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**Saturday 6th April 2024**  
Pitching In Northern Premier League - Midlands

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Winners 2007

**BCFA Midweek Floodlit Cup**  
Winners 2007

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**United Counties League Programme of the Year**  
Winners 2023

**Midland Alliance Programme of the Year**  
Winners 2008  
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**Midland Combination Programme of the Year**  
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Ticket Manager: Mandy Seddon  
Programme Editor: Chris Nee

### FIRST TEAM STAFF

Joint Manager: Shaun Thomas  
Joint Manager: John Woodward  
First Team Coach: Nigel Starkey  
Goalkeeping Coach: Damian Morgan  
Goalkeeping Coach: Michael Taylor  
First Team Physio: Kirk Holland  
Kit Manager: Paul Seddon  
Chief Scout: Jim McClean

### GROUNDS TEAM

Paul Wright, Martin Sutton

### MEDIA TEAM

Chris Nee  
Liam Cook

### PHOTOGRAPHY

Marcus Robinson  
Stuart Guest

### MATCHDAY HOSPITALITY

Leanne Talbot & Donna Crouch

### MATCHDAY VOLUNTEERS

Martin Sutton, Dave Bull, Alan Townsend

### Coventry Sphinx Football Club

Sphinx Industrial Supplies Arena, Sphinx Drive, Coventry, CV3 1WA  
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## Final 2023/24 Fixtures

HOME



### Coventry Sphinx v Walsall Wood

Pitching In Northern Premier League - Midlands

Saturday 6th April 2024 | 3.00pm

Sphinx Industrial Supplies Arena  
Sphinx Drive

HOME



### Coventry Sphinx v Shepshed Dynamo

Pitching In Northern Premier League - Midlands

Tuesday 9th April 2024 | 7.45pm

Sphinx Industrial Supplies Arena  
Sphinx Drive

AWAY



### Anstey Nomads v Coventry Sphinx

Pitching In Northern Premier League - Midlands

Saturday 13th April 2024 | 3.00pm

Cropston Road  
Cropston Road, Anstey, LE7 7BP

HOME



### Coventry Sphinx v Boldmere St Michaels

Pitching In Northern Premier League - Midlands

Saturday 20th April 2024 | 3.00pm

Sphinx Industrial Supplies Arena  
Sphinx Drive

AWAY

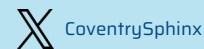


### Hinckley LR v Coventry Sphinx

Pitching In Northern Premier League - Midlands

Saturday 27th April 2024 | 3.00pm

Leicester Road Stadium  
Leicester Road, Hinckley, LE10 3DR



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## In this issue

6	Editorial	22	2023/24 Season Overview
8	Our History	26	Report: Lye Town 1-1 Sphinx
12	Meet The Squad	34	The Nakata Blueprint
16	Report: Sphinx 0-1 Sutton Coldfield Town	36	Today's Opponents
18	2023/24 Player Statistics	40	NPL Midlands
20	Moments That Matter	44	Match Squads

Wherever we go from here, walking into the Sphinx Industrial Supplies Arena last Saturday was an experience I won't forget in a hurry.

I'm a relative newcomer to Coventry Sphinx but a decade is still a long time, and we've been through an awful lot. We've had relegation battles and a title win, cancellations and covid, and seeing the old place fully renovated seemed to sum it all up. Sphinx Drive is almost unrecognisable.

If you read this page in every programme for some reason, I apologise for doing the broken record thing again. The work that's gone in behind the scenes to bring fencing, terracing, roofing, hard standing, pitchside toilets and new turnstiles to the stadium has been immense.

It's also noteworthy that our approach to getting promoted and meeting ground grading requirements as a Step Four football club has been whole-hearted and delivered upon to a standard that some other clubs in the same position might consider taking on board.

By the time we kick off today's match against Walsall Wood (for anyone suspecting a dig here, they're absolutely not one of those clubs!) we'll have had our ground grading inspection. Whatever the outcome, I'd like to thank those involved in getting the stadium up to scratch and doing so properly.

The boys have been doing the job on the pitch as well. It's fair to say our ambitions for the season were as modest as remaining in the eighth tier, where we're playing for the first time in our history. Slowly but surely we've dragged ourselves towards that line.

It's been a tough season for John and Shaun and their players, but I remain full of admiration for

what they've achieved in 2023/24. We've picked up points consistently, which we've believed all along would be the key to surviving.

Make no mistake: if we stay up in our first season in the Pitching In Northern Premier League Midlands, it'll be as much a success as winning the United Counties League Premier Division South last season. We are punching well above our weight and we've done it all season long.

The next challenge for Sphinx is to pack on some more weight of our own. Consistent progress is a worthy ambition in itself and it's that momentum that's propelled our club forward in the last couple of seasons. There's no reason to stop now; we just need to keep on swimming.

Another season at this level would come with new realities of its own. From my point of view, we're now at the stage when we need the community behind us. Coventry is a football city and non-league can thrive here. These boys deserve — and that's not a word I use lightly — bigger home attendances.

This afternoon we welcome the supporters, players, management and officials of Walsall Wood to Sphinx Drive for our second meeting of the league season. I really enjoyed our visit to the Wood in the autumn and the draw was a fair result at the end of a really entertaining game.

Today included, we have five fixtures left. The next is Shepshed Dynamo here on Tuesday before matches against Anstey Nomads (away), Boldmere St Michaels (home) and Hinckley Leicester Road. There's nothing easy in there, but we've turned over the odds all year.

Let's finish the season on a high. The run-in starts now. Come on you blue boys!



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# OUR HISTORY

The history of Coventry Sphinx began in 1946. Armstrong Whitworth Aircraft FC had been highly successful in the city before and during the Second World War and changed their name to Sphinx FC.

AWA's legacy was replicated by the new club. Sphinx won a number of league and cup competitions throughout the 1950s and 1960s before playing a major role in the formation of the Coventry Alliance and continuing to win trophies in the following decades.

Coventry underwent significant socioeconomic change in the 1990s. The recession led to the closure of factories in the city and surrounding areas, which in turn led to the dissolution of many of Coventry's football clubs. Sphinx needed a new challenge and joined the Midland Combination Football League in 1993.

In our first season in the Midland Combination we were promoted from Division 2 and reached the semi-finals of the Birmingham Sunday Vase. A second consecutive promotion followed thanks to a second-placed finish in Division 1 the next season.

With promotion to the top division of the Midland Combination secured it was decided that the club should be linked more closely to our city. We became Coventry Sphinx and the first match under our new name was against a Coventry City XI at our home ground.

Throughout its history, our club has been served by countless loyal and hard-working local people who've contributed enormously to Coventry Sphinx on and off the field. Through their dedication we

have achieved some unbeatable highs. There have also been times of great tragedy.

In November 2001, Sphinx manager Willie Knibbs was killed in a car accident on the way home from a cup match at Meir KA. Willie was a former Sphinx player in his second spell as manager. His death was a terrible loss to our club and to local football in Coventry.

After a painful season, Sphinx went on to win the Midland Combination Challenge Cup and it was renamed the Willie Knibbs Cup as a mark of respect. Our main stand is also named in Willie's honour.

Sphinx became one of the leading teams in the Midland Combination Premier League, finishing as runners-up in our first season and again in both 2005 and 2006. We reached the final of the Endsleigh Challenge Cup on three occasions, losing to Alveston at Villa Park in 1999 but beating Coventry Marconi in 2003 and Feckenham in 2005.

We also won the Coventry Evening Telegraph Cup in successive seasons, making Sphinx the last winners of the competition at Highfield Road and the first at the Ricoh Arena.

Although first team success is a driving force, the heartbeat of our club is the thriving junior section. Formed in 1997, it started with just three teams and has grown ever since. There are now hundreds of players representing Coventry Sphinx and we were the first club in Coventry to achieve the FA Charter.

Our youth team started competing in the Midland Floodlit Youth League in 2003 and one of the

biggest successes to date came in the 2014/15 season, when they won the double after suffering only one league defeat and beating Stourbridge 3-0 in the Birmingham County FA Midweek Floodlit Youth Cup.

Under manager Paul Charnley, Coventry Sphinx's men's first team completed a remarkable treble achievement in May 2007.

In addition to finally becoming champions of the Midland Football Combination – achieving promotion to the Midland Football Alliance in the process – Sphinx won the Coventry Charity Cup and the BCFA Midland Floodlit Cup.

The 2007/08 season saw Sphinx enjoy our best ever run in the FA Vase, reaching the quarter-final for the very first time and losing controversially to Kirkham & Wesham, the eventual Wembley winners, in a replay at Sphinx Drive.

We made a run to the semi-finals of the League Cup in the same season and went on to win the Midland Alliance Polymac League Cup by beating Westfields in the final in 2009/10.

In 2014/15 the club was honoured to become a founder member of the Midland Football League Premier Division. After a top ten finish under Stuart Dutton, Lee Knibbs took over as manager in the autumn of 2017.

Lee is the son of Willie Knibbs and returned to the club after an earlier spell as assistant manager to Danny McSheffrey.

