

A large, semi-transparent portrait of a man with short, dark, curly hair and a light beard. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background of the entire page is a gradient of yellow and blue, with a vertical white stripe running through the center.

THE #5 DIGESTIVE

MARCH, 2020





Editor Notes

Alex Everson



The Digestive returns after a turbulent month of results for Reading which saw us pick up just 2 league wins during February. However with a gap over the relegation zone remaining fairly consistent throughout (Outside of the never to be spoken of again Wigan match), it seems that the league season is slowly drawing to a conclusion. With just 10 games to go, it appears that the aim now will be to finish as high up the table as we can, with relegation looking like a threat which the door can now be shut on.

In this issue, we take a look at previous times we've competed in round 5 of the FA cup with new writer, Jamie Butler. We also get a look into the life of supporting Reading from literally from the other side of the world as Richard Crewdson gives us his experiences of supporting the Royals from Adelaide. We also remember former loan players with Rob Saunders later in this issue.

We also have your usual preview and review articles to pore over, along with a look back at our recent midweek form over the past few seasons. We also continue the memorable minute series with Cabin__13. Finally an article about a Reading legend as featured on our cover this month from Paul as he discusses the blur that was, Michael Gilkes.

With the season slowly coming to a long, drawn out close, hopefully a good result in the upcoming FA cup game will give our season an extension - however I think I speak for the majority of us in saying, at least it shouldn't be going to the last day this time.

Until next time,
Alex Everson

Thanks to our contributors in this issue

Cabin__13
Erik Orrgarde
Jamie Butler
Paul Mann
Richard Crewdson
Rob Saunders





Feb Review

Alex Everson



February has come and gone with Reading having picked up 7 points from a possible 18 and progressed through on penalties from the 4th round of the FA Cup against Cardiff after a replay at the beginning of the month.

We began the month with a 2nd trip in the space of 5 days to Cardiff travelling over the Severn Bridge. Despite going 2-0 down to the Bluebirds, a comeback was on, with Omar Richard and Andy Rinomhota managing to score goals in the second half to push the game into extra time. A goal from Josh Murphy looked like it was going to send us crashing out of the competition, before a late Yakou Meite goal sent the game to penalties. Sam Walker proving the hero as he saved the first penalty, before a missed second Cardiff kick meant it was an easy win for the Royals on penalties, as they triumphed 4-1. A draw against Sheffield United in the 5th round awaits.



That weekend, Reading hosted Hull City. Hull at this point having sold Bowen and Groscki were on a horrendous run, which has since continued. Many Reading fans went into the game expecting an easy victory - including myself. A 1-1 draw in which it felt like the teams were extremely level was not what we were hoping for. A neat pass from John Swift through to Jordan Obita leant itself to a very tidy finish through the keepers legs with his left foot. However, late on, the killer equaliser came as the ball fell to Wilks in the box, his shot was deflected up and over Rafaels' outstretched arm leading to the first point of the month, but continued the streak of no clean sheets or home wins in 2020 as we went deeper into February.

Another midweek game came shortly after, as the matches came thick and fast for Reading. Hosting top of the table West Brom was always going to be a struggle, and they looked a class apart from us on the night. Despite an early lead for us with Puskas slotting away an early penalty, West Brom created a tonne of chances against us and looked good value for their 2-1 victory on the night. One of the better sides to play against us this season at the Madejski, and it wouldn't surprise me to see them win the league.

"It wouldn't surprise me to see them win the league"

The first of two weekend trips to Yorkshire on back to back weekends saw us travelling to play against Sheffield Wednesday. In what was probably the best performance we have seen from Reading since the turn of the year, they dispatched the Owls with ease. All 3 strikers getting on the scoresheet as we took all 3 points back to Berkshire in a 3-0 victory.





Feb Review

Alex Everson



A week later, it was back up the M1 towards Yorkshire, as we took on another high flying side in Leeds United. Despite managing to see a close run first half, Leeds managed to produce the moment of quality mid way through the second half to claim a 1-0 victory, and send us back to Berkshire with zero points, and beginning to look over our shoulders at relegation, with two big games coming up against relegation threatened Wigan & Barnsley coming up.

The midweek match up saw us take on Wigan at home. A game which no Reading fan will want to remember saw us get taken to the cleaners, in a display that lacked a plan, lacked energy and fight. Wigan were first to every ball, and to find ourselves only 1-0 down at half time was extremely fortunate. Wigan played the game out comfortably and ended up as 3-0 winners in front of very few fans left in the ground by the end of the match. Reading fans were getting worried about relegation by this point - with a 5 point gap between them and relegation. A big game against Barnsley was coming up just 4 days later, and Reading needed a reaction.



5 changes against Barnsley who had just come off a run of 3 games won in a row could have been seen as extreme, but after that performance against Wigan - a response was needed. An entertaining first half, with a goalmouth scramble resulted in a lead 1-0 at HT through Meite. Not sure we'll see many goals scrappier than that at the Madejski anytime soon! A fantastic double save at the end of the first half by Rafael kept the score at 1-0. After half time, a long ball up from Obita, followed by a flick and turn by Puskas led to a well taken 2nd goal which all but killed the game off as a contest, with the game being seen out by the Royals as they scored a 2-0 victory.

