

HIT THE BAR!



April 2025

£1



Well, except for....

Morecambe (A)

Port Vale (H)

Accrington Stanley (A)

Cheltenham Town (A)

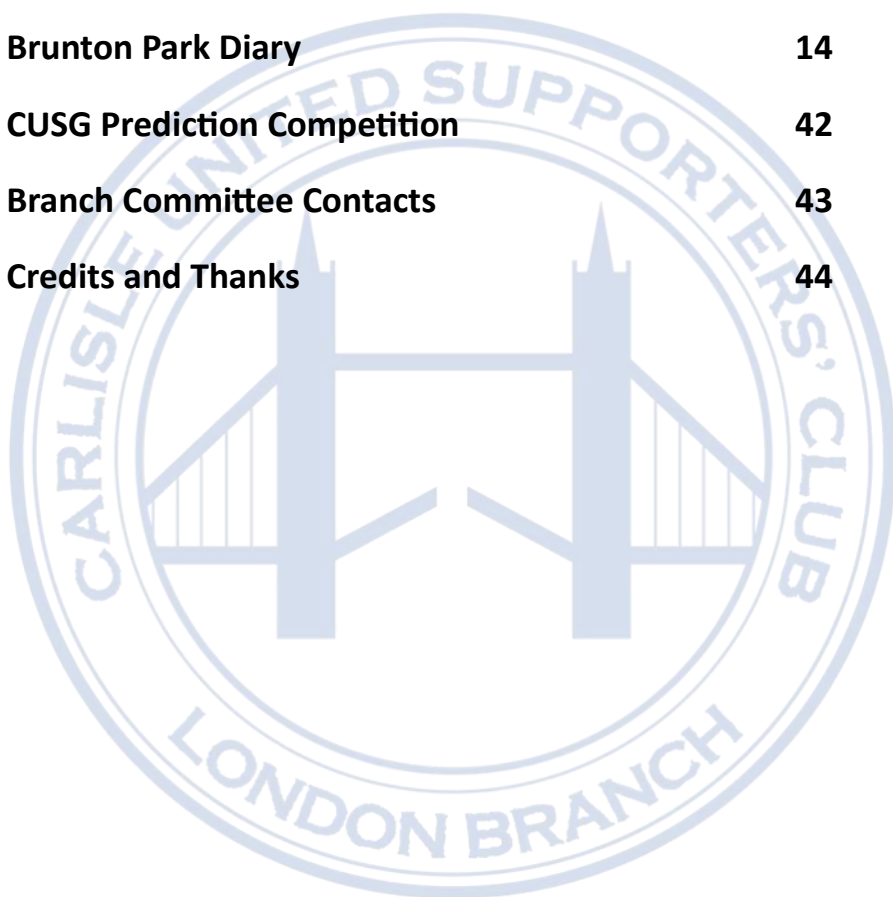
Salford City (H)

It's the hope
that kills
you!!



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EDITORS BLEAT



Welcome to HTB! 336.

I write this following the very welcome win at home to Newport at the weekend. It is, as we've noted in these pages many times before, the hope that kills you. A win at Morecambe would not only dial up the hope a notch, but also see off that truly dreadful statistic of 98 games without back to back League wins.

The branch committee are planning for the worst and hoping for the best. If we are in the National League next year it will make it all the more important that we help branch members and all travelling Carlisle fans, navigate previously un-visited parts of suburban London and the South. As least this time we won't have to go to Barnet.

Both Dave and Ken have shared their thoughts on the shambles that has unfolded this season and where we go next. To be honest, I can't comment as I haven't seen the team 'live' since the game at Wimbledon in October. My eye bother at Christmas (all better now thanks) is part of the reason, but really the belief left me on that wet afternoon in SW17.

We started the season looking back on 50 years since Carlisle United were top of the First Division and it seems that we will end 24/25 at the very opposite end of the Football League. The thing that amazes me is that our home and away support has stuck with the team despite the consistent dross on the pitch. If the Piataks can find the right advice and the right people to implement it, the bright future that seemed to be beckoning at Wembley is surely there for us. They say things go in cycles, perhaps ours is a very long one. I look forward to the next 50 years.

Up the Blues
John B

NOTES FROM THE CHAIR



A lot has happened since I last wrote my column for the November HTB.

This HTB was due to be published in January but due to an urgent eye operation for our editor, John Bowman, was very delayed. I am delighted to report that John is fully recovered.

In November Mike Williamson (right) was nominated for manager of the month after we won at Salford and had draws against Bromley away and Doncaster and Crewe at home. It was fair to say that most of us felt we would be drawing away from the relegation zone although not exactly pulling trees up with our performances.

By Boxing Day and a home defeat to

relegation rivals, Morecambe, most of us felt that Mike and his style of football would not save us from relegation. We were just too fragile, making key mistakes at the back, failing to create enough chances and failing to put those we had into the net – there seemed a complete lack of a plan B when things went against us. Nevertheless, the owners and the club backed Williamson into the transfer window bringing in 11 players (some rumoured to be on high value, long contracts) to suit his style and backing him at a fans' forum in early January.



We played at Crewe on New Years Day and were the better team for 90 minutes, going into extra time 2-1 up

and looking good for a critical win. 9 minutes (yes that long) later we had lost 3-2 failing to manage the game out.

We lost every other game in January with the same failings experienced in December. We had brought in lots of midfielders but no strong strikers (although Matt Dennis is starting to look a reasonable player). We also transferred out legend Jon Mellish to Wigan, Harrison Neal to Fleetwood and striker Luke Armstrong to Motherwell (on loan). Inevitably, after a 5-1 drubbing at home against Swindon, Mike Williamson was sacked on the 3rd February. 3 days later, Mark Hughes was appointed.

We have looked a little better since Sparky arrived but unfortunately not good enough. We have looked good in too many games and lost such as Newport. Yesterday against Doncaster, we started quite well but then let in a very poor goal – poor defending and the ball going under Gabe Breeze’s body from a weak shot. In the 2nd half, every single player apart from Kadeem Harris, looked poor – lacking confidence, commitment, desire.

The frustration at the end from Carlisle fans was palpable. No one that I am aware of believes we will be playing in any division other than the National League next season. The fans this season (and last) have been the high spot.

There are loads of noisy kids in the Warwick, we are regularly the best season attendances at away games, we are still getting crowds of 6500 despite the awful results.

Every Carlisle fan knows how hard it will be to get out of non-League next season – only 1 automatic promotion place and then a battle through 2-7 to win another place through the play offs. There are a myriad of ex-football league clubs languishing in the National League and other divisions below. Most 5th tier clubs are now full-time professionals and quite a lot have fervent supporters.

So, is it all doom and gloom for the future? I don’t believe so. 4 years ago, we looked to be going down to non-league with a crumbling stadium, a huge debt around our neck repayable at any time, no training facilities, no proper gym or medical facilities, a poor commercial operation. We also had a loyal and supportive chairman but elderly and not in the best of health.

If we had gone down then, I would have been seriously worried that we would have soon gone out of existence.

The arrival of first, Simmo, and then the Piatak family, generated a huge revival of our fortunes. A re-birth of interest in the club in the town and the area in every age group, the freedom from the debt, the upgrading of the stadium and



training facilities, the re-vamping of the commercial operations has taken the club to a new level. At this stage there will be no pleasure in that from the fans – “who wants the best fanzone in the non-league?”. A fan at Doncaster said to me “Its easy to do all the things the Piataks have done if you have the money.” If it was that easy, why has it never happened before in the 65 years that I have supported Carlisle United?

The Piatak family have made, in conjunction with the rest of the board, some terrible decisions on the football side – the results since November 2023 show that. However, I am very confident that they are here for the long-term and that they are very able to learn and adapt. I also think, contrary to a lot of social media comments, that Nigel Clibbens is an asset rather than

someone to be sacked. I have seen him up close over a number of years and have seen that he nursed our club through many years to get it to the stage where a new owner could take it over.

I do believe that our future can be secure and sustainable, and ultimately successful, but only if there is a lot of work going on now inside the club to ensure that next season, we will be challenging at the top of the National League. Here’s hoping.

Up the Blues

Dave

Chair

KEEP THE FAITH



It's been estimated that Carlisle United's spend on the playing side this season could be over £5 million, the highest in League 2. We are now virtually certain to be relegated out of the Football League with all the consequences organisationally and financially that entails. How is it that we are hurtling towards the National League virtually cut adrift from safety?

One thing's for sure, it's nothing to do with a lack of cash. Clearly mistakes have been made and it seems that most fans think the most fundamental mistake made this season was to appoint Mike Williamson. My view is that

the biggest mistake was the timing of the appointment, when the transfer window had just closed, and the Pitaks in effect giving a brief to the new Head Coach to play in a certain way. The only brief owners should be giving a new manager/coach is to win games. Simmo had recruited players to suit a particular way of playing. Williamson clearly had his own, different way of playing and a lot of the existing players were a bad fit for that. If you want to change to a more possession-based style of play then it takes time.

