

London Owls Newsletter

CHRISTMAS 2011

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Transfer talk

American Dream

It looks like James O'Connor has played his last game for the club. The 32 year old Dubliner has received a player/coach offer from an unnamed Major League Soccer club and after discussions with his manager, Gary Megson, is set to leave on a free transfer.



Gary Megson explained: "James only signed a six-month contract in the summer. I wanted him to stay on and sign for another six months to the end of the season and we'd take it from there." However, he has always had one eye on a future management career and with Prutton back to full fitness this seems to be a good option for all parties.

O'Connor added: "I'm disappointed myself, but such is life. I wish them all the best. It's a fantastic club; it's been an absolute privilege to play for them."

Permanent Fixtures?

Megson has made no secret of his desire to land loanees Ben Marshall, Danny Bath and Stephen Bywater on a permanent basis.

Bywater is out of favour at Derby and seems likely to be available on a free, but some extraordinary sums have been mentioned in terms of transfer fees for Marshall and Bath.

Below are the top five transfer fees ever paid by English third division clubs. All of these fees were commanded for well established players who had proven themselves at a higher level, and were often bank-rolled by sugar-daddy chairmen such as Mohammed Al Fayed.

5. Nathan Ellington. Bristol Rovers to Wigan. £1.2m (2002)
4. Peter Thorne. Stoke to Cardiff. £1.7m (2001)
3. Graham Kavanah. Stoke to Cardiff. £1m (2001)
2. Barry Hayles. Bristol Rovers to Fulham. £2m (1998)
1. Chris Coleman. Blackburn to Fulham. £2m (1997)

With this context in mind Megson and the Owls' Chief Executive Paul Aldridge can be hopeful that the Bath and Marshall – two young players with little experience above this level, who are largely unknown by their own club's fans and in Marshall's case six months from the end of a contract – might just be available for much less.

Useful Contacts

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Follow the Current Squad on Twitter

Ben Marshall - @bmarshall_10
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Danny Bath - @Danny_Bath
Giles Coke - @RealCokes
Jon Otsemobor - @semi36
Julian Bennett - @B13NNT
Liam Palmer - @LiamPalmer12
Matthew Tumilty - @Matty_Tumilty
Richard O'Donnell - @RichODonnell23
Ryan Lowe - @rlowe15
Sanchez Watt - @sanchezwatt



A True Christmas Cracker!



It was a match which reminded why you fell in love with football in the first place. It was also a match which reminded you how cruel the game can be. As Owls manager Gary Megson later commented, the game was lost, then won and eventually drawn.

The stage was certainly set for a classic: nearly 29,000 fans came through the turnstiles determined to sing their side to victory and celebrate Milan Mandric's first anniversary as chairman. This was not only the biggest Hillsborough crowd of the season, but the fourth biggest in the country on Saturday.

Visitors Huddersfield clearly arrived in S6 with a specific game-plan. Striker Jon Parkin was dropped as the Terriers fielded a five man midfield and concentrated their attacks on the inexperienced right back James Tavernier.



In the first twenty minutes this plan succeeded emphatically. Wednesday struggled to get any possession in midfield, and the visitor's left winger, Gary Roberts, was tying the Owls' right back in knots.

The thirteenth minute proved unlucky for Wednesday. Inevitably it was Roberts – a target for Wednesday in the summer – who cut inside from the left and put the ball on a plate for Jordan Rhodes to open the scoring.



Three minutes later Rhodes got across the Wednesday back line to meet another teasing Roberts cross to double the Terriers' lead.

Megson's men were struggling to get into the game, and struggling to contain Huddersfield's threat down the left. Both Prutton and Lines took turns on the right side of midfield in a bit to help out Tavernier, but the Newcastle loanee had clearly been targeted by Huddersfield and Lee Novak also got clearly on the left to send in a dangerous cross in the early stages.



Fortunately, Wednesday's class of 2011/12 have a mental strength which many of their predecessors have lacked. Equally importantly they are extremely adept at converting set pieces, and with the battle for possession going so clearly against Megson's men it was perhaps unsurprising that this is how they found a way back into the game.

On 27 minutes Marshall, following up from a long throw, picked up the ball on the left. He floated a delicious ball to the back post where Rob Jones climbed highest to halve the deficit.

Just two minutes later another long throw lead to the mother of all goal mouth scrambles. Wednesday hit the bar, had an effort blocked on the line by Ian Bennet, appealed for a hand-ball all before Reda Johnson wrestled the ball away from Huddersfield to knock home the equaliser.

Before the game Jones and Johnson were the joint top scoring defenders in League One, with three goals each. Amazingly, in the space of a matter of seconds they'd both move onto four. Benin international Johnson clearly didn't want his captain to move ahead of him in the scoring charts!



Everyone in the ground need a breather at half time, but the peace wasn't to last long as the second half maintained the frenetic pace of the first. Ryan Lowe replace Sanchez Watt up front and showed terrific levels of energy and determination to unsettle the Huddersfield defence.



The kop were doing their best to suck the ball in and sure enough just after the hour mark Wednesday scored again.

Ben Marshall received the ball on the left and ran inside towards the penalty area. Typically, Chris O'Grady's movement off the ball was excellent, the big number 9 taking the Town defenders with him as he ran to the centre of the penalty area. Marshall fully exploited the gap this created and palced a low shot across the goalkeeper into the far corner. The Stoke loanee celebrated with the Wednesday fans in a way which would encourage those who would love him to stay at S6.

In the 73rd minute it was finally the selfless O'Grady's turn to get on the score-sheet, as he instinctively flicked a looping header over the goalkeeper and into the net.

Wednesday were playing really well at this point. Prutton was playing deep on the right and doing an excellent job of nullifying the earlier deadly threat down Huddersfield's left. Semedo smashed a shot inches wide and there were appeals for a red card when a Huddersfield defender pushed the ball away from Lowe – who would have been clean through – with his hand.

But then, as the game entered the final ten minutes, Jones didn't get close enough to Rhodes and the game's outstanding player kept his composure to fire past Bywater.

Butterflies began to flutter in the stomachs of the thousands Wednesdayites on packed into three sides of Hillsborough. Perhaps if the Owls had been able to hold onto the two goal advantage for a few minutes longer Huddersfield would have lost belief. Instead they went for it, throwing on Parkin and pummelling the Owls' box with long balls.

Wednesday's lack of savvy contributed to the inevitable. Bywater hit two shocking goal kicks out of play, and Prutton, who otherwise had an excellent second half inexplicably gave the ball way on a couple of occasions.

Rhodes only needs a sniff of goal and when he got in front of Reda Johnson in the 97th minute this is what he got. In hindsight Johnson might made a different decision, and accepted a red-card for hacking down the Scottish international. But once he got a yard of space Rhodes was the calmest man in the stadium as he bore down on goal to coolly slot past Bywater.

It was cruel blow for Wednesday, but afterwards the manager expressed his hope and belief that they would learn from this and more effectively see out games in future.

Whilst the last second equaliser was a heart breaking moment, upon later reflection the result can be seen as a positive one. Wednesday have still not lost to a top five side and with Charlton also drawing they have lost no ground on the leaders and will be in the automatic spots on Christmas Day. Those who were at Hillsborough on Saturday also know they saw one of the best games of recent times. ■

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.

Travel Details

As ever, The London Owls will be travelling to all forthcoming home league games, catching the 0955 outbound and returning on the 1827 for the price of £32.

Please email iancol@clara.co.uk if you want to get involved.