



MOORE THAN A
CAPTAIN

THE DIGESTIVE #3

NOVEMBER, 2019



Editor Notes

Alex Everson



And so the season rolls on, as we move past the last International break of 2019, Reading now face a gruelling stretch of 10 games in the next 40 days up to and including Fulham away.

The last month has provided some respite for us Royals fans as we have seen an uptick in fortunes under the start of the Bowen tenure, as Jordan looks at in his review. ReadingDeep returns to examine how Bowen is differing his tactical approach to that of his predecessor.

Alongside those, we also have a throwback to the glory days of both the Simod Cup as Dave Stevens touches on the glory at Wembley, with a reminder that sometimes managers with no experience, no wins and sitting in a relegation zone sometimes turn out ok from Matthew Williamson who ventures back to the McDermott hiring.

We also have a piece on the importance football plays in many fans lives, and how it can provide both comfort, and escapism for many. This is one of the more poignant pieces we've received to date and is a must read.

If you want to get involved with writing in the next issue of The Digestive, please don't hesitate to contact me on Twitter @Readingfanman, or fill in the form on our website www.elmparkroyals.com

We will speak again at Christmas time, but until then, get behind the team, and fingers crossed that the current unbeaten run perhaps is the start of the upswing we've all been waiting for.

Alex Everson

Thanks to our contributors in this issue

Anon.
Ben Morley
Dave Stevens
Erik Orrgarde
Harrison Mitchell
Jordan Cottle
Liam Beazley
Matthew Williamson
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Bowen So Far

Jordan Cottle



A period that started with discontent from the fanbase and scepticism towards rookie manager Mark Bowen has ended with 10 points from 12 and chants of 'Bowen's Barmy Army' at the Mad Stad. How did we get here and what have we learnt from Mark Bowen's first 4 games? Bowen's appointment was almost universally met with disappointment from the fanbase.

For some, it was the unsavory nature of a DOF replacing the man he was supposed to be working in tandem with. For others, it was the idea of a career assistant manager taking a stab at the hotseat. I'm sure for many the sense of déjà vu following Paul Clement's forgettable spell was not welcome. The Gomes sacking has divided the fanbase but seemingly the Bowen appointment had united them with a common thought - "this appointment isn't a good idea".

5 days after Bowen's appointment, Preston arrived in town as top scorers in the division and trying to break their way in to the top two. Bowen had spoken about small tweaks rather than wholesale changes to the press earlier in the week and that's how it looked when the team sheet showed Reading in their familiar 352.

However, this was not the 352 of Jose Gomes. Bowen had picked Swift and Pele as a double pivot in midfield with Ejaria ahead of them, closer to the Strikers. The wingbacks, Obita and Yiadom for this game, started deeper and the CBs were going direct whenever possible.

The idea was clear; have the ball spend more time in Preston's half than ours. With only 5 days to work with the players it's no surprise that this was fairly un-refined and Bowen admitted after the game that the players took his desire to go direct a little too much to heart, particularly in the 1st half.

***"Small tweaks,
rather than
wholesale
changes"***





Bowen So Far

Jordan Cottle



This led to a lot of loose, aimless balls out of defence and rash clearances under little pressure but Reading did have the better of the chances with Ejaria taking a few pops at goal and Puskas inches away from a tap in at the far post. The second half followed a similar pattern to the first with neither side putting together meaningful attacks.

Despite Preston changing personnel and shape (more on this later) early in the half it was only Reading showing intent towards the end of the game. Preston’s bizarre decision to come away from home to a struggling side and time-waste bite them in end as **Reading nicked an 90+8’ minute winner.**

Miazga smashing the ball past the keeper following Obita’s piledriver being spilled. A deserved win? Maybe just about but after a tough time of things the win was the important part. One interesting note was the fan reaction during the game. I expected a small crowd and not much atmosphere but that wasn’t the case. Whilst there was little affection towards the new manager, there seemed a real willingness to support the team and for that the winner felt a rich reward.

One win down but little time to dwell on a tepid performance as a few days later we were in London for the Hoops derby. There was more optimism pre-match and certainly a sense that we could get something out of this match with our new look resolute defence. Reading were running low on strikers with Joao and Boye out but there was still some surprise to see Sam Baldock back in a starting XI. Bowen had spoken of fresh starts and, following a lively cameo at Preston, Baldock had forced his way into the team.

This was a more cohesive performance than against Preston and Reading were on top for much of the first half. Nahki Wells got his customary goal against the run the play following some poor hold up play from Puskas and some poor positioning from Morrison. Readings response was quick and quality. Ejaria winning the ball on the edge of our box spinning and threading a perfectly weighted ball to Puskas running in behind. The much-maligned striker perfectly stroked the ball past Kelly in goal and Reading took the draw that was the very least they deserved into half time.

QPR changed shape in the second half to try and wrestle back some control and did snatch another goal as a deflected shot left Rafael with little chance. Another forgotten man, Gareth McClearly, came off the bench to give some impetus to our attack and soon enough Reading had their equalizer. Swift’s lofted cross into the path of Yiadom who headed back across goal where Baldock was stealing in to finish. In a match where much of the build up was about Eze of QPR it was our own superstar dribbler Ejaria that stole show. This match was the first real sign that Swift and Ejaria could continue their impressive individual seasons in a system that, despite conceding 2, gave away far fewer chances that under Jose Gomes.





Bowen So Far

Jordan Cottle



If Reading edged the game against QPR then ***they completely dominated the first half against Millwall*** at home. The intensity of our pressing completely unsettled them and they offered very little going forward. A lovely moment for Jordan Obita, scoring his first goal in 30 months, as the ball broke loose from a long throw allowing him to arrow it into the far corner.

Reading were well on top and another goal followed towards the end of the first half as Ejaria picked the ball up in space, fed Baldock in on goal who took the ball across the defender and smashed it into the top corner. The game could and should have been out of sight in that first half with Swift, Yiadom and Miazga all going close. Another opposition forced into an early tactical change as Millwall brought on the familiar Jon Dadi Bodvardsson at half time. Reading were in control but perhaps worked themselves into a false sense of security early in the 2nd half.

Following an injury to Moore, who was replaced by Tyler Blackett, the calm control up to that point evaporated as Jed Wallace somehow kept running until through on goal to finish neatly past Rafael. What followed was 30 odd minutes of aerial bombardment from Millwall which caused some nerves both on the pitch and in the stands. On reflection Millwall created little, despite the pressure, with Bodvarsson going closest with an overhead kick. Questions can be asked of Bowens substitutions which instead of wrestling back control of the match sought to settle for the lead and see out the game. In the end it worked as Reading came away victorious.

I think it is fair to say that performances have got better with every game Reading have played under Bowen in his short tenure so far. Luton at home saw the same if not more dominance from the Royals albeit against an opposition woefully short of quality. Swift pulled the strings in midfield and Ejaria dazzled in spells. Ovie took his goal tremendously well, cutting inside to smash home on the counter following an earlier goal from Morrison heading in from a corner.

Omar Richards put in a MoM performance and Rinomhota looked back to his best as Reading hassled and squeezed Luton up the pitch. Lessons were learnt from Millwall the previous week and after weathering a little spell of Luton possession Reading wrapped the victory. McCleary off the bench to rob the Luton backline of the ball and race up the pitch to finish past Shea. Despite neither scoring there were signs of a burgeoning partnership between Puskas and Baldock, something we've not really been able to say about any combination of Strikers so far this season.

They played close together, looked for each other when possible and importantly their movement dovetailed nicely with each taking it in turns to drop short or go in behind. Perhaps the biggest indication of how the game went is the astonishing stat that Luton did not have a shot after the 40th minute.

Luton were poor, there is no getting away from that, but Reading did well to keep them at arm's length and concede so few chances.

So, what have we learned from Bowen's first month in charge? It is still too early for any major conclusions, but early signs are positive. We've seen opposition teams repeatedly forced into early tactical/formation changes as our setup has prevented them from playing their preferred way. We've seen an 'ugly' side of Reading for the first time in years. Our pressing game is more cohesive and effective and as a result we are winning more 2nd balls than before.