The idea of having a consistent philosophy about the way we play, often called a club DNA, has a lot of appeal.

The theory is that if a playing philosophy is applied consistently throughout the club from academy through to senior level it means that players can be developed and recruited to fit in with that philosophy, so you don't have square pegs for round holes that we seem to have had for much of this season. It's a philosophy that has been applied in a lot of clubs and at international level, including for England with some success.

Part way through the season has proved to be the worst possible time

to introduce a new philosophy about the way we play and changing a club's style of play can take a long time. **It has been said that it takes 3-6 windows of good recruitment to get to where you want to be. To try and change our style of play overnight was never going to work.** Our successful spells of passing the ball around were few and far between. There was a decent spell of it in the first half against Bromley and we looked good for a while and got in on goal, even though we didn't score. A lot more of that, with good finishing at the end of it, would do for me, but it proved to be a rare good performance and it wasn't sustained.

It became inevitable, given continuing bad results and the growing unrest amongst the fans, that further managerial/coaching changes would have to be made. Unfortunately, the timing of this, immediately after the transfer window closed, was awful once again.

There was renewed hope when Mark Hughes took over as new head coach. It didn't last long. Most of the 11 new signings made during the transfer window are not up to the job and, as before, we are struggling to score goals. The fact that Vela was called back because of the deficiencies in the squad says it all.

It's not surprising that splurging money

on lots of players in January hasn't worked. You'd think lessons would have been learnt from last season's disastrous January signings. Too many of the players recruited this time were either inexperienced or hadn't played much



recently and were unfit. We're lumbered with them as well because a lot of them were signed on longish contracts.

I think Mark Hughes was a good appointment in the circumstances, it's just that the odds were really stacked against him. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. Once again the timing was appalling, on transfer deadline day, so he couldn't do much about improving the squad he inherited. Having said that the new philosophy about the way we're organised as a club means that the continuity is meant

to be provided by the Sporting Director who is in charge of the recruitment of players as well as overseeing the whole of the playing operation.



It hasn't been a great six months for Rob Clarkson. His background and expertise is player recruitment and, if measured by the last transfer window, he's been an abject failure.

So what of the future? We need to be preparing for life in non-league now. My own view is that attempts should be made now to secure Hughes on a longer contract. Maybe he'll be up for the challenge of making an immediate return to the Football League. His record in management is mixed but with plenty of successful spells.

Getting Blackburn Rovers into Europe was no mean achievement and achieving 3 consecutive 9th places in the Premier League for Stoke City is not to be sniffed at. The area where he needs good support though is in player recruitment. That's where the club really needs to step up its game.

Our recovery needs to be quick or we're faced with the prospect of losing academy funding and status as well as other significant financial hits. For a club that, last summer, provided the pre-tournament England squad with more players (3) that had been in their academy than any other club apart from one (Liverpool), reduced status will be a massive blow.

As fans though we can look forward to visiting some old stomping grounds like Aldershot, Rochdale and Dagenham as well as some new delights like Braintree and Solihull Moors. Oh what joy!

Ken Hullock

The London Branch owns 2 season tickets for the Paddock terrace at Brunton Park. As a member, each ticket is available to you for a cost of just £10 - compared to £20 in advance and £24 on the day.

To use a ticket/s, contact Linda McLoughlin seasontickets@cusclub.com 2 weeks in advance. Preference will be given to those who haven't used them ever before or in the current season.

50 YEARS OF THE LONDON BRANCH

The Carlisle United Supporters' Club London Branch was founded on 16th November 1974 on the evening following our game against QPR when Carlisle were in the First Division of the Football League. Its birthplace was the Finborough Arms in Earls Court. This pub is now Yogi's Kensington an Asian Fusion Cuisine, Cocktail and Wine Bar. Their website describes it as "an escape into an enchanting world of sensory delight", so still very appropriate for the London Branch.

On the next few pages are some snaps from that 50 years.



First up is the late and much missed **Dave Nicholson**. No one before or since has expressed his support for the Blues in such sartorial splendour.



Branch members
at Barnet, at
the old Wembley
and talking to
Andrew Jenkins .



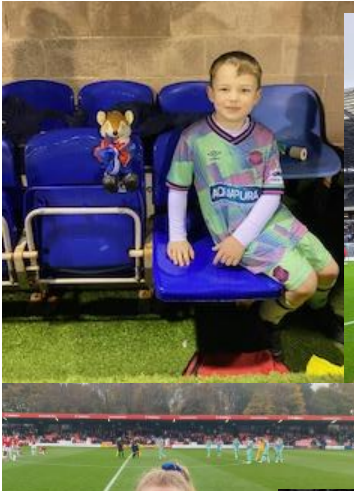
Mascot Roll of Honour 24/25

This season the London branch took on the task of organising Carlisle mascots at as many away games as we could. Thanks to the hard work of Ruth Vamadevan, Anna Jensen and Simon Clarkson, we've had mascots at most matches.

Gillingham	Jessie Bushnell
Milton Keynes Dons	Parker Harrison
Bradford City	Ayda McGinley
Swindon Town	Rowan Collier
AFC Wimbledon	Brunel Rowland
Salford City	Florence Benney
Fleetwood Town	Millar Bowerbank
Notts County	Willam English
Grimsby Town	Freddie Lewthwaite
Barrow	Thomas Benson
Harrogate Town	Arthur Dollard
Doncaster Rovers	Jack Bone
Chesterfield	Talitha Hancock

Full details of each mascot's day with the team and lots of photos are on our website

<https://www.carlislelondonbranch.org/branchmascots>



Just some of this season's mascots. See all the pictures on our website



Brunton Park Diary

2024/25

The Brunton Diary - 23 clubs all capable of beating each other and then a 24th team that the rest of the league can't wait to play

Nov 8th (Fri)

After his international clearance thumbs-up, 31-year-old free agent **Ka-deem Harris** finally completes his move to United on a deal until January, the former Owl and Bluebird being MW's second signing.

Nov 9th (Sat)

BURTON YTH 1 CUFC YTH 1

No match details given.

SALFORD (0) 0 CUFC (0) 1

If not quite hitting the heights of the 4-1 drubbing handed out to the hosts two seasons ago, this was nevertheless a well-deserved win with a battling, front-to-back defensive performance at its base. Roared on by a travelling army numbering over 1,350, Ben the Bank's late, late winner sent the away end into bedlam, a heaving mass combining relief and delirium. The first 45 was a quiet affair, Adu-Adjei and the lively Sadi setting up Armstrong in the box, only to

all look to the sky as Luke's hurried effort sailed upwards in the same direction. Breeze at the other end dealt comfortably and confidently with any crosses or on the rare occasion, a shot came his way. Harris had a promising cameo after coming on, Adu-Adjei going close with the Blues now sniffing a winner. They didn't have to wait too long, Biggins' terrific inswinging corner met by the bonce of a diving Barclay.

CUFC*: Breeze 7, Hayden 7, **Lavelle 8**, Thomas 7, Mellish 6, Neal 7, Guy 6, Burrey 7, Sadi 7, Armstrong 6, Adu-Adjei 6. Subs: Harper 6, Biggins 7, Harris 7

Nov 12th (Tue)

MORECAMBE (1) 1 CUFC (0) 2 – BRISTOL STREET MOTORS TROPHY GROUP STAGE

You wait ages for one and then two come along at once. Both teams laid out shadow squads in essentially a meaningless fixture, 17-year-old Freddie O'Donoghue grabbing a first senior goal in a strong performance with the fit-again Williams getting the other. Armstrong headed his customary chance over the bar before the Shrimp

ticklers punished the Blues after slack play at the back presented the ball back to old Blue Hope, who took the easy chance. When Harris, United's best player in the first half, was substituted at the break as part of his return to full fitness, all the points looked a long way off. Step up O'Donoghue with 15 minutes left on the clock, arriving in the box to convert Williams' cross at close range. Soon it was 2-1, Armstrong building on the good work of Atkinson and crossing for Williams to slide in and seal the win.

CUFC: Lewis, Barclay (Atkinson 62), Ellis, Robinson, Allan, Charters (O'Donoghue 75), Harper (Neal 62), Hetherington, Vela (Lowe 74), Harris (B Williams 46), Armstrong.

