunts' unsavoury chanting!



▲ Jose drops to his knees in prayer as the rest of the team celebrate



◀ Captain and manager embrace at the final whistle



▲ New boy Antonio beats his man

Milan Mandaric Paul Aldridge

A true story of one man's fight to succeed in the one place he loved

MARK KERMODE, BBC FILM REVIEW

"MEGSON GIVES THE PERFORMANCE OF HIS LIFE"

SETH BENNETT, RADIO SHEFFIELD

"NATURAL LEADER"

STEVE BASFORD, CHESTERFIELD STEWARDS

"AT ALL SAID"

MEGSON

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IMAGINE



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The Debate

Welcome to the new London Owls rant corner. Got something to get off your chest? Something that drives you mad about modern day football? Then send it in and we'll publish it. The more pedantic and petty the better!

The Football League's reduction in subs is bad for managers, players and fans

By Matthew Kelcher

This season has seen a major change in the way the football is played in the English lower leagues. The change was announced with little fanfare and was barely noticed by many fans, who, as ever, were not consulted. It has not been a change for the better.

The Football League's decision, ratified by the clubs just two and a half weeks before the season kicked off, to reduce the number of named substitutes from seven to five, has had a negative impact on managers, players and fans.

The main reason for this is that it promotes caution and conservatism – two things which never lead to a more exciting or interesting game on the pitch.

The most obvious way that it does this is by giving managers less options to cover potential injuries in the starting eleven. Most managers select a goalkeeper for the bench, leaving just four places to cover the ten outfield positions.

Sheffield Wednesday manager Gary Megson has repeatedly pointed out this season that he cannot simply pick his "next four best players" for the bench but needs to select flexible players who can play in multiple positions and cover numerous potential injuries.

Alongside the managers left sweating on the fitness of their starting team, the other obvious losers from this trend are the players who miss out on a chance to get into the match day squad. There are also potential longer term dangers to the English game.

Managers have become increasingly discouraged from selecting specialised players who can only effectively contribute in their natural position, and to favour all-rounders and utility players. Unfortunately, specialist players tend to be exactly the kind of skilful, attacking footballers fans love to watch. Which players are most likely to get you off your seat – the pacey winger who sometimes fails to track back, the penalty-box poacher who just needs one chance to score, the mercurial playmaker who likes to pepper the goalkeeper with long range shots – or the big lad who can adequately do a job anywhere along the backline?

Incentivising clubs to buy and develop these "poly filler" players, who can fill any hole you push them into, will further push flair and specialised players out of the game.



The reduction of substitutes also discourages the right kind of youth development. Many youngsters will not get their chance to break into the first team from the bench. Partly because there simply will not be as many spaces for them, but also because with less options managers will be less likely to take a chance on them.

There is already a major problem with youth coaching in England as teenagers are trained to win at all costs rather than given the time and breathing space to develop their skills and learn the game in their best position. The FA have at long last begun to address this problem under the leadership of Sir Trevor Brooking. However, if clubs continue to scramble around for utility players will young, flair forwards get the chance to learn the game and hone their ball skills?

Besides encouraging a less skilful game, the reduction in substitutes also short-changes fans in other ways. Firstly, it makes the outcome of a game more dependent on chance. Of course luck, whether good or bad, is a vital element of football and always will be. However, in the same way that fans and pundits decry an early harsh red card as "spoiling a match", an early injury can do just the same. Imagine the frustration of a Hartlepool fan making the long journey for a game in Exeter, only to see their side's entire game plan ripped apart by an early injury to their left winger, a role which no-one else in the match day squad is practised in performing. Of course this could happen however many subs the team has, but with more options available on the bench the team are more likely to have a specialist to come onto the pitch and maintain the balance and therefore excitement of the match.



Secondly, more substitutes makes the game more interesting. One of the joys of Jose Mourinho's spell in the Premier League was his radical use of substitutions. If his side went a goal behind he would throw on an extra forward even after thirty minutes of play. If they overcame the deficit and took the lead he would change things again to protect his lead. Norwich's Paul Lambert has used his substitutes to radical effect this season regular changing formations mid-way through a match to react to the opposition's strengths and weaknesses. In Norwich's away game at Loftus Road, QPR defender Clint Hill was seen to run to the bench after Norwich made a trio of substitutions and holler: "you've got to change it! It's five against four! They've got wing backs!" His manager, Neil Warnock, did not heed this advice, and moments later Norwich netted their inevitable winner. Matches are enhanced by this tactical flexibility and innovation, but it would be much harder to pull off with only four outfield options to select from.

Football has become more riveting, interesting and balanced since it became a squad game rather than merely about the eleven first choices on the pitch. We should embrace and not run away from this.

Whilst the change was brought in to help clubs comply with fair play regulations it is delivering an inferior product to fans whilst handicapping managers and flair players. It should be withdrawn before next season.