Maybe most importantly we are, so far, still able to create good scoring chances in a system that is much more resolute defensively. The unbeaten run will not go on forever. It may even end in one of the next two tough fixtures but this team looks in better state than we could have possibly hoped for a month ago.





Captain, Leader, Legend?

Alex Everson



Following on from the second podcast that has been uploaded recently to ElmParkRoyals.com with Liam Moore, I wanted to offer a short piece on what Moore could become at Reading.

Since joining Reading in mid August 2016, Liam Moore has become an integral part of a first team squad that has battled valiantly to keep themselves in the Championship.

During his first season at the club, Reading had ups and downs throughout, however became known that season for being able to hold onto a lead, only dropping points a handful of times throughout the season once taking the lead, in large part down to the form of both Ali Al Habsi, who went on to win player of the season and also an encouraging season from a centre half who was just 23 by the name of Liam Moore.

Moore had become integral to the team very quickly, and was gaining a reputation for putting himself in front of shots, a skill and determination we still see three years down the line, as he blocked over 60 shots in the Championship that season, leading the entire league for blocked shots.

The season ended in disappointment at Wembley as Moore missed his penalty kick. Something that took both him and the squad a while to get over, as the 17/18 season wore on, the spirit which had been there was crumbling before fans eyes - and despite another strong season personally, one in which he had managed to win the fans affections even more, the club languished toward the bottom of the league, only surviving relegation fears on the final day.

The summer brought with it the rumour mill and Brighton interest. The Brighton interest has been well covered elsewhere (Including with Moore himself on the 1st EPR podcast with Liam Moore) - and so as to not cover old ground, I'll just end this sentence by saying, Liam Moore signed a new contract (Remember that? Yep, that one we all assumed was just to add a release clause?).

In 18/19, Moore became the on field captain, as Clement, and then Gomes left Paul McShane either unselected, or awaiting his return from the treatment room for the majority of the season. Moore led the side to safety later on in the season, assisted by the star five loan signings that came in.

We're now at this season - Liam Moore is club captain.

Now, the real reason for writing this piece.

Liam Moore has the potential to become a Reading FC club legend.

He has now been here 3 years - and has built a relationship with the majority of the fanbase which is going to be very tough to break. He may not ever play for England and lift the World Cup, however with realistic aspirations, we could see a Liam Moore led Reading side eventually make it to the Premier League. If that were to happen, and we see a decade of service from him, it will be hard to deny him a spot as a club legend.

Will it happen? Who knows - but isn't it enjoyable to have a captain who is refreshingly open, honest and determined to put his all into every game. If he keeps that up, I will hope we are watching him at CB for Reading for years to come.





90 Mins of Escapism

Anon.



"Some people think football is a matter of life and death. I don't like that attitude. I can assure them it is much more serious than that."

Bill Shankly

'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.'

Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities

The first Reading game I saw was a pretty dull nil – nil draw with Millwall on Boxing Day 1994, but my interest was piqued a decade before with the appearance at my school of Ian Branfoot and the Reading FC squad (I think it was the 13 wins team but my memory is faded). Sitting in the hall behind wooden desks in the school signing autographs for beaming schoolboys. I was not from Reading, so I had no real affinity with the team. I was a football nomad, starting with Manchester City before moving on to West Ham before the 1980 FA Cup. Fast forward to 1994 and I was a Reading fan, and have been ever since. So many different circumstances can go together to point you towards a team, family, location, friends. Mine was more a combination of location and friends, but once I was in, I was in. There was no going back.

You might wonder about my choice of quotes that opened this piece. The Bill Shankly one is well known among football fans, the idea that football overcomes all other priorities. The Charles Dickens one I chose very deliberately. Even when things are going incredibly well, it can just be a mask, a facade for the turmoil that goes on behind the scenes. Football can be an interest, a hobby, a discussion focus, yet at some level football can also be a crutch. *A support at a time you most need it*, an aspect of certainty which can provide comfort at times of upheaval and turbulence, a beacon of hope when life is offering you wave after wave of despondency.

I know this sounds overblown and a little over the top, **but take a step back and ask yourself where you would be without football?** Look around your social network, and you will undoubtedly have contacts that you made through the game. This may be the people, you go to the game with, people who sit around you every home game, or it may just be the ever increasing legion of people you meet online these days as you discuss the goings on at the club or as you follow the games.



I have had what I think you could easily call a horrendous summer. I lost my last remaining parent after a short illness at the end of May, closely followed by getting dismissed for the first time in nearly 35 years of employment (one was an influence on the other) and finally my marriage crumbled. All in the space of three months. 12 weeks.

Three of the foundations of my life gone just like that. Pretty much the only consistent pillar of my life left standing was football, but I was lucky because I had that.

I lost my other parent on the day Jaap Stam managed his first competitive game for us. It was my father. Football was a connection, an interest we shared. An inquest of the latest result being held on Skype after the game, as well as the grabbing of rumours I could pass on. My father had had a stroke a number of years before he passed. Getting to games was not an option.





90 Mins of Escapism

Anon.



That season was a comfort even though we did not get promoted. It gave a distraction and a focus at a time when things were a bit of a mess to be honest.

When you only have a small family unit, you cannot understate the huge impact that something like this can have on you. *You cannot relate to loss, if you have not experienced it*, unfortunately the flipside to this is that you cannot be prepared for it either.

Now football has provided a great distraction for me over the past few years, but when I look back, it was always this way. I was very shy during my teenage years, and even into my early twenties. I didn't know what to talk to people about, so what could I talk about? **Yep. Football.**

The discussion of the big stories from Saturday (weekend games only used to be on Saturdays kids) always meant there was something to say on Monday morning. Once the conversation had started it moved onto other places.

Given the bad few years I have had, I count myself really lucky to have made some close friends through Reading FC and Twitter. It sounds strange to say that, even stranger if you think that after probably four years at least, I am still yet to meet them. They know who they are, and through this I will thank them again for the help and support they have provided, from the odd joke through to listening when I needed it most, and still they listen when asked.

These are people I could have met (and plan to soon!) offline, but the fact I hadn't in almost 30 years of being in Reading, suggests to me I probably wouldn't have.

That is the point of my piece though.

Football can provide so many levels of comfort and support to you, that you just don't realise it.

Following the club itself can be a very up and down process, but it gives you a framework for your life. Saturday then Tuesday then Saturday. Team news. Gossip. Yep, and managerial changes. It creates a pattern to your life, and provides a map you can follow through the uncertainty you may be experiencing. Even when the season ends, there is the excitement and frustration that transfers can bring, and the diversion they can provide to whatever maelstrom exists in your life elsewhere.

Then there are the friendships and communication avenues you develop. You start off talking about football, and before you know it you have friends for life who help you through some of the hardest stuff life will ever throw at you, and will be there for you when you emerge the other side. I wouldn't say I have emerged yet, but I think I can see a chink of light coming from the end of the tunnel. The club still provides focus, and I follow each game as best I can depending where I am. I am not in the place I want to be, but I know I will get there with the help of my friends.

Thus we find ourselves back at the start of the journey, and I thank you for joining me on this little overwrought excursion.

So what of the two quotes I started this piece off with? Well, Shankly was right. **Football is more important than life or death. It has certainly provided me with the means to carry on living, whilst also coping.** Many things on our lives are transient, whether we want them to be or not.

Having something you can focus on while buffeted by the worst storms we will experience really is special. Dickens' knack was to know that no matter how good things look, there will also be sadness.

However, this can be inverted, as no matter how bad things feel or get, there are always good things that provide escapism, even if it is for just 90 minutes once or twice a week. Reading FC is my escape from life for 90 minutes a week, and no matter how bad things feel or get, that escapism will always be there for us all as fans.





Turning Points

Harrison Mitchell



After finishing 3rd in the first season of the Stam tenure, expectations for the following season were high, however after 1 win in 19 in the second half of the season, playoffs were not the case for Reading and in fact it was almost the opposite as Reading ended up fighting off relegation towards the end of the 17/18 season.