Nov 13th (Wed)

BARNSELY YTH (0) 0 CUFC YTH (0) 1 – FA YOUTH CUP 2nd ROUND

Shot to pieces 1-5 by the Tykes' youngsters only 12 months ago at Brunton Park, sweet revenge was extracted in an excellent performance. Helped by star turns from promising tyros keeper Thomas Randall and defender Hayden Atkinson, they held the hosts at arm's length before countering with the perfect sucker punch early in the second half, Lewis Lambert's hopeful strike slipping through the home goalkeeper's

grasp like a bar of wet soap covered in glycerine. The reward is a 3rd round home tie against neighbours Plymouth Argyle.

CUFC: Randall, Chapman, Hodgson (Smith 78), Penney, Porter, Atkinson, Rigby, Skinner (Lambert 46), O'Donoghue, Lowe, Hopper.

Nov 16th (Sat)

CUFC YTH (1) 3 HOLLYWOOD YTH (2) 3

Back in league action, Birch's Babes fell behind to an early goal from the north Welshmen. A superb 25-yard piledriver from Bell quickly levelled things however Hollywood FC were immediately given a penalty by the ref in exchange for a signed shirt for 1-2. It stayed that way until United score twice in 8 second-half minutes, Lambert playing a lovely ball through to Smith to find the far corner with a curling effort and then Hopper scoring from the spot after Lowe was chopped down. A cruel 93rd equalizer was served up with a second spot-kick for Hollywood FC in exchange for a Deadpool 4 set visit.

BROMLEY (0) 1 CUFC (0) 1

The Cumbrians frustratingly just fell short of putting the EFL newcomers back in their box with a strong away showing led by Guy's promptings and control in the middle of the park, lieu-

tenants Harris and Sadi again making skillful contributions. Lavelle's renaissance in the back line under Williamson continued and it took a suicidal tackle from Williams to find a way past Breeze. Adu-Adjei's excellent finish in injury time brought home up a point, the Kent side having been reduced to 10-men by then for an elbow whipped into big Sam's chops. It maybe could and should have been all 3 points back to Cumbria with either a little more luck or composure in the penalty box, the biggest culprit surely Charters who was suddenly 2 versus 1 and through on goal from a last-minute break only to mess up the chance.

CUFC*: Breeze 6, Barclay 6, Lavelle 7, Mellish 6, Williams 6, Burey 6, Harper 7, **Guy 7**, Sadi 7, Harris 7, Adu-Adjei 7. Subs: Charters 6, Ellis 6, Vela 6

National League North side Scunthorpe United continue their love affair with former bit-part United strikers by signing big **Mark Beck**, now classed a veteran 30-something – bet that makes some of you feel old. His team-mates will include fellow Beck-in-waiting striker **Sam Fishburn**.

Former Curle-era midfielder **Gary Dick-er** leaves his assistant head coach role with Brighton & Hove Albion's Under-

21s to take on the top job at USA! USA! USA! Crown Legacy FC, a third tier MLS Next Pro side from North Carolina.

Nov 19th (Tue)

CARLISLE CITY (0) 1 CUFC XI (0) 0 – FRED CONWAY CUMBERLAND CUP 2nd ROUND

A game of few chances where the colts struggled in the final third, Lowes' late strike against the post being the nearest they came to scoring against their fellow senior citizens. The men versus boys match-up was nevertheless excellent experience in tough conditions, showing throughout that they were up for the fight.

CUFC XI: Sillitoe, Chapman, Hodgson, Allan (Lambert 64), Porter, Atkinson, Hetherington (Rigby 64), Skinner, O'Donoghue, Lowes, Hopper.

Ex-gaffer **Keith Millen** returns to his home turf, taking on the big chair at AFC Croydon Athletic. The Isthmian League South East Divisionistas are owned by Stormzy - for the Ovaltine-drinking over 60s, he's what's called a "Rapper"; look it up - and former Palace winger Zaha.....for the falafel and organic soy worshipping under 25s, he's what's known as a "Diver".

Nov 23rd (Sat)

CUFC (0) 0 DONCASTER ROVERS (0) 0

A possible step forward with a point against a top three side, the one remaining failing in the obvious area. A storming finish saw Harper's fine finish narrowly chalked off for offside, Kelly ruled to be interfering with play. Back up the pitch for one final attack, Lavelle saw his arrowed header brilliantly saved in front of the Warwick by the visiting keeper. Harper had earlier set up Adu-Adjei in the first half, the young Cherry this time fluffing his lines and the top of the cake, ballooning his effort over the Donny goal. He then had another well saved as the team went off for their tea and oranges to deserved applause. Breeze shaded being the busier stopper in the second period until the frantic few minutes, which included the visitors being reduced to 10 men following a sending off.

CUFC**:

Breeze	7.40,	Hayden	6.60,
Lavelle	7.80,	Mellish	7.50,
Williams	7.10,	Burey	6.20,
Harper	6.90,	Guy	6.40,
Sadi	6.80,	Harris	6.20,
Adu-Adjei	6.50.	Subs:	Neal 6.50, Vela 6.10

Nov 27th (Wed)

Keeping legend **Keiren Westwood** is appointed Head of Goalkeeping at The New Saints, the Welsh Premier club still hunting silverware in the Europa Con-

ference League.

Nov 30th (Sat)

CUFC YTH (0) 0 CHESTERFIELD YTH (1) 2

A harsh first-half penalty for a Hodgson handball and a fine second half solo goal was enough to beat a United side that saw their best efforts blocked or scrambled clear.

CUFC: Randall, Chapman, Hodgson, Skinner, Porter, Atkinson, Rigby, Lowes, Lambert, O'Donoghue, Hopper.

Dec 2nd (Mon)

Nearly 20 years on from when he made his first team league debut for them, former winger **Nicky Adams** returns to the Shakers after a recent spell at Radcliffe. It will be the 38-year-old's fourth spell at Gigg Lane as he looks to add to his remarkable 750-plus career appearances.

Dec 3rd (Tue)

Dudik's loan to South Shields is extended until 1 January 2025 while **Lavelle** is nominated for November's PFA League Two Fans' Player of the Month.

Dec 6th (Fri)

Gabe Breeze misses out on shaping 250-yard goal kicks, the officials taking a wise course of action and postponing

the weekend game down in Newport with Storm Darragh's hurricane-force winds rapidly approaching.

Dec 9th (Mon)

Former Blue **Danny Devine** is off on his travels, this time joining Northern Premier League East Division side Liversedge in the eighth tier; a bit of a comedown having been released by Simmo less than three years ago.

Dec 10th (Tue)

CUFC YTH (0) 2 PLYMOUTH ARGYLE YTH (0) 4 – FA YOUTH CUP 3rd ROUND (2-2 AET)

The battling Blues narrowly missed out on a fourth round place for the first time in eight years, the Pilgrims sending the game into extra time with two minutes left and then benefitting from some tired legs. Hopper had equalised the visitors spot kick, running powerfully through the middle to slotting into the corner. Lambert then looked set to put Birch's Bairns through on 79 after more excellent work from Hopper, driving past two defenders and cutting the ball across for Lambert to finish after a block to his first effort.

United: Randall, Chapman, Hodgson (Hatton 94), Skinner (Bell 98), Porter, Atkinson, Murray (Lambert 58), Lowes, O'Donoghue, Rigby (Smith 67), Hopper

(Towers 106).

Three draws and a win is enough to see **MW** perhaps rather generously shortlisted for the League Two manager of the month award for November. I wouldn't be dusting the living room mantelpiece just yet and the last United winner was remarkably **Keith Curle** way back in October 2016.

Dec 13th (Fri)

CUFC U17s 0 BLACKPOOL U17s 3 - PDL (Professional Development League) CUP

No information available.

MW is denied the League Two manager of the month curse/award by Morecambe boss Derek Adams.

Dec 14th (Sat)

CUFC (0) 0 CHESTERFIELD (1) 2

A head-scratching inverted wing-back formation didn't seem to do the Blues any favours, the recent week's settled team disrupted and the resulting imbalance showing up all over the pitch. The visitors were nothing special but too street wise to provide any early Christmas gifts and apart from perhaps the first 15 minutes and towards the end when Kelly came on, the Cumbrians never looked remotely threatening; more 'Disunited' than United. The big

forward did break clean through only for the offside flag to be raised to the collective disbelief of 90% of the ground. He then narrowly headed over from Guy's cross and had another header blocked on the line in a late tilt before the team trooped off to a warm round of indifference. In between Hayden had a complete Weston-Super for the Spireites second goal, dithering and allowing them to pick his pocket and score.

CUFC*: Breeze 5, Hayden 4, Lavelle 5, **Mellish 6**, Harper 5, Burey 5, McGeouch 5, Vela 4, Jones 4, Sadi 5, Adu-Adjei 5. Subs: Neal 5, Guy 6, Kelly 5, Biggins 5

With **Jude Smith** still MIA through a back problem, 17-year-old youth team keeper **Thomas Randall** made the bench after it was revealed **Harry Lewis** had suffered a broken finger during training.