He guided Sphinx to some of our most memorable results of the decade before deciding to step aside in November 2019.

Knibbs was succeeded by his assistants, John Woodward and Shaun Thomas, who became the club's joint managers and ended the truncated 2019/20 season on a long unbeaten run, the foundation of Sphinx's greatest achievement to come.

Sphinx made a sideways move as part of FA restructuring ahead of the 2021/22 season, competing in a newly formed Premier Division South in the United Counties League.

In our first season we finished in fourth place, losing only twice in the second half of the season, and enjoyed a long run in the FA Vase, narrowly missing out on another quarter-final.

The following season saw Sphinx lose on penalties again in the same round of the FA Vase but 2022/23 was the best season in our history.

In the space of one week in April, our club acquired the freehold to the Sphinx Drive ground for the very first time and secured the United Counties League Premier Division South title with a 7-0 win against Eynesbury Rovers.

Sphinx won all of the last eleven league matches to close a big gap at the top and become champions. We scored 106 goals and ended the season three points clear of runners-up Rugby Town to confirm promotion to the Northern Premier League Midlands Division. 2023/24 is our first ever season at Step 4.

Football never stands still. Local football in Coventry has declined over the years, so to be playing at our highest ever level after more than seventy years is an achievement of which the players, officials and supporters of our club can be proud.

The structure in place at senior, youth and junior levels for both men and women promises a bright future for Coventry Sphinx as we work towards the progress Willie Knibbs' memory deserves.



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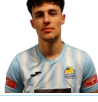





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# MEET THE SQUAD

	<b>Leo Brown</b>	Talented striker who rejoined the club from Alvechurch in March 2024 after a successful loan spell earlier in the 2023/24 season.			<b>Jordan Hayward</b>	Former Long Buckby wide player who scored on his debut in August 2022 and went on to win the UCL Premier Division South in his first season.	
	<b>Alfonso Castellano</b>	All-round midfielder who joined Coventry Sphinx in the summer of 2023 and played his way into the team at the end of an injury-hit season.			<b>Callum Martin</b>	Pacy former Coventry City junior full back who loves a tackle and causes opponents problems in the attacking third.	
	<b>Antonio Cristofaro</b>	Skilful former Walsall youth midfielder with dribbling ability, sharp creative instincts and an eye for goal.			<b>Cam Moore</b>	Dynamic attacking player who joined the club from Loughborough Dynamo in March 2024.	
	<b>Ashton Demulder</b>	A former Sphinx junior player who rejoined the club on loan from Solihull Moors after a spell with Coleshill Town.			<b>Dawid Peplinski</b>	Future Pro Academy scholar and former Sphinx youth central defender who joined the first team ranks after playing Step 5 football in 2022/23.	
	<b>Jack Downes</b>	Versatile, battling midfielder with a tremendous engine. Outstanding since returning to Sphinx Drive and a league winner in 2022/23.			<b>Joe Pursey</b>	Sturdy defender who came in late in 2022/23 and had an instant impact in Sphinx's title quest.	 024 7644 2838
	<b>Luke Downes</b>	Creative midfield player who returned to Sphinx in 2021 after countless impressive performances here as a youngster.			<b>Jac Redhead</b>	Creative midfield player with experience at Barwell and Halesowen Town.	 024 7644 2838
	<b>Jamie Draper</b>	Defender who emerged from the Sphinx youth team and has become a regular starter in our best ever team.			<b>Matthew Shipman</b>	Physical and mobile striker who led the line in the UCL Premier Division South title season after signing from Long Buckby in 2021/22.	 Sponsored by BF ESSENTIALS 07927 649288
	<b>William Edjenguele</b>	Experienced former Coventry City central defender who joined from Bedworth United after spells with Barwell and Nuneaton Borough.			<b>Finlay Shorrocks</b>	Versatile left-sided player who joined Sphinx in September 2023 and debuted in our first win in eighth tier football.	
	<b>Keelan Fallows</b>	Talented goalkeeper who joined from Tamworth at the start of Sphinx's first season in the eighth tier of English football.			<b>Callum Whiteside</b>	Versatile defensive player who joined Sphinx at the start of 2022/23 and quickly became a reliable regular for John Woodward and Shaun Thomas.	
	<b>Louis Guest</b>	A former Sphinx junior and now a leader in our squad, Guesty is a long-serving central defender and the club's vice captain.			<b>Leo Wood</b>	Promising striker who joined Sphinx on loan from Solihull Moors in early 2024.	
	<b>Tyler Haddow</b>	Dynamic and respected wide attacker who arrived at Sphinx in January 2024 with a fearsome reputation locally.			<b>Callum Woodward</b>	Long-serving legendary club captain, a battling mainstay in the Sphinx midfield and a vital source of goals and creativity.	 Dream Displays Exhibitors • Displays • Bespoke Fixings

## FIRST TEAM MANAGEMENT

John Woodward	Joint Manager	Sponsorship available
Shaun Thomas	Joint Manager	Sponsorship available
Nigel Starkey	First Team Coach	Sponsorship available
Michael Taylor	Goalkeeping Coach	Sponsorship available
Damian Morgan	Goalkeeping Coach	Sponsorship available
Jim McClean	Chief Scout	Sponsorship available
Kirk Holland	First Team Physio	Sponsorship available
Paul Seddon	Kit Manager	Sponsored by CEFOVID UGANDA
Sharon Taylor	Club Secretary	
Martin Sutton	Matchday Volunteer	CNS SPORT 
Liam Cook	Match Commentator	
Chris Nee	Programme Editor	

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## COVENTRY SPHINX 0 SUTTON COLDFIELD TOWN 1

**Pitching In NPL**  
**Division One Midlands**  
Saturday 30th March 2024

Coventry Sphinx were unable to capitalise on the momentum of a big win against Loughborough Dynamo and slipped to a 1-0 defeat at home by Sutton Coldfield Town.

The relegation battle in the Pitching In Northern Premier League Midlands is still a concern and a result in this match would have been another boost in the quest for safety.



Kyle Byrne scored the only goal of the game with eleven minutes remaining, taking the best chance of a tight and tense match that threatened at times to boil over.

Sphinx pushed hard for a late equaliser but it was a couple of close calls in the first half that they were left to regret.

With leading scorer Matty Shipman suffering a long-term injury last weekend, joint managers John Woodward and Shaun Thomas moved quickly to bring striker Leo Brown back to the club before the registration deadline. Brown went straight into the team, flanked up front by Ashton Demulder and Jordan Hayward.

Cam Moore again got the nod in midfield and played in front of captain Callum Woodward and Luke Downes. The familiar back four of Joe Pursey, Louis Guest, Will Edjenguele and Finlay Shorrock started in front of goalkeeper Keelan Fallows.

Sutton Coldfield goalkeeper Jono Brown was the first to be called into action. Five minutes in, Leo Brown was fouled in the corner and Sphinx were awarded a free kick.

Woodward delivered well and the visiting goalkeeper had to react smartly to parry Guest's thumping header to safety.

Fallows matched him three minutes later, getting off his line quickly to make an important block as Sutton Coldfield started to get on the ball. A speculative shot from 35 yards posed no danger.

New Sphinx signing Brown got into a promising position in the right channel in the 13th minute and fired the ball across goal to try and pick out Hayward. The winger was thwarted by two Sutton defenders who arrived at the same time to make the block with the goalkeeper taken out of contention by the pass.

The home team started to shade what had been an even first quarter of the game, which became increasingly chippy.

With 25 minutes played, Woodward fed Brown into the right slot again by taking a quick free kick that sent the striker into the box. He chopped back onto his left foot and his shot beat the goalkeeper but was cleared by a defender on the cover.



The hostility grew throughout the first half but goalmouth action was at a premium. Brown didn't quite catch all of his shot on the turn in the 33rd minute, and in the 36th Shorrock was forced to athletically clear a loose ball off the goal line to ensure that Sphinx went into the half time break at level pegging.

Sutton Coldfield started the second half on top and stayed there for the majority of the period. Fallows easily held a free kick and then had his

angles right as he watched a header from a corner sail past his post.

The home team eventually settled into the half but chances remained hard to come by. On the hour, Woodward's corner kick from the left was sent beyond the back post. Guest's header was deflected over the crossbar by a defender but a goal kick was awarded and a short burst of Sphinx pressure came to a premature end.

Alex McSkeane then fired wide with a low shot for Sutton Coldfield. The play was fairly evenly matched through the middle of the half but the next opening came their way too, substitute Reece Gibson this time the man who couldn't direct his attempt on target.



Just as the match started to feel as if it was drifting towards its conclusion, Sutton Coldfield found the winning goal in the 79th minute. Another substitute, Byrne, got himself loose in a similar position to those picked up by Brown in the first half and his finish was crisp enough to beat Fallows low and give the visitors a late advantage.

If Sphinx had managed to take a point from this game after going behind it might have been harsh on the away side, but they gave it a crack anyway.