We finished the season in 20th place on 44 points and there are many reasons behind this, such as: poor recruitment, tactics being found out by other clubs, a lack of a plan B, a toxic atmosphere around the club and many more but for me our season fell apart on the 11th of December 2017.



On the 11th of December 2017, we sat in 16th in the league and hosted a Cardiff City side in second place. It had been a fairly mixed start to the season but results had started to pick up November and the start of December.

All fans knew the challenge we faced by playing second in the league, but still confidence was high but a strong first half leading to a Callum Patterson own goal and Mo Barrow doubling our lead in the 41st minute found ourselves ahead at half time. I remember looking at the league table at half time and we found ourselves in 12th which was only 8 points off 6th, I remember thinking to myself 'we could actually get playoffs this season'.

I knew there was still a long way to go in the season but I really felt a win against high flying Cardiff would give us that confidence for the rest of the season. But then, it all changed. An hour later, Joe Bennett scoring what all Reading fans were hoping would be a consolation goal.

7 minutes to go.

7 minutes was all we needed to hold on for and like every other time watching Reading, I was nervous. It was squeaky bum time. We had made to the end of normal time but 6 minutes were put up by the fourth official, 'SIX? SIX? SIX?' was the reaction from the crowd.

Before we could even finishing reacting to this. Goal. Cardiff had equalised. Lee Tomlin in the 91st minute had crushed the hopes of the Reading FC fanbase. Who else could it be? The man who always seems to score against us. Of course Lee Tomlin has scored more goals against us than any other team, 7 appearances against Reading, scoring 6 goals in the process.



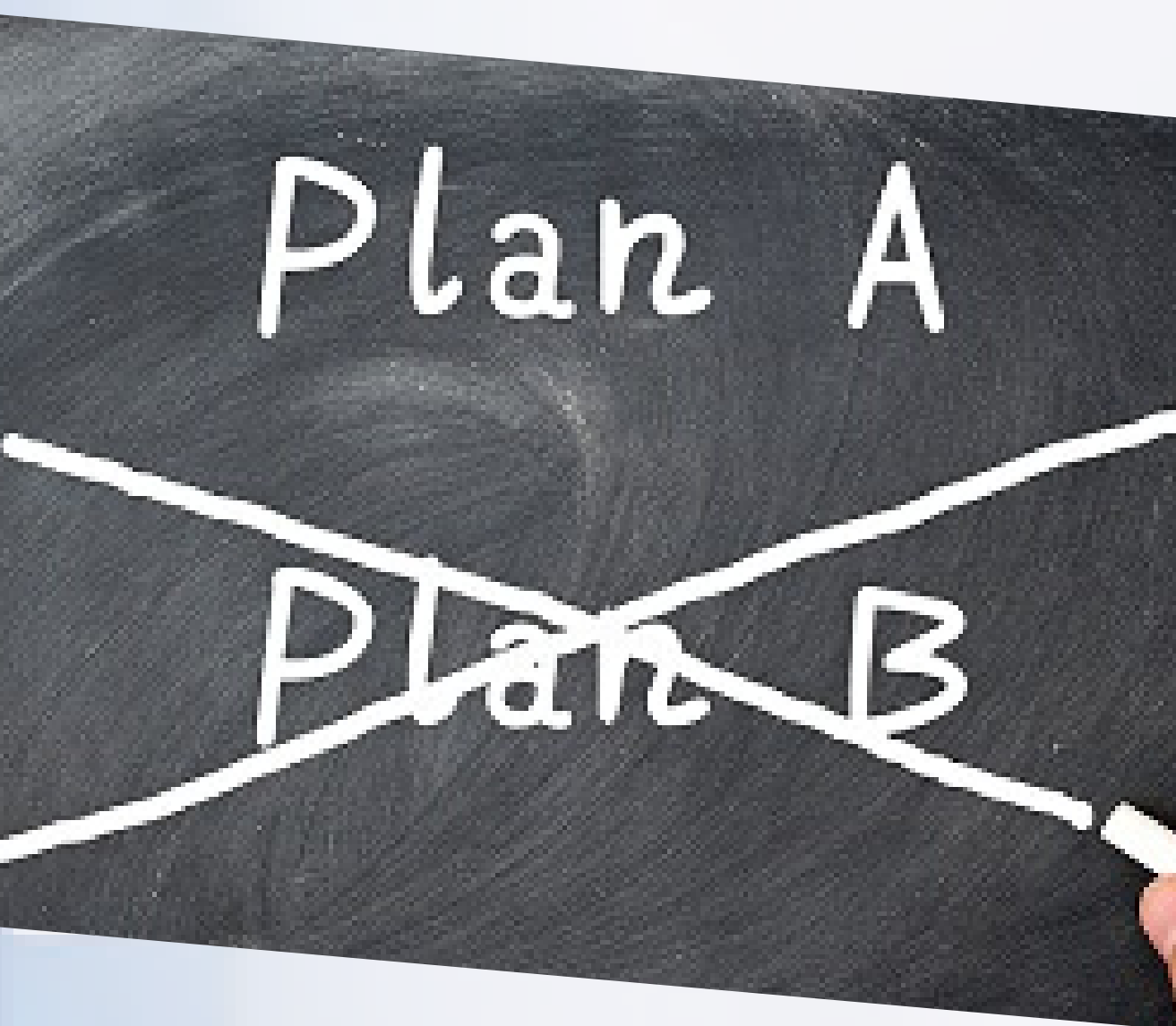


Turning Points

Harrison Mitchell



Now the remaining 5 minutes was all about holding on to a draw, of course before the game I would have snapped your hand off for a draw but to concede two late goals is gutting. A draw against second in the league was still a good result in my eyes and a point took us up to 14th, I was just hoping this result allowed us to kick on.



However it didn't, in fact the opposite happened. Our next three games all resulted in defeats and our next win didn't come until the 30th of January against Burton, which turned out to be 1 win in 19 by mid March. This then resulted in end of Stam's tenure at the club. The result against Cardiff just shows how important confidence is in football, because if you don't believe you have ability, then you won't perform well. Low confidence leads to negative thoughts which ultimately leads to low performance levels and this can then turn into a vicious cycle.

Luckily we managed to survive in the 2017/18 season but it still wasn't the season that we were hoping for. The draw against Cardiff wasn't the only reason we finished 20th a few seasons ago as we also have to remember that a lot of teams knew our tactics and therefore found out how to beat us and we then had a lack of plan B.

I'm not saying that we would have won the league, but I genuinely believe that if we managed to beat Cardiff, we would have been in a much stronger position come the end of the season and definitely not in a relegation battle, and perhaps that the Cardiff match has been now remembered of the beginning of the end for Jaap Stam at Reading.





Royalty in America

Richard Saunders



I have been a Reading FC supporter for 30+ years now, holding a season ticket for the majority of those years. I first went to Elm Park with my dad to see Ian Branfoot's team. I was at Wembley for the Simod Cup final and have witnessed all four of our Playoff final defeats with an added FA cup semi final loss just for good measure.

My life changed for the better in 2016 when I first met Jess, who would end up being my wife, on a training course at work. The slight challenge here was that she lived in America.

The following year we got married and, while Jess was clearly dazzled by the Broad Street Mall and the Oxford Road, we made the decision that I would be making the move across the Atlantic.



Through the whirlwind of sorting out the visa process and preparing for the move, I also had to deal with the fact that I would be saying good-bye to my family and friends & my life in England. This meant saying goodbye to Reading FC. **Or so I thought.**

Fast forward three years and I now live in Boston. I'm lucky enough to be in a sports mad city and have gained the Bruins as my ice hockey team and the Red Sox as my baseball team. I avoid the MLS as much as possible because it isn't very good, but this is counterbalanced with the fact that I can watch more Premier League football than I can at home over here, a fact only slightly soured by having to suffer with listening to Andy Townsend on occasion.

I can also watch every Reading game, home and away, from the comfort of my sofa.

I have a ritual for a Saturday 3PM kick off built out now - it usually starts with the early Premier League kickoff. This means falling out of bed at 7.15am in order to make coffee and to get my butt on the sofa in time for a 7.30am kick off.