Dec 17th (Tue)

CUFC XI (0) MORECAMBE XI (4) 8 – CENTRAL LEAGUE CUP

With Sophie's physio room queue stretching out of the door and down to Tesco's, management decided to fulfil the fixture using the academy lads. They were duly no match for a strong, vastly experienced senior team sent out by Adams. Third-year scholar Aran Fitzpat-

rick, on his return from injury, being the nearest thing to an older head.

CUFC: Sillitoe, Rigby (Rafferty 72), Hodgson, Skinner (Bell, 55), Fleming, Porter, Murray, Lowes, O'Donoghue (Smith, 63), Fitzpatrick (Lambert, 55), Hopper.

The contract release of experienced midfielder **Martyn Waghorn** by Northampton immediately kicks off rumblings that he might be one of Magic Mike's early signings.

Dec 18th (Wed)

Whether it's a blessing in disguise or not, midfielders **Dylan McOuch** and **Josh Vel-aaagh** are set for a long spell on the sidelines with a hamstring injury and calf problem respectively. With **Harris** nursing a hip problem and other assorted knocks and absences within the squad, the team tombola might be rolled out again for the weekend.

The trip to Newport County is rearranged for Tuesday, February 11.

Dec 19th (Thu)

The local edition of 'Derry Now' runs a Sports section headline confirming that after four years at the club, **Will Patching** is "no longer a Derry City player" with various social media sources claiming that his next destination will be at

the mighty Cumbrians.....well ok, some may have swapped one of those words with “struggling”. Patching scored six goals in 11 games at Derry while initially on loan spell from Dundalk, signing for the 2022 season and going on to make 130 appearances in total scoring an impressive 35 goals and assisting 29 times. In his time at the club, Derry City also had the unique record of never once losing a game when Patching scored. Ireland’s top division is presently on its end of season break having concluded in November with the new season set to begin in mid-February.

Dec 20th (Fri)

One of United’s youth team crown jewels, 17-year-old **Dan Hopper**, goes out on loan to Penrith on a month-long work experience deal. Darren Edmondson’s Northern League Division One currently sit 14th in Northern League Division One after 24 games.

Dec 21st (Sat)

PORT VALE (0) 0 CUFC (0) 0

A gritty performance by the patched-up Cumbrians earned a deserved point for the noisy faithful at 2nd-placed Vale that might have been a case of “Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells, Jingle all the way” if Armstrong’s controversially disallowed third-minute strike after good work by Neal hadn’t been struck off for one of the softest challenges ever seen at L2 to be

whistled for a foul. On the rare moments that Vale did get a sight of goal, Breeze was there to keep the clean sheet, his stock now increasing with every game. Jones shot just wide of the post in the first half and Armstrong just failed to beat the keeper from close range in the second period.

CUFC*: Breeze 7, Barclay 7, Hayden 7, Lavelle 7, Ellis 6, Mellish 6, **Neal 7**, Harper 6, Jones 6, Sadi 6, Armstrong 6

Teenager **Sam Hetherington** and **Anton Dudik** are recalled from their respective loan spells due to the Blues current injury crisis, **Guy** being signed off with a undisclosed medical problem and **Kelly’s** calves of Weetabix failing him once again. Georgie’s cameo after being out 3 months is nearly the stuff of statistician legend. He was on the pitch 4 minutes and got in the way of United scoring a last minute winner against Doncaster, gave a late penalty away and got booked in his 16 minutes at home to Crewe, and missed 3 good chances in 45 minutes against Chesterfield, getting booked again, before getting injured warming up at Port Vale.

Dec 26th (Thu)

CUFC (0) 0 MORECAMBE (0) 1

A desperate result and performance, one that reminded fans of cult fly-on-the-wall film Spinal Tap where a music

critics opinion of their new album "Shark Sandwich" was merely a two-word review which simply read "S**t Sandwich". For a game billed as potentially the most important to date and critical to United's campaign, to put the fans through an abject performance left MW's fiercest critics sharpening their knives. Hayden's astonishing second minute miss from just a couple of yards out felt like a premonition of things to come and things might certainly have turned out very differently if that had gone in. While the early loose touches or misplaced passes were met with weary and familiar sighs, the nervousness within the home support and team seemed to feed on each other, the sighs and groans eventually turning into shouts of anger. Possession based keep-ball became pointless side-to-side passing, thoughts of relegation to the National League to the fore. A bereft second half showing saw the Blues fall behind and then almost immediately lose Mellish to an early bath for a clumsy, largely innocuous challenge.

CUFC*: Breeze 4, Hayden 4, Lavelle 4, Barclay 3, Ellis 3, Mellish 4, Neal 4, Harper 3, Jones 4, Sadi 3, Armstrong 3.
Subs: Biggins 3, Harris 3, Adu-Adjei 3

Dec 27th (Fri)

The **Will Patching** speculation comes to

fruition with the 26-year-old hopping across the Irish sea on a two-and-a-half-year contract with the Blues reported to have beaten competition for his squiggle from elsewhere.

It takes all of five seconds for a panel to decide that **Big Jon's** Boxing Day red card against Morecambe were the actions of a complete loon (aka James Oldham) and that he's now free from suspension.

Dec 29th (Sun)

CUFC (1) 2 ACCRINGTON STANLEY (0) 1

Chants of "you might know what you're doing"? Pressure, Schmessure. The Blues finished 2024 with 50% more home wins over the year than when they started the day after bagging that elusive third victory on home turf. A positive start attacking the Waterworks was rewarded when good play down the left involving Big Jon, Sadi, and Biggins teed up Harris to smash home from near in. DAA missed from close-range and then Harris headed against the crossbar after Hayden cushioned a well-directed Biggins free kick to the back post. Stanley had their moments too, a warning just before half-time when Whalley's shot tested Breeze's crossbar. Armstrong gave some needed breathing space, striking into an open goal after the ball broke into space following good

pressure on the keeper from Harris following a slack back pass.

Tyler Walton was played through one-on-one with Gabe Breeze and made no mistake to half Stanley's deficit and give the visitors a lifeline. The visitors denied United the luxury of an easy last 20 minutes after a well-worked move and finish around Breeze however it was solid, backs-to-the-wall stuff to see the game out.

CUFC**:

Breeze	6.50
Harper	6.50
Hayden	7.10
Jones	6.60
Biggins	7.00
Adu-Adjei	6.40
Mellish	8.00
Sadi	7.60
Barclay	7.20
Armstrong	7.90
Harris	7.40
Sub: Neal	6.30

Dec 31st (Tue)

The Blues injury Russian Roulette continues with respected football journalists Alan Nixon and Peter O'Rourke reporting that 25-year-old Blackpool midfielder **Elliot Embleton** is on his way to Brunton Park on a 3-and-a-half-year deal. A player of undoubted quality at his best, Embleton came through Sunderland's academy and was capped at four different youth levels for England, playing 92 times in all competitions the Black Cats. He broke his ankle and suffered significant ligament damage in December 2022 and was out for 9 months. A loan with Derby was cut short after just two games when he

suffered a serious thigh injury as he took a corner kick in a training session, missing a whole season. Before this season, injuries had restricted him to only 4 league starts in the last two years, added to with less regularity once ruddy-faced chubby wobbler Steve Bruce arrived as manager of the Donkey Lashers' in early September 2024.

Other rumoured moves to the Home of the Gods include **Callum Whelan**, 26-year-old CM currently at Gateshead, **Stephen Wearne**, a 24-year-old AM, who followed MW to MK Dons from Gateshead and Liverpool's 21-year-old right-back **Calvin Ramsay**, currently on loan at Wigan.

Jan 1st (Wed)

CREWE ALEX (1) 3 CUFC (1) 2

How did we throw it away, United's capacity to find new and ever more excruciating ways to lose seems limitless. This was a devastating loss after doing pretty much everything right in normal time, lacking the nous to use any means including the dark arts if necessary to help see a game out. Ellis was an unlikely opening scorer, his first senior goal a downward header into the pitch and over the keeper from Biggins' deep free kick. Barclay was perhaps unfortunate to lose his footing while shielding a long ball, his stumble to the turf capitalised

by the Crewe striker going through on goal. His shot was saved superbly by Breeze, only for the ball to hit the bar and agonizingly back-spin its way over the line. The introduction of Harris and Jones in the second half gave the Blues a second wind and it was the former who coolly finished after good interplay involving Armstrong, who got the final assist. If Bogle's 93rd minute equaliser wasn't bad enough – why do we never get out to the ball to stop crosses!?! – the 98th minute home side winner was a catalogue of poor defending, switching off in the box and allowing Lankester all the time in the world to pick his spot. Gutting.