Overall, February feels like it wasn't a million miles away from what we were hoping for - outside the loss against Wigan, Reading haven't dropped too many points where they may have been expected to. A quieter month is coming up in March with an international break due at the end of the month - and potentially an FA cup quarter final if we can make our way past Sheffield United!





Run, Run, Run, Run Gilksey!

Paul Mann



"I knew he must be there because I heard & felt the noise"

1985. South Bank. Night match. Floodlights. Petrol Burgers. Piss. Beer.

RFC. Gilkes. Heart beating faster.

When he appeared, I didn't notice Gilkesy because I saw him with my eyes. Instead I knew he must be there because I heard and felt the noise rapidly increase around Elm Park. The crowd had seen it all before.

The blaze of speed left many defenders on their arses before Gilkes had even got near them. It's what most of Elm Park had really come to see.

It was my first time. I was hooked.

If you never experienced a moment when Gilkesy got the ball, with you standing on the South Bank, then you missed out. It was sensational. He gave us something we didn't have. We missed it when he wasn't fit. Sheer pleasure.

We could talk about his final pass and it's erratic delivery but that's not the Michael Gilkes I want to remember. For me he was a beacon of hope, stretching over 400 appearances and more than a decade at the club, scoring 53 goals in that time.

He was a 1985 Division 3 winner, a 1988 Simod Cup Winner, a 1994 Division 2 Winner, and part of the team which reached the 1995 Division 1 Play Off Final (let's ignore the result).

He scored a beauty in the Simod cup final. Did he mean it ? Who cares?

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Run, Run, Run, Run Gilksey!

Paul Mann



But that wasn't even his greatest moment.

His greatest moment came in the Simod Cup Semi Final, against Coventry City, in front of a capacity crowd at Elm Park. The score was 1-1 after extra time. Reading had taken the lead in the second half, Neil Smiley scoring at the Tilehurst End. David Speedy equalised with eleven minutes to go of normal time, forcing me to endure 30 tortuous minutes of extra time. Then, my first ever time watching a penalty shoot out live. Coventry went first, scoring three of their first four spot kicks, as did Reading. Our keeper Steve Francis saved Coventry's fifth penalty, making it 3-3 with one kick left to Reading.

The crowd were silent as Michael Gilkes walked up to take his penalty. Bear in mind two facts. He'd missed one recently in a league match, and now he's got the chance to send Reading Football Club to Wembley for the first time in it's 117 year history.

If he wasn't feeling the pressure I definitely was. As a smallish 12 year old, sandwiched between my Dad and one of his work colleagues for protection, I could only see the crossbar and a small patch of net. Fear running through my veins, and then sheer delirium when the noise from the crowd told me he'd scored ! This alone is enough to make him an icon of RFC.



On a very personal level, another favourite Gilkesy memory is when he used to come round to my house after training. At that time we had Keith Knight lodging with us, so it wasn't unusual for other players to pop by. (And if you can remember Keith Knight, then you are definitely old!) Having one of your heroes sat on the sofa next to you, talking about the match which happened a few days ago, whilst he was eating a biscuit and having a cup of tea, was amazing.

For Michael it may have been a bit scary, not knowing what I might come out with - I was an unpredictable teenager.

So when I think of Michael Gilkes I think of good times, being stood on the South Bank, Wembley, and that huge anticipation when he got the ball.





Royals Down Under

Richard Crewdson



Written at Singapore International Airport prior to the 0-3 defeat to Wigan:

Well I've begun the long trek across the world to see the Royals play again. A 10,136 mile journey according to Google from my home in Adelaide.

This is the 4th time I've made the trip. My first was back in 2012 when we were in the Premier League. I'll never forget my first game. We played Everton at the Madejski and won 2-1, our first win that season, perhaps a lucky charm.

Similar trips in 2015 and 2016 followed but I've had to wait a bit longer this time to make it back to support the Royals.

.How does someone from Adelaide South Australia get to be so passionate about a football team on the other side of the world?

Well I'm sure there are plenty of people who travel long distances to see their team play. Mine happens to include a 7 hour flight to Singapore and then 13 hours after that onto London.

I was born in Australia however my mother is English and grew up in Hayes, Middlesex. Then immigrated to Australia. My Uncle and cousin played for Hayes. These days of course its Hayes and Yeading. I'd really love to see them play one day as well.

I've always loved my English blood and have followed English football all my life. In fact I can clearly remember the day I asked my mum which team was closest to where she lived. Of course there were plenty of teams but the conversation finished with a choice between Brentford and Reading. I was 7 years old.

All my friends followed one of the big teams as most Aussie kids do. Dad is a Manchester United fan and my cousins follow Spurs so the pressure was to follow one of them. I do have a soft spot for United and Spurs but my heart has always belonged to Reading FC. We were up and down the four divisions throughout my childhood.