While watching this, I usually check Twitter on my phone and message friends on WhatsApp to keep in check with the build up, see what people's thoughts are and just how confident they are about the game. This is also when the US slack group, United States of Reading FC, springs to life.

One of the nicest surprises of my move was finding that there was a small community of Reading FC supporters out here. Some, like myself, have been to games over in the UK, some have been supporting from the States for years without having made it over yet. We have all supported Reading through thick and thin and it's good to be part of.





Royalty in America

Richard Saunders



As the time hits 9.00am, the Premier League game is coming to an end. This is also when the line ups for our game are announced so I have one eye on the game and one eye on Twitter to see who will be in the team. This is another opportunity to catch up with friends to see what they think about the news and how it's gone down with the people they are with. Around 9.30am I grab my laptop and head to iFollow.

We get a couple of options for following the game.

1. Listen to the BBC Berkshire coverage with Tim Dellor and Mick Gooding, just like at home.
2. Watch the game with the BBC Berkshire commentary.

The coverage has improved year on year and it's pretty good right now. There are various camera angles and we even get replays this year. This is great for letting friends in the ground know if they should continue to be mad about a particular decision or if the officials got it right (I know that sounds far fetched but it does happen from time to time!).

The BBC coverage, and Tim Dellor in particular, is one of those love it or loathe it situations. I actually enjoy listening to it as it really does remind me of home, even if some of Tim's theories and ideas do drive me up the wall. As the match plays out on my laptop, I keep involved with Twitter, Slack and WhatsApp on my phone. All with one of the 3pm Premier League kickoffs on in the background.

On occasion the game isn't available to watch on iFollow and is being screened across the US on ESPN+. ESPN+ is an additional ESPN channel and is the home of the Championship as well as other leagues such as Serie A. ESPN+ matches are a different experience. Firstly, you can watch these games on the TV. Secondly, there seems to be no rhyme or reason to the Reading games they choose to inflict on their subscribers across the country. Of course people would love to watch our away game against Stoke. What bigger game is there this weekend than our away game at Middlesbrough?

The beauty of being 5 hours behind is, even if I squeeze in all of the games, it is still only about 2pm once everything finishes and I have most of the afternoon ahead of me. I dip in and out of Hobnob over the next few days and also listen to our very own Elm Park Royals podcast alongside the Tilehurst End's offering. On top of that, I also look at GetReading and the Reading Chronicle's coverage most days.

"There seems to be no rhyme or reason to the Reading games they choose to inflict on subscribers"

Midweek games are the weirdest for me. They tend to kick off at 3pm on a Tuesday or Wednesday while I am in the office at work. I am usually listening to the BBC Berkshire coverage from about 2pm and have the slack group open. As kick off comes around I usually fire up the iFollow app on my phone and have the game playing as I work.

I have just nabbed a second monitor from IT so I might try watching the game on that next time. The biggest challenge for watching in the office is strategically managing calls and meetings so they don't encroach on the game!





Royalty in America

Richard Saunders



Midweek games have been pretty smooth for me so far, but I did get rumbled last season during the Norwich game when Andy Rinomhota thumped in his last minute equaliser. I celebrated a bit too loudly and found that my coworkers were all laughing at me when I took my headphones off.

Depending on my hours that day, I will either watch the entire game before leaving, or will listen to the last 30 minutes on my phone as I walk through the city on my commute home.

Is It the same?

Although I am 3242 miles away from the Madejski, I still feel like I am very much involved and very much a Reading supporter. It is still strange to me watching from afar.

I miss having a few beers with my friends before the game. I miss getting out of my seat with the excitement of an attack. I miss passing on my regards to Neil Warnock. Things like a last minute winner again Preston a few weeks ago are fantastic, but from here, it's not quite the same as being there.

On the flip side, I see more games now than when I lived in England. I can watch from my sofa while drinking my morning coffee, I can watch evening kickoffs from my desk at work. I've even listened to games earlier in the season while laying on the beach and then watch the entire game when I got home.

I still talk to my friends who are at the Madejski before, during and after the game. I am still and will always be a Reading fan - just a slightly different one now.

URZ!



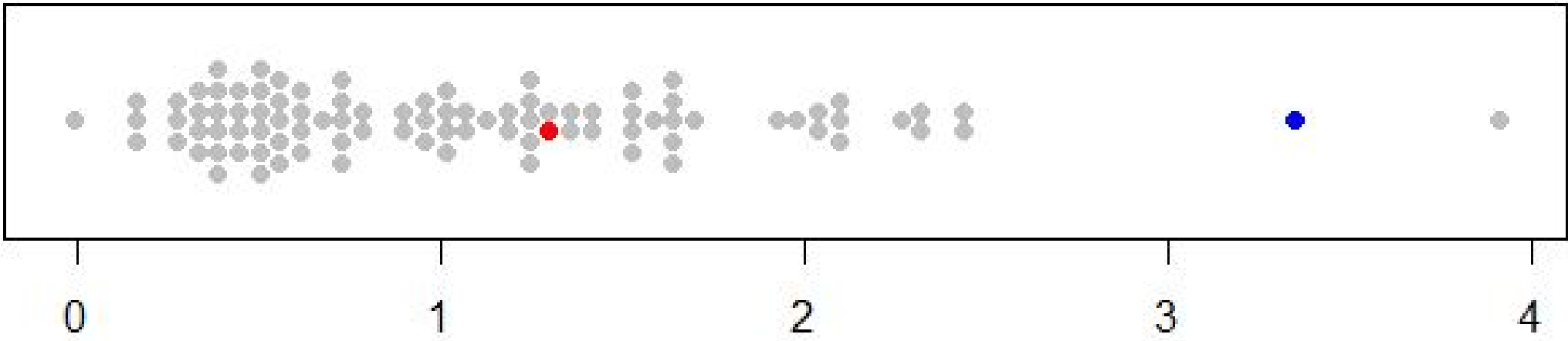


SwOvie (*Ed - This name will not be sticking around!*) - **John Swift & Ovie Ejaria as they are better known** - is the topic for this months visualization corner, and just how well are they actually performing?

Its official, I'm on the SwOvie hype train. John Swift has seemingly shaken off the injuries that have plagued him over the last couple of seasons, while Ovie Ejaria seems to have evolved from a solid dribbling midfielder to a ball progressing magician, leaving a heap of players bemused and disorientated. The midfield duo offers so much threat through the middle of the pitch leaving our current offensive approach largely unrecognisable from the wing play that underpinned so much of our two Championship titles through Convey/Little and McAnuff/Kebe, and a play-off final through Beerens/McCleary.

But how do they rank against their championship centre midfield peers? I sampled every player to have made at least 6 appearances as a central midfielder according to WhoScored.com. This left me with a pool of 94 players to compare against our dynamic duo for a range of midfielder key stats, all plotted per 90 minutes as beeswarm plots where each dot represents a different player.