CUFC*: Breeze 6, Barclay 5, Lavelle 5, Mellish 6, Ellis 7, Sadi 6, Neal 6, Harper 6, Biggins 6, Adu-Adjei 6, **Armstrong 7**.
Subs: Jones 5, Harris 7

Jan 2nd (Thu)

The **Elliot Embleton** deal mentioned two days ago comes to a fruition with a whopping three-and-a-half big ones being the correct contract length.

National League South club Dorking Wanderers secure former bit-part Beech-era stopper **Magnus Norman** following his release from Oldham Athletic.

Jan 3rd (Fri)

Mikey hits the CTRL+SHIFT+R refresh shortcut again as he raids his former club to sign 26-year-old Gateshead midfielder **Callum Whelan** on a two-and-a-half-year deal for an undisclosed fee. Described as a technically gifted player, he came through the academy at Manchester United and, after a loan at Port Vale, had permanent stints at Watford, Oldham and Solihull Moors before arriving at Gateshead in the summer of 2023 on the back of an earlier loan spell. He's played 26 times this season for 'The Heed', scoring 6 times.

Jan 4th (Sat)

TRANMERE ROVERS (1) 1 CUFC (0) 0

Pelters for the coaching team from the terraces once again, squandering the progress made against Accrington and Crewe with a poor performance and going down with a whimper. If not a must-win then a must-not-lose match against a relegation rival in equally poor form, the Blues were back in their role as sheep in wolves' clothing. Whelan had the better game of the two debutants and looked a good addition to the side, always demanding the ball in a bright opening even if he faded towards the end. At the other end of the scale, the recalled Hayden had perhaps his worst game for the Cumbrians, pass after pass failing to find a teammate

and looking lost on the pitch. Harper at left-back, wasn't much better. United were opened up like a tin of beans mid-way through the first half for the hosts' goal and the sight of first Patrick and then Dennis were painful reminders to a time when we had the firepower to get back into the game, instead of simply tickling the tummy of a Rover. The best chance fell in the second half to Adu-Adjei, whose shot was saved by the keeper following up an initial effort from Whelan.

CUFC*: Breeze 6, Hayden 4, Lavelle 5, Mellish 5, Harper 4, Sadi 4, Biggins 4, **Whelan 6**, Embleton 5, Harris 5, Armstrong 4. Subs: Adu-Adjei 5, Neal 5

It was confirmed post-match that defender **Ben Williams** will be freeing up a locker following the expiration of his contract. After a promising debut at Gillingham despite the final scoreline, his defensive attributes became less trusted by the coaching team, forcing them to play him in midfield on occasion.

Jan 6th (Mon)

Four years after first joining United on a short-term agreement from Hebburn, 26-year-old striker **Cedwyn Scott** arrives back in on a one-and-a-half-year deal with an undisclosed fee heading in

Notts County's direction. Scott played under MW while at Gateshead (where else) before helping the Magpies win promotion from the National League with 17 net ticklers. Scott has mainly operated from the bench this season, making 13 appearances while doing two goals for Notts, having been given a leave of absence to receive help for his mental health.

Jan 7th (Tue)

BLACKPOOL YTH (2) 3 CUFC YTH (1) 5 – YOUTH ALLIANCE CUP

The mighty Blues turned the game on its head in the final thirty minutes, scoring four unanswered goals to progress to the next round of the EFL Youth Alliance Cup. The Blues, who finished top of northern Group A with four wins and a defeat from their five matches, face a trip back to Hollywood FC in the last 16.

A well-attended fans' forum hears **Tom P's** crackdown on the Liam Sweeting U-turn rumour and the full backing of **Mike Williamson** to turn the ship around before the large, dark iceberg-shaped shadow on the horizon approaches. Sporting Director **Rob Clarkson** also spoke well on the night, providing a measured and confident explanation of his view on the present and future at Brunton Park including the need for "more youth, dynamism, hunger"

amongst the playing squad. MW did his best to put forward his strategy however ultimately came across as a shy-but-frustrated wanabee psychologist wedded to a single style unsuited to our current predicament. A Maths-obsessed **NC**, head coach **Ian Watson** and Trust lead **Matt Spooner** also contributed to the night's takeaways.

Jan 8th (Wed)

With the promise of several new signings before the transfer window slams shut, United use their fingers and toes to decide to dispense with utility man **Tyler Burey** following his 11 appearances for the club.

Ex-Blue **Elias Sørensen's** latest English adventure ends, the striker shipped off to Norwegian club Vålerenga after a disappointing one goal following a substantial fee paid to Danish club Esbjerg. We did try to warn them!

Jan 10th (Fri)

The Brunton Park pitch is deemed frostier than a John Sheridan post-match interview, saving MK Franchise a long jaunt up north for nothing.

Mikey's mate **Paul Dummett** is tempted by United's medical facilities, signing a short-term deal until the end of the season. The 33-year-old left-back made over

200 appearances for the Magpies and five for Wales having been at Wigan most recently. Gray, Hill, Harte, Mountfield, Gerrard, Huntington.....now with fingers and toes crossed, add Dummett to that pantheon; what could possibly go wrong?

A mini-injury crisis on the south coast results in a recall back to Bournemouth for youngsters **Dominic Sadi** (25 appearances, 2 goals) and **Dan Adu-Adjei** (17 appearances, 2 goals) in a promising start to their senior careers.

The big rumour is that Wigan, 12 months on from their last bid, have finally got their man and are about to sign big **Jon Mellish**. Another is that **Stephen Wearne** has agreed terms and will be announced early next week. Others being mentioned include **Barclay** off to Oldham, **Robinson** to Hartlepool, **Charters** to Queen of the South and both **Vela and McGeouch** paid off to make space in the bulging squad.

Jan 11th (Sat)

Black armbands and half-mast flags at Brunton Park with confirmation that **Mells** has signed a three-and-a-half-year contract with League One Wigan for an undisclosed fee. The Blues' longest-serving player with five-and-a-half years' service under his belt, joined United

from Gateshead in the summer of 2019 under Steven Pressley, and went on to make 246 appearances, scoring 32 goals. In the end, the temptation to continue the dialogue with Stockport County's fans was perhaps just too great.

At the other end of the run-through-a-brick-wall-to-play spectrum, it's a big "thanks but no thanks" from the Shrews as they package **JJ Kayode** up in cotton wool, stuff him in a jiffy bag and post back to parent club Rotherham.

Jan 13th (Mon)

As rumoured, 24-year-old MK Franchise midfielder **Stephen Wearne** is reunited with MW after signing on a two-and-a-half-year deal for an undisclosed fee. The attacking midfielder arrived in plastic cow land from naturally, Gateshead in early 2024 having also figured for Sunderland, Torquay United on loan and Grimsby Town.

Promising 19-year-old Newcastle centre back **Charlie McArthur** is strongly linked with a loan move to United. Described as someone very comfortable on the ball, McArthur came through the ranks at Kilmarnock, making his debut at just 16 and captaining Scotland at the U19 Euros. His availability for the Blues would be a long overdue apology for

previously sending Elias Sørensen.

Jan 14th (Tue)

CUFC YTH 1 BLACKPOOL YTH 2 - No match information given.

With five fellow midfielders already through the door this month, **Harrison Biggins** is allowed to return to parent club Shrewsbury Town after a fitful loan spell with United.

Sadi and **Adu-Adjei** make the Bournemouth bench for their league game against Chelsea.

Jan 16th (Thu)

Williamson opens up his American-owned Franchise burger App in the afternoon, clicks on Rewards and finds that he had won a **'Big Mac'** - see **13 Jan rumour**.

United's midfield enforcer **Harrison Neal** is another victim of 'Williamsonball', rejoining the Pete Wild fan club down the road at Fleetwood on an 18-month deal. Neal had his moments yet was never able to shake off the tag of being a poor technician while running like someone pulling a tyre. It could be a quick reunion with news that the trip to Fleetwood has quickly sold out with an army of 1,117 Blues going.

Jan 17th (Fri)

“What’s that coming over the hill, is it a gnarly, experienced lower league goalscorer, lower league goalscorer?” as the song might have gone. Nope. Manchester United’s 21-year-old **Joe Hugill** arrives on load fresh from an early season spell with Wigan Athletic where he scored five goals in 18 appearances. Hugill gives his preferred style as playing on the shoulder and running in behind; if only we had a young Chris Balderstone or an Ian Bishop still in midfield.

The region’s Record Sport rag reports that Motherwell are in the running to take **Luke Armstrong** off our hands.

Jan 18th (Sat)

HARROGATE YTH 0 CUFC YTH 1

No match information given.

GATESHEAD OLD BOYS XI (0) 0 BRADFORD CITY (0) 1

Paul Dummett witnesses his second car crash in the space of 48 hours. With home debuts for no fewer than 8 players, with 6 of those debuts in the starting lineup, it was perhaps understanding that not everything would suddenly click. Despite an even and generally promising first half with the lads applauded off the pitch, the sight of Graham Kavannagh celebrating his son’s

goal for the visitors in the Directors’ box didn’t exactly help the mood in a fragmented display after the break.