When I first started following the Royals they were in Division 4. All my school friends would ask .. who do you follow? As a school kid I was always asleep when we played. So way before the internet, back in the 70s, I remember getting up Sunday mornings to listen to the BBC round up of all the scores across the divisions. Then watching Match Of The Day on a Monday night with mum and dad hoping one day Reading would be in the big time alongside Manchester United, Liverpool and the other big clubs.

Those Division 1 days and the Premier League years of 2006-2008 and 2012 are such great memories.





Royals Down Under

Richard Crewdson



Fast forward to 2020 I'm now 54 and my passion for my club gets stronger every year. I feel the highs and the lows like any supporter and I'm a member of the club. These days I don't have to wait until morning of course. Most game days I'm up at 1.30am on a Sunday morning Adelaide time to watch my team on IFollow or if I am really lucky on Bein sports which telecast the Sky EFL games each week.



If I miss a game then the extended highlights package is the go. My twitter is full of Reading supporters. I love to watch the game and read the Twitter feed. It feels like I am there.

Truth is though...there is nothing like being there. I'm so jealous of people who can go each week (Even if sometimes the results don't make you think I should be!). There's something so special about the Madejski Stadium. Whenever I am there it feels like home. I absolutely love being there.

I always spend way too much in the merchandise shop but I wouldn't have it any other way. I have many home strips and of course this year's strip will be my first purchase this time around. This trip I get to go three times to the Madejski.

Two Championship games against Barnsley and Stoke and the FA Cup tie against Sheffield United which I cant wait for. Throw in the away day in Birmingham and I have 4 games in 14 days. A dream come true for this Aussie Royal. Win lose or draw, rain hail or shine my heart is blue and white.

Can't wait to cheer the boys on!! Urzzzzzzzzzz





Loan Stars of Yesteryear

Rob Saunders



Over the years Reading have had some successful and some shall we say not so successful loans. Some players on the list had so much potential and have gone on to do rather well but for whatever reason never clicked at Reading.

I've brainstormed a list of players I felt worth the mention and in no particular order. Over the years we've had players on loan who've had a positive and negative impact on the team and supporters. I've picked out a few players that in my opinion and from what I felt the fanbase had reacted to are worth the mention.

Marcus Hahnemann: What a guy! The 6 Foot 3 Inche goalkeeper joined The Royals from Fulham on loan in December 2001. Marcus was almost surplus to requirements at Fulham with Edwin Van Der Sar being the first choice keeper at Craven Cottage. Luckily for us we had a superb goalkeeper that would shore up the defence and go on to make 276 appearances for us.Boomer, his nickname, certainly fit as you could hear him from anywhere in the ground when he barked his orders. Marcus joined us Permanently after his loan and was released in 2009.

Matthew Upson: What a solid player Matty was for Reading and became a fan favourite rather quickly. Upson joined Reading from Arsenal on loan in September 2002. Upson seemed the perfect fit for Reading and went on to make 14 appearances in the blue and white hoops. Sadly the funds weren't there to sign him and he went on to join Birmingham City. I really feel we missed out there and he really could have been a player who would have been at the club for a long time and achieve so much.

Glen Little: Blakey joined The Royals in September 2003 on loan from Burnley. Little became a much loved player with his wing play and runs that had defenders crossed up in knots. Glen would have a stint at Bolton until he joined The Royals on a free in 2004. Little was a pivotal player in the 05/06 season and made 96 appearances for Reading up to Glen departing The Mad Stad in Summer 2008.

Zurab Khizanishvili: I will admit I wasn't 100% sure on Zurab when he was announced on loan from Blackburn Rovers in January 2010. I did however feel his Premier League experience would be a good addition to a rather unsettled defence and I was proven right. We went on to re-acquire his services for the 2010-2011 Season which as we know ended in a playoff final which still leaves a bitter taste in any Loyal Royal's mouth. Khizanishvili left the club after the playoff final but remained as a soldier of that Season and was respected from there on.

Hayden Mullins: I was very excited by this particular acquisition, being a local lad and someone who I'd been to school with (albeit he was finishing secondary school as I was starting). I had always kept track of Hayden and his career through the Bias of Ryeish Green School and when he joined in March 2012. Mullins only clocked up 7 games in that promotion season and ultimately didn't play again for Reading after that season. With his very impressive CV I did feel Hayden just didn't click with the squad and maybe would have with another manager at the helm. But either way it was great to cheer him on and watch him play for his hometown club.





Loan Stars of Yesteryear

Rob Saunders



Lucas Piazon: Well I'm sure this guy needs no introduction to most Reading fans. Lucas joined Reading in August 2015 on a season long loan from Chelsea. Piazon played 23 games and scored 3 goals in his time at the club. He didn't set the world on fire when he was at The Mad Stad and his behaviour after leaving Reading turned him into the pantomime villain. Not one for being hushed on social media he has let it be known what he felt of Reading and our Fans which is a shame for someone meant to be a role model for younger fans.