Jack Downes, returning from suspension as a substitute, powered a shot over the angle as the home team looked for an instant reply, but Sutton were as likely to score the next goal as concede it. In the last minute of normal time, Fallows made two superb saves in quick succession to keep Sphinx's hopes alive.

At the other end, Jono Brown made a simple save from Leo Brown in the fourth minute of stoppage time before Hayward got the best Sphinx chance of the second half with almost the final kick. It was a presentable look but not an easy finish at all, and Hayward's left-footed strike just ended up just the wrong side of the near post.

It was a frustrating afternoon for Sphinx, who came into the game with confidence but were marginally second best and unable to pick up a result that would have been a real bonus with other results at the bottom of the table going their way.

The quick turnaround of Easter weekend will see them back in action just two days after this defeat.

Thomas and Woodward's team will be eager to get the disappointment out of their system quickly by stepping up a gear in a Bank Holiday Monday visit to Lye Town.

Like Sphinx, the Flyers are playing Step Four football for the first time after being promoted in 2022/23. They've taken to the eighth tier well but were beaten last time the teams met during the Christmas period.

### TEAMSHEET

- 1 Keelan Fallows
- 2 Joe Pursey
- 3 Finlay Shorrock
- 4 Luke Downes ▼ Wood (81)
- 5 Will Edjenguele
- 6 Louis Guest
- 7 Ashton Demulder ▼ J. Downes (68)
- 8 Callum Woodward @
- 9 Leo Brown
- 10 Cam Moore ▼ Castellano (81)
- 11 Jordan Hayward
- 12 Jack Downes ▲ Demulder (68)
- 14 Jamie Draper
- 15 Tyler Haddow
- 16 Alfonso Castellano ▲ Moore (81)
- 17 Leo Wood ▲ L. Downes (81)

**SPHINX MAN OF THE MATCH**  
**KEELAN FALLOWS**



# 2023/24 Player Stats (all competitions)

Player	Apps	Mins	Starts	Full 90	Sub On	Yellows	Second Yellows	Straight Reds	Goals	Assists	Goals Per 90	Assists Per 90	G+A Per 90
Adams, Jamal	4	133	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Bailey-Nicholls, Khaellem	6	96	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Brown, Leo	7	628	7	6	0	1	0	0	3	1	0.033	0.011	0.044
Bryson, James	13	951	11	9	2	1	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Carey, Kyle	7	530	6	5	1	2	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Castellano, Alfonso	9	315	3	1	6	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Cristofaro, Antonio	4	105	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Dainty, Gio	9	534	7	1	2	1	0	0	2	1	0.022	0.011	0.033
Demulder, Ashton	10	592	8	0	2	1	0	0	1	2	0.011	0.022	0.033
Downes, Jack	30	2461	27	20	3	12	2	0	2	1	0.022	0.011	0.033
Downes, Luke	32	1980	22	14	10	7	1	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Draper, Jamie	3	192	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Edjenguele, Will	23	1907	22	18	1	4	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Ellis, Sam	10	239	2	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Fallows, Keelan	33	2970	33	33	0	4	0	0	0	1	0.000	0.011	0.011
Guest, Louis	31	2652	30	28	1	8	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Haddow, Tyler	6	540	6	5	0	1	0	0	1	2	0.011	0.022	0.033
Harkin, Ryan	1	46	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Hayward, Jordan	21	1263	14	7	7	1	0	0	3	2	0.033	0.022	0.056
Hedge, Zach	3	270	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Jackson, Sam	1	28	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Johnson, Max	12	539	5	2	7	1	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Lock, Alex	17	1009	11	7	6	4	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Martin, Callum	7	463	5	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Moore, Cameron	4	281	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Parker, Dylan	15	1125	12	7	3	3	0	0	3	3	0.033	0.033	0.067
Peplinski, Dawid	4	168	1	1	3	2	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Phillips, Leigh	3	125	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Purseley, Joe	33	2865	32	30	1	7	0	0	0	1	0.000	0.011	0.011
Redhead, Jac	19	1436	17	7	2	5	0	0	3	3	0.033	0.033	0.067
Shipman, Matty	32	2880	32	32	0	9	0	0	13	5	0.144	0.056	0.200
Shorrock, Finlay	27	2162	26	19	1	2	1	0	1	1	0.011	0.011	0.022
Whiteside, Callum	27	1951	22	18	5	6	0	0	1	0	0.011	0.000	0.011
Wood, Leo	9	281	2	1	7	0	0	0	1	0	0.011	0.000	0.011
Woodward, Callum	22	1816	22	14	0	8	0	1	1	3	0.011	0.033	0.044

# 2023/24 Player Stats (NPL Midlands only)

Player	Apps	Mins	Starts	Full 90	Sub On	Yellows	Second Yellows	Straight Reds	Goals	Assists	Goals Per 90	Assists Per 90	G+A Per 90
Adams, Jamal	4	133	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Bailey-Nicholls, Khaellem	6	96	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Brown, Leo	7	628	7	6	0	1	0	0	3	1	0.033	0.011	0.044
Bryson, James	13	951	11	9	2	1	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Carey, Kyle	5	404	5	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Castellano, Alfonso	8	295	3	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Cristofaro, Antonio	3	91	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Dainty, Gio	8	464	6	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	0.011	0.011	0.022
Demulder, Ashton	10	592	8	0	2	1	0	0	1	2	0.011	0.022	0.033
Downes, Jack	27	2191	24	17	3	11	2	0	2	1	0.022	0.011	0.033
Downes, Luke	29	1738	19	12	10	6	1	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Draper, Jamie	2	102	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Edjenguele, Will	22	1817	21	17	1	4	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Ellis, Sam	8	183	2	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Fallows, Keelan	30	2700	30	30	0	3	0	0	0	1	0.000	0.011	0.011
Guest, Louis	29	2472	28	26	1	7	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Haddow, Tyler	6	540	6	5	0	1	0	0	1	2	0.011	0.022	0.033
Harkin, Ryan	1	46	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Hayward, Jordan	19	1137	13	6	6	1	0	0	3	2	0.033	0.022	0.056
Hedge, Zach	3	270	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Jackson, Sam	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Johnson, Max	10	449	4	2	6	1	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Lock, Alex	16	955	10	7	6	4	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Martin, Callum	6	427	5	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Moore, Cameron	4	281	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Parker, Dylan	12	891	9	5	3	2	0	0	2	3	0.022	0.033	0.056
Peplinski, Dawid	4	168	1	1	3	2	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Phillips, Leigh	2	63	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.000
Purseley, Joe	31	2685	30	28	1	6	0	0	0	1	0.000	0.011	0.011
Redhead, Jac	18	1346	16	6	2	5	0	0	3	3	0.033	0.033	0.067
Shipman, Matty	29	2610	29	29	0	9	0	0	13	5	0.144	0.056	0.200
Shorrock, Finlay	26	2108	25	19	1	2	1	0	1	1	0.011	0.011	0.022
Whiteside, Callum	24	1695	19	16	5	6	0	0	1	0	0.011	0.000	0.011
Wood, Leo	9	281	2	1	7	0	0	0	1	0	0.011	0.000	0.011
Woodward, Callum	21	1754	21	14	0	8	0	1	1	3	0.011	0.033	0.044



# MOMENTS THAT MATTER

Football supporters in England love to talk about history. From all-time records to romantic notions of football's distant past, tradition and nostalgia are woven into the very fabric of the sport.

History can be a loaded term. Manchester City and Chelsea are lazily accused of having none because of the artifice of their modern successes, as if Malcolm Allison and Peter Osgood never happened. It's a barb and a bullet, munition because it matters.

When Aston Villa supporters talk about history, they really do mean history. Villa are one of the English game's great names, their status built entirely on success just like anybody else's.

Villa have won the European Cup but they did it before the release of *E.T.* They've won the FA Cup seven times but Peter McParland scored both goals in the final last time they did. Of Villa's seven league titles, six were won by George Ramsay. The Glaswegian was Villa's first manager, such as it was in the Victorian era, and his team's last championship was in 1910.

In other words, Villa's heritage has its origins in football's formative years. A league title in 1981, the European Cup in

1982, the European Super Cup in 1983 and a bunch of League Cups are all they have to show for their trials and tribulations since McParland's controversial Wembley brace in 1957.

But all of our clubs have made special memories. Whether they deliver silverware or not, they mean more to us than 19th Century titles or FA Cup wins while Walter Winterbottom still ran the England team. The enjoyment we get from those moments is why we keep coming back, keep watching our teams muddle and meander along, going nowhere until they suddenly go somewhere.

Villa are no exception. European nights are a part of their modern social history despite not playing in the Champions League or getting anywhere near the UEFA Cup final. Two League Cup wins in the 1990s were celebrated with gusto and gave a whole new generation of supporters a taste of the glory they'd been told was in the club's blood.

These memories matter. 1994 and 1996 don't count for less because Villa only won the Coca-Cola Cup. But they might have been overshadowed in 2019, when Villa went back to the same venue – the rebuilt version of which had brought near total misery up to that point – and saved their skins. Villa had come a long way in a short time just to end up back

where they were a year earlier. In 2018 a tame performance in the Championship Play-Off final allowed a single Fulham goal to condemn Steve Bruce's Villa team to another year in the second tier and that was the tip of the iceberg in terms of the club's future.