CUFC*: Breeze 6, McArthur 6, Lavelle 6, Barclay 5, Jones 5, Harris 6, Patching 6, **Whelan 6**, Embleton 5, Wearne 5, Hugill 6. Subs: Ellis 5, Fusire 5, Harper 5, Scott 5

After 6 goals in his 45 games for United, **Armstrong** is dumped from the match day squad as speculation about a move away grows.

One of The Mirror’s football journos claims that 22-year-old Birmingham City right-wing-back **Josh Williams** is poised to join United on a permanent deal. Described as pacy and aggressive, Williams spent 5 games on loan at Cheltenham last season and joined Gateshead on a three-month loan in November.

Former youngster **Ryan Carr** joins National League Ebbsfleet United on loan from Ipswich Town until the end of the season.

Jan 20th (Mon)

Football League World reports that both United and Bromley have had bids for Barnet’s Sierra Leone winger **Idris Kanu** rejected. The former Posh and Vale wide man joined the Bees in 2022,

notching 10 goals in 46 appearances across all competitions during that season.

Jan 21st (Tue)

Saturday's rumour rings true with the arrival of **Josh 'cheat code' Williams** on a two-and-a-half-year deal for an undisclosed fee. The fleet-footed right wing-back played ten times for the Blue Noses and spent the first half of last season on loan at Cheltenham Town, making nine appearances mostly from the bench. There then followed ten games for Gateshead on loan this season.

Jan 22nd (Wed)

Ex-skipper **Paul Huntington** extends his deal with Bradford City until the end of the season.

Jan 24th (Fri)

Luke Armstrong's loan move to Motherwell is finally confirmed, the Well praying they've signed the Harrogate version of the player. Armstrong remains under contract at United until the summer of 2027.

Jan 25th (Sat)

CUFC YTH (1) 1 BRADFORD CITY YTH (0) 0

A first-half strike from Freddie O'Donoghue secured a 1-0 victory for the young Blues.

FLEETWOOD TOWN (0) 1 CUFC (1) 2

The Blues survived a second half wobble caused by faffing about at the back to claim three precious points with Lavelle heading in a Fusire cross with five to go. Dummett had an interesting three-minute cameo before hamstringing knock ended his debut and possibly his season. Patching won the midfield battle in a strong display before tiring while Scott got his second spell off the mark by turning in Kadz's cross in the 19th minute.

CUFC*: Breeze 6, McArthur 7, Lavelle 7, Dummett n/a, Williams 7, Jones 6, Patching 7, Whelan 6, **Harris 8**, Scott 7, Hugill 6. Subs: Thomas 8, Fusire 7, Embleton 6

Jan 27th (Mon)

After weeks of speculation, the Cumbrians are boosted by securing man of the match magnet **Kadeem Harris** until the end of the season.

Taylor Charters goes out of the door in the search of first team football, the 23-year-old linking up with Peter Murphy's Queen of the South on loan until the end of the season. Academy prospect **Dan Hopper** extends his stay with Penrith for the rest of the campaign on a work experience deal.

United are tracking a mystery loan striker from higher up the ladder according to various sources.

Jan 28th (Tue)

NOTTS COUNTY (1) 1 CUFC (0) 0

The consensus was that the Blues deserved a point against high-flying County, several home fans commenting on United being one of the best teams to visit this season. As usual a lack of cutting edge and lady luck combined to play their part, Huggill showing some quality front-running and hitting the inside of the post.

CUFC*: Breeze 7, Hayden 5, Lavelle 6, McArthur 7, Williams 6, Jones 6, Fusire 5, **Whelan 7**, Embleton 5, Scott 5, Huggill 6. Subs: Thomas 6, Patching 6, Harris 6

Andy Dallas, who was supposedly heading to Morecambe until their transfer dealings had the plug pulled on them, is the latest incoming striker rumour.

Jan 29th (Wed)

Dummett's hamstring knock is described as significant and may require surgery while MW is looking to bring another striker in on a loan deal before the weekend.

Jan 30th (Thu)

Former midfield cog **Elliot Watt** signs for Scottish Premiership side St. Johnstone on loan until the end of the season after being out of the picture at Burton Albion, his summer move from Salford not working out.

Jan 31st (Fri)

Young Burnley and ex-Albion Rovers U21 forward **Joseph Bevan** joins on loan until the end of the season. Let's hope he's as good a finisher as his namesake, Michael.

Freddie O'Donoghue goes out to Carlisle City on a month-long work experience loan while **Jake Allan** is allowed to rejoin the Jameaters for the remainder of the campaign.

Dallas is scratched off the rumour list after joining the Shrimpers after all.

Feb 1st (Sat)

CARLISLE UTD (0) 1 SWINDON TOWN (1) 5

The dominant first 20 minutes and Huggill's fine goal late on were the only bright moments in a proper shoeing for the Cumbrians, not helped by the dismissal of Jones for two alleged dives, the first of which was a foul.

CUFC*: Breeze 4, Lavelle 4, Thomas 4, McArthur 4, Williams 3, Jones 4,

Whelan 4, Patching 3, Embleton 3, Harris 4, Huggill 6. Subs: Scott 4

This time it's **Luke Plange's** turn to take the plunge down the 'Well, linking up with Armstrong after moving on loan from Palace until the end of the season.

There's sad news with former second-tier star **Alan Shoulder** passing away at 71, the tricky winger/forward scoring 33 goals in 122 games for the Blues after his move from the Barcodes.

Feb 3rd (Mon)

Never believe everything you hear at a fans' forum. After 18 points from a potential 66, **Mikey Williamson's** tippy tappy ball will be no more with the club's corner flag announcement confirming his check-in into Hotel Du One.

The Daily Mail claim the Blues are weighing up an offer to **Steven Gerrard** to be their next head coach, although we could do with him getting his old boots down from the loft if he fancied a challenge. Others being linked include former Trotters' boss **Ian Evatt**, former Cobbler Jon Brady, ex-Wigan and Roth-erham boss **Leam Richardson** and former Preston North End chief **Ryan Lowe**. BetVictor add Mark Hughes at 33/1.

Let the deadline day mayhem commence! Forgotten man **Jack Robinson** is mutually consented out of the back door while **Owen Moxon** signs a three-and-a-half-year deal with Stockport County after moving for an undisclosed fee to Pompey, where he'll link up with former striker **Sam Cosgrove**, who joins on loan from Barnsley until the end of the season, and ex-loanee **Jack Diamond**. County allow another former striker, **Jack Stretton**, to leave by mutual consent after a recent career plagued by injury.

Fin Back won't be returning to Brunton Park for the third successive season, the 22-year-old right-back making a permanent move from Forest to promotion-chasing Wycombe Wanderers, where he's joined by the previously linked wide man **Adam Reach**.

Comedy villain **Harry McKirdy** - or hero in some eyes after his role in Simmo's return - is allowed to leave by Hibs in his search for game time, which is wrapped up the next day with Bromley. Two other former players men become free agents, **Offy Zanzala** and **Dean Bouzanis** moving on from National League club AFC Fylde and League One club Reading respectively.

Feb 4th (Tue)

Former Cobblers boss **Jon Brady** emerges as the new bookies' favourite for the Brunton Park hot seat. A disciple of direct football in a 4-2-3-1 formation, Aussie Brady took over their hot seat in 2021 following Mysterious Curle's sacking and helped gain promotion for them in May 2023, finishing a respectable 14th the following season.

Feb 5th (Wed)

After a month or so of footsie under the table, **Jack Robinson** agrees to link up again with **Gavin Skelton** and a host of other past-their-sell-by-date Blues (**Gary Madine, Adam Campbell** and **Tom Parkes**) with a move to Hartlepool United on a permanent deal.

Mark Hughes emerges as odds-on favourite with bookmakers to succeed MW with **Brady's** odds drifting from 2/5 to 3/1. **Stevie G** is still as low as 4/1 in some markets while **Ian Evatt** is now around 6/1.

Feb 6th (Thu)

Sparky is confirmed as the man to try and save United's league status, a job even the Mission Impossible film series scriptwriting team discarded as being too far-fetched. His managerial CV includes the Wales national team, Blackburn Rovers, Manchester City, Fulham, Queens Park Rangers, Stoke City, South-

ampton and helping the Blues into League One by taking off their best player in the PO semi-final while at Bradford City.

Former utility man **Tyler Burey** decides on a little Bosnian adventure as he signs for Igman Konjic, who sit in 10th of 12 clubs in their Premier League, until the end of the season.

Feb 7th (Fri)

Promising nipper **Sam Hetherington** is allowed to join National League North promotion chasing Darlington on an initial month-long loan.