Nelson Oliveira: A player that seemed to split opinion amongst the fans from what I saw. I personally wished Nelson had stayed after his loan spell. Having joined Reading from Norwich on 22nd January 2019 we had got a decent striker with a proven record. Oliveira scored some vital goals for Reading keeping them from the jaws of relegation. This all came at a cost when Tyrone Mings seemed to step onto Nelson's face causing horrific facial injuries and a broken nose. Oliveira scored 3 goals in his time at the Berkshire side and I'm sure would have scored so many more had the incident not occurred. It looked like Reading would maintain the services of Nelson for the next season but after financial issues the deal was never going to happen.



Emiliano Martinez: Somewhat of a journeyman Emi joined Reading in January 2019 for the remainder of the season. He proved to be a very crucial signing and provided some much needed confidence at the back in a relegation dog fight. Emi clocked up 18 games between the sticks and pulled off some stunning saves keeping Reading in the fight to remain a Championship club. The Argentinian returned to Arsenal when the season was over where he is now getting first team game time which is nice to see. Again I would've loved to see Reading sign him but the Embargo would've made that an impossible task.

Ovie Ejaria: Does this guy need me to say much more? As we live in his world It's only right he's on the list. Ovie joined Reading in January 2019 on loan from the Merseyside giants Liverpool. With his twinkle toes and dazzling skills Ejaria instantly made an impact not only on results but on the fans. When the season had come to an end and Ovie returned up north it seemed that was going to be it. But thankfully he's back in Berkshire on a season long loan with the option to buy!. I honestly feel he is the best midfielder in the league at this moment and has a huge future with Reading. Although he's not scored many goals he has created chances and attacks that have led to goals galore. He reminds me of a Kebe/Convey/Harper blend that gets the fans off their seats which is exactly what we need.

Matej Vydra: An odd one to say the least, I wasn't very sure he was worth the loan fee of £2.43 million for his season long loan. I feel Watford got a better deal out of that compared to Reading. Matej just didn't gel and although he scored a hat trick against Huddersfield in the FA Cup he didn't really do much else. A talented player and has gone on to do well but it just wasn't to be for him at Reading during the 2015/2016 season.

Of course there are plenty of other lonees I could've added but the list would be huge! It surprised me how many players we've had on loan that are very successful players but just didn't work out at Reading. Was this to do with Coaches and Managers at the time? Who knows, It will be interesting to see the loanee list in 2 or 3 years time and who we may have in the squad.





A Minute Of Memory

Steven (Cabin__13)



December 10, 2011 – somewhere in the 85th/86th

It begins with a miss. A block. A rebound. A ball bouncing away.

It begins after a “piling forward,” as television commentator, Steve Wyeth, called it, “in numbers.”

Not all heroes wear capes, they say.

Had I heard that when I was much younger than I am today, my loudest and simplest thought would have been but a single word that is not really even a word: Duh.

The Flash did not wear a cape. Wonder Woman, Green Arrow; no capes. Everyone’s friendly neighborhood Spider-Man: no cape. Almost none of the X-Men. Not Asterix, nor Danger Mouse. Not a single Transformer or any of the lions that made up the legendary intergalactic defender known as Voltron.

No Thundercat.

No Mutant Ninja Turtle. Not of any age.

Not all heroes wear capes, they say.

Duh, I reply.

Just before I became a teenager myself, I quit football and took up basketball. It helped that I was tall. Also, the club I had been playing for did not want me anymore. And they made it evident they did not want me anymore until I decided I did not want them either—or the game that had brought us together.



Shaun Cummings meets the ball coming forward. There is no one near him. No one but Jem Karacan. The closest opponent—West Ham, on the day—is 20 yards away. Shaun Cummings could do whatever he wants with the ball. With one touch, he passes it ahead to Jimmy Kebe.

Reading Football Club were still in the Premier League when Jimmy Kebe joined in January of 2008. He had been playing in the French Ligue 2. At the time, Nick Hammond said it would be “a massive step up” for him. Here, a much smaller step. With a single touch of the foot at the end of his outstretched right leg, Kebe traps the ball.





A Minute Of Memory

Steven (Cabin__13)



“Pull your socks up, get your walk right”

De La Soul, American *hip hop* legends

My favorite comic book hero when I was growing up was the Punisher. He never wore a cape; he would have thought them impractical; but he did sometimes wear long coats. For concealment and such. The Punisher had no powers, and calling him a hero is a bit of a stretch, to be honest.

The Punisher is an anti-hero. One of Marvel’s best anti-heroes. Astride the line where heroism and villainy blur and blend into one another. In a way, he served as Marvel’s answer to DC’s Dark Knight: a self-described “warrior fighting a lonely war.” Only poorer and angrier than that caped crusader.

And without the cape. Or his own special light to shine over his city.

After I had been playing basketball year-round a while, an older teenager stepped into the sport’s spotlight in my city. From there, he would go on to play a part on teams in the NCAA and, later, for just a few days, in the NBA. In those teenage years, though, he had been a star. So much so that younger kids like myself who had yet to even see him play had heard of him and how he played.

When I finally did see him play, I saw, first, his socks. They were tall. So tall, in fact, and his shorts so long, that his entire legs were covered. The next time I went out to play, I copied him. I told my friends I was doing it because it was funny. But then I liked it. Then it became the way I played and, ultimately, the way I dressed. Socks, tall.

There are no West Ham players near Jimmy Kebe either. He, too, could do whatever he wants. And, as we know, he does. The ball frozen before him, Reading’s mercurial Malian magician bends down to address his own socks. Perhaps it is because he caught sight of them imperfect when his right leg did the work he commanded of it, or perhaps it is because he felt the air on a part of his legs on which he was not accustomed to feeling air, or perhaps it is because it is simply a habit of his—a tick, a quirk, a part of the routine of him centering himself in a situation. Whatever the impetus, Jimmy Kebe touches both hands down onto his shins and then pulls at the top of his left sock as he stands back up.

“The first thing I do after I make a big play is pull my socks up.”

NFL Hall of Famer with the San Francisco 49ers, Jerry Rice

As my habitual interest in comic books may have hinted, I was not “cool” in my youth. Despite my height and involvement in sports, “nerd” was the word most often used to describe me. It was on top of this that I decided to add tall socks. On top of that, my

parents moved us to a new town and a new school. On my first day there, waiting for my first class, the kids around me, loud enough so I could hear, made clear their opinions of the new kid wearing the tall socks. In a later class, as I went forward to collect my book from the teacher, I watched him stare at my socks as I approached. When at last I stood before his desk, he looked up at me and shook his head.





A Minute Of Memory

Steven (Cabin__13)



West Ham disapprove. To show their disapproval, they are now, at last, closing out to their left flank.

As Kebe passes the ball back to Cummings, midfielder Jack Collison is coming out from the D. As Cummings takes two touches to once more pass it to Kebe, Collison is charging. Jimmy Kebe pauses over the ball, and Jack Collison is on his toes, watching Kebe, watching the ball, watching for an opportunity.

Kebe traps it again. Kebe fakes a pass just to roll it back to himself. Jack Collison is sucked in closer with every movement. The “Red Mist,” his manager Sam Allardyce will blame after the match, a villain worthy of any comic escapade, has hold of him. Jimmy Kebe has played with him to make him think he is keeping the ball. And he’s played him just long enough to make poor, and poor-thinking, Jack Collison believe he will keep it. The midfielder stampedes past the point of no return just as Kebe returns the ball to Shaun Cummings.

In the Punisher’s first ever appearance, in The Amazing Spider-Man #129 (yes, I own it), the Punisher is tricked in to hunting Spider-Man by a villain called the Jackal, thus establishing his anti-hero status from the beginning. The Jackal wants Spider-Man out of the way, but he does not want anyone to know he was responsible for it. The Punisher wants to rid the city of crime, but he does not know he is being lied to. One of the reasons the Jackal so easily convinces the Punisher that Spider-Man is a villain is because J. Jonah Jameson had said as much in his newspaper, The Daily Bugle. J. Jonah Jameson wants Spider-Man branded the criminal he sees him as, but he does not know his staff photographer, Peter Parker, is the “costumed freak” he so despises. Peter Parker just wants to be left alone to do what he does, without being thought a criminal, but he does not want to let it be known that he is the man behind the costume.

So it is that Spider-Man is swinging thru the city, fresh from Peter Parker’s job at that very same Daily Bugle, on assignment from that very same J. Jonah Jameson to get pictures of the very same Punisher, when the two characters first come together. Lost in his search for the Punisher, Spider-Man is unaware that the Punisher already has him in his sights—that the Jackal and the Punisher have set a trap for him. It is only his Spidey sense that saves him. With less than a second to spare, Spider-Man moves out of the line of fire.

It is a clattering. It is studs against leg. It is forearm into chest. It is hands and arms throwing into shoulder. Jimmy Kebe is left on the ground. Shaun Cummings, standing calmly over the ball at rest, raises one restrained hand toward the line judge, as if to say of the foul, simply but clearly, “Duh.”

Meanwhile, Julien Faubert, the first West Ham player to loom over Kebe, begins an argument with the felled winger over the necessity of his having succumbed to forces beyond his control. Jimmy Kebe pulls himself up by Simon Church’s shirt to offer a Newtonian counterpoint, and from there the discussion gathers momentum with every additional player that gathers to it, eventually absorbing even philosopher-goalkeeper, Rob Green, a reluctant expert on the concept that things in motion sometimes remain in motion no matter how hard you try to stop them.

Referee Neil Swarbrick stands away from the physics melee and near the offender to have set it in motion. As Wyeth’s voice on the broadcast asserts that he has “got some sorting out to do,” Swarbrick sorts the red card out of his back pocket. Collison takes his punishment in disbelieving hands on his head. For a brief second, he looks for sympathy from the player to his left. But it is Jobi McAnuff he finds there, and the Reading captain pays the Hammer no mind. As Collison exits the pitch, he looks at no one. His hands no longer holding it up, he leaves with his head down. ‘Does he regret his actions?’ one wonders. After the game, BBC commentator, Steve Claridge, would say of Collison’s behavior... “In that situation, it’s understandable.”





A Minute Of Memory

Steven (Cabin__13)



“Who’s the dork with the pulled-up socks?”

Some jackass I went to school with, whose name I cannot remember

At lunch on my first day at my new school, I was getting a drink from the vending machines when I was approached by two girls. They wanted to know my name. They wanted to know where I was from. They asked me more questions; I do not remember them. They stopped. Abruptly. But lingered. As if they wanted more. “Well... okay,” one of them said, then paused, and then added, “...bye.” And then they each bent over and pushed down one of my socks.

And then they left. Ian Harte is lining up to address the given free kick with his famous left foot. Five Reading players are in the box, waiting to pounce on a third goal against a now 9-man West Ham. Jack Collison is somewhere down the tunnel. One imagines he is commiserating with Joey O’Brien, the first of the Hammers to see red, when he was made to look a fool by the Royals’ wing on the opposite side. Neither of them will have a part in the goal about to be scored, but only because their play meant they could not be there to play a part.

Playing no more part, as well, is Jimmy Kebe. He stands by himself outside the box.

I was near the end of my first day, outside the gymnasium, walking with my new school’s basketball team—well, those trying to make it on to my new school’s basketball team—to the running track. The tackleball team was coming from the opposite direction. One of them caught sight of me and stared me down. His face was painted. It had only been practice, but his face was painted. And the paint on his face had run with his sweating. His face was grimed and stained. He called out to the guy walking beside me while never taking his eyes off of me: “Who’s this faggot!?” The guy walking beside me did not answer. I chose not to either. He feinted at me as we passed one another. I do not remember if I flinched. Whether I did or not, I am sure he would remember that I did. He did not say anything about my socks, but after the day I’d had, the message from him and all of my new school was given simply, loudly, clearly: If I was going to fit in there, I would have to be more like them—I would have to behave as expected. To do otherwise, to not adhere to how things were done... to quote every Steve Claridge and J. Jonah Jameson I went to school with... was not only “unnecessary,” it was “disrespectful.”

“If you watch Jimmy, it is something he does generally.... He’s always fiddling with his socks.”

Jobi McAnuff, Reading Football Club captain

One of my favorite comics is a completely unnecessary and totally surprising Punisher-Archie crossover. It’s ridiculous. I own two copies. In it, Archie is mistaken for a villain. He is kidnapped by rival villains and rescued by the Punisher, but the action is only beginning there. It comes to a head in the school gymnasium, at the Riverdale High Sock-Hop. There’s a shootout. There’s a hostage situation. There’s a Spider-Man hot air balloon. I don’t want to ruin it for you, but it ends with the good guys having breakfast and burgers at Pop’s Chocklit Shoppe. The Punisher wants to stick around. Maybe because, in Riverdale, with Archie & friends, he could be one of the good guys after all. But he cannot stay. His personal war... the thing that makes him an anti-hero... it will not let him.





A Minute Of Memory

Steven (Cabin__13)



I have never bothered to watch the current iteration of Archie and all of Riverdale being broadcast on television, a fact that sorely disappoints my oldest niece. She tells me it is cool. Somehow, even without a visit from the Punisher, they have managed to make Riverdale darker. And cool. So my niece tells me. And, somehow, they have even made Archie cool. And Jughead is now the hot one? Or the hot, brooding one, maybe? I’m not sure. My niece assures me it is all cool. And she would know. Certainly better than I.

There were no CW producers to rewrite my school days to make me somehow cool. In my first year at that new school, somewhere along the way, I let my socks fall down and left them there. The next year, though, with some encouragement from old friends over the summer, I had managed to pull them back up. And that year we had a faculty versus students basketball game in front of the whole school.

In it, I embarrassed the teacher who shook his head at me my first day there. In the class I still had with him after the game, other students were talking about it—talking to him about it. Clowning him. In trying to defend himself, he complained that I had done something wrong, cheated in some way. “In an actual league, you’d have been called for travelling,” he said loud enough so I could hear.

As if I had not practiced the move he was talking about a thousand times before. As if I had never counted the steps. As if I did not have them down pat. The other students did not buy it. They kept on him. I said nothing. Not a word. Not out loud. Inside, though, I laughed my ass off.

Jimmy Kebe is not laughing. Indeed, he shows no sign at all of the events that took place less than a minute earlier. He is no longer grimacing from the kick he took. He shows no hurt from being shoved to the ground. But neither is he smiling at his success. Neither showing off nor celebrating. It was only part of the game. It is all only part of the game.

“Some people get up at five in the morning to go to work in the factory. I get up every morning to play football. So I can’t complain.”

Just as Ian Harte is to run up to the free kick Jimmy Kebe won, Jimmy Kebe—in a moment which will not be talked about by a single person in Reading, West Ham, the national media, or anywhere in the entire footballing world—bends down and touches both hands onto his shins to address his socks.

Not all heroes wear capes, they say. But most of them wear socks, I’d wager. And some of them, they do what they want. Because, sometimes, just doing what you want is heroism. Even if it looks like villainy to someone else.

It ends with a goal. A birthday gift to Simon Church from Ian Harte.

“Three points and a couple of goals would be nice,”

The striker had said the day prior. So it was. So he runs off, two spread arms becoming one pumping fist.





Midweek Nightmares

Alex Everson



Since the start of 18/19, Reading have massivley struggled at playing midweek. Since then, we have now played 18 midweek league matches, and have only managed to win once.

Last season - from 9 games, Reading managed to win once against Blackburn in the relegation run in with a late goal from Nelson Oliveira. However, outside this, Reading struggled hugely picking up 3 points in just another 8 games. Defeats at Birmingham City, Leeds United to name but a few meant the only points picked up were where Reading took the league. But in all 3 of those games, they ended up throwing away a victory. Blackburn, where they led by 2 before collapsing to 2-0. Bolton away in January where the Royals led 1-0 before letting a late equaliser slip also. Then, once again, late in the season Reading had taken the lead. This time against Norwich City, who were on their way to the Premier League. Reading looked destined to cause an upset before going 2-1 behind against the eventual champions. A late equaliser from Rinomhota did give the Royals another point, but still, struggling to pick up those midweek wins.

This season - Reading have now played 9 games in midweek in the league. Of those, they've won zero. Getting beaten five times. This lack of midweek form is killing any kind of momentum that the squad are trying to build. But why is the midweek form so bad, and can anything be done to rectify it?

Personally, I have two theories, one of which is fitness is a major issue, and that we are unable to play Saturday and then play again midweek. However, we have got, and have had a big squad, should this really be an issue? The second theory involves preparation. The amount of time clearly is the same amount of time for both sides, but it feels like the prep for the Royals must not be sufficient in terms of planning for their midweek opponents, with plenty of games in the past few years seemingly throwing in some abject performances.

Reading have at least one midweek fixture left this season in the league against Derby County - a game in which they seem unlikely to win against a very strong home performing Derby. If they fail to win, this would make the record zero wins in 10 this season in midweek - almost 25% of the season without picking up a win. This is holding the league record back hugely and is something that has to be solved and addressed over summer if Reading are to push up the table next season towards a playoff spot.

Attendances continue to dwindle, and with the introduction of the red button for midweek games, this form is making the Madejski very quiet in midweeks, with a reported crowd of less than 7000 actual fans against Wigan scanning through the turnstiles, if the club want to win fans back, fixing the midweek form next season seems like a move which will bring back fans quickly, as they can start to see momentum building from weekends through to midweek games.





Up For The Cup

Jamie Butler



"I can still picture the save now, point blank reaction down the far end of the ground at Goodison"

Tuesday night sees us welcome high flying Sheffield United in the 5th round of the world's greatest cup competition. I'm confident we can blunt the Blades as they'll be focusing their attention on finishing the job in the Premier League to qualify for Europe, so I thought I'd focus my attention elsewhere too and take a brief stroll down memory lane...

This is just the 14th time Reading have made it to the 5th round of the FA Cup in our 149 year history and

we're fortunate enough to have witnessed 7 of those 14 occasions in the last 13 years. Prior to that, we'd made it this far just once in 72 years before - ironically enough, against Sheffield United in 1998!

Back in 2007, I was part of a large away following that went to Old Trafford where a Brynjart Gunnarsson header and a "man of the round" performance from Adam Federici secured a replay for us to bring United back to the Madejski. The replay started in chaotic fashion as United soared into a 3-0 lead after 6 mins. We rallied back to get it to 2-3 and if Gunnarsson's late strike had've gone in rather than hitting the bar, I think the Madejski roof would've come off!

3 years later, we again found ourselves in a 5th round tie that went to a replay. West Brom came to town and we couldn't have had a better start, with Jimmy Kebe scoring Reading's fastest ever goal, just 9 seconds into the tie, followed by his iconic ear cupping celebration (as seen below). West Brom scored a late equaliser, which I'm still irked by as I recall it came from a quickly taken throw in miles ahead of where the ball had gone out of play. Nevertheless, we went to the Hawthorns, with Brian Howard scoring a fine last minute equaliser to take the game into Extra Time. 5 mins later and down the other end, Gylfi Sigurdsson curled in an absolute peach of a goal to silence the home fans and send us through.

The following season, we had another great cup run under Brian McDermott and the 5th round tie this season saw us go to Everton. This has got to be one of my all time favourite Reading away games, you just can't beat a famous old ground like Goodison Park, under the lights and with a packed out away end. I can't remember why, but this game was midweek - long before the introduction of the "winter break" we've had this season. This was a real gutsy "McDermott's Reading" performance, with the whole team fighting for one another. Matt Mills got the only goal of the game for us to win 1-0 but it was Alex McCarthy's amazing save - I think to deny Leon Osman - that really felt like the match winner. I can still picture the save now, point blank reaction down the far end of the ground at Goodison - still one of the best saves I've ever seen live.

Reading's 2nd attempt at Premier League football in 2012/13 wasn't as successful as our previous top flight spell and I had actually completely missed the fact that we made it to the 5th round that season....we were knocked out again by Manchester United in a 2-1 defeat. This was to be McDermott's last FA Cup tie in his 1st spell managing the club, with him being sacked just 3 weeks after this defeat.





Up For The Cup

Jamie Butler



After relegation from the Premier League in 2012/13 and then narrowly missing out on the play offs on the final day of the 2013/14 season,the 2014/15 season saw us again have a disappointing league campaign.Nigel Adkins was sacked at Christmas and replaced by Steve Clarke,with us eventually reaching the FA Cup semi finals for the first time since 1927. Along the way, we picked up good away wins at Huddersfield, Cardiff and Derby; with Derby away being the 5th round tie. This will always be remembered for being the game in which YAKUBU scored his one and only goal for Reading – a powerful left footed strike into the bottom corner.



Finally, the following season we again hosted West Brom in a 5th roundtie at the Madejski. This particular season it felt like half the squad were loanees. West Brom took the lead but we battled back from1-0 down to see off our Premier League opponents 3-1 in the end. My favourite memory of this match is that Paul McShane notched ourequaliser and it felt after we got things all square, that we were the only team that'd go onto win. My least favourite memory of this matchis getting so hammered in town afterwards that I fell asleep on thelast train home and woke up dazed

& confused at Clapham Junction station, having to get a cab home.

Not the first nor the last time that Reading FC have cost me a few quid...!

Looking ahead to Tuesday's game, I hope Bowen puts out as strong ateam as possible. We've been in such poor form since the turn of the year that we should be looking to do whatever we can to pick up and maintain some form, to finish the season as strongly as possible.The win against Barnsley was a huge step towards guaranteeing safety, but the gap to the play offs is too big a hurdle to climb at this stage of the season.

With this in mind, I'd like us to give it ago on Tuesday and see if we can pull Sheff United's pants down and get a result.There's something special about a cup game that's midweek, it's normally a replay where we're guaranteed to see a result decided on the night. With the introduction of there being no replays for 5th round ties, this has got the feel of a replay about it already and so hopefully with a strong team out and a good turnout from the home support, both the fans and players alike can be really up for it and give Sheff United a good game.

Don't quote me on it, but I'm going for us to pick up a 2-1 win.





March Preview

Erik Orrgarde



Following our FA Cup adventures vs Sheffield United we move on to March and league action. It looks more likely that Reading haven't got anything to play for in the league. The remaining hope is that we improve our home form and show some of the form we saw over the Christmas period to try and build some momentum for next season.

Our first league game in March is a visit to St Andrews to face Birmingham City on the 7th March. There were lots of rumours of George Puscas choosing Reading over Birmingham in the summer so nothing would please me more than to see our Romanian hitman on the scoresheet for this game.



St Andrews has some painful memories for me personally; it's the only stadium where I've been refused entry for having 1 or 2 too many beverages on the train to Birmingham. Thinking on my feet I paid to get in the home end, only for us to lose 6-1 in Nigel Adkins last game as Reading manager. I should have stayed in the pub.



The following Saturday we welcome Stoke City to the Madejski in a game with two teams who have struggled for form this season and both, with seemingly nothing to play for.

So do we have any fond memories of the Charlie Adam derby? The first thing that pops into my head when I hear “Stoke City at home” is the 1st game of the season in the last stint we had in the premier league. The game finished 1-1, mainly down to a mistake from Adam Federici. Going full circle, we may well see Fedders on the Stoke

bench as he plays backup to what has been a very mistake prone Jack Butland these days up in Stoke-on-Trent.

In the only mid-week league game in March we travel to Derby to take on Wayne Rooney's Derby County.

County seem to have put the Richard Keogh/Tom Lawrence controversy behind them but Philip Cocu's side is inconsistent and more drama is always around the corner with questions about the sale of their stadium to circumvent financial fair play.





March Preview

Erik Orrgarde



I once visited Derby County in a midweek game. Back on Valentine’s day in 2012 me and a couple of friends (very clearly, very single friends) travelled to follow Brian McDermott’s men. We were rewarded with a 1-0 victory. Noel Hunt scored the only goal of the game. Wouldn’t it be fantastic if we could upset Sky Sports News by beating Wayne Rooney and co?



Our final league game in March means a visit from the Bees as Brentford make the journey down the M4 to the mighty Madstad. Brentford are due to move into their new (rather ugly) stadium next season. Why is that significant do you ask? Because their move also means a move to west London for London Irish.

The Madejski will no longer be hosting Rugby on a regular basis. I’d like to see this game as us passing the baton. I hope they look forward to ruined pitches for many winters to come. Let’s hope they take the temporary rugby megastore with them back down the M4 after the game.

All in all – 4 league games in March and with little to play for it’s difficult to judge how many points to expect! 6 points would be an average score. Let’s hope our home form improves so that we can push up to a mid-table finish.

Come on URZ!!