The 2017/18 final felt existentially important. Even getting there was a shaky business, Villa's expensive yet patchwork team boasting enough individual quality to reach the final but failing to show up when it mattered. Villa's ownership was showing signs of disintegration and their finances were unravelling. They had to win and they didn't.

One year on, Bruce had gone and Villa had been taken over. They roared into the play-offs rather than stumbling over the line. Ten league wins in a row gave them confidence and united a notoriously fractious support behind a team full of players who suited the club and the moment. Several were on loan and Villa tried to make most of them permanent. Tyrone Mings, Axel Tuanzebe, Anwar El Ghazi and Tammy Abraham felt right in a way John Terry and Lewis Grabban never did. John McGinn, a permanent signing, ended up taking over from Mings as Villa's captain.

But what propelled Villa through 30 unanswered points and promotion back to the Premier League was a potent pairing in the team leadership. Dean Smith was appointed as manager in November 2018 after success with Walsall and Brentford. Smith is Villa through and through but arrived with some managerial pedigree. His new captain was Jack Grealish, also a Villa man, who was in the process of graduating from youthful phenom to one of England's premier football talents.

Smith and Grealish, in that place and at that moment, were the perfect combination. Two Brummie Villans came together to make magic and it culminated in a visceral, guttural explosion of destiny at the home of football. There was a palpable difference between Villa's play-off finals in 2018 and 2019. The former was about pressure. Tension hung thick in the air. Defeat, it was thought, could easily lead to disaster. Villa couldn't afford to be outside the Premier League any longer.

The latter was about business. Villa supporters arrived at Wembley with a sense of focus. This wasn't a day out. It was in, win, out. Derby County were the opposition and their supporters had the same look about them as had Villa a year earlier – with, it turns out, just cause.

Smith and Grealish were Villa's driving force and both pulled their weight at Wembley but Mings and Tuanzebe were superb at the back. El Ghazi's headed goal was the pinnacle of his time at Villa. McGinn's tenacious second made the game safe and, despite a goal back for Derby, it never seemed likely to end up any other way.

Villa were promoted in the best possible manner, with a sentimental manager and captain leading the way. When the final whistle blew under the arch, years of decline and disappointment gushed from the stands and away into the past.

Smith's Villa staged a remarkable escape to avoid relegation back out of the Premier League in their first season back. Behind closed doors on the other side of the covid shutdown, Villa turned their fortunes around not because of

a technological error but a string of results that had looked unlikely in the old normal.

There followed a mid-table finish in a 2020/21 season with some quite extraordinary highlights, albeit still in the bizarre covid hinterland that took yet more games behind closed doors to be played with the voice of Mings booming around the empty stadium.

Grealish was at the height of his powers at last and Villa now had real quality around him. Statement victories over Liverpool, Arsenal, Tottenham Hotspur and Newcastle United were reinforced by a defeat of Chelsea on the final day and notable wins at Leicester City, Leeds United and West Bromwich Albion.

Neither Smith nor Grealish stayed much longer. Smith was sacked in November 2021 with his team falling short of the same standard, later struggling to find the same spark at Norwich City and then Leicester City.

By the time Smith left Villa his captain was long gone. Grealish was sold to Manchester City for £100m and his move became one of the many fault lines along which supporter opinion splits. Reviled by some and revered by others, one suspects the fullness of Grealish's Villa legacy will only be established in retirement.

The emotional intensity of Villa's promotion will eventually be diluted by the passing of time. Without the benefit of recency it will fall down the historical pecking order. But it shouldn't be overlooked because it was achieved away from the top level, or because Smith unfortunately ran out of road, or because Grealish chose to leave and alienated some supporters in doing so.

Smith and Grealish mattered. They mattered like Ron Atkinson and Brian Little, like Dean Saunders and Dalian Atkinson and Kevin Richardson, like Dwight Yorke and Ian Taylor and Andy Townsend, because they did something. For those who were there, the size of the triumph relative to others is meaningless.

There's a temptation to dismiss Smith and Grealish's claret and blue allegiances and Brummie backgrounds as irrelevant. After all, their abilities and personalities took Villa back into the Premier League, not their accents. For supporters those backgrounds were everything. Players and managers come and go.

Some succeed, most do not. Some assimilate into the culture of the club, many do not. Supporters warm to people from all places, all backgrounds, who come into their clubs and get it.

But Smith's management and Grealish's captaincy of Villa were extra special. Two supporters at the top of their game coincided with one another to form a tremendous bond and carried their club – our club – away from the doldrums. If the essence of football could be bottled, magical moments like this would be its scent.

Chris Nee  
hpbp.substack.com

Date	Opponents	Comp	H	A	Res	Starting Eleven											Substitutes ( <i>not used in italics</i> )						
						1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	14	15	16	17 / GK	18	19 / GK
5 Aug	Stourport Swifts	FAC EP	A	2-0	L	Fallows	Purse	Hayward	L. Downes	Guest ©	Whiteside	Parker	J. Downes	Shipman	Carey	Johnson	Ellis	Jackson	Peplinski	Cristofaro	Billing	Martin	Selley-Haywood
12 Aug	Quorn	NPL M	H	1-1	D	Fallows	Purse	Hayward	J. Downes	Guest	<b>Whiteside 1</b>	Parker	Woodward ©	Shipman	Carey	Johnson	L. Downes	Ellis	Phillips	Cristofaro	Martin		
15 Aug	Gresley Rovers	NPL M	A	1-1	D	Fallows	Purse	Martin	L. Downes	Guest	Whiteside	Parker	Woodward ©	<b>Shipman 1</b>	Carey	J. Downes	Johnson	Peplinski	Ellis	Jackson	Cristofaro		
22 Aug	Sporting Khalsa	NPL M	H	0-1	L	Hedge	Purse	Martin	L. Downes	Guest ©	Whiteside	Hayward	J. Downes	Shipman	Carey	Johnson	Parker	Ellis	Peplinski	Cristofaro	Jackson		
26 Aug	Spalding United	NPL M	A	4-0	L	Hedge	Purse	Martin	J. Downes	Guest	Whiteside	Hayward	Woodward ©	Parker	Ellis	Johnson	L. Downes	Peplinski	Cristofaro	Draper			
28 Aug	Bedworth United	NPL M	H	0-1	L	Hedge	Purse	Martin	L. Downes	Guest	Whiteside	J. Downes	Woodward ©	Parker	Cristofaro	Johnson	Phillips	Peplinski	Ellis	Penton			
2 Sep	Sutton Coldfield Town	NPL M	A	4-1	L	Fallows	Whiteside	Martin	J. Downes	Guest	Peplinski	Purse	Woodward ©	<b>Shipman 1</b>	Redhead	Parker	L. Downes	Johnson	Ellis	Phillips	Cristofaro		
9 Sep	Quorn	FAT 1Q	A	4-0	L	Fallows	Whiteside	Phillips	L. Downes	Guest	Edjenguele	J. Downes	Woodward ©	Shipman	Redhead	Parker	Johnson	Carey	Cristofaro	Peplinski	Ellis	Hedge	
16 Sep	AFC Rushden & Diamonds	NPL M	H	2-1	W	Fallows	Whiteside	Shorrock	L. Downes	Guest	Edjenguele	Hayward	Woodward ©	<b>Shipman 1</b>	Redhead	Parker	J. Downes	<b>Parker 1</b>	Johnson	Ellis	Peplinski	Bryson	
30 Sep	Rugby Town	NPL M	A	1-2	W	Fallows	Bryson	Shorrock	J. Downes	Guest	Edjenguele	Whiteside	<b>Woodward © 1</b>	<b>Shipman 1</b>	Redhead	Parker	Purse	Bailey-Nicholls	Castellano	Ellis	Phillips		
7 Oct	Corby Town	NPL M	H	0-1	L	Fallows	Bryson	Shorrock	Whiteside	Guest	Edjenguele	Purse	Woodward ©	Shipman	Ellis	Parker	Johnson	L. Downes	Phillips	Bailey-Nicholls	Redhead		
14 Oct	Shepshed Dynamo	NPL M	A	2-2	D	Fallows	Whiteside	Shorrock	L. Downes	Edjenguele	Bryson ©	Purse	J. Downes	<b>Shipman 1</b>	Lock	<b>Parker 1</b>	Guest	Ellis	Johnson	Cristofaro			
21 Oct	Coleshill Town	NPL M	H	0-0	D	Fallows	Purse	Shorrock	L. Downes	Guest ©	Edjenguele	Parker	J. Downes	Shipman	Lock	Dainty	Whiteside	Bryson	Redhead	Ellis	Johnson		
4 Nov	Anstey Nomads	NPL M	H	2-2	D	Fallows	Whiteside	Shorrock	L. Downes	Guest ©	Edjenguele	Purse	Lock	<b>Shipman 1</b>	Redhead	<b>Brown 1</b>	Parker	Johnson	Bryson	Reed	Hedge		
11 Nov	Walsall Wood	NPL M	A	1-1	D	Fallows	Whiteside	Shorrock	L. Downes	Guest ©	Edjenguele	Purse	Lock	Shipman	Redhead	<b>Brown 1</b>	Dainty	J. Downes	Johnson	Parker	Hayward		
14 Nov	Nuneaton Borough	BSC 2R	H	2-3	L	Fallows	Purse	Shorrock	L. Downes ©	Whiteside	Draper	<b>Parker 1</b>	J. Downes	Shipman	Lock	<b>Dainty 1</b>	Martin	Hayward	Castellano	Guest	Redhead		
18 Nov	Hinckley LR	NPL M	H	1-1	D	Fallows	Purse	Shorrock	L. Downes	Guest ©	Whiteside	Brown	Lock	Shipman	<b>Redhead 1</b>	Dainty	Edjenguele	Hayward	Bailey-Nicholls	J. Downes	Draper		
21 Nov	Harborough Town	NPL M	A	6-1	L	Fallows	Whiteside	Shorrock	L. Downes	Guest ©	Edjenguele	Purse	J. Downes	Shipman	Brown	Dainty	<b>Redhead 1</b>	Lock	Bailey-Nicholls	Hayward			
25 Nov	Boldmere St Michaels	NPL M	A	3-1	L	Fallows	Purse	Shorrock	L. Downes	Guest ©	Whiteside	J. Downes	Redhead	Shipman	Brown	<b>Dainty 1</b>	Woodward	Edjenguele	Lock	Bailey-Nicholls	Hayward		
9 Dec	Cambridge City	NPL M	A	0-1	W	Fallows	Purse	Shorrock	J. Downes	Guest	Edjenguele	Lock	Woodward ©	<b>Shipman 1</b>	Redhead	Hayward	L. Downes	Adams	Bailey-Nicholls	Whiteside			
16 Dec	Gresley Rovers	NPL M	H	1-1	D	Fallows	Purse	Shorrock	J. Downes	Guest	Whiteside	Adams	Woodward ©	<b>Shipman 1</b>	Redhead	Hayward	L. Downes	Bailey-Nicholls	Lock	Bryson			
23 Dec	Quorn	NPL M	A	4-2	L	Fallows	Whiteside	Shorrock	L. Downes ©	Edjenguele	Bryson	Purse	<b>J. Downes 1</b>	Shipman	<b>Redhead 1</b>	Lock	Woodward	Hayward	Dainty	Adams	Bailey-Nicholls		
26 Dec	Lye Town	NPL M	H	2-0	W	Fallows	Whiteside	Shorrock	<b>J. Downes 1</b>	Edjenguele	Bryson	Purse	Woodward ©	Shipman	Redhead	Dainty	L. Downes	Adams	<b>Hayward 1</b>	Lock			
1 Jan	Bedworth United	NPL M	A	1-0	L	Fallows	Bryson	Shorrock	L. Downes	Guest	Edjenguele	Purse	Woodward ©	Shipman	J. Downes	Dainty	Hayward	Adams	Lock	Martin	Cristofaro		
6 Jan	Spalding United	NPL M	H	0-1	L	Fallows	Bryson	Hayward	Lock	Guest	Edjenguele	J. Downes	Woodward ©	Shipman	Redhead	Carey	Purse	Whiteside	L. Downes	Dainty	Shorrock		
13 Jan	Sporting Khalsa	NPL M	A	3-0	W	Fallows	Purse	Hayward	L. Downes	Guest	Bryson	Lock	Woodward ©	Shipman	Redhead	Carey	Edjenguele	Whiteside	Harkin	Martin			
27 Jan	Coleshill Town	NPL M	A	2-3	W	Fallows	Purse	<b>Shorrock 1</b>	Castellano	Edjenguele	Guest	Demulder	Woodward ©	<b>Shipman 2</b>	Redhead	Haddow	L. Downes	Lock	Wood	Whiteside	Bryson		
3 Feb	AFC Rushden & Diamonds	NPL M	A	0-0	D	Fallows	Purse	Shorrock	Castellano	Guest ©	Edjenguele	Demulder	J. Downes	Shipman	Redhead	Haddow	L. Downes	Lock	Whiteside	Wood			
17 Feb	Rugby Town	NPL M	H	1-1	D	Fallows	Purse	Shorrock	J. Downes	Edjenguele	Guest ©	Wood	Lock	Shipman	Redhead	<b>Haddow 1</b>	L. Downes	Demulder	Bryson	Whiteside	Castellano		
24 Feb	Corby Town	NPL M	A	3-0	L	Fallows	Whiteside	Shorrock	L. Downes	Guest ©	Bryson	Purse	Castellano	Shipman	J. Downes	Wood	Demulder	Hayward	Haddow	Redhead			
5 Mar	Loughborough Dynamo	NPL M	H	2-2	D	Fallows	Purse	Shorrock	J. Downes	Edjenguele	Bryson	Haddow	Woodward ©	<b>Shipman 1</b>	<b>Demulder 1</b>	Hayward	L. Downes	Whiteside	Lock	Wood	Castellano		
9 Mar	Harborough Town	NPL M	H	1-2	L	Fallows	Purse	Shorrock	J. Downes	Edjenguele	Bryson	Haddow	Woodward ©	Shipman	Demulder	Hayward	L. Downes	Guest	<b>Wood 1</b>	Castellano			
16 Mar	Cambridge City	NPL M	H	2-2	D	Fallows	Purse	Shorrock	L. Downes	Guest	Edjenguele	Haddow	Woodward ©	<b>Shipman 1</b>	Demulder	<b>Hayward 1</b>	Moore	Wood	Bryson	Castellano			
23 Mar	Loughborough Dynamo	NPL M	A	2-3	W	Fallows	Purse	Shorrock	L. Downes	Guest	Edjenguele	Demulder	Woodward ©	<b>Shipman 1</b>	Moore	<b>Hayward 1</b>	Castellano	Wood	Draper				
30 Mar	Sutton Coldfield Town	NPL M	H	0-1	L	Fallows	Purse	Shorrock	L. Downes	Edjenguele	Guest	Demulder	Woodward ©	Brown	Moore	Hayward	J. Downes	Draper	Haddow	Castellano	Wood		
1 Apr	Lye Town	NPL M	A	1-1	D	Fallows	Purse	Shorrock	L. Downes	Guest	Draper	Demulder	Woodward ©	<b>Brown 1</b>	J. Downes	Moore	Edjenguele	Wood	Castellano				
6 Apr	Walsall Wood	NPL M	H																				
9 Apr	Shepshed Dynamo	NPL M	H																				
13 Apr	Anstey Nomads	NPL M	A																				
20 Apr	Boldmere St Michaels	NPL M	H																				
27 Apr	Hinckley LR	NPL M	A																				

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*Providing Screening and Defibrillators to  
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The Daniel Wilkinson Foundation is a charity set up in memory of Daniel Wilkinson who died in 2016 aged 24, while playing the game he loved, from an underlying heart condition called Arrhythmogenic Right Ventricular Cardiomyopathy (ARVC).



Dan played football from an early age and joined Hull City AFC when he was 10, earning a professional contract aged 18. Loughborough University followed where he completed a degree in Accounting and Financial Management while playing non-league football. He was an athlete who enjoyed the gym and took his health and nutrition very seriously. He lived life to the full and had so much ahead of him.

Other than feeling light-headed on a few occasions in the month before he died, he had no symptoms!

## SUDDEN CARDIAC DEATH IN THE YOUNG (SCD)

- SCD is the leading cause of death in young athletes during sport and the majority of deaths occur with NO SYMPTOMS or family history.
- ARVC can be found in one in every 1,000 to 5,000 young adults - IF IT IS LOOKED FOR.
- Warning signs may include light-headedness, fainting, palpitations, swollen legs, breathlessness.
- Every week in the UK, 12 apparently fit and healthy young people (aged 35 and under) die from previously undiagnosed heart conditions.
- In Italy, where screening is mandatory for all young people engaged in organised sport, they have reduced the incidence of young sudden cardiac death by 89%.

## OUR MISSION

The Daniel Wilkinson Foundation has been set up to raise awareness of SCD and to provide funding towards heart screening, defibrillators and CPR/defibrillator training primarily for grass-roots sporting teams.

**Tragedies can be prevented through cardiac screening. It is vital that young people are identified and treated.**

## Find out more

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## LYE TOWN 1 COVENTRY SPHINX 1

**Pitching In NPL**  
**Division One Midlands**  
Monday 1st April 2024

After defeat two days earlier, Coventry Sphinx bounced back to claim a vital point away at Lye Town on Easter Monday and boost their prospects of avoiding relegation from the Pitching In Northern Premier League Midlands.

Leo Brown scored the first goal of his second spell at Sphinx with just five minutes remaining, securing a 1-1 draw against a Flyers side still in the hunt for a play-off place.



Brown was flanked up front by Cam Moore and Ashton Demulder as joint managers John Woodward and Shaun Thomas navigated the absence of Jordan Hayward, while Jack Downes came into midfield alongside brother Luke and Sphinx skipper Callum Woodward.

Jamie Draper started at centre back next to Louis Guest, and full backs Joe Pursey and Finlay Shorrock continued in the back four in front of goalkeeper Keelan Fallows.

The game took its time to really get going despite an end-to-end start. Lye squeezed Sphinx briefly, then vice versa, but neither could muster any early chances to show for it.

The first quarter of the match was anything but timid, lacking only in meaningful attempts on goal. The first shot of note arrived in the 23rd minute and sailed harmlessly over both Fallows and his crossbar.

That effort didn't give cause for concern but it did help spark the match into action. Sphinx immediately hit back through nice play by Jack

Downes and Brown, who sent a high ball in behind for Moore.

Moore, in his second Sphinx start, did brilliantly to pull the ball down and get a shot off. Flyers goalkeeper Ben Newey was off his line smartly to block Moore's attempted lob and keep the game scoreless.

The visitors had grown into the task and were holding their own. Lye caused consistent problems with their direct play and their quality in the final third when they were able to make the ball stick up front.

The first half was close but not overly defensive. Nevertheless, there wasn't a great deal of attacking joy for either side before Lye opened the scoring six minutes before half time.

Fallows got across goal to save a powerful shot from the edge of the box but wasn't able to smother the ball. Prince Henry, following in for the Flyers, couldn't miss from close range and gave his team the lead.



Sphinx had a couple of chances to equalise before the break. Woodward set pieces served them both up.

First, a long free kick dropped on the penalty spot and Newey had to save from Demulder's glancing header. Then, from a corner, a header by Guest produced the same outcome.

Lye took the one-goal lead into the break and the second half began just as the first had ended. The home team attacked down their left, crossed the ball and sent an improvised knee shot over the bar. Newey gathered a cross from Demulder that screwed towards the target.

Sphinx needed to get the ball down and play with more patience, and a shift in approach from joint managers Woodward and Thomas ten minutes into the half had the desired effect.

Demulder had given Lye a few things to think about defensively but made way for Leo Wood as the visitors added more central firepower and tweaked their tactics to make the most of it.

On the hour, a frantic goal-mouth scramble almost resulted in a Sphinx goal. Brown dragged the ball just wide after a Jack Downes shot was superbly blocked on the line.

Draper put in an otherwise impressive performance in his first start at centre back since returning from injury but his wayward backpass left Lye with a golden opportunity to double their advantage. The eventual shot over the bar was a relief to the visitors.

Fallows got his fingertips to a deflected shot from distance, turning it onto the post in the middle of a half that grew increasingly tense and became harder to referee with every passing minute.

With a little under 20 minutes remaining, the away team started to turn the screw as they sought an equalising goal. Moore tried to catch Newey out with a curling left-footed shot from 30 yards out but it curved harmlessly wide of goal.

Newey added to his collection of contributions in goal, saving one-on-one from Wood after some clever footwork from the Sphinx substitute. As the visitors cranked up the pressure, Lye had Newey to thank for keeping them in front.

Sphinx got their moment five minutes from time, benefiting from two pieces of real quality. Jack Downes did well to deliver any kind of cross with the ball starting to run away from him on the right. His delivery was perfect.

The cross took Newey out of the picture and found Brown at the back post. The striker got in front of his markers and lifted the ball into the roof of the net with his thigh. It was a deft finish and Sphinx were level.

There was still time for action at either end. Fallows made a tremendous save with Sphinx under pressure in the last minute of normal time. At the other end, a foul by Lye captain Ben Billingham in the seventh minute of stoppage

time earned him a second yellow card. Woodward's free kick was off target and the referee blew the final whistle to end a full-blooded affair with honours even and the points shared.

This Bank Holiday Monday draw was a satisfying way to kick off the final month of the season, not least because the team had to dig deep and really earn the point against opponents who were promoted last season and just kept on rolling.

The visitors had the better chances but the outcome was the right one and by no means disappointing.

Sphinx moved a game closer to safety thanks to a number of results going against the teams around them, and there's no sign of complacency as the run-in heats up.

Another busy week awaits. Walsall Wood visit the Sphinx Industrial Supplies Arena on Saturday 6th April before the rearranged home fixture against Shepshed Dynamo on Tuesday 9th.

### TEAMSHEET

- 1 Keelan Fallows
- 2 Joe Pursey
- 3 Finlay Shorrock
- 4 Luke Downes ▼ Castellano (61)
- 5 Louis Guest
- 6 Jamie Draper
- 7 Ashton Demulder ▼ Wood (55)
- 8 Callum Woodward @
- 9 Leo Brown ⚽
- 10 Jack Downes
- 11 Cam Moore
- 12 Will Edjenguele
- 14 Leo Wood ▲ Demulder (55)
- 15 Alfonso Casellano ▲ L. Downes (61)

SPHINX MAN OF THE MATCH  
**JACK DOWNES**



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## YOUTH TEAM FIXTURES

Thursday 17 August	1-4	L	Solihull Moors	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Thursday 31 August	2-1	W	Rugby Borough	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Thursday 7 September	5-2	W	Stourport Swifts	FA Youth Cup Preliminary Round
Thursday 14 September	1-1	D	Inkberrow	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Thursday 21 September	0-6	L	AFC Wulfrunians	FA Youth Cup First Round Qualifying
Thursday 28 September	3-1	W	Stratford Town	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Thursday 5 October	1-4	W	Rugby Town	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Thursday 12 October	4-0	W	P S Olympic	Joel Richards Memorial Cup R1
Monday 23 October	1-0	L	Stourbridge	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Thursday 9 November	3-4	L	Stourbridge	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Thursday 16 November	3-0	W	Atherstone Town	Joel Richards Memorial Cup R2
Tuesday 5 December	*1-1	D	Rushall Olympic	Colin Lowe Memorial League Cup R3
Thursday 14 December	1-6	L	Stourbridge	Joel Richards Memorial Cup QF
Monday 8 January	5-3	L	Bedworth United	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Thursday 11 January	5-1	L	Inkberrow	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Thursday 1 February	1-3	W	Stratford Town	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Friday 9 February	1-2	W	Alvechurch	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Monday 12th February	6-3	L	Solihull Moors	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Monday 26th February	1-6	W	Rugby Borough	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Thursday 7th March	6-2	W	Halesowen Town	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Monday 25th March	4-1	L	Halesowen Town	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Tuesday 2nd April	5-2	W	Kidderminster Harriers	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Monday 8th April	19.45	A	Kidderminster Harriers	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Thursday 11th April	19.45	H	Bedworth United	MFYL Southern Premier Division
Thursday 25th April	19.45	H	Alvechurch	MFYL Southern Premier Division
TBC		H	Rugby Town	MFYL Southern Premier Division
TBC		H	Stourbridge	MFYL Southern Premier Division

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# THE NAKATA BLUEPRINT

Cult hero. It's a label that oozes unbridled affection. It eschews the nitty gritty and speaks of a boundless, enveloping love. It's wholesome and true. Yet it's also a qualifier. A cult hero is flawed by definition, their failings laced into the fabric of the label itself. As such, it's an attachment that can be reductive. Occasionally it's almost offensive.

Every now and again you'll see Hidetoshi Nakata written up as a cult hero. It's the faintest of praise for a football pioneer. Nakata was Japan's first great modern maverick and an international style icon. He burned brightly in Europe and then retired at 29 just because. Combined, his career and legacy ushered in a whole new way for Japanese players to

embrace football and fame. Nakata had the quickest of feet and an electric turn of pace across the grass. He beat players with ease, his balance and strength making it nearly impossible to knock him off the ball. Though he was a skilled technician, Nakata's dribbling style was more chaos than craft. It was raw. It was improvised. He showed defenders the ball before nicking it away from their toes.

Acceleration enabled that and was a big part of his game. At full pelt, Nakata's legs were a blur. But he was also a fabulous passer with vision, and was full of flicks with purpose. If the simple effectiveness of the Cruyff Turn is a matter of form following function, Nakata was Japanese football's Bauhaus.

His style was the result of total ball mastery and supreme confidence in his ability. It didn't always come off but it was seldom less than thrilling.

He scored some spectacular goals – in Italy especially – and what was striking about them was the variety: one famous overhead kick, a handful of long-distance thunderbolts, some cracking volleys and clever chips, and at least one diving header. He made more than a few, too.

Japan hasn't had many players of his kind. Who has? None has been as good and few have been close to his international status.

He blazed a trail to follow for generations of creative Japanese players, his influence undeniable in the swagger of Keisuke Honda, the effectiveness of Shinji Kagawa and the progression of many players besides. The gloriously intense Yuma Suzuki is an uncapped acolyte.

Nakata was all of these successors rolled into one. In the beginning, there was a choice. Football won out; baseball's loss. As a youngster he played for Bellmare Hiratsuka (now Shonan Bellmare) in what's now J1 League, Japan's top flight.

He made his name in international football. After representing Japan in two matches in Florida at the Olympic Games in 1996, Nakata made his senior debut against South Korea the following year.

Japan played in the World Cup finals for the first time in 1998 and Nakata caught the eye in the spotlight.

He was snapped up by Perugia and became the second Japanese player to feature in Serie A. The first was Kazuyoshi Miura, who had a spell on loan at Genoa four years earlier and is still playing at the age of 56.

Roma followed. Nakata was a Scudetto winner under Fabio Capello in 2001 and added a Coppa Italia win as a Parma player in 2002. His move to Emilia-Romagna made him the most expensive Asian player up to that point and far beyond, an accolade befitting of his stature in the world game.

Japan co-hosted the World Cup that year and Nakata played all four of their matches, scoring his only World Cup finals goal with his head and a little good fortune to end a measured passing move in a group stage win against Tunisia.

Halfway through Nakata's third season at Parma he was loaned to Bologna, before a permanent switch to Fiorentina in the summer of 2004 and another loan – this time to Bolton Wanderers in the Premier League – in 2005/06.

If Sam Allardyce wondered where Nakata would be playing his football after the World Cup in Germany, he'll have been surprised by the answer.

A few days before Zinedine Zidane exited the world stage in the full glare of the international media, Nakata hung up his boots at the age of 29.

He'd played all three of Japan's matches at the World Cup and immediately retired. An Italian championship, three World Cups and a stack of individual honours later, the little boy who chose football had fallen out of love with playing.

It's easy to aggrandise great players with the benefit of hindsight. Nakata beat a new path in Europe but loans away from both Parma and Fiorentina were indicative of an element of decline.

Imperfections shouldn't diminish his legacy, though. At his best, Nakata was a phenomenon.

But perhaps what most sets Nakata apart is what he's done since leaving the game. In life, as he was in football, he's diligent and logical, artistic and curious, and he knows how to maximise his enjoyment from that unorthodox combination.

The "best-dressed footballer on the planet" has modelled for Calvin Klein and regularly attends fashion shows. He created a tastemaker website and was given the honorary role of editor-at-large for a lifestyle magazine in Japan.

Nakata is an impossibly passionate and quite brilliant sake entrepreneur. He creates his own sakes and built an app designed to educate users about them. It all came about after a seven-year exploration of Japanese cultures and an identity he felt he hadn't fully understood before becoming a man of the world at 21.

The core idea behind Nakata's business was to build the absent infrastructure required to market and export craft sake. Founded in 2015, it's gone on to develop a sake cellar concept and a sake blockchain.

"It is the logistics to trace and record each sake bottle through the entire distribution route from the brewery, the exporter, the importer, the warehouses in-between and to the final destinations such as retailers and restaurants," he told *Forbes*.

"Sake remains refrigerated seamlessly throughout the route in temperature-controlled containers at -5°C/23°F and each step is easily operated by scanning a 2D code."

He's come a long way since Bellmare Hiratsuka. In 2022, Nakata added Hanaahu tea to his portfolio. It's a luxury tea brand created with food pairings in mind. Naturally, it's grown and produced in Japan.

Nakata is the polymath ambassador. He's famous around the world, a cosmopolitan and multilingual style icon with a World Cup goal to his name, but his business is in promoting the cultures he belatedly discovered in football retirement.

Nakata's example in football and fame is one for young Japanese players to follow. He's still there, creating. Still forging ahead and breaking new ground. Still laying the track behind him.

On and off the pitch, Nakata showed the way. But the ultimate truth is there might never be another like him in either realm, never mind both.



# WALSALL WOOD CLUB HISTORY

The club's exact formation date is still unclear, but recent research has shown that organised football was being played in Walsall Wood before 1900. The amalgamation of a number of clubs after the First World War meant they were soon winning trophies, the first in 1919.

The Walsall Wood club was especially prominent throughout the 1920's and 30's and again when football recommenced after the Second World War. The club was one of the strongest sides in the area outside of their professional neighbours in the Football League. Such was the strength of the club that it appeared on sets of cigarette cards that were a feature of the period, alongside the likes of Aston Villa, Birmingham City, Walsall, West Bromwich Albion and Wolverhampton Wanderers. Indeed, many of the club's players during this time enjoyed spells with professional clubs, such as those above and others further afield, including Newcastle United, Notts. County and Tottenham Hotspur.

Cup competitions have long been the clubs forte, winning many of the non-league competitions of the day. The Walsall and District F.A. Senior cup was first won in 1923 and they went on to win it another 9 times between 1932 and 1962. During the same period the club were finalists on another 7 occasions, losing to amongst others Shrewsbury Town, Stafford Rangers, Stourbridge, Blakenall and Oldbury United.

In league competition arguably the most successful period came when the club first entered the Worcester Combination (later to become the Midland Combination) in 1951-52, competing against teams such as Wolves, Bromsgrove Rovers, Halesowen Town, Evesham and others to take the title at the first time of asking. In April 1952 Wood then beat Smethwick Highfield 4-2 to virtually clinch the title in front of a then record crowd of 3,500. They were runners up another 5 times in the fifties, perhaps the most exciting finish came in 1957-58. Wolves had won the first division title, were Central League champions and they won at Oak Park to make sure

their 'A' team won the Combination. Stan Cullis was taking no chances fielding not one, but four first teamers, (Eddie Stuart already a South African international and a first team regular was right back and captain). The Wood finished above Wolves the next season but lost out on the title to champions Sheffield Athletic by a point.

The stand at Walsall Wood is one of only 2 of its kind now in the British Isles, the only other left standing is at Arbroath in Scotland.

Season 2011/2012 saw a massive upheaval at the club with a new board of directors taking over as well as on the playing side, 2 management changes over the course of the season, with manager Mark Swann taking over the reins in January 2012. He made an immediate impact saving Wood from almost certain relegation. In season 2012/2013 the team re-wrote the record books on the field reaching Round 6 of the FA Vase, before going out to Guernsey after a replay in the Channel Islands.

The season ended with Wood winning the League for the first time in 61 years by an incredible 15 points even though they had to play 3 games a week from 1st April until the end of the season. The backlog of fixtures finally took its toll when they lost in the Final of the Les James Trophy to Brocton & then drew their last game at Southam. Wood now moved up to the Midland Alliance (now the Midland League) for the first ever time.

Still in transition, Wood only ran 2 teams that season, First & Under 17's, as the club looked forward with renewed optimism to another chapter in their proud history. The first season in a higher league is always one of consolidation, but after a poor start they put together a 17game unbeaten run in the league which saw them finish in a very creditable 6th place.

Wood looking to the future ran 7 teams the next season, 4 of them Ladies football, ending 8 points better off and finishing in a creditable 4th place, as

well as reaching the 4th round of the FA Vase before going out after a replay against Shaw Lane Aquaforce from Doncaster.

Last season an injury ravaged effort saw a 7th place finish in what was a disappointing campaign. After what has been a lengthy process (in excess of 12 years, from when talks began from both sides) Shire Oak Saints a local successful junior organisation with 14 boys teams plus 4 girls teams and an academy for 3 – 7 year olds finally became Walsall Wood Saints in a merger that can only benefit the future of Walsall Wood as a whole community not just on the footballing side.

Season 2016/17, disappointingly the Wood lost the respectful services of Mark Swann and Jay Hawkins in late November who had done a great job for the club. This eventually led to a difficult league campaign with the Wood relegated despite collecting an incredible 47 points.

It was time for another change and in preparation for the 2017/18 season the Wood board wasted no time to try and get back into the MFL Premiership by appointing former Walsall striker, Gary Birch as Manager, assisted by Richard Teasdale and Gavin Hurren a formidable team; both bringing a wealth of experience, ability and a fresh approach to preparing for games. In addition to the new management team, the Wood Saints JFC had started to influence matters within the Club, who by now had increased in size to over 30 junior teams.

The Saints JFC now have a greater involvement on 1st team match-days with many of the junior team managers providing a much-needed organised and supportive approach around the ground.

It is now refreshing to see the Saints youngsters around the ground, sporting their red team kits, who are either watching games or acting as 'ball boys and ball girls' and have become a permanent part of the Wood furniture which is fantastic to see.

A difficult but exciting 2017/18 season lay ahead for Birchy and Tees; who developed a quite remarkable, quality football side who not surprisingly, became convincing Division 1 title winners again, by a margin of fifteen points, scoring an unbelievable 173 goals in the process. The games came thick and fast towards the end of the season with the playing squad used to the maximum. With the title now won, success then

continued in the cup, with The Wood defeating premier league outfit Coleshill Town FC 2-1 in the PPL Cup Final at Banks's Stadium what a great achievement. Just two days after this triumph the Wood narrowly lost to Rushall Olympic FC 4-3 on penalties in the Walsall Senior Cup Final in a fantastic game of football, with the players giving their all. The season finally ended for the Wood with a JW Hunt cup semi-final game against Wolves Sporting which was a game too far in such a long hard-fought season for the lads who had done brilliantly.

Nevertheless, this was a successful season to remember and cherish, with so many positives restoring belief and hope once more around the club.

This success was also fitting for the Wood as we had to come to terms with the sad passing of our match day reporter Bill Shaw who was such a character and is now commemorated with the bottom goal now named The Shaw End.

An exciting 2018/19 season lay ahead, with the Birchy, Tees and Hurren combination, busy again recruiting more quality players ready for another push for promotion.

The Wood had a decent start to the season but after a few games Birchy had to make a decision about his future with the Wood. A lucrative offer from Solihull Moors could not be turned down and a new role as Head Groundsman meant that Birchy's successful reign had come to an end. Birchy then lined up his replacement very quickly and Darren Byfield was put in place to continue on with the good work.

Shortly after Birchy's departure, the formidable coaching staff of Teas and Gav also left the club and this made way for a new management team as Byfield (Bys) swiftly appointed from within giving Peter Till and Jemiah Richards new roles as Assistant Managers. The season under Byfield's reign was successful enough to take the Wood close to promotion to step 4.

The Wood and Ilkeston were both challenging for the title and despite the Wood beating Ilkeston away from home and totally outplaying them in the process, the final games despite having both teams winning we're decided eventually on goal differential and with Ilkeston winning convincingly and surprisingly by 0:8 at Loughborough University they took the title.

The success of Byfield's reign swiftly attracted other clubs and he moved him onto Alvechurch FC at step 3. This paved the way for Mark Swann to return to the Wood after a successful season at Romulus bringing with him Andy Paddock, Kris Taylor and Stephen Cooke as his management team.

The season started well for Swanny and soon produced a team to challenge again for promotion. Unfortunately, and disappointingly, Swanny left the Wood for personal reasons and so his unfinished business went unfinished.

The Wood had a brilliant season in 2020/21 making Non-League History again with Darren Byfield back in charge who took the club to the semi-finals of the FA Vase just missing out on Wembley to the eventual winners Warrington Rylands FC losing 2-1.

Harry Harris was appointed as Wood manager following the departure of Darren Byfield and following a short term caretaking spell for the Wood by Charlie Merson who did a great job.

### Season 2022/23

Bringing the club up to date with technology, the introduction of quality, Hi-tech video coverage by 'The Wood TV' had also created interest in a number of ways to review certain games as part of learning with the players. A special mention here to our other media guys; Russell Smith for his expertise, generous use of his equipment in the past. Along with Simon Evans our previous match-day twitter guy, who had provided great coverage of our games.

### On the pitch

Harry has produced some terrific football from his squad during this season which had been going through the normal player transitions and despite this we had yet another decent run in the FA Vase.

### Champions

However, the season finished superbly with Harry, Hinksy, Huckers, Casey and Corine making club non-League history by topping the season from September 2022 onwards through to the end.

Walsall Wood FC are the new champions of the Midland Football League Premier division and are promoted to step 4 for season 2023/24 what a fantastic achievement and a fabulous occasion to

celebrate for our local community, our supporters, our volunteers and our diverse football development infrastructure.

Again, this brought another first for the club in the promotion to Step 4 for the first time in the club's history, bringing us in line with local clubs like Chasetown, Hednesford, and Sutton Coldfield, which was always the aim of the board since they came in 10 years ago.

We can also say that we are now in the 21st century with our great YouTube channel, over 10k followers on Twitter and Instagram, spreading the news of The Wood far and wide, thanks to people like Russell Smith for his help in introducing us to this new world but mainly OFGraphicz for their great tireless and constant work for content and innovation over the past 2 years and ExcelPrint's fantastic matchday programme.

### Lest we forget

In Memory of folk who have passed we do not forget their service to the club as committee, faithful volunteers, and supporters. God bless Keith Arblaster, David Teesdale, and ex-players Andy Bottomer and Danny Page in 2019.

Ron Tranter followed by our dear friend Steve Preston and more recently in November 2021, we lost former player/coach Leon Taylor #LT9 at such a young age. In November 2022 we lost our former chairman and Excelprint guru John Sylvester, whom the club proudly renamed the stadium permanently in his honour from the 2023-24 season.

In 2023, we also lost Maureen Seedhouse and Paula Arblaster again never forgotten god bless them.



# COVENTRY SPHINX LADIES FC

Sunday 3 September	0-4	L	Solihull Sporting Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 10 September	3-0	L	Shifnal Town Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 17 September	1-8	W	Crusaders Women	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 24 September	1-6	L	Worcester City Women	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 1 October	0-5	W	AFC Telford United	Women's FA Cup 2QR
Sunday 8 October	5-5	D	Solihull Sporting Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 15 October	0-5	L	Stourbridge 1st	BCFA Women's County Cup
Sunday 22 October	7-5	L	Northampton Town	Women's FA Cup 3QR
Sunday 29 October	3-4	W	Kidderminster Harriers Women	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 26 November	3-3	D	Burton Albion Women	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 3 December	3-2	L	Worcester City Women	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 17 December	5-1	W	Lichfield City Ladies	West Mids Premier Cup 1R
Sunday 7 January	4-0	L	Lye Town Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 14 January	4-3	W	Crusaders Women	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 21 January	2-1	W	Shrewsbury Town Women	West Mids Premier Cup QF
Sunday 28 January	4-0	L	Shrewsbury Town Women	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 4 February	2-3	L	Burton Albion Women	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 25 February	3-0	L	Knowle Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 24 March	1-1	D	Lye Town Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 7 April	14.00	H	Lichfield City Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 14 April	14.00	H	Shrewsbury Town Women	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 21 April	14.00	H	Knowle Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 28 April	14.00	A	Lichfield City Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 5 May	14.00	H	Shifnal Town Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 19 May	14.00	H	Coundon Court Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division
Sunday 26 May	14.00	H	Kidderminster Harriers Women	West Mids Regional Premier Division
TBC	A		Coundon Court Ladies	West Mids Regional Premier Division

# PITCHING IN NORTHERN PREMIER LEAGUE

## DIVISION ONE MIDLANDS FIXTURES

Saturday 6th April

AFC Rushden & Diamonds	v	Anstey Nomads
Cambridge City	v	Boldmere St Michaels
Coleshill Town	v	Hinckley LR
Coventry Sphinx	v	Walsall Wood
Gresley Rovers	v	Lye Town
Loughborough Dynamo	v	Bedworth United
Quorn	v	Spalding United
Rugby Town	v	Shepshed Dynamo
Sporting Khalsa	v	Harborough Town
Sutton Coldfield Town	v	Corby Town

Tuesday 9th April

Anstey Nomads	v	Walsall Wood
Coventry Sphinx	v	Shepshed Dynamo
Lye Town	v	Harborough Town

Saturday 13th April

Anstey Nomads	v	Coventry Sphinx
Boldmere St Michaels	v	AFC Rushden & Diamonds
Corby Town	v	Sporting Khalsa
Harborough Town	v	Quorn
Hinckley LR	v	Gresley Rovers
Lye Town	v	Loughborough Dynamo
Rugby Town	v	Bedworth United
Shepshed Dynamo	v	Cambridge City
Spalding United	v	Sutton Coldfield Town
Walsall Wood	v	Coleshill Town

# PITCHING IN NORTHERN PREMIER LEAGUE

## DIVISION ONE MIDLANDS LEAGUE TABLE

Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
1	Spalding United	34	24	5	5	77	31	46	77
2	Harborough Town	33	24	4	5	75	24	51	76
3	Anstey Nomads	32	21	9	2	80	34	46	72
4	Loughborough Dynamo	34	18	7	9	66	51	15	61
5	Hinckley LR	34	17	9	8	54	43	11	60
6	Quorn	33	17	8	8	72	45	27	59
7	Lye Town	33	16	7	10	49	38	11	55
8	Sutton Coldfield Town	34	15	6	13	54	50	4	51
9	Sporting Khalsa	34	15	5	14	50	56	-6	50
10	Corby Town	33	13	9	11	67	43	24	48
11	Bedworth United	35	13	7	15	46	42	4	46
12	Walsall Wood	32	13	5	14	50	58	-8	44
13	Boldmere St Michaels	34	13	4	17	58	51	7	43
14	Coleshill Town	34	10	5	19	49	75	-26	35
15	Shepshed Dynamo	32	9	5	18	38	56	-18	32
16	Coventry Sphinx	33	6	13	14	34	56	-22	31
17	Cambridge City	34	8	6	20	44	74	-30	30
18	AFC Rushden & Diamonds	34	7	4	23	33	73	-40	25
19	Gresley Rovers	34	5	8	21	35	85	-50	23
20	Rugby Town	34	6	4	24	34	80	-46	22

3/4/2024



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Jamie Draper	Shay Carter
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Tyler Haddow	Claudio Dias
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Matthew Shipman	Jesper Kutshienza
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Duncan Van Den Top	Josh Mansell
Callum Whiteside	Ben McSkeane
Leo Wood	Kevin Monteiro
Callum Woodward	Emmanuel Olaloko
	Declan Riley
	Lewis Riley Stewart
	Samuel Roberts
	Harrison Styles
	Sam Unitt
	Oliver West
	Max Whitehouse

Referee: Richard Morris

Assistant Referees: John Stephens and Ryan Haynes