Feb 8th (Sat)

GRIMSBY TOWN (0) 2 CUFC (1) 1

Not a great game and a worse result, the Blues hardly helped by a referee straight out of Billy Smart's Circus big top with two strong penalty shouts ignored. Lavelle had given United an excellent start, touching in Embleton's fine corner. Harris hit the inside of the post and add the shouts, it remained a slender, nervy 0-1 instead of a potential 3 or 4 goal drubbing handed out by Hughes and co. The Mariners' improved in the second half and Trevor Kettle's sprog couldn't wait to award them a sickening winning penalty near the end.

CUFC*: Breeze 6, Williams 5, Thomas 6,

Lavelle 6, McArthur 5, Patching 5, Whelan 5, Harris 6, **Embleton 7**, Wearne 5, Huggill 5. Subs: Robson 5, Bevan 6, Scott 5

Feb 10th (Mon)

62-year-old **Gary Liddle** finally hangs up his boots after making his 800th career appearance at the weekend for NPL Premier side Whitby Town, where he's the current gaffer.

22-year-old free agent **Matt Dennis** makes the number of signings a round dozen since the start of the year as the striker joins on a short-term deal following a spell out on the pasture training with the Blues. The former Arsenal youth player found himself unwanted by MK Franchise FC and after 11 goals across three seasons, was allowed out on loan to Rochdale in late October.

The injured **McGeouch** is cut from the squad list for the second half of the season.

Feb 11th (Tue)

NEWPORT COUNTY (0) 1 CUFC (0) 0

Nobody was quite sure how United managed to lose the match, by far the better team in every aspect apart from unfortunately the most important one, the hosts scoring from their only shot on target saying it all.

CUFC: Breeze 6, Williams 6, McArthur 5, **Lavelle 7**, Thomas 6, Patching 5, Whelan 6, Harris 6, Wearne 5, Embleton 6, Huggill 6. Subs: Scott 5, Bevan 6

Feb 13th (Thu)

36-year-old former quality loan defender **James Chester** calls time on his playing career after 18 years and over 500 games.

Feb 14th (Fri)

The newly installed goalkeeping coach revolving door under the main stand gets another spin with news that **Tom Weal** has quit to join Sunderland with 34-year-old former N*b End and Wigan Athletic academy coach **Jack Cudworth** replacing him on a short-term deal until the end of the season, his current gig being with Taiwan. Weal's four months still feels like one of the longer stints over the last few years. Cudworth retired from between the sticks ten years ago having journeyed around with Macclesfield in their League Two days, Chorley, Telford and Colwyn Bay. He was also in the away dugout at the home of the Gods when his Wigan side took on United early doors last season.

Feb 15th (Sat)

HUDDERSFIELD YTH 0 CUFC YTH 3

No match information given.

CUFC (0) 0 COLCHESTER UTD (0) 0

A better game than the scoreline suggests, both keepers earning deserved plaudits in the 'CUFC Derby' with Breeze's second half save from Lyle Taylor borderline jaw-dropping. United's best chances fell to Wearne and Embleton but on both occasions, Macey was equally outstanding. The visitors soon showed why they had arrived on a 17-game unbeaten run, Sparky's plan B providing a tentative foothold as the Blues went to 3 at the back when in possession.

CUFC*: **Breeze 8**, Williams 5, McArthur 5, Lavelle 7, Thomas 7, Patching 6, Whelan 7, Harris 7, Wearne 6, Embleton 6, Hugill 5 Subs: Harper 6, Hayden 6, Robson 6, Bevan 6, Dennis 6

Feb 17th (Mon)

The MW-era coaching exodus continues with Mr xG's no.2 (literally) **Ian Watson** quitting United; his next post almost certainly lined up.

Former Ipswich Town, Crystal Palace, Cardiff City and Sunderland striker **Connor Wickham**, who's recently been keeping fit scoring goals for fun with Watford's Under 21 team, is on the club's radar according to rumours.

Feb 18th (Tue)

Hughes runs the rule over the squad in an in-house training game set up to help put some minutes in the legs of **Davies** and **Guy**, who are both returning from injury. Scott and Hugill found the net in the bounce game.

Ex-gaffer **Keith Millen's** 3-month stint as the Croydon Athletic head honcho is over as he steps down (i.e. is pushed down the stairs).

Feb 20th (Thu)

Having limped off against Colchester, a scan reveals that **Josh Williams'** hamstring twang will probably detain him in the oft occupied Brunton Park M.A.S.H. unit for the remainder of the season. Hughes pours cold water on the Wickham rumour.

Feb 21st (Fri)

Palace allow former loan defender **Seán Grehan** to rejoin Bohemians on loan while **Sam Fishburn's** struggling career takes him to Northern Premier League East Division club Ashington on a month's loan from Scunthorpe United.

Omari Patrick lifts the lid on his departure at the end of 2022/3 on 'The Last Ditch' podcast, saying he was keen to stay and there was friction between himself and Simmo.

Popular cult hero **Jamie Devitt** steps up from his academy role to the first-team scene, joining the main coaching team under Hughes.

Feb 22nd (Sat)

DONCASTER ROV YTH (0) 1 CUFC YTH (0) 0

A game in a lifetime for the hosts' full back, setting up the winner and then making three match-winning saves against United after having to spend the final half-hour between the sticks.

CUFC (0) GILLINGHAM (0)

A close as you can get to two bald men fighting over a comb with two more dropped points against the out-of-form men of Kent. On a positive note, creating chances and not taking them is better than the previous of not creating anything at all and it was good to see Guy and Davies making an earlier-than-expected return to the starting XI.

CUFC*: Breeze 6, Davies 6, Harper 6, Lavelle 7, Thomas 7, Guy 6, Whelan 6, Embleton 5, **Harris 7**, Bevan 5, Dennis 5.
Subs: Ellis 6, Patching 6, Wearne 6, Scott 6, Hugill 5

Feb 24th (Mon)

Mark Birch's player library loan out right-back **Trent Chapman** and defender

Josh O'Brien to Carlisle City along with defender **Mason Fleming** to Penrith on work experience deals until the end of the season, joining Freddie O'Donoghue and Dan Hopper already in situ at the two clubs.

2009/10 season veteran **Tom Aldred** helps Mohun Bagan Super Giant claim the Indian Super League title in his debut season.

Feb 25th (Tue)

Ex-Blues lining up to have a field day in a National League match-up next season are starting to form an orderly queue, the latest being **Offy Zanzala** as he joins high-flying National League South side Torquay United.

Feb 27th (Thu)

BARROW (0) 0 CUFC (1) 1

At least one side are generously trying to keep United in the league, the sub boys handing out almost a quarter of the Blues' points total thanks to a clinical finish from Dennis. There was nothing too fancy in an often backs-to-the-wall performance that relied on XL Breeze's MoM keeping, but at least it gave the proper Cumbrians a sniff of staying up.

CUFC*: Breeze 7, Davies 7, Harper 6, Thomas 7, Lavelle 7, Guy 7, Whelan 6,



Victory at Barrow provided some encouragement for the players and the fans



Embleton 6, Harris 6, Scott 7, Dennis 7.

Subs: Patching 6, Vela 6

Head of performance **Toby Frost** is confirmed as no longer with United.

Feb 28th (Fri)

Young left-back **Fitzpatrick** returns to the Jameaters Reds on loan until the end of the season.

Ex-Blue **Jack Stretton** is thrown a rescue rope from non-league Woking, signing for Burton Albion on a deal until the end of the season.

Mar 3rd (Mon)

Former coach **Ian 'couldn't wait to leave' Watson** returns to managerless MK Dons.

Mar 4th (Tue)

CUFC (1) 1 WALSALL (1) 1

A spirited point against the leaders, no more typified by Davies' chase and tackle to prevent a clear shot on goal as United went toe-to-toe. Hayden rolled back the (injured) years with a fine, headed equaliser after a stuttering start had again coughed up an early lead. The Blues had a few nervous moments before a strong finish to the game saw them agonizingly see just miss out on the winner after a barrage of blocked shots.

CUFC*: Breeze 7, Davies 7, **Hayden 7**, Thomas 6, Lavelle 7, Guy 7, Whelan 6, Embleton 6, Harris 6, Scott 6, Dennis 6.

Subs: Vela 6, Jones 6

An update on United's new Sheepmount training ground confirms plans to have three training pitches ready for use this summer plus further meetings with Cumberland Council to progress the 99-year lease to enable more significant investment to be made.

Mar 8th (Sat)

CUFC YTH (0) 0 LINCOLN CITY YTH (1) 1

United again disadvantaged by having so many players out on loan but nevertheless always in the game against a useful Imps side.