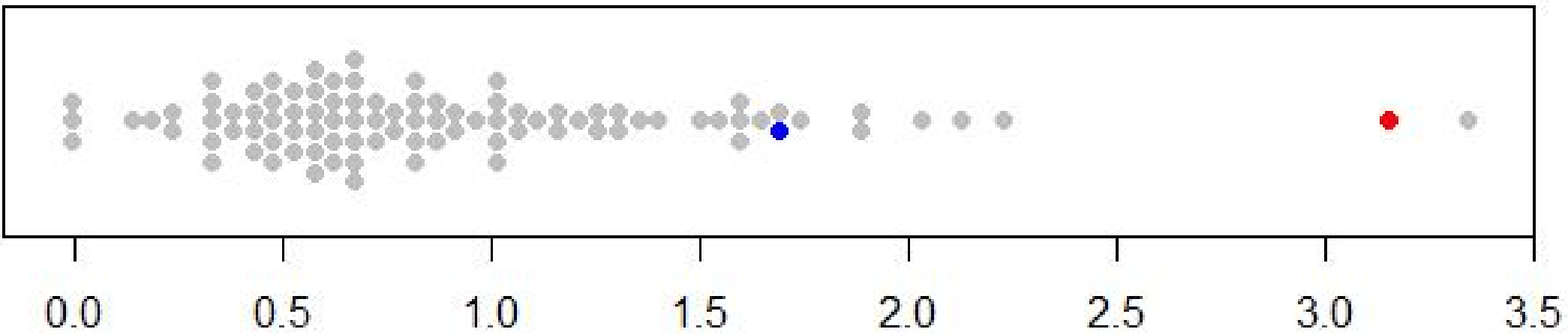
Key Passes



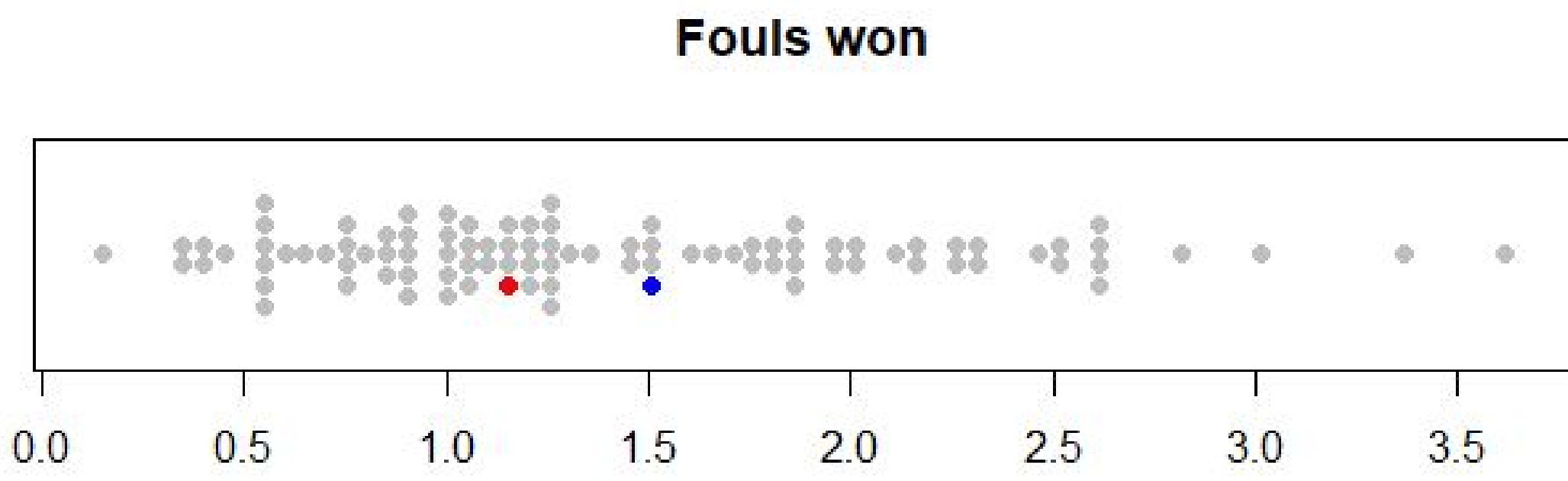
First up, open play Key Passes (passes resulting in a shot) where John Swift's 3.36 per 90 (blue shaded dot) puts him slightly behind Luton's Izzy Brown, **but 0.9 ahead of the next best in the league**. This is also an area that Ejaria has shown some promise this season, notably assisting George Puşcaş for the equalizer at Loftus Road with a perfectly weighted pass in recent weeks. Despite not being his main weapon he sits above average with 1.29 Key passes per 90 (red shaded dot).

So, about his main weapon – dribbles. As an inverse to the above, **Ovie sits second out of the 94 players**, with his 3.15 successful dribbles per 90 a little behind QPR's Eberechi Eze (WhoScored has the QPR maestro as playing centre mid for 6 games/500 minutes, with the rest spent in a more dribble-friendly role wide left). Remarkably, John Swift also stands out as an above average midfielder for dribbling, with his 1.68 successful dribbles good enough for 10th highest in the league.

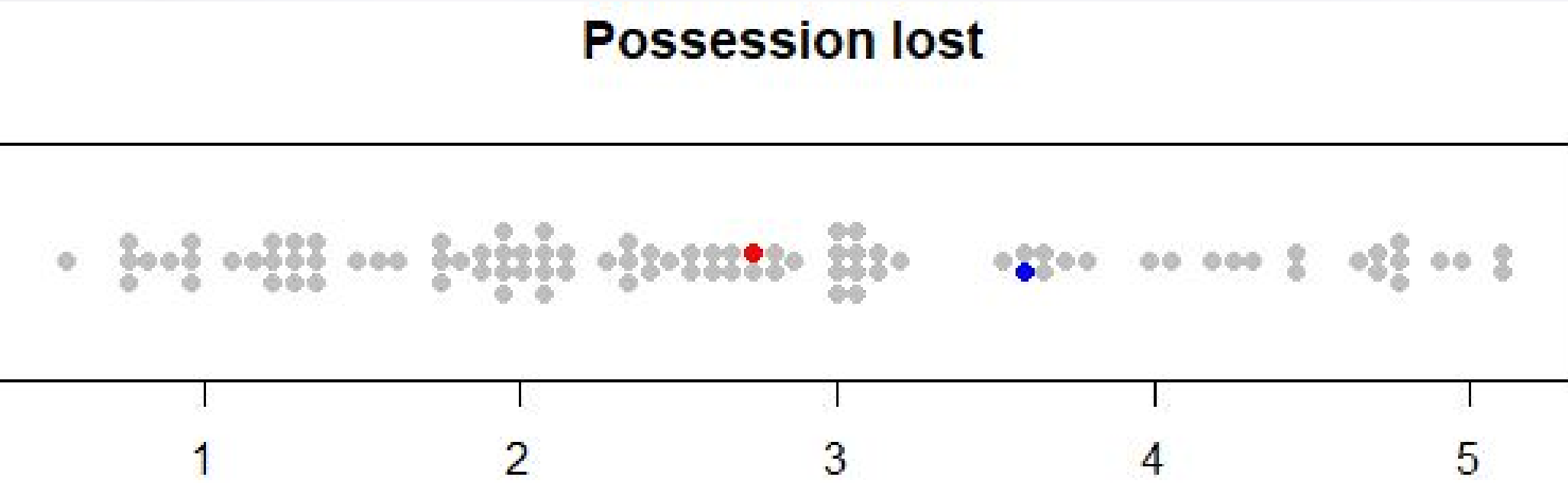
Successful dribbles



But what about when they aren't breaking defensive lines down with their passing and dribbling? Well, despite high dribble volumes, both are ranked reasonably averagely for winning fouls, with Swift and Ejaria in the 65th and 43rd percentile respectively. Combine them together and you still don't get anywhere near the 3.6 fouls per game committed on Charlton's poor Jonny Williams.

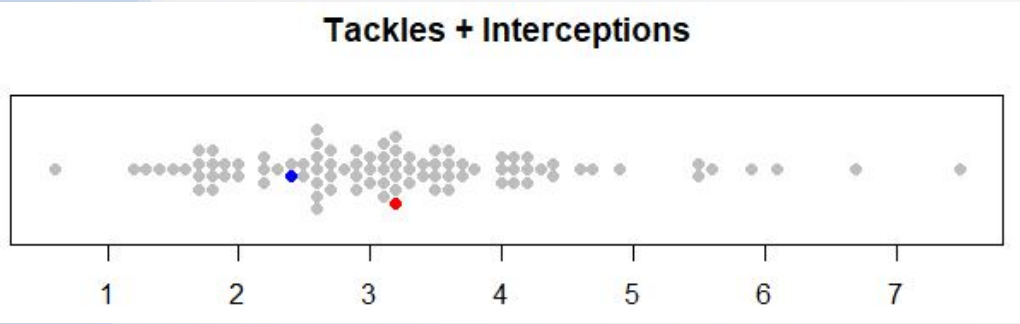


While they aren't drawing an exceptionally high number of fouls, nor are they wasteful on the ball, with possession lost (dispossessions and unsuccessfully controlling the ball) above average in the 58th and 78th percentile, and comfortably below that-man-again Eze's league high 5.1 per game (he is also top 5 for being dispossessed, another measure where SwOvie are comfortably in the mid pack).



What about when out of possession you cry? Swifts 2.37 per 90 minutes put him in the 23rd percentile while Ejaria's 3.15 slots him comfortably in the middle – solid enough but unspectacular, reinforcing the need for a midfield anchor to do much of the defensive work in the middle of the park.

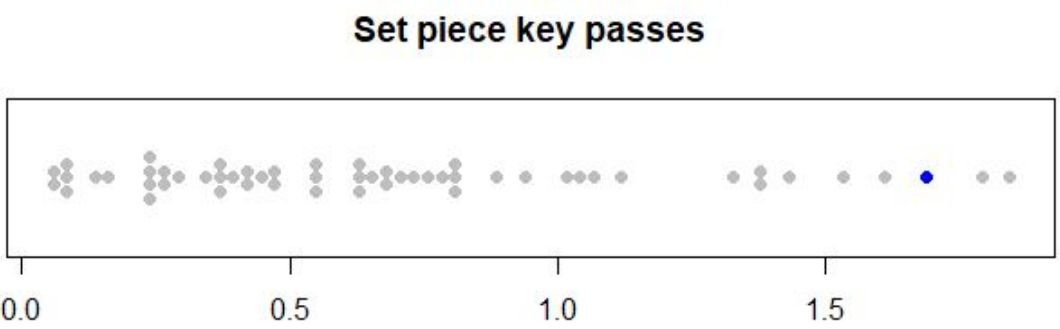
Finally, in addition to the impressive open play Key Pass figures from the first chart, John Swift has averaged a further 1.68 key passes per 90 from set pieces. Only Preston's Paul Gallagher and Luton's Andrew Shinnie producing more chances from dead ball situations per 90 minutes out of the 55 players to have taken 15 or more this season. This isn't just a high-volume situation either, with 0.2 chances per set piece (or one chance every 5 set pieces) in the 80th percentile.



If they can stay fit and in form then we can expect quite a highlight reel come the end of the season.

As I wrote in the opening line, I'm on the hype train: all aboard.

Put that all together and we have a creative dynamic threat in the middle of the park, who progress the ball through dribbles and passes, aren't excessively wasteful (*unlike Eze*) & are also able contribute modestly to defensive duties when out of possession.





No Experience, No Problem

Matthew Williamson



"By contrast, the home side had Grzegorz Rasiak & Simon Church up front"

Going into 2010 things were looking bleak for Reading Football Club. Steve Coppell had left at the end of the previous season, after a play-off semi-final defeat to Burnley, before the club turned to managerial newbie Brendan Rodgers over the summer.

A man with a long history at Reading, and stints in José Mourinho on his CV, there was a lot of promise, but perhaps his vision didn't match the players at his disposal. A disastrous spell only lasted six months before a draw at home to Scunthorpe, and a falling out with Tim Deller precipitated the end for the Northern Irishman.

Enter Brian McDermott.

McDermott had actually joined the club almost a decade earlier, taking up the role of chief scout, before moving into management roles with the youth and reserve teams. In December 2009 he took over as the first team's caretaker manager. There was no sudden up-tick in the side's fortunes. The team did draw back-to-back games immediately following his appointment, against sides that finished the campaign in the top ten, but in the last game of the year they were hammered 4-1 away at Home Park.

Reading's first game of the new year was in the FA Cup, at home to Liverpool. The big four dominance may have been waning, but Liverpool were still a formidable force. They turned up at The Madejski making four changes, but Reina, Gerrard, Kuyt, Torres all started. By contrast the home side had Grzegorz Rasiak and Simon Church up front.

In fact it was the two Reading strikers that linked up to provide the opening goal of the game. Rasiak hooked Ryan Bertrand's overhit free-kick back into the six yard box, and, more than anything, it ricocheted off Church into the net. Gerrard managed to level the score soon after when Kuyt dummied over his cross-cum-shot, and the ball found the far corner. The second half had chances at both ends, and in particular two Liverpool headers didn't quite go their way. An Aquilani chance was directly at Hamer, who had replaced an injured Federici, and right at the death Torres stole in front of the goalkeeper but his effort was just over the bar. *Replay secured.*

And what a famous replay it ended up being. Reading put on a truly masterful counter-attacking display. In the first half they had great joy getting the ball down the right flank quickly. Rasiak completely mishitting a ball across from Church, and then Church himself failed to connect with a header after McAnuff's run. Liverpool came into it at the end of the half, and Gerard's cross deflected off Bertrand for the opening goal.





No Experience, No Problem

Matthew Williamson



A goal down, but that didn't dent the impressive display. In the second half a poor pass from Aquilani saw McAnuff pick the ball up inside the centre circle. He rode two challenges before running at pace at the Liverpool defence, darting between Carragher and Agger on the edge of the box, he was under no real pressure as he bore down on goal. The goalkeeper went the wrong way, but Jobi didn't quite wrap his foot around the ball, it just evaded the right hand post. With the last attack of the game a long throw ended up falling to Shane Long. He got to the ball just ahead of Yossi Benayoun, who brought down the forward inside the box. An ice cool Sigurdsson slotted the penalty into the corner.

It was another Icelfander who provided the moment of quality in extra time. Brynjar Gunnarsson Cruyff-turned past Benayoun, nutmegged Insua, and then put a pinpoint cross in for Long to turn home. **Reading's first ever win at Anfield - and completely deserved.**

In the fourth round Reading welcomed Burnley, and a chance to avenge the defeat in May. The game was petering out before Andy Griffin's pass from deep found Sigurdsson in the box, and he rolled it past the keeper into the corner to send Reading through.

Reading's league form still dire. Losses to Forest and Sheffield United left the side winless in seven, sitting next-to-bottom of the table. Despite that, and still without a league win, McDermott was offered the role permanently. The faith shown in him was quickly repaid, as would become a key facet of McDermott's side, they won eight of the next nine, while only conceding six.

In mid-February focus returned to the cup. Reading hadn't made it to the Quarter Finals since 1927, and Championship opposition in West Brom was all that stood in the way. The Baggies led the division, but even they couldn't contain Jimmy Kebe. It only took seven seconds for the Malian to break the deadlock, the fastest FA Cup goal (or one of them, anyway). Robert Koren levelled for WBA before twenty minutes had gone, and the sides remained deadlocked into half time.

After the break the sides traded red cards - Shane Long wasn't to be the saviour this time as he was dismissed for a high tackle, before Mulumbu received two yellows - before they traded goals. Simon Church's finish in the 73rd minute looked to have broken the long wait for a Sixth Round place, but Joe Mattock swept home with three minutes left to send the tie to another replay.

Another midweek match away from home, and this time Koren and Kebe swapped roles. Koren struck first, before Kebe hit back three minutes later. Again, the sides were drawing at the break, but Koren scored his third of the tie minutes into the second half. Just like the third round Reading left it almost unbearably late to level. In stoppage time Kebe capitalised on another defensive error, and squared to Brian Howard. The midfielder tucked the ball into the far corner in front of the rapturous away end.

An important piece of Reading's season was Gylfi Sigurdsson. He ended the season with 20 goals across all competitions, fifteen of those after McDermott took over, and contributed 10 points alone.





No Experience, No Problem

Matthew Williamson



Nowhere was he more crucial than in the very cup run that kickstarted the team's season. His goals secured extra time at Anfield, sent us through against Burnley, and in extra time at The Hawthorns he received the ball twenty-five yards out, turned, and delicately placed the ball over Scott Carson into the top right corner. Finally West Brom failed to reply, and Reading set up a home tie against Villa in the quarters.

Inevitably the FA Cup journey finally ran out of steam. Reading were two Shane Long goals to the good at half time, but as we have often seen *no lead is safe at Fortress Madejski*, particularly in cup competitions.

Ten second half minutes saw Villa turn it around, and John Carew finally completed his hat-trick in stoppage time to see them run out as victors. It wasn't the end of Reading's FA Cup Adventures, though. Since 2010 we've reached the three more times, twice under the stewardship of McDermott, and the other we actually made it to Wembley, albeit only as semi-finalists.

Reading finished the 2009/10 season ninth, only seven points from the play-offs. From the time McDermott took over there were only three teams better in the league; those that finished the season in the top three positions. Just as much credit should go to Sir John Madejski, and the club hierarchy.

Not many chairmen would back an inexperienced manager, sitting in the relegation zone, with zero league wins.

It ended up being a masterstroke, as he became only the second manager to lead us to The Premier League just two years later.





Bowen's Tweaks

ReadingDeep



After going unbeaten in his first four games in charge Mark Bowen seems to have won over much of the fanbase that seemed universally against his appointment, introducing a high tempo, less possession based brand of football that has seen Reading more than double their points total since Mark Bowen was introduced as manager of the first team.

It's not just the results that have impressed but the manner of them with Reading impressing in each game. While Gomes was clearly unlucky in his last games as Reading manager, the changes have obviously had a positive impact so far.

The most obvious change made by Bowen is the speed at which Reading progress the ball. Fast attacking transitions have characterised his early tenure and mark a clear departure from the football Reading fans have been used to in the last few years

Under Gomes Reading tried to hit the front 2 early but this was mostly used as a method of retaining possession higher up the pitch. Now the front 3, with Ejaria positioned higher, are constantly looking to receive the ball and turn to attack the defence. Starting positioned close together they first try to use quick combinations to turn the defence but failing this will lay the ball off to an onrushing midfielder or wingback and make an attacking run looking for a return ball. Under previous managers with the emphasis on playing out from the back but not necessarily being good at it Reading have often lost possession when forced long but the structure now allows Reading to win second balls more often with the attackers closer together.

It is not all direct football however with Reading happy to retain the ball if the initial attack breaks down. After the first half against Preston myself and many other Reading fans were worried by the aimless nature of football on display but postgame Bowen spoke about how he emphasised the need for patience at times at halftime and this has luckily been on display since.

While Bowen and Gomes both lined up with a 352 formation the key difference in their teams is the shape of the midfield. As opposed to the single defensive midfielder with 2 in front deployed by Gomes we now see a double pivot with a more attacking midfielder ahead of them.

The main thing this allows is for the advanced midfielder, so far Ejaria or McCleary, to get into attacking positions earlier almost forming a front 3 at times.

"Fast attacking transitions have characterised his early tenure"





Bowen's Tweaks

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Perhaps the most important part of the team, Ejaria looking forward quickly has already created goals against QPR, Millwall and Luton. Further back Swift and Rinomhota playing the pivot allows Reading to progress the ball much better than Pele alone receiving the ball from the centre backs. Both more technically gifted than Pele, Swift with excellent vision and technique obviously allows for better progression and Rinomhota while not the greatest passer of the ball utilises one-twos and his ability to turn in tight spaces to bypass the press.

With only one midfielder dropping to receive at a time Reading maintain enough presence in the middle of the pitch, which has been an issue at times this season. While restricted in the first phase of possession, Swift is released in the final third and allowed to take up attacking positions similar to those he did under Gomes, creating overloads high and wide with Ejaria. The cover provided by the wider positions of the deeper midfielders also allows the wingbacks to get further up the pitch quicker to create the team's width.

The most drastic changes made so far by Bowen have been offensive, but he has also tweaked how Reading defend. While they have maintained the high line the pressing is less intensive, keeping a midblock until the opponents take a heavy touch or are forced backwards. The strikers mainly look to block passing lanes wide with the advanced midfielder often the one to close down opponents centrally, seen to greatest effect against Luton when McCleary nicked the ball after Sheehan's poor touch and scored.

Under Gomes the wingbacks were often isolated defensively but now the deeper wide midfielder get across more often to stop the wingbacks facing so many 2v1s.

The very narrow shape this creates with Yiadom and the opposite midfielder tucking in leave Reading vulnerable to switches of play at times however.

Overall a very positive start for Bowen in his first managerial job. He's said all the right things so far, integrated Baldock and McCleary back into the squad with instant impacts and in our very own Elm Park Royal's latest podcast Liam Moore (*find it at elmparkroyals.com*) said some very promising things about his training intensity and emphasis on opposition analysis.

All that's left to be seen is if he can keep this up now that opposition teams know what to expect from this new look Reading side.





What's a Simod anyway?

Dave Stevens



"Ian Branfoot guided the club to the third division title following a record 13 wins start to the season"

Reading's solitary Wembley success came in a competition with roots in some of the darker times in English football. Following the 1985 Heysel Stadium Disaster, in which 39 people died and the blame for the events attributed to Liverpool's fans on the night, English clubs were banned from European competition indefinitely.

There was a desire to replace the lost fixtures in the football calendar for England's top clubs, so a new competition formed just for those in the top two divisions at the time - League Division One and League Division Two.

The format for the competition was modeled on the existing Associate Members Cup - which itself continued on and is now known as the EFL Trophy. It's name: The Full Members Cup (owing to the fact that clubs in the top two divisions were "Full Members" in terms of voting rights in the league).

The first Full Members Cup was held in the 1985/86 season, though participation wasn't widespread: those who had qualified for European competition at the end of the previous season were entered in to the English Super Cup (an even more short lived competition - it lasted one season and failed to attract a sponsor until the final!) and four clubs refused to be a part of it at all - Arsenal, Spurs, Man Utd and Liverpool deciding they were above such things.

Nevertheless, Ken Bates - then of Chelsea - was a big proponent of the competition and its potential, pointing out to people that the League Cup had taken off pretty quickly and in time, this cup would too. The inaugural competition played out with 21 teams having entered, the majority of whom came from the second division, and the final ended with a high scoring 5-4 win for Chelsea over Manchester City.

With sufficient interest in the Cup and no sign of the European ban being lifted, it returned in 1986/87. This also marked the Royals first entrance in to the competition, as Ian Branfoot had guided the club to the Third Division title following the record 13 win start to the season, which put them in the Second Division - and full members eligibility - for 86/87. Having made it through the first round with a 1-0 over Shrewsbury Town, there was to be no cup run in this instance, losing out in a 2-0 loss when Ipswich Town came to Elm Park for the Second Round. That year, Blackburn Rovers emerged the victors, winning a narrow final 1-0 against Charlton Athletic.

With the second Full Members Cup attracting more participants - 30 teams entered, with almost half being First Division clubs - and the viability of the competition being a little less uncertain, the league were able to secure a sponsor for the next incarnation - and so, for the 1987/88 season, it was known as the Simod Cup - the name we've come to remember so fondly.





What's a Simod anyway?

Dave Stevens



Who - or what - was Simod?

The company that secured the sponsorship were an Italian Sportswear company that appear to still be in business today. Their headquarters is just south of Venice in Italy, so a little romance to the story even before you imagine Gilkes coasting down the wing.



This season, the format continued as it had since inception - ostensibly divided on a North/South basis to encourage the prospect of local games (derbies in some cases).

Quite how the lines were drawn is a mystery, however - as the first round in 87/88 saw Plymouth travel to Manchester City (and get trounced 6-2) and Charlton hosted Hull City (a 1-1 draw, with Charlton advancing thanks to a 5-4 win on Pens, if you're following along).

There were 40 teams entered this season, some of the big hitters at the time being Nottingham Forest, Leeds United, Newcastle United and a Chelsea side featuring former Royal Kerry Dixon. Up first for Reading was a trip that had they existed in 1987, Sky would have been all over: away to QPR. It ended with a comeback from a goal down to win 3-1 - finding the scorers has been tricky, but as those present best remember, Martin Allen scored for the fake hoops and Linden Jones scored two to turn the game on its head.

In the second round, the organizers' dreams of a derby were realized: Oxford United, at Elm Park. Younger readers may be surprised to learn they were eligible for this particular competition but back in those days, they were actually in the top flight, above Reading... which made the 1-0 win - thanks to a Dean Horrix goal - all the more sweet, I imagine.

Unrelenting, the competition continued to a third round and Reading got another home tie, this time against Nottingham Forest. Come the end of the season, Forest would finish 3rd in the top flight - and would go on to win this particular competition twice. At the time, they sat second in the top flight, chasing Liverpool for the title - but it ended with a big 2-1 victory for Berkshire's finest. Having taken the lead, former Royal Neil Webb equalized for Forest to take it to Extra Time - where Dean Horrix again lashed the ball home and ensured progression to the Quarter Finals.

There, Reading again got the benefit of a night at Elm Park, welcoming Bradford City - a team going well in the Reading's division. Extra time was needed again for this one, and some good fortune as Bradford missed an open goal - but Horrix was again the man to see us through as the match finished 2-1.





What's a Simod anyway?

Dave Stevens



The Semi Final match up was against a First Division side again - Elm Park the venue for a marathon night battling Coventry City who were also the Holders of the FA Cup. As those who were there tell it, the Southbank was packed out and Coventry brought a full house for the Town End.

The game ended 1-1 - Neil Smillie first for Reading, David Speedie equalizing for Coventry, and onwards to Penalties. Despite being down by 2 at one point in the shootout, Steve Francis became a hero on the night, saving 2 to set up a finale where Michael Gilkes has the chance to score the winning penalty... which he does, cueing up a pitch invasion and wild celebrations.

The final itself, at the old Wembley, has been covered extensively. Few fans will not know the score on that day - a 4-1 win over Luton Town, despite falling behind early on. If you have a look on YouTube, you can see all the goals and some glorious footage of Wembley in the 80s (I dearly wish they'd bring back the G O A L animation, that was superb).

Beyond the fact that a Wembley win - and at that time, any silverware at all - was a rarity for a club of our size, it's also worth considering the context in which this win came. Just five years had passed since Robert Maxwell's mercifully-failed attempt to merge Reading with Oxford to destroy both clubs and form the Thames Valley Royals. English football was in decline through the 80s, but for Reading, there had been an uptick in fortunes - first, setting that record on the way to a Division Three title, staying up, then this success at the National Team's Stadium. Truly, a great time for the fans of this club - and any that were there will gladly tell you all about it.

I wasn't there - I was four years old, and hadn't yet discovered the club - but I've had plenty of discussions over a few pints with those that followed the cup run (all those home ties really helped with attendance) and I'm always left with a strong wish to have been a part of it.

Ultimately, the 87/88 season ended in less happy terms for the Royals, as they slipped back in to Division Three having finished 22nd in the league - their cup heroics not translating to league success. This meant that the following season, they were no longer eligible for the competition so could not defend their title. Overall, the competition never really grabbed the attention of the public or the biggest clubs in the English game, and with the lifting of the European ban being completed in the 91/92 season, the end of the Full Members Cup - by then known as the Zenith Data Systems Cup after a sponsor change - was confirmed after the 1992 final, won by Nottingham Forest.

In it's seven years in existence, only twice did a team from the Second Division win it - Reading and Blackburn holding that distinction. While it never captured the nation's hearts, there is no doubt that in Reading the Simod Cup will always hold a special place.





Pre-Xmas Preview

Erik Orrgarde



Following an upturn in form and a more than acceptable start under the stewardship of the “Welsh Wonder ©”, Mark Bowen we head into the pre-Christmas period which is surprisingly busy considering how busy the Christmas period itself also is. We have 6 games in 4 weeks, 4 of which are away from home with just the 2 games at the Madstad. Out of the 4 away games, 3 of them include lengthy journeys up north so if you're a loyal royal planning to attend – pack your long johns!

Our first game after the international break is a final visit to Griffin Park with Brentford due for a move to their new home; the Brentford Community Stadium in the summer of 2020. This is good news for a couple of reasons; 1) Our record at Griffin Park is not the best and 2) Those professional egg-chasers London Irish are moving away from the Madejski to join Brentford in their new home.

With regards to the game, Brentford are shrewd operators in the Championship having now been here for 4 full seasons and famously deploy a “Moneyball” type system for operating their club. Having been to west London on a few occasions I can safely say I didn't see any Brad Pitt look-alikes though. Brentford will provide a tough test for the Royals but hopefully we can carry on our recent good form and upset the odds.

A mere 3 days after our short trip down the M4, we take on the visit of Leeds Utd at home at the Madejski Stadium for what is bound to be a stern test under the lights on a Tuesday night, and yet another Leeds United match occurring on Sky Leeds TV. As we know, Leeds will of course bring more fans down to Reading than any club in history even if it is Tuesday night, and they'll be sure to re-enforce that point over and over on social media too.

What I am more worried about is the weeks leading up to the game where we may find some of Leeds coaching staff **copying our own Jacob South Klein and taking “Bushwatch” to the next level, we know they have previous!** Leeds were one of the favourites for promotion at the start of the season but I hope that the ‘Bond’ between our players sees us through to a positive result, regardless of any spying.

Following the Leeds fixture, we travel to the DW Stadium and face Wigan on Saturday 30th November.

"Leeds will of course bring more fans down to Reading than any club in history"

I have a grand total of 0% chance of attending this game as it falls on my wedding anniversary. I wouldn't say I am under the thumb but *given how grim Wigan is I know which battles I want to fight at home and this isn't one of them!*

For those of you who do brave the journey up the M6, be prepared for something that will feel like travelling back in time. . I distinctly remember a miserable 0-0 in the Premier League in 2008 and who can forget a 3-2 defeat in 2012 with a hattrick from Jordi Gomez after Reading going 1-0 up through Sean Morrison.





Pre-Xmas Preview

Erik Orrgarde



These were the days of #CerealQuest (how on earth was this a thing?!). Perhaps if Morrison had focused on his defending as much as his breakfast we'd have had a better result on the day. Needless to say, let's hope for a GRRR-EAT! Performance this time round and a better result to match.

Into December and we take on Birmingham City at home on Saturday 7th. There were rumours of Birmingham being interested in our favourite Romanian, George Puscas, in the summer so I hope for the hitman to have a particularly good game here.

On the pitch, Birmingham have had a perfectly reasonable season and find themselves in 13th place, 4pts ahead of the Royals. Might we be closer or even ahead of the Blues when we face each other at the Madstad?

Birmingham also own the worst goalkeeper in the championship, how on earth *is Lee Camp still a professional footballer?*



I would put us as slight favourites for the game if Camp is in goal and I still feel like we owe them after the 6-1 drubbing at St Andrews in 2014 which ultimately cost Nigel Adkins his job as the Reading manager. Demarai Gray was a hattrick hero that day so I certainly wouldn't mind a home hattrick hero in our favour this time.

Following the Blues game we face a long trip to Yorkshire on a Wednesday night to take on Barnsley. I last visited Oakwell on that fantastic run of wins in 2012 in our last promotion season. That game finished 4-0 to Reading and featured a phenomenal goal from Jem Karacan. This result at the time felt massive as it moved us 3 points clear of West Ham in 3rd place and it certainly helped carry on the momentum of our promotion push as it was our 9th win in 10 games. The game this year is likely to be a game with stakes slightly lower set than in 2012 but Barnsley are rock-bottom of the table as we speak so we have to think they are for the taking!

This is definitely a candidate of lowest away attended game for Reading this season. A trip to Yorkshire on a Wednesday night in December. The brave fans who do make the trip will certainly hope for 3 points to make it worthwhile.

Our final game in this group of fixtures ahead of the festive period is a visit to Stoke City on 14th December. Stoke have had a horrible time so far this season with Nathan Jones getting the sack so new management is something we have in common. Stoke have turned to the Northern Ireland manager Michael O'Neill to turn their fortunes around. They have a really strong squad on paper with players like Joe Allen, Lee Gregory and Tom Ince and so we shouldn't underestimate the Potters. The Bet365 Stadium is also famously cold and windy, I remember a 1-0 victory for Reading from a Dave Kitson penalty back in 2005. How funny that Kitson joined Stoke 3 years later for £5.5M although his fortunes under Tony Pulis weren't what either of them would have hoped for and certainly not representative of the large transfer outlay in 2008.





Erik Orrgarde

Device	Model	OS	Status
Device 1	Model A	Android	Online
Device 2	Model B	Android	Online
Device 3	Model A	Android	Online
Device 4	Model B	Android	Online
Device 5	Model A	Android	Online
Device 6	Model A	Android	Online

No I don't.

Come on URZ!!!

