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sumo

HOME TOWN  
HERO

#4

THE  
DIGESTIVE

JANUARY, 2019





# Editor Notes

## Alex Everson



A new decade, a new fanzine, potentially the start of a new era?

With Bowen having now been here for 3 months (And making it past Xmas, despite the cries of Reading fans at his hiring who predicted impending relegation), we're here to bring you the latest articles on how Bowen is faring in our fanzine, with a piece about the similarities between him and ex-Reading boss, Brian McDermott.

Alongside that, we also take a look at the opposite side of transfers coming into the club, and asking, just when is the right time to sell players? There's also a historical look at the first piece of silverware Reading FC won, the Berks & Bucks cup.

A guest piece with extraordinary quality remembering a minute in time of Reading FC from Steven is also a must read deeper into the fanzine.

Lastly, we have the regulars (Shout out Matt, Erik, Ben and Reading\_Deep for their ever present feature articles since issue 1!) back writing our monthly previews, reviews and tactical and statistical looks at this season, so be sure to check those out.

With the potential for a cup run (which may be all over by the start of Feb of course), our season (hopefully) isn't over just yet, and we will be back very soon with the latest goings on, historical look backs and another issue of The Digestive for you to scroll through.

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](http://www.elmparkroyals.com)

**Alex Everson**

## Thanks to our contributors in this issue

Ben Morley  
Erik Orrgarde  
Jordan Cottle  
Matt Lansley  
Matt Williamson  
Oli Scott  
Reading\_Deep  
Rich Saunders  
Steven (Cabin\_\_13)





# January Review

## Matt Lansley



Well, what an up and down month. After one of our best Christmas periods in history, a late play off push? Didn't seem too far-fetched. Coming into the New Year, sitting in 14th place, 7 points off the playoffs, with a game in hand, we had good reason to dream of a playoff push.

Recent results only boosted the dreams. Unbeaten in 5 games, 2 games won on the bounce, the most impressive being a 2-0 away win away to play off pushing and the best home team in the league Preston North End. Moreover, Bowen had seemingly had changed us from relegation fodder to team who could actually compete with teams at the top end of the championship!

The next month would be crucial if we wanted to be taken seriously as playoff contenders. But it would prove to be a long and grueling month.

What. A. Day. A new year, a new decade. New fortunes? The month started off with a New Year's Day away trip away to 3rd place, and promotion chasing Fulham FC. A familiar foe of recent years. Fair to say there was a few heavy heads in the away end, but a sell-out 2000 strong following sure seemed in good spirits. Sure the team responded, coming flying out the blocks and being on a 3 game winning streak, the confidence was flowing. A fantastic team goal, nigh on mirroring the week before at Preston. An Ovie through ball, a Blackett cut back and a "Swift" finish. 3 goals in as many games for the playmaker.

Been a while since we've seen a team playing with such confidence and purpose but boy, was this team good to watch! 2-0, 3 minutes after half time? Dreamland, the Scottish Pirlo sending the away end into complete delirium.

Don't you know pump it up? Boy, the Royals were certainly on the up!

Even Cavaleiro bringing a goal back on the hour mark, and a late Fulham onslaught couldn't dampen the spirits in the away end. This will certainly go down as one of my most memorable and best away days of recent years! 2-1 the final score, 4 wins running, 5 points off the playoffs with a game in hand. What a festive period it had been! Sadly I could not think of a worse time for an FA Cup 3rd round tie against Blackpool to come.



But it did. One of the best weekends for the football romantics, the FA Cup 3rd round. In all honesty, was I really bothered if we lost? Not really, I just wanted to get back to the grind of the championship and our playoff push! But Blackpool at home it was. A tame affair by all accounts, for a 2-2 score draw, this wasn't the most entertaining of affairs. The only things that stick in the memory, THAT penalty miss.... Many hours or laughter has been had mulling over that clip. What was he thinking?!?! A clever finish from Loader, and the captivating thought of a Tuesday night, 500 mile round trip to Blackpool... What a time to be alive.

Back to the championship and another playoff pushing challenge. This time came the challenge of 4th place Nottingham Forest. A stern test and made even the more challenging given the loss of Lucas Joao, who arguably had been the driving force of our recent run of form, reportedly out for as much as 3 months with a hamstring injury.







# January Review

## Matt Lansley



By all accounts, 90+5mins and 0-0, another resolute and defensively sound performance! Que the most bonkers minute of added time you'll experience. Sure, Forest scored, a highly dubious goal, but then to score an equalizer 20 seconds later? Come on... Fair to say, I've not celebrated a 1-1 equalizer that much before!

Another point against a promotion pushing team and the good run continues!

Next came the replay everyone had been counting down the days to. Blackpool away on a Tuesday night in an already congested January, the magic of the cup hey?

Another 11 changes and a chance for the kids' to show their worth. Ultimately it was another professional performance and ultimately another 2-0 win and a home tie against Cardiff was the reward. The real magic of the cup!

Reading were now on a 9 game unbeaten run and only 5 goals conceded in all competitions. Bowen for sure had impressed, turning us from relegation fighting, to a team fighting for each other, playing with a purpose and panache, many starting to liken to a McDermott team of yester year. His reward? A new 18 month contract. A move that's split opinion but a fine reward for a great job he's done in my view.

So, Bowen's future secured, a good foundation has been set, time to kick on and start looking forward and up the table! Next up, a trip to the Den and Millwall FC. A tough afternoon on the best of day. An even tougher prospect given the form the Lions have been in since the arrival of Gary Rowett. The team news gave a nice confidence boost. Puskas, The Romanian Rifleman back in on the bench after his 7 week spell on the side-line. In truth, this was probably the first time I've watched us under Bowen and seen us truly get outplayed. Millwall to their credit were fantastic and proved why they're real playoff contenders, sitting 7th after their 2-0 win over us.

As soon as we got back from Millwall, the thoughts already turned to Wednesday night and the away trip to Forest. Not every year you play a reverse fixture in the league, 10 days after the first fixture. I guess we have the Forest Ground's Vanarama National League North standard drainage to thank. But with the last minute madness of the previous fixture still fresh in the memory, their may've been a bit of extra spice to this fixture.

A few changes coming into the game, Puskas restored to the starting XI and also the young starlet Olise. Can't lie, I was dubious about Olise starting, a baptism of fire against one of the best teams in the league but wow, what a performance he put in. Again, a very good performance, defensively solid and 80mins gone 0-0, would've happily taken that pre match.

***"You could feel a tension in the home stands and even more so on the pitch"***

But one lapse in concentration, Grabban finds himself free at the back post for the simplest of tap ins. Strangely, from the moment they scored, you could feel a tension in the home stands and even more so on the pitch. Sure enough, "it happened again". To be fair to Baldock, it was a great finish.





# January Review

## Matt Lansley



To work himself some space, to get the shot away but the goalkeeping.... Fair to say, Samba didn't quite get his revenge he was after. Another solid draw though against a team thick in a promotion chase but the playoff dream seemingly slipping away by the game. Now sitting in 15th place and 9 points off 6th place.

I've never quite have known such a run of games but Saturday came back around and again it was the turn of the FA Cup, Cardiff at home in the 4th round. Another 11 changes and a welcome return for Meite given the loss of his father the week prior. My one burning thought when walking to the game?

Avoid a replay at all costs. To be fair to him, Tom McIntyre did his best, getting sent off with 10 minutes to go but still couldn't avoid another replay. In truth though, the day belonged to Yakou Meite. Scoring the day after his father's funeral, he was a man determined to prove a point and sure, put in a performance I'm sure his father would've been smiling down at.

***Nous sommes tous avec toi Yakou. ("We are all with you Yakou")***

Can't lie, I've lost count of the games this month and the game against Bristol City just seemed a game too many. Again we were very defensively solid, a trait of this Bowen era so far but the midfield looked tired, no real pace or purpose in attack either and we were as sloppy on the ball as I've seen under Bowen. 1 mistake was all it took at City took the 3 points back along the M4. In truth, this has been a gruelling month. 8 games in 28 days with a 9th still to come before the month is out.

Maybe an underwhelming month for some given results but when you take into account the quality of the opposition we've faced in the league over the month (3rd, 4th - Forest both games - 7th & 9th) I think we've got a lot of positives to take out. We're actually competing against some of the best teams in the league, defensively we look very good and still believe Bowen has laid a great foundation for his team going forwards. Some people will look at the new contract and supposed downturn in results since, but time will tell. Personally I think it's far too early to be pointing the figure given the job he's done so far. The loss of Joao can't be underestimated but given we're all but out of a relegation scrap for the first time in years and playoffs may seem a bit farfetched now, let's sit back watch with a freedom, enjoyment and see where the coming months takes us!







# Hometown Hero

## Alex Everson



The player we all want to see play for our clubs.

The childhood fan. The one who grew up with the club in their veins, the one who was at the stadium seeing and experiencing the same highs and lows as us. All the while, waiting, developing, hoping that one day, they too would be able to make the step out onto the field and play in the famous blue & white hoops.

Tom McIntyre is that player.

Having had a season ticket since the age of four, McIntyre has had Reading central to his life. An academy player at the age of 6. He became graduate number 48 back in December 2018 in a 1-1 draw away at Rotherham, and the centre half has gone on to establish himself as a member of Bowen's first team squad this season. Despite only having made 9 appearances for the Royals to date, reviews all come out the same after each viewing of the defender. Calm head. Good on the ball. Strong in the air. These reviews have applied over and over again as we have seen him develop from academy product to potential first team player.

Featuring on the left hand side generally of the centre back pairing, McIntyre hasn't had it all his own way as he has come through the ranks, being sidelined as a teenager for over a year with a stress fracture in his back. Followed up with a knee injury picked up early on in his career which both had the potential to derail him very early on. Despite these, he has grown and matured into the centre back of the modern game that Reading fans are excited to see develop, leaving everything on the field every time he steps out there.

Off the field, Tom comes across as a player who is keen to be involved with the squad, and his almost big/little brother relationship with Liam Moore which is often displayed on social media is enjoyable to watch. The 21 year old is still maturing into the player he is going to be, and despite a recent sending off against Cardiff City in the FA cup, he remains a potential fan favourite going forwards, with all the hallmarks of a potential (*whisper it*) one club player.

The excitement around him as a player cannot be underestimated from the fan base, and it would not be a surprise to see him break into the first XI on a regular basis before the end of this season, and I for one would be delighted to see it happen. Scottish youth international call ups have already happened, with McIntyre representing the U18 and U21 previously, with a strong end to the season, a full squad call up from Steve Clarke cannot be far away. And the manager who gave him his first opportunity to come up and train with the first team? Steve Clarke back in 2015, when Tom was still playing in the U16 squad.

He grew up in Reading, went to school in Reading, supported Reading, and now plays for Reading.

Tom McIntyre is Reading FC







# We've got the Record, 106!

## Rich Saunders



## *"The cogs aligned for one hell of a season"*

For many Reading fans we had become somewhat complacent to the old Division Two and Division One football. But beyond our wildest dreams the cogs within Reading FC all aligned for one hell of a season.

We would catapult from what seemed obscurity into a team spoken about all over the world. We would achieve the ultimate and do so with style, I don't think we will ever see such a season like that again but I hope I'm wrong.

The 04/05 season wasn't particularly memorable having missed out on the playoffs by one place. But there was a spell early on that looked like we would have a very good season with possible promotion. Unfortunately injuries to Dave Kitson, Nicky Forster and Shaun Goeter hampered our chances to progress.

A highlight though was the recruitment of Les Ferdinand and Martin Keown bringing vast experience to the team. I had hopes Les and Martin would complete the team a bit like Matty Upson a few seasons before but it wasn't to be. Another highlight that sticks out in my mind was Kitson scoring a hat trick against Alan Pardew. This certainly was something to remember given the manner in which he left Reading for West Ham.

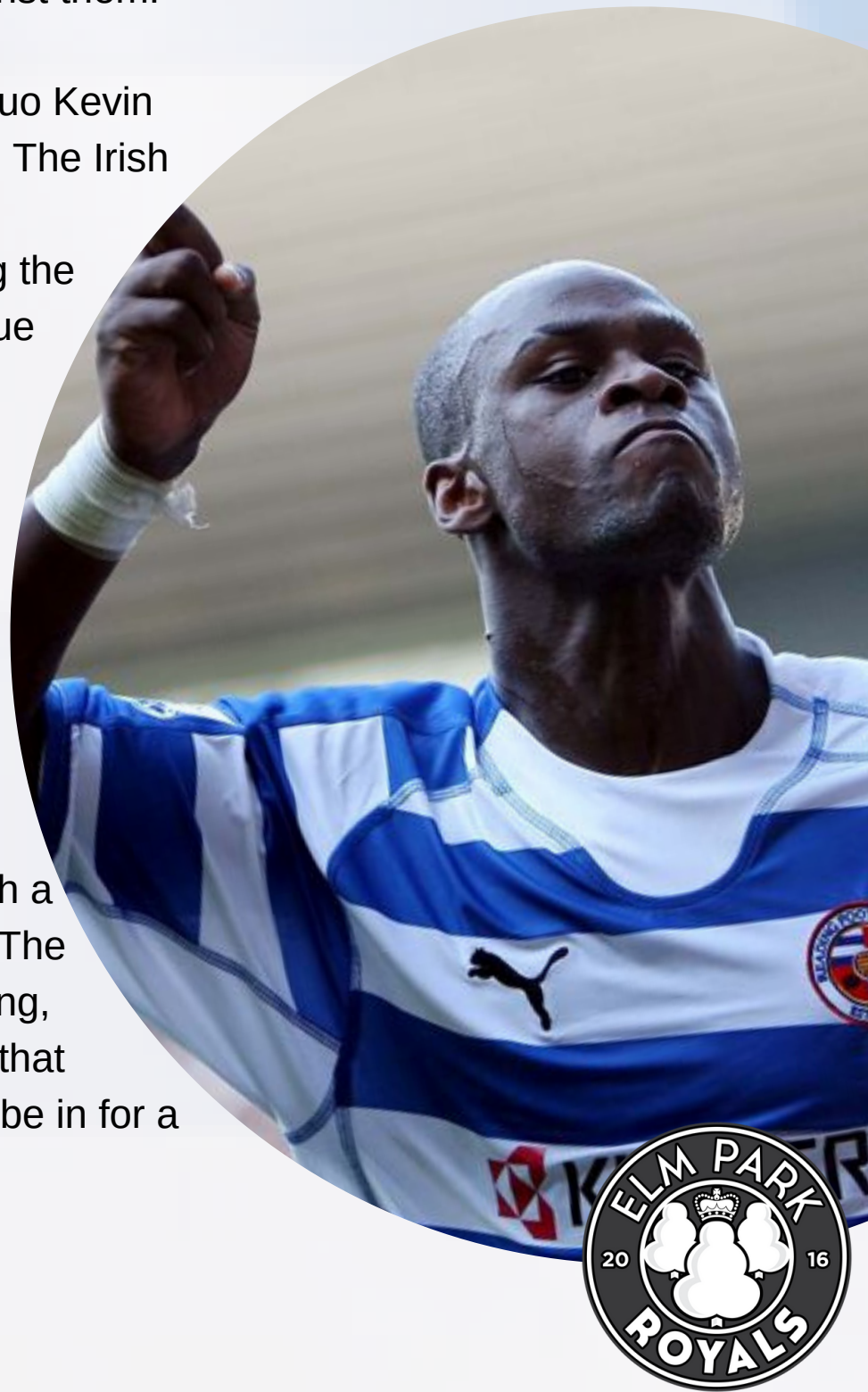
The pre season for our 05/06 Season started with games against Staines Town, Didcot Town and Farnborough Town. The team then went to Sweden for 3 matches then back to the UK for two more against Tottenham and Dorchester.

I remember looking at the three teams who were relegated from the Premier League as the ones to watch for 05/06. Crystal Palace, Southampton and Norwich were only two points apart when they suffered relegation the season before. This stuck in my head as the main threat to us and I had them chalked of as 9 to 12 points lost from the 18 possible against them.

Steve Coppell brought in the soon to be formidable Irish duo Kevin Doyle and Shane Long from Cork for an absolute bargain. The Irish theme continued with Stephen Hunt joining Reading from Brentford and re-joining his old gaffer Coppell. Also joining the ranks was our new club record signing Leroy Lita and a true fan favourite to be Brynjar Gunnarsson along with Chris Makin, John Oster and Graham Stack.

Behind the scenes the backroom staff who were already very established in the club clearly had everything in order and the players on side. The giant that was Reading FC 2005/2006 was waking up to the new season and ready to roll.

On to 6th August 2005 we would start our epic season with a bit of a splutter against Plymouth Argyle at the Mad Stad. The final result was a 2-1 loss but Leroy Lita was off and running, scoring on his debut. I honestly thought we should've won that game and at the time I wasn't too concerned that we may be in for a long and arduous season.







# We've got the Record, 106!

## Rich Saunders



After our hiccup of a start to the campaign we notched up 18 wins and 5 draws before tasting defeat to Arsenal in the league cup. We then continued to dominate with only a loss to Birmingham in the FA Cup then Luton in the league to tarnish the results. I clearly remember my mindset after the Luton game and I didn't feel the wheels were coming off or we were going to bottle it. I do however remember feeling like a spoilt brat that had their toys taken off them. What a vast contrast to my usual level headed and patient mentality when it comes to dealing with our results.

For me personally I felt every week we went into the games that we would win. I became almost complacent which as we all know is dangerous in football. Reading churned out win after win like a machine and we just turned teams over with ease and were a force to be reckoned with.

I sensed that the reality of going up became real around the Leicester game after Christmas when we'd clocked up 5 wins on the bounce. But I never felt we had over achieved and would bottle it at this point.



The vibe around the club amongst fans was something I'd never felt before as a Reading fan or ever witnessed for that matter. This felt different to any season including the 01/02 season when we got promoted even if we did come second that season. Dare we dream was a thought I had for the weeks that came and then the unbelievable happened.

Step up Mr Kevin Doyle to score an 85th minute equaliser which ended Readings 135 year wait to reach the highest league in the land. Promotion was gained but now we wanted to keep up the run and get our hands on that trophy. Reading then thumped Derby 5-0 at the Mad Stad and after the final whistle the fans poured onto the pitch in celebration of securing the Championship Title.

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his was by far the most amazing experience I've had as a Reading fan. To see the hallowed turf of The Madejski Stadium filled with Royals fans was a sight I will remember forever. As the players gathered in the Directors Box on the west stand overlooking the jubilant Reading fans below we all savored that moment and could now look back on that amazing achievement.

One last push from the lads in the final game against QPR saw Captain and legend Graeme Murty notch in a penalty to claim not only the 99th Goal that season, or the honour of every outfield player scoring that season but the new record for the most points scored in a season with 106 points. With Liverpool seemingly going to threaten this we have held that record with pride. It will be a shame to see our record go but regardless nothing can take away "That" season.

After the season had finished and the town turned blue and white as the team celebrated with an open top bus parade it dawned on me. Through the euphoric rise we now faced an almighty challenge that is The Premier League.







# We've got the Record, 106!

**Rich Saunders**



It turns out I need not have worried with Reading showing we meant business in the Premier League (Even if we only lasted two seasons). Being a Reading fan and working in West London has always thrown up it's fair share of banter and attention from the QPR, Brentford and Chelsea fans I work with and some comments are well wide of the mark.

But Reading and our consistent winning made them all sit up. This was little old Reading and that "not a bad little club with a nice stadium" squad are going toe to toe with the best and coming out on top!. Suddenly I'm thrust into this new world of supporting not only a record breaking promoted team but a Premier League team.

I won't lie the thought of facing Spurs, Chelsea, Man United and Liverpool is a mind blowing one when you have memories of Reading and where we came from and our meteoric rise. But regardless of all this we rightfully had our place at the table that is the Premier League and we wanted to stay.

I really hope we will get back to the promised land and have a good crack at the Premier League one day. With the owners having the funds and they've shown they want us to be back in the Prem maybe it isn't a thing of dreams. Dreams have come true before and who knows what the future holds for our club but whatever happens we still hold the record 106

**Urzzzz!**







# Bowen v McDermott

## Matthew Williamson



In many ways Mark Bowen feels like a natural successor to another bald manager, promoted from within. Brian McDermott's success was never really built upon, and a succession of men at the helm failed to turn around the club's fortunes.

Adkins had a semi-successful season when he finished outside the play-offs on goal difference, and Stam had a complete anomaly of a year - getting to within a penalty of The Premier League, but even the return of McDermott himself couldn't bring any kind of consistency.

Bowen inherited Gomes' 5-3-2, and immediately you could see his main focus was solidifying us defensively. Moving Swift deeper to protect against the counter attack, and stopping the wing backs from pushing so high up in possession. Likewise building from the back was a crucial part in McDermott's tenure.

On paper a back four of Cummings, Pearce, Gorkss, and Harte were not the division's biggest stars - perhaps shown by what each has gone onto after leaving the club - but they gelled better than anybody could have asked for. And with an industrious central midfield pairing sat in front of them it was always safety first.

McDermott's heart always seemed set on the wing play that took Reading to the top tier in the first place. Jobi McAnuff on the left, and Jimmy Kebe on the right is the stuff of dreams. The most surprising thing is that for a man so focused on playing down the flanks his forwards were never particularly imposing targets. He inherited Grzegorz Rasiak, but the Pole was moved on at the end of his first season - even after scoring ten goals.

And McDermott ended his first Reading stint with Pavel Pogrebnyak as a lone striker, but that was always more to make up for the deficiencies of the squad by packing the midfield than any ideological choice. The BFR was, infamously, a glamour signing by the 'owner'. There was one notable example in Reading's promotion season. A certain Jason Roberts linked up very well alongside his strike partner.

Instead the Reading side of 2009-2013 were focused around smaller, hard-working strikers á la Long, Hunt, Church, Le Fondre. Potentially a victim of circumstance more than anything, but Bowen has ended up with Lucas Joao, almost as far as you can be from McDermott's model. Work rate is not the big man's strongpoint, but his ability to link with the midfield is second-to-none.

It will be interesting to see what happens when Bowen can bring in his own players. The crucial difference between the squads that the two men had available to them is that McDermott had a plethora of wingers - in one particularly disappointing match the year after his departure Adkins was forced to start four, with two more among the substitutes - but the current squad is completely devoid of any.







# McDermott v Bowen

Matthew Williamson



So the Welshman is forced to deploy them as something closer to inside forwards, cutting in as they approach the opposition third. Both Meite and Ejaria have been utilised as such, but I think it's also interesting that Bowen has reverted Obita to play further up the pitch for times we need more width.

Both men love to get the ball forward quickly, but in markedly different ways. How many times did we see Federici quickly kick long, or Kebé carry the ball the length of field in the blink of an eye? Charlie Adam came into the side this season for exactly that job - to get on the ball, and to be as direct as possible. In the last few weeks that's petered out as teams have figured out the system, but it has crept into other players too. The Stam era may finally have been coached out of them.

Because Kebe, McAnuff, HRK, and the like were so important in getting the team forward they were often less involved in defensive phases than our wide men are in the current team. You could see against Nottingham Forest at the City Ground that the two wingers - Olise and Obita - were tasked with tracking the opposition's full backs as they made runs from deep. But the job to protect the back four fell namely to the pair in central midfield. Whether that was Jay Tabb, Mikele Leigertwood, and perhaps the man who sums it up better than anybody else, Jem Karacan, they seemed to cover every blade of grass.



Crucially, both men are also pragmatic enough to understand the positives in their squad.

Gylfi Sigurdsson rose to prominence when McDermott chose to build a 4-3-3 around him. Likewise Bowen has managed to design a system that allows him to have all his best assets on the field at once.

Time will tell whether it's personal preference or availability that stops Bowen playing from out-and-out wingers, but the philosophy is similar. Two banks of four, a rigid defensive unit, direct play, and players who play for the team.







# When did we forget how to sell?

Jordan Cottle



Unless you are an elite club, everyone needs to sell players. No one likes seeing their best players lured away but selling players does not have to be entirely a bad thing. I would argue it's a pretty important part of moving forward.

Firstly, clubs can generate a lot of revenue through player sales. That revenue can be re-invested into the playing staff to secure the next wave of sellable assets for the club and if you can do that enough it can buy you a whole stadium a la Brentford. Revenue generated through players sales is essential for almost every club in the EFL now due to FFP. Regardless of how deep a club owner's pockets are the rules around losses dictate you cannot spend and spend with no limit.

The maximum loss is 13 million a season assessed over three years, so 39 million in allowed losses. Those loss cover everything bar a few exceptions such as academy investment. Even if a club were starting from a position of net zero loss, 13 million doesn't get you as far as it used to. 5 clubs spent more than that in transfer fees alone this summer.

Isaac Mbenza and Ivan Cavaleiro were both (according to Transfermarkt) bought for 10+ million this summer. That doesn't leave much wiggle room without players sales and parachute payments.

In order to compete for promotion even the shrewdest clubs are having to spend significant sums. Player sales can offset that expenditure in order to not fall foul of FFP regulations. Something several clubs have done already this season.

***"Timing can be crucial when selling players"***







# When did we forget how to sell?

**Jordan Cottle**



Selling players also allows for churn in the playing stuff which can be beneficial. Too much player turnover can be disruptive, but no turnover can lead to staleness and squad players being disillusioned with their playing time. In an ideal world, players transition from 3rd to 2nd to 1st choice in their given position over time. Part that process is the players ahead of them falling down the pecking order or being sold. Good recruitment isn't just about replacing players once they are gone it is often about bringing in a potential replacements while they are still here.

Now, football is not that simple. Recruitment at most clubs is somewhat hit and miss, lots of things can aid or disrupt player development and ultimately players are people with their own thoughts and feelings. But if a club is confident in their recruitment and in the potential of the backup player then they should have no concerns over selling 1st team players. If anything, selling players for good profit is a compliment to a club for identifying and/or developing talent.



Finally, and perhaps most relevant to Reading, selling players can provide opportunities for academy players. Replacing 1st team players does not always have to come from external recruitment. Clubs with good academies will always have players on the fringes hoping for an opportunity. The primary goal of an academy is to prepare young players so that they are ready for first team football but with large squads, and often short-term thinking, it can be difficult for these players to get opportunities.

Regardless of talent an academy player with 3 senior players ahead of them in their position is unlikely to make matchday squads let alone get minutes on the pitch. The need for clubs to sell players to clear a pathway for the most promising academy players is often the final hurdle that stops players breaking through.

## So, when did Reading forget how to sell?

Historically Reading have been a club that have had their best players pinched. If a player puts in a good season, they will inevitably be subject to interest and more often than not the deals are too good to turn down. We cut our cloth accordingly. It's part of the Reading way. We've moved away from 'the Reading Way' in lots of regards over the last few years and seemingly we've stopped selling players. Not entirely but we've stopped selling well.

The last few years have been littered with players sold at a loss (Illori, Hurtado) or released from their contract (Edwards, Clement, Kelly) or who left at the end of their contract (Williams, Robson-Kanu). That doesn't even tell the whole story. Timing can be crucial when selling a player and there is certainly a skill to maximizing a player's value







# When did we forget how to sell?

**Jordan Cottle**



We have seen a few good examples of players sold when their stock was highest such as Blackman and Tshibola. But there are more examples where holding on too long has seen us miss out on big sales. Liam Kelly and Jake Cooper were both subject to (reported) interest after their breakthrough seasons, but we decided against cashing in and both have since left the club for small fees.

We've rejected good bids for Moore and Meite and I would suggest their market value has almost certainly dropped since. The future of Danny Loader is still up in the air, but it seems likely he will leave on a free this summer with fees decided by tribunal. 6 months ago, we pulled out of a late deal to sell him to Wolves. He hasn't started a league game since the opening day of the season.

Not all of Reading's recruitment has been bad, in fact a lot of it has been good, but this summer again we will see a host of players let go at the end of their contract with mixed success. Gunter and McCleary have been brilliant servants for the club, Mannone and Adi Popa have had limited impact and at 34 Adam may not get another year. I'm sure we will look to offload McNulty, Barrow and Aluko but they will all fall into the 'sold at a loss' bucket. Those wages off our books will be a big positive and give us some room to work in the transfer window but it doesn't reflect that well on our transfer strategy if we only ever buy and never sell (for profit).

## So, what should our transfer policy be?

I will leave a deep dive into Kia and Mattos for another time but whatever we do, I think our transfer policy should be dictated by our academy. We are in a privileged position as a football club. We are financially stable thanks our owner's deep pockets. We are settled having spent the last 17 seasons in the 2nd tier or higher. Crucially we are one of a handful of clubs with a CAT 1 academy outside of the Premier League.

All that together should make this club the perfect environment to give opportunities to young players, watch them develop and then, yes, sell them for a profit. Ideally somewhere in there we get promoted as well. Bar the selling aspect that I touched on earlier we are doing okay at this but we can do more. In the FA cup 4th round vs Cardiff Ben House became our 57th academy graduate and amazingly the 32nd in just the last 6 years. That is a brilliant achievement and testament to the work the academy does but I'm sure they would agree that they don't work to provide debutants, they work to provide first team players.

With the quality and quantity of players coming out of our academy I fully believe that the 3rd choice player in every position should be from the academy. Not all of them will go on to make 100 appearance but can they do a job when needed? Absolutely.

Take someone like Tennai Watson, who in the 16/17 season he was our backup right back. He made 3 leagues appearances and started every EFL cup games and didn't look out of place. He's since had 2 tough loan spells and his future probably now lies elsewhere but he was more than good enough for the role he played that season. He was good enough that we didn't need to bring in a journeyman on his way down or a Premier League loanee as cover. I think we have players in the academy in almost every position that we can say the same for. As a minimum they can come in and play a handful of games if we are seriously impacted by injury.

That would allow the club to focus recruitment around a core of 18-20 first team players and avoid the bloated squads we've seen over the last few years. When we bring players in, we should be keenly aware of what it will mean for the most promising players coming through. I really like Matt Miazga but unless we sell Moore I don't want to see us sign a CB this summer because Tom McIntyre looks ready. If we target wide players this summer, we should be careful not to push Olise too far down the pecking order. If we offload Sam Walker this summer, then don't buy a replacement we've got an outstanding crop of young keepers. We will, and should, sign players this summer but part of the deliberation should be 'who's development will this impact and is it worth it?'.

**The Academy is our future, but it can play a part in our present too.**







## Playoffs - To Be Or Not To Be xG?

Over the last few weeks, Mark Bowen has overseen an unbeaten run longer than any seen for the past 7 years, culminating in the Royals briefly topping the league's form table. For the first time in recent memory, eyes have dared to glance optimistically up the league rather than nervously downwards.



Unfortunately, this run has tailed off slightly, but at the time of writing (Before Bristol City defeat) we have a 13 point cushion over the relegation zone- wider than the 9 point deficit to the final playoff place. But how sustainable was this run? Were the playoffs ever really in reach?

One lens we can use to tackle these questions would be seeing what the expected goals (xG) figures tell us about this run. As I commented on in previous *Digestive* articles, this is far from a perfect measure, with gamestate a large consideration when looking at xG on a game-by-game basis. But by expanding the sample to a series of matches, some of these issues will wash out, leaving a clearer picture of how well the performances matched the results.

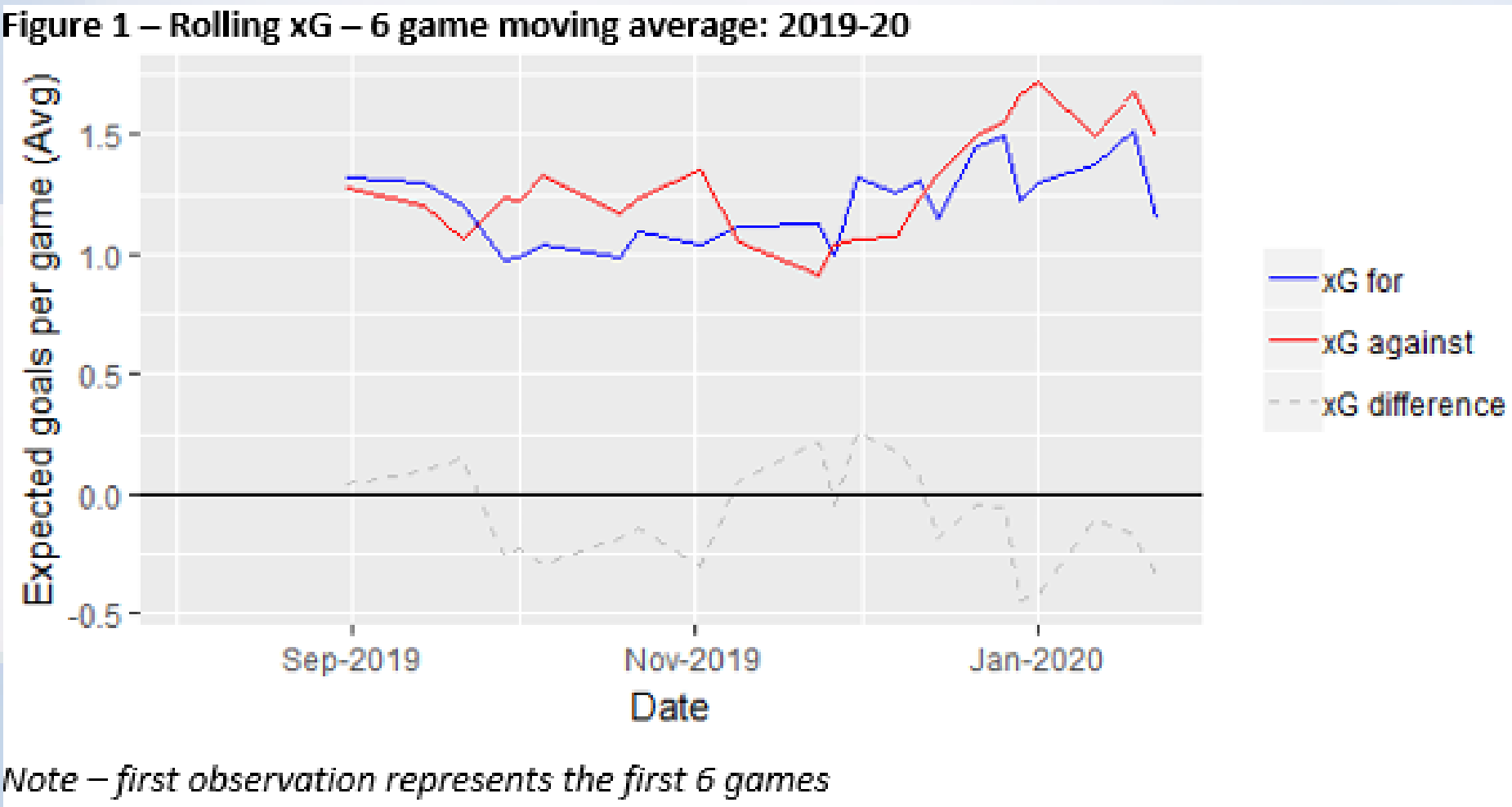


Figure one tells a bit of a mixed story – for a slight majority of 6 game samples, we have conceded more expected goals than we have scored (red line above blue line), something we would reasonably expect from a mid-lower table team than a playoff team.

While this isn't the be all and end all (Forest and Bristol City have the 16th and 24th best xG difference this season according to Ben Mayhew's latest Experimental 361 xG tables – significantly worse than their current 4th and 9th place positions respectively), it is broadly consistent with our overall current league position of 15th.

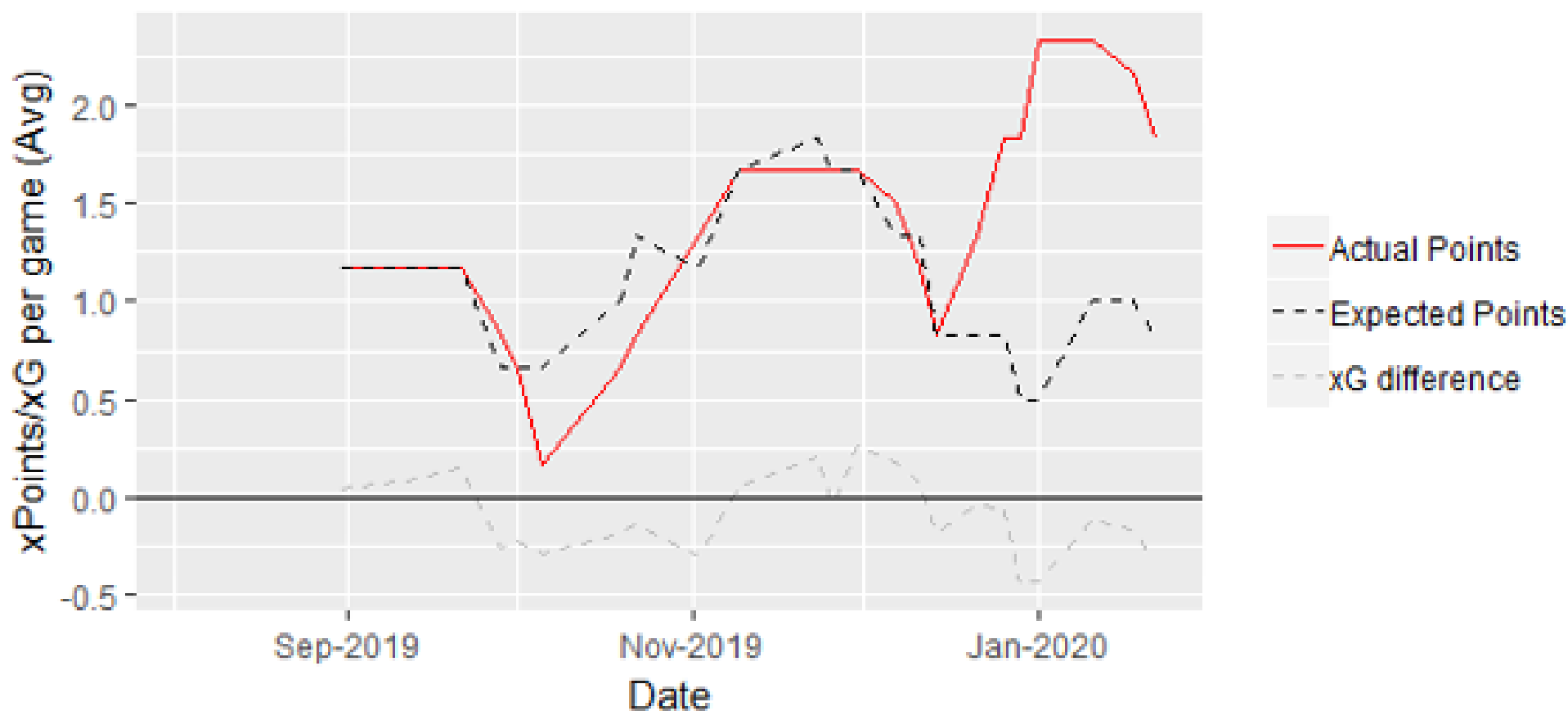






We can build on this by turning the expected goals into expected points on a game by game basis – where the xG generated differed by less than 0.5xG I have declared a draw a ‘fair’ result, and when wider I have assigned an xG-implied ‘win’ to the team with the higher xG total. Again this is not an exact science, but Figure 2 shows how up until mid-Dec, the expected and actual points moved mostly in lockstep albeit with a small points underperformance (actual points line below expected points line) in the games around the sacking of Jose Gomes and muddled appointment of Mark Bowen.

Figure 2 – Rolling xG implied points – 6 game moving average: 2019-20



For me, the real striking point in the chart is how actual points have decoupled from expected ever since mid December. In the 6 games up to the New Year’s Day victory over Fulham, we had earned 2.33 points per game (14 in total), while only ‘expecting’ 0.5 per game (3 in total). To be clear, I’m not actually suggesting we deserved to win 11 fewer points over this run, and it shows the gamestate critique perfectly; in multiple occasions on this unbeaten run we would have happily sat back after taking a lead (adding fewer xG) while trusting Rafael, Moore, Morrison et al. to do the rest. Nevertheless, I do believe we overperformed a little bit during this run, evidenced by two tight one-goal victories and one perfectly executed away performance at Preston.

So all things considered, our brief flirtation with the playoffs might have been fun, but perhaps was overly optimistic. That sounds like a rather negative conclusion, so again - it’s not a perfect analysis and I doubt Forest and Bristol City fans are too bothered about being told they are unstustainably overachieving; we certainly weren’t when in the same position in 2016/17. As long as they remain in the hunt for the playoffs anything can happen in a single match at Wembley.

And with that, context is king. Below are the same charts for the whole of last season. No single 6 game run had us generating more xG than we conceded, and aside from a spell almost exactly a year ago we were earning points at a significantly higher rate than xG says we deserved.

**We might not be a play off team yet, but early into the Bowen era we at least appear competitive, and that progress is exciting.**

Figure 3 – Rolling xG – 6 game moving average: 2018-19

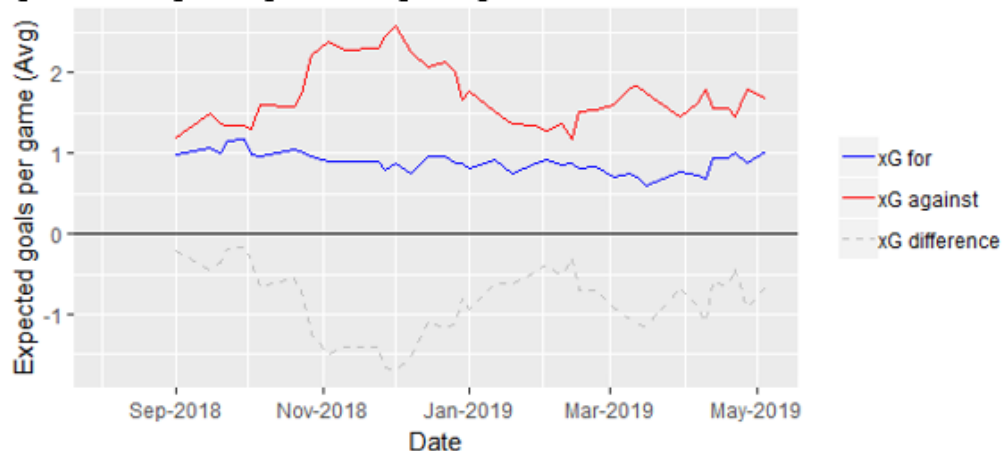
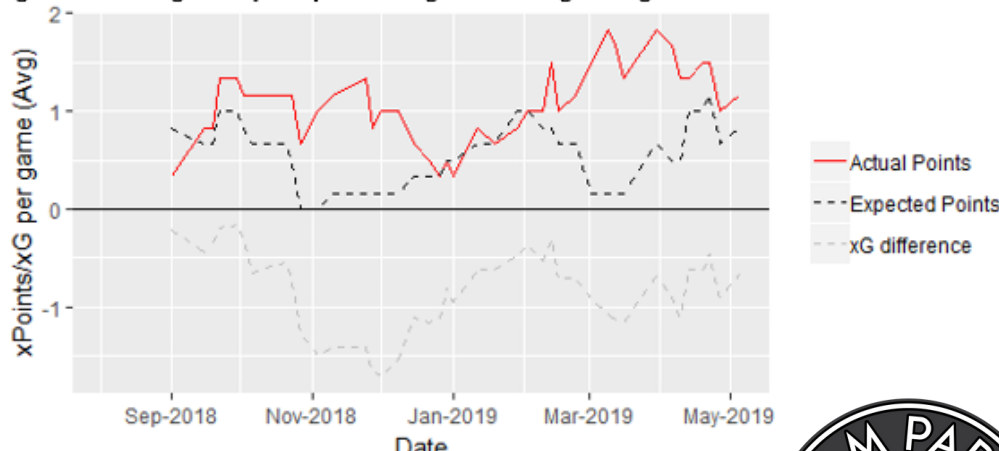


Figure 4 – Rolling xG implied points – 6 game moving average: 2018-19







# Opening The Trophy Cabinet

Oli Scott



*"It's safe to say the 2010's were rather fruitful in terms of cup competitions"*

As Reading FC move into the 16th decade that they have existed in, it is safe to say the 2010s were rather fruitful in terms of cup competitions. Famous victories against West Brom, Everton and Bradford saw the Royals reach three FA cup quarter-finals and a semi-final, the latter being only the second time the club have appeared at this stage of the competition in their 148 year history. However, to go back to the clubs first cup triumph you would have to rewind to 1878 in a wholly different footballing landscape; a time when

referees did not use a whistle, the penalty spot was an inconceivable phenomenon and the crossbar was merely a line of gaffer tape fixing one post to the other. Yet it was in this era that the Biscuitmen would pick up their first trophy as the team won the Berks and Bucks Senior Cup in March 1879. Through investigating the British Newspaper Archives and reports from the Berkshire Chronicle, Reading Mercury and Reading Observer it has been possible to piece together the vague puzzle that was Reading's inaugural cup win.

Whilst today's FA Cup attracts 736 teams, the Berks and Bucks Senior Cup first round draw took place with just ten teams in the hat, as the Royals were drawn against Wallingford at home. Having merged with other local outfit Reading Hornets, in 1877, the Biscuitmen were stronger than ever. The game took place on the 23rd of November 1878 and although it was a tight affair, the Chronicle reported that talisman Sillence scored from a 'well-directed corner kick by Rogers.' Set pieces seemed to be key to the Biscuitmen and Rogers, who was the captain of the side, was key in creating chances for the team.

Reading would not play another cup fixture until the 8th of February, at home to Maidenhead, as they battled it out for a place in the third round. Despite only being a newfound club of seven years, the Chronicle commented that a 'great amount of interest was taken in this match, as was evidenced by the number of spectators who watched the game.' It would be a far more entertaining affair than the first-round clash as the Biscuitmen rushed to a 3-0 lead before half time. The pick of the bunch was again scored by Sillence when 'about five minutes before half-time Holbrook middles the ball beautifully before the goal, and Sillence, who played with great discretion throughout the game, kicked the third goal for Reading.'

With that, Reading had made the semi finals with relative ease, alongside Marlow and Remnants, and a huge slice of luck was to come their way. Whilst cup draws in 2020 take place in illustrious locations such as Wembley, the National Football Museum or Old Trafford in 1879, it was a wholly different affair and at 'The Bull' pub in Maidenhead, Reading were given a bye meaning they would automatically be in the final. Not only this, but the fixture would be played at their home ground, Reading Cricket Ground. It seemed luck was on the Biscuitmen's side.

The final would be played on Thursday the 27th of March 1879 against Marlow, who would beat Remnants in their respective semi-final. The Reading Observer claimed there were 'a large number of spectators representing each county' showing that already, football was divided along regional lines and in a pre-globalisation world, **your football team was dictated by the place of your birth and little else.**





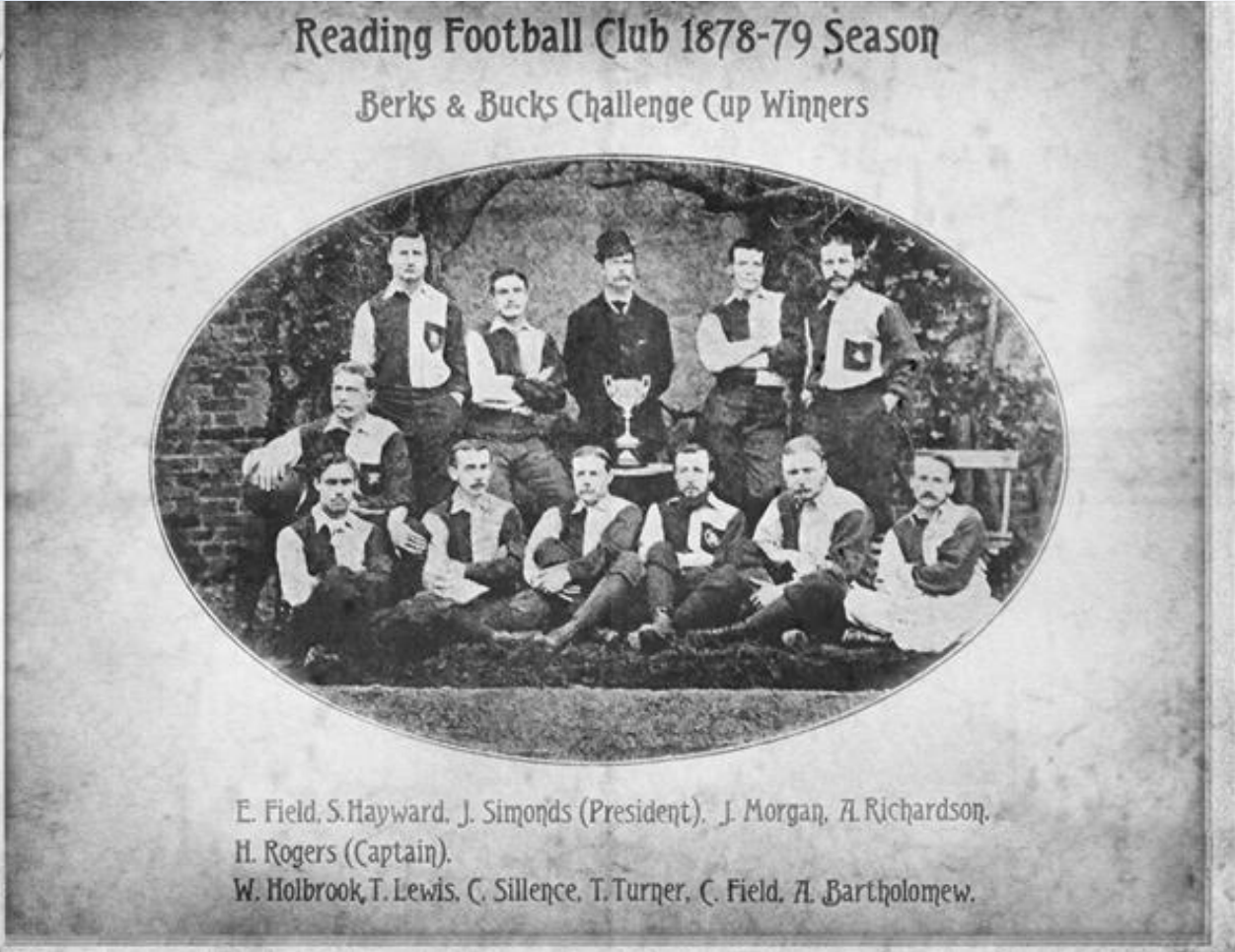


# Opening The Trophy Cabinet

## Oli Scott



Reading's success in the cup so far was built on a solid back line with goalkeeper Hayward, full backs Morgan and Field and half backs Rogers and Richardson yet to see their goal breached. Their strength as a defensive unit came into play once again in the final as the Observer commented 'through the splendid play of their backs and goalkeeper, prevented any point being gained before half time.' The game remained a stalemate until its dying embers when 'Morgan from a magnificent corner kick, created a scrimmage near the goal, which resulted in Reading, amid loud cheering, obtaining a goal.'



The unknown scorer of the winning goal will be a mystery to Royals' fans for all eternity, yet the Berks and Bucks win capped off a season that 'has certainly been the most successful one in the history of the club' according to the Observer.

In 23 games the Biscuitmen would lose just five times and the rock solid defence conceded just nine goals all season whilst the free flowing attackers, led by Sillence and Turner, scored 57.

The men behind this victory were skillful, innovative players who have an important part in the club's history. The goalkeeper, Hayward, was a loyal servant of the club, playing between the sticks for 16 seasons before hanging up his boots, H.F. Rogers, the captain, was a versatile half or full back and W. Holbrook was described as 'one of cleverest wingers to ever step on a football field.' However, the jewels in this cup winning crown were the two full backs, J.B. Morgan and Edgar Field. Morgan would go on to play 1st XI football for Cambridge as well as gaining seven caps for Wales, captaining them for their first victory over England in 1881. Chartered accountant Field, had just as impressive a footballing CV, gaining two caps for England before leading Clapham Rovers to the FA Cup in 1880, perhaps the pinnacle in late-Victorian football.

The Reading side of 1878/9 were clearly a talented one, and the success of individual players proved that. They ensured the first honours would return to the club within a decade of its formation, and thanks to the British Newspaper Archive as well as David Downs fantastic book 'Biscuits and Royals' it has been possible to shed a light into the early successes of the team. These successes would only be built upon with the return of the cup to Reading in 1892 and later an expansion of the club to its much beloved Elm Park in 1896. Therefore, the Berks and Bucks triumph of 1878/9 has more than earned itself a special place in the history of Reading FC.







# A Minute Of Memory

## Steven (Cabin\_\_13)



January 13, 2010 – 92:00-93:00

*It begins with a point. A gesture. An acknowledgement. At 92:02, a right hand waves off other ideas, then the left—it points again.*

How many penalty kicks does a footballer take in their lifetime? And how many can they remember? Popular theory tells us there are three types of long-term memory: semantic, meaning facts; episodic, meaning events; and procedural, meaning skills. The first two are explicit, conscious. The latter is implicit. Ingrained. In my 20's, many of my friends were big on quoting lines or scenes from movies and television that had struck them in some way memorable. Hanging out with the right (or wrong, depending on your tolerance for the habit) combination of them meant subjecting one's self to volleyed lines from one Seinfeld script or another, the entire tipping scene from Reservoir Dogs, or—most often—a patterned crescendo of quotes from Val Kilmer's version of Doc Holliday in that movie where he joins up with the Earp boys to clean out a town of desperate and hungry men who had chased their dreams into the desert, all for the want of silver.

Tombstone. That's the one.

I have no memory for movie quotes. I'm too detached from them. They don't belong to me. My memory requires a moment lived in; physical space, occupied. Air, breathed. So being, when I do happen to pull a movie quote from the past, I pull it not from the source material but from my friends' plagiarizing the words. When Doc Holliday says into my mind, "I have two guns, one for each of ya," it is Val Kilmer's face I see, but it is my friend's voice I hear.

So I could never participate in that part of my core group of friends. In those moments when their quoting others' work would take over, I was alone—regardless of how many of them surrounded me. Alone, waiting for my moment to get back in the conversation.

### How many penalty kicks does a footballer take in their lifetime?

As a child, a teenager. From youth to academy football. From the academy to football as a profession. Over every practice, every match. Every kick of the ball away from the eyes of others, when it is only them and dreams of kicking the ball before thousands.

### How many?



In addition to my poor recall of what some movie character said to another, I, somewhat purposefully, hold no memory of what happened in books I've read. I've found doing so makes re-reading books much more enjoyable. Losing the specifics of events, but holding on to the how they felt—to how they made me feel.

When I was 6 years old, my class held a contest for who could read the most books. Once you finished your first one, the teacher—Mrs. Freeze—printed out a certificate with your name on it, then hung it up on the wall. As you finished subsequent books, she gave you big, gold stickers to place on your certificate on the wall, one per book finished. As the competition went on, every student in my class taped their name up to the wall. And every student in my class had at least one nugget of gold stuck up beside their name. But if you had looked for my name on the wall, you would not have found it. Not because I had not read any books, but because my name on my certificate on the wall was covered over in gold, front and back.







# A Minute Of Memory

## Steven (Cabin\_\_13)



I've no idea who Mrs. Freeze thought would win her contest. I was neither the best nor most assertive student. But when it came to reading, I was hungrier than every other person in the class. I craved stories. They were as good as gold to me. And far better than gold stickers.

Still, I cannot remember any of the books I read. But I do remember how they made me feel.

I think that's why I gravitated to watching sports in addition to playing them: because every moment is a story. Every play, every game, every season, every career. Every movement. A story.

How many penalty kicks does a footballer take in their lifetime? And how many can they remember? And how many do they need to remember?

Bottom right corner, upper 90 to the left. Chip down the middle, score. Too close to the keeper's left, blocked. Over the bar, over the bar. Wide left, wide right. Post, post, post. Side netting, side netting. With power, with power, with placement. Top of foot. Side of foot. Outside foot. Looking straight, right. Looking left, right. Pick a spot, kick. Pick a spot, kick harder. Pick a spot, kick better. Wait. Three step run-up. Five step run-up. No run-up. Watch the keeper, don't look at the keeper, keep your eyes on the ball. Score, miss, score, block, score, score, score. The keeper dove left. The keeper dove right. The keeper didn't dive. The keeper didn't have to dive. Do better. Hard on the ground, hard to the side, hard and high. The keeper is jumping, the keeper is talking, the keeper, the keeper, the keeper. The ball. The spot. The goal. **The goal.**

Does a player recall the first sensory memory that drove taking a penalty kick to the procedural memory it would become? Do they remember the bite in the air? The way the ball felt as they placed it on the grass? The descending quiet in their ears? How 12 yards can look like 20 when it's the last 12 yards to go? Do they remember that first whistle? Do they remember how it made them feel? Surrounded by people, the penalty taker is alone. Even in a stadium of thousands fewer than the thousands who usually fill it, the penalty taker is alone. As alone as a small white spot in a field of green. As alone as one referee making a penalty call against the home team.

*Jobi McAnuff can hardly look on. He stands just outside the D, helpless, his hands covering the bottom half of his face. His head, slightly bowed.*

Is he remembering his own shot to get back in the game? Is he remembering his run? Is he remembering speeding away from defenders? First one, then two, then three. Is he remembering two touches, one for each of the last outfield players in his way? Is he remembering the ball... just wide of the post?

I was. I still do. The best Reading goal that wasn't. Or so I remember the story. Jobi McAnuff, his hands on his face, just as they were after the goal he did not score, can only look on. Same as me. Same as many. Their chance, gone. Jobi McAnuff's part in the story was not to take the penalty.

Neither was it the role of the man who had won it. No, the ball on the spot, Shane Long stands farther away than most Reading players. Waiting. Waiting to make his run into the box on the off-chance the present chance is missed. Waiting, he does not yet know it, for his bigger part in the day's story. Waiting for memories that are not yet his.

Near the end of the movie Tombstone, the villain, Johnny Ringo, spies a figure approaching from the trees with the sun at his back. He thinks it is Wyatt Earp, for it was Wyatt Earp he had challenged. He thinks it is one who will be an easy draw. "Well," he says, elongating the word to communicate his feigned surprise at him who is not his equal having bothered to show up for their duel, "I didn't think you had it in ya." The gilt-edged silhouette raises his head to say, as he has said before in his history, "I'm your Huckleberry."

So said Reading Football Club to Liverpool in January of 2010, following up a 1-1 draw to the Premier League outfit at the Madejski with a replay at Anfield—where the heralded club would find the Royals were not the draw they had anticipated.







# A Minute Of Memory

## Steven (Cabin\_\_13)



So said Gylfi Sigurdsson to his part in the story. Twenty years old, and alone. Only his memories and all they have wrought in him. Twenty years old, and surrounded. By his teammates, by his opponents. By fans who want him to make his kick, by many more who want him to miss. Surrounded, and alone. By the lights of the stadium. In the spotlight of the moment.

Gylfi Sigurdsson stands just inside the 18, his hands on his hips and his shadow to either side of him.

At 92:55, the whistle blows. His sensory memory activates.

At 92:57, he is on his fourth step, and his procedural memory, having taken him thus far, subsides as he pauses.

It is hardly a pause. Not enough for a breath. Not enough for forecasting. It is a lagging, really. An ebbing. And just another part of the procedure. A step taken slow enough to glimpse the goalkeeper. To read his body positioning and what it means. Slow enough so his episodic memory can tell him where the keeper is going and, in turn, where he must go.

At 92:58, the ball is in the goal. Less than a second before, Diego Cavalieri had decided to go to his left. By the time the hand of his on that side had hit the pitch, he knew he was beaten. Side foot, on the ground, right of keeper – the ball hit against the back corner of the net.

How many penalty kicks does a footballer take in their lifetime? A thousand? Five thousand? One?

Over and over? The same penalty kick, over and over? Repetition into adaptation?

One man. One kick. One moment. All story.

Told over and over. The story of chasing a dream.

The dream of a single lonesome kick in front of thousands on thousands.

To remember is golden. To be remembered, gold.

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**It ends with a dash for the corner. Another run. More chasing.**

**At 93:00, Gylfi Sigurdsson's arms are spread wide, his neck is in the embrace of Brian Howard, and Simon Church is running alongside him gesturing to the crowd. Behind him, Jobi McAnuff, Shane Long, and all of Reading FC run after. After Gylfi. After the next goal. After a winner.**

**All for the want of silver. And one hell of a story.**

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On January 13, 2010, Reading Football Club knocked Liverpool out of the Third Round of the FA Cup. This is a fact. This is semantic memory.







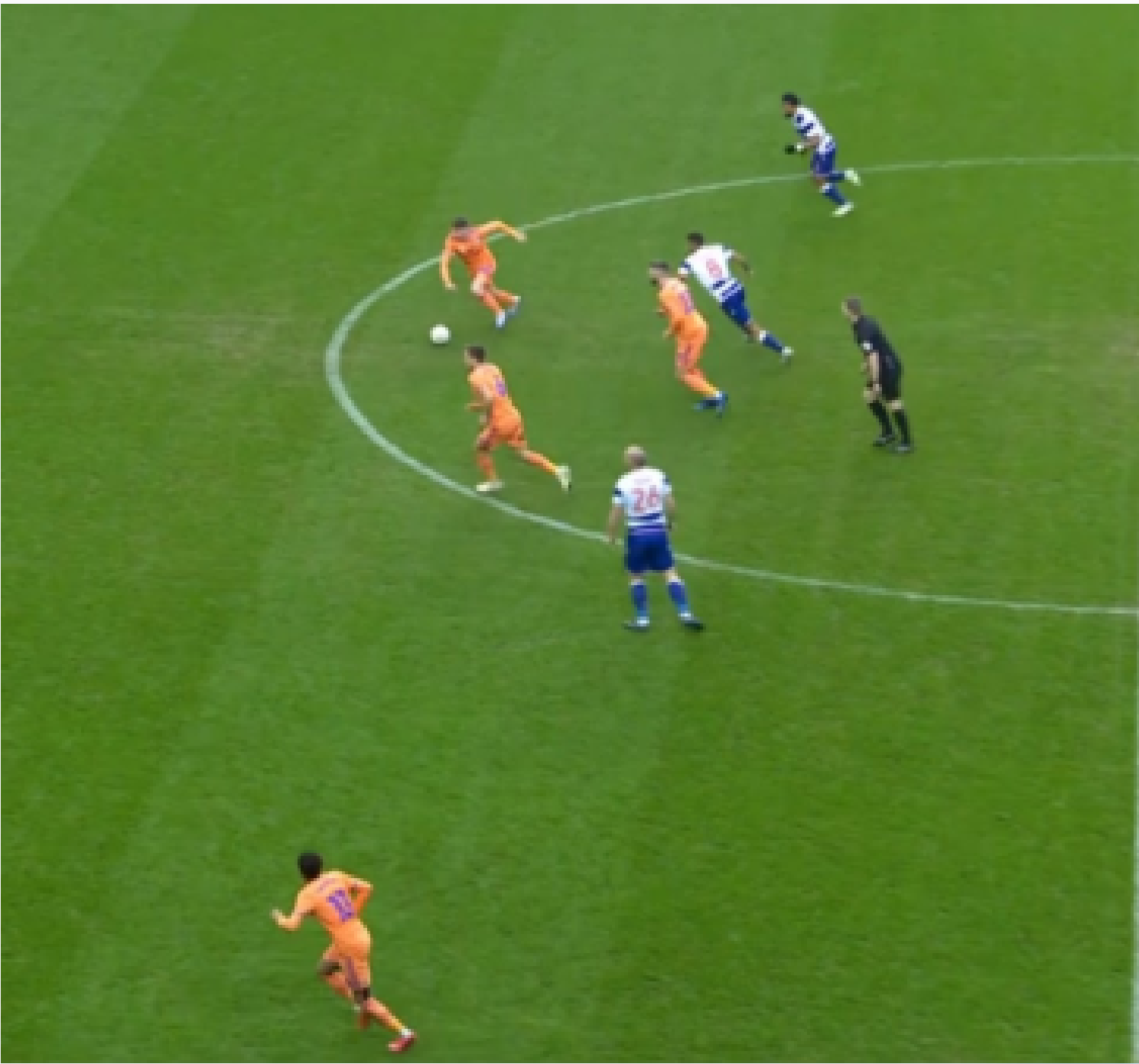
# Is Adam Worth It?

## Reading\_Deep



In what was a very weird transfer window for Reading the signing of a 34 year old Charlie Adam was perhaps the strangest deal. While undeniably a great player earlier in his career many fans were worried by his advanced age and poor reviews from Stoke fans.

At first it seemed like he was another John O'Shea, an experienced player signed primarily to have an impact off the pitch who would only make a handful of ten minute appearances, but after the sacking of Jose Gomes and an injury to John Swift he got his chance.



The appointment of Bowen didn't mean instant game time for Adam but after a midfield three of McCleary, Pele and Rinomhota failed to impress the Scotsman was given a chance to be the creator in Swift's absence. He started in two unimpressive draws against Barnsley and Stoke before starting all 4 of Reading's subsequent 4 match winning streak over the Xmas period.

Adam seemed to emerge as a key player in just a month with two goals and kept his place even when Swift returned. With fans having come around to him, Reading switched to a 3 man midfield to accommodate both Swift and Adam. However I'm not convinced he deserves his rave reviews and with Reading's form faltering and the balance of the team looking off I think it's time to question Adam's place in the starting 11.

Off the ball Adam is incredibly weak and a massive defensive liability. Obviously he's lost his legs so in defensive transition Reading are massively open, especially when Bowen opts to play him as part of a midfield two. Even defending deeper he is the obvious weak link and often finds himself out of position. For a player with so much experience he makes a lot of poor decisions as to when to commit and lacks the energy or work rate to recover his position leaving the opponent far too much space on the edge of the box.

In the FA Cup match against Cardiff we see a perfect example of him (Above) being caught in possession leaving the opponent free to attack the Reading box and eventually awarding them a shot. Even if Rinomhota doesn't commit he's still in an impossible 3v1 situation. This happens, players lose the ball, and as an isolated incident isn't a problem but these situations happen frequently. Surprisingly for a player who publicly criticised Xherdan Shaqiri for not tracking back we also see Adam's inability to do so. Perhaps it is unfair to attribute this to workrate but he is so lethargic at turnovers and seems to get away with it when other players without his reputation wouldn't.







# Is Adam Worth It?

## Reading\_Deep



Fulham was probably Adam's best game for Reading, starting the counter attack for the first goal and scoring the second, but his deficiencies were still on full display defensively. On the left here we see his poor positioning, failing to get over to cover when Blackett and Ejaria are in a 3v2 situation.



He doesn't have any excuses this time, Reading are set in defence and Fulham don't work it particularly quickly, this is just emblematic of his poor defensive game. In addition to this general poor positioning teams also find it incredibly easy to play around Adam even in Reading's own half with his tendency to commit and not retreat quickly enough and it is impossible to even attempt a competent press with him in the team.

The argument for Adam's inclusion in the team is obviously his ability on the ball. He frequently plays impressive progressive passes and has made the switch of play his trademark, but I'm not convinced that this justifies starts with the other options we have in the team.

Swift's passing range is just as impressive and his defensive ability has come on leaps and bounds this season. Ejaria has been forced out wide and hasn't been able to dominate games like he did earlier in the season.

Adam attempts the most forward passes of any Reading midfielder, 17 per 90 to Swift and Ejaria's 14 and 9, but contrary to his reputation completes much less of them than Reading's other creators, completing 62% compared to Swift's 74% and Ejaria's 80%. This just means Reading face more turnovers he is unable to defend.

Surprisingly his closest competition in progressive passes is Pele, with Swift narrowly behind. With the defensive midfielder able to contribute to the build up, I'm not sure dropping Adam would cripple our attacking play. Even if Bowen thinks Ejaria's linkup with Blackett on the left is integral to the system we have options like Olise or McCleary who could be given another chance centrally.

Adam deserves credit for what he's done this season, he's certainly proved me wrong in that he still has the ability to make an impact, but I don't think he's able to consistently feature at this level. He's a useful backup for when Swift is unavailable or an impact sub late on when Reading need to change up a game but if we want to seriously compete for playoffs we can't afford to have such a defensive liability in the team every week.







# Feb League Preview

Erik Orrgarde



Once we stop facing Cardiff in every other fixture we head into February and what is a jam-packed schedule with 6 games in 3 weeks. Luckily for us 4 of them are home games, both mid-week fixtures are at home and the only 2 away trips, both to sunny Yorkshire are on a Saturday with a week-long break in between. So.... On the surface an easier run of fixtures? Let's dive into each and see what our prospects are.

The first home game in February sees us take on Hull City at the Madejski Stadium. On the surface it looks like a winnable fixture, Hull have only won 1 league game since the turn of the year, against Sheffield Wednesday away on New Years' Day. They also lost against Derby away and against Fulham at home. The form table suggests Reading are in better form just about and so let's hope we can keep that going and beat the Tigers. The danger man for Hull is without doubt the £20M-valued Jarrod Bowen who is 3rd in the goal-scoring charts, only behind Ollie Watkins and Alexandar Mitrovic. Not bad for a player who usually plays out wide. Whoever plays LB will have their hands full for sure.



The following week we welcome Slaven Bilic and promotion chasing West Bromwich Albion. Playing West Brom at home brings back memories of one of the most memorable fixtures in Reading history.

The famous 3-2 comeback in the Premier League in 2013 where Pavel Pogrebnyak scored a 90th min winner. The other memorable thing from that game was the appearance of Daniel Carrico who barely featured for us but who went on to captain Sevilla and won multiple Europa Leagues.... Oh, what could have been.

The 2020 edition of this fixture could feature the return of the academy graduate Hal Robson-Kanu. The script is set for him to score. I wouldn't mind betting he would celebrate. Let's hope he plays like he did 90% of the time for us at the Mad-stad, he won't be close to scoring if so.

Mid-Feb we visit Sheffield Wednesday. If you've done your duty on Valentine's Day the day before you may be allowed out to make the long trek to south Yorkshire. I remember going there in 2013 to face the then, bottom-of-the-league Wednesday with us in 5th.

***"The return of  
academy  
graduate Hal  
Robson-Kanu.  
The script is set  
for him to score."***

Can you remember how the game finished? We lost 5-2 and of course Michail Antonio our former player scored against us. Of course, the game was also the day before my birthday so I had the Royals to thank for starting my 27th birthday in a bad mood! Fast forward 7 years and as it stands we are 5 points behind Wednesday in the league. By the time we face each other we could well be switching positions in the league. 2 decent results before this game and we have a chance!







# Feb League Preview

Erik Orrgarde



A week beyond the trip to Yorkshire we go back to Yorkshire to face regular league bottlers Leeds United. Having spent most of the season in the Top 2 they've seen the gap shrink further and further in recent weeks. Are their nerves shaking? Nothing would give me greater satisfaction this month than if we go there and knock them out of the top 2. Although, a comeback win against Millwall leaves less hope for this potentially! Let's keep an eye out in all the Berkshire bushes in the weeks leading up to the game to make sure they're not spying. Let's also hope for a similar result to Dec 2011 where a 2nd minute Simon Church lob secured all 3 points for Reading in a 1-0 smash-and-grab victory. I remember the drive back home from the hugely overrated Elland Road that day. It was a great drive with a smile that lasted all the way until traffic on the A34.

The last 2 games in February sees us take on 2 teams at home, both of our opponents are currently in the bottom 3 so if we hope to do anything of note this season, 6 points from the final 2 games are a must. Wigan at home will bring some good memories. The 2019 corresponding fixture is probably the highlight of Jose Gomes' Reading tenure as we scored in the 89th and 97th minutes to win 3-2 and edge our way towards safety. Yakou Meite scored the winner and one of the loudest eruptions of noise at home in recent memory became a reality. I remember clearly from the game, what a horrible team Wigan are. Long balls, time wasting and really poor quality. Wouldn't it be a shame if we helped push them down towards relegation this year? Fingers crossed! They still have Paul Cook in charge so expect to see more of the same and a scrappy game.



Our final game in February happens on the rare 29th of February – will this bring us luck!? I tried to google my way round to see if we've played on 29th February before but I failed massively and couldn't find anything.

Make sure to ask @BiscuitAnalytic on Twitter – he's much better at that sort of thing than I am. Barnsley are currently 3rd from bottom and 13 points below Reading. Hopefully the gap is bigger before we face them and even bigger after we do.

Overall, I'm happy with 4 home fixtures, 3 of which are winnable and 2 tricky trips to Yorkshire where we might upset one. If we can accumulate 10-12 points from these games we are still very much in the playoff hunt with the business end of the season approaching. Let's see how we progress under the Welsh Wonder between now and then!

**Come on URZ!!!**