HARROGATE (0) 1 CUFC (0) 0

Horrible game, horrible result, bogey side Gate's long-ball, anti-football deserving no reward but taking all the points with only seconds left after Vela deflected in a shot from the edge of the box that was going well wide. Neither keeper was properly tested with United's best chances spurned by Lavelle and Thomas.

CUFC*: Breeze 6, Hayden 6, **Lavelle 6**, Thomas 5, Davies 6, Harper 5, Guy 4, Whelan 4, Embleton 4, Harris 4, Scott 4.



Another bad day in Harrogate. Must be something in the water.

Subs: Hugill 5, Vela 5

After eight appearances for Donny, ex-Blue **Josh Emmanuel** joins National League FC Halifax Town.

Mar 12th (Wed)

Remember the name, 14-year-old goalkeeper **Marley Irving** from Cleator Moor leaves Carlisle to sign for Manchester United's academy having been with the Blues since the U8s.

Mar 15th (Sat)

MANSFIELD YTH (0) 2 CUFC YTH (0) 0 – no game details given

CUFC (0) 1 AFC WIMBLEDON (1) 2

A passive, disjointed display with the Wombles barely breaking sweat, the fat lady certainly clearing her throat on this evidence. Harris' move to the right wing at least started to cause the occasional problem, his fine cross finally providing the consolation of a home goal to cheer through Dennis' well-directed header.

CUFC*: Breeze 5, Davies 5, Harper 4, Lavelle 5, Thomas 5, Guy 4, Vela 4, Jones 4, **Harris 6**, Bevan 5, Dennis 5.
Subs: Whelan 5, Scott 6, Wearne 5

Mar 17th (Mon)

Sam Hetherington's loan spell with Darlo is extended until the end of the sea-

son.

Mar 18th (Tue)

CUFC YTH (1) 1 MONKEY HANGERS YTH (0) 1

A frustrating afternoon for the young Blues, Lowes' deflected effort from the edge of the box gave the lead, which would have been extended but for the oppo keeper pulling off three excellent saves before the break. Pool then equalised from a corner at the back stick at the start of the second half with neither team able to find a winner.

Mar 20th (Thu)

On loan defender **Charlie McArthur** is drafted into the Scotland Under-21 squad for their games against the Republic of Ireland and Iceland while **Simmo**, the 'Calypso Cumbrian', joins Steve McClaren's Jamaica as assistant coach.

Former midfielder **Antony Sweeney** steps up as interim assistant boss at Crawley Town following their latest managerial axing.

Mar 22nd (Sat)

CUFC YTH (1) 1 MORECAMBE YTH (0) 2

Mason gave the Blues an early lead and then had a goal ruled out for offside just after the break. Shrimps volleyed an equaliser with twenty left and five

minutes later, the same player completed a brace with a header. Although reduced to 10 men going into stoppage time, they held out as the young Blues struggled to find an equaliser.

CUFC (1) 2 BROMLEY (1) 1

Perhaps too little too late but if United end up going down, a bit of upward momentum won't do any harm thanks to this belting performance. The game could easily have finished 7-4 on the good chances alone. If putting one over Webster and pantomime villain McKirdy was sweet, finally winning at Brunton Park at a Saturday 3pm KO was even sweeter after an incredible 566 days of waiting. Wearne shimmied away from his marker to score from the edge of the box for the first, Harris unluckily hitting the inside of the post when 2-0 looked on the cards. The Blues responded well to the little wazock's equaliser, Jones having his best game in a blue shirt almost scoring both before and after the break and Harris hitting a penalty against the post after Webster handled. Whelan's deflected winner then lifted off the roof of the Warwick with the Cumbrians surviving a couple of customary late scares, the usually prolific Cheek providing the favour.

CUFC*: Breeze 6, Davies 7, Harper 7, Lavelle 7, Thomas 6, Vela 7, Whelan 7,

Jones 6, Harris 7, **Wearne 7**, Dennis 7.
Subs: Guy 6

Mar 24th (Mon)

Bank of **Branthwaite** captains England Under-21s to a fine 4-2 victory against Portugal.

Mar 25th (Tue)

CUFC (2) 2 MK FRANCHISE (2) 2

The wait for back-to-back wins goes on after an entertaining encounter, particularly in the first half with the Blues not allowing the tippy-tappers to settle. Dennis had equalised after good work out right from Davies and then after falling behind again after a moment United's provider would wish to forget, Harris made it all square as he smelted a shot past the keeper on the angle.

United: Breeze 6, Davies 6, Harper 6, Thomas 6, Lavelle 7, Whelan 6, Vela 6, Jones 6, Harris 7, Wearne 6, **Dennis 7**.

Mar 27th (Thu)

Midfield misfit Ethan Robson joins National League outpost Gateshead on loan until the end of the season.

Mar 28th (Fri)

Academy scholars **Sam Hetherington, Dan Hopper, Freddie O'Donoghue**, and **Thomas Randall** are all offered contract extensions to remain at Brunton Park

**A better performance
against MK Dons but
still only a point at**



next season with a delayed decision on **Jake Allan, Trent Chapman, Aran Fitzpatrick, Mason Fleming, James Murray, Will Nicholson, Josh O'Brien, and Bobby Skinner** are the unlucky ones who'll be released on completion of their scholarship.

Mar 29th (Sat)

DONCASTER ROVERS (1) 3 CUFC (0) 0

A must win game after Tranmere's win the previous night turned into a lesson in taking chances and putting lesser sides to the sword. In fairness, United were hanging on in the game until M-o-M Gibson was given the freedom of the park to score his new side's second, Harris being denied by two decent saves

in the first period and then Bevan's daisy cutter agonizingly a couple of yards the wrong side of the far post early in the second half. The way the Cumbrians petered out in the last half hour was concerning, little aptitude or fight left when a quick response might have left the promotion-chasing hosts nervous.

CUFC: Breeze 5, Davies 4, Harper 5, Thomas 5, Lavelle 5, Vela 4, Whelan 4, Harris 6, Bevan 5, Wearne 4, Dennis 4.
Subs: Embleton 4, Kelly 4, Fusire 4

Mike Kilner

*Player ratings (star man in bold) used with kind permission from [Jon Colman @News & Star](#) - see link for subscription



CUSG PREDICTION COMPETITION

Player ratings from whoscored.com

Pos	Name	Pts	Pos	Name	Pts
1	John Kukuc B	36	28	Bryan Hemingway A	21
2	Ken Hullock A	34	29	Harold Bowron B	20
3	John Kukuc A	33	30	Rick Wilkes A	19
4	Mike Kilner A	32	31	Robert Calvert B	19
5	Mark Temple	31	32	David Cornwell	18
6	Richard Coughlan	31	33	Rick Wilkes B	18
7	Ken Hullock B	31	34	Robert Calvert A	18
8	Martin Coughlan	31	35	Bryan Hemingway B	18
9	Marley Vamadevan	29	36	Neil Nixon B	17
10	Pete Edwards	28	37	Mike Temple	17
11	Steve Tyson	27	38	Sandro Scapin	17
12	Iain Davidson B	27	39	Chris Holmes B	17
13	Lee Cragg	26	40	Ian Kellitt	16
14	Alex Tyson	26	41	Kev McGeorge A	16
15	Andrew Fullalove	26	42	Martin Thomas	16
16	Harold Bowron A	25	43	Chris Tembey A	15
17	David McLean B	24	44	Mark Scott B	15
18	Lee Rawcliffe	24	45	Martin Broad B	15
19	Neil Nixon A	24	46	Martin Broad A	15
20	David McLean A	23	47	Chris Holmes A	14
21	Mike Kilner B	23	48	Kev McGeorge B	14
22	Simon Clarkson A	22	49	Ruth Vamadevan	13
23	Simon Clarkson B	22	50	Hannah Tyson	12
24	Dave Brown A	22	51	Martin Lundie	12
25	Dan Coughlan	22	52	Nick Storey	6
26	Mark Scott A	21	53	Chris Tembey LD	3
27	Iain Davidson A	21	54	Dave Brown B	0

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We have regular social events in central London, often at the Civil Service Club, off Whitehall.

Virtual Hit the Bar! carries news of all forthcoming events.

Look out for details of matches, meeting places and other events in Virtual HTB! or visit

ALAN ASHMAN brought his whole playing staff, all 19 of them, down from Carlisle to witness this very wonderful occasion and said: "Breathe it in lads, its an historic moment." As a footballing occasion it was all truly wonderful for we long-standing Carlisle supporters.

They amazed Chelsea, and no doubt themselves, with a goal in the first minute. Balderstone floated in a free kick which man mountain Droy missed, Houseman watched, and Green, Carlisle's gangling captain, trundled in at the second attempt.

Their second goal came ten minutes before half-time when O'Neil cheekily lobbed over Bonetti. In between, it has to be admitted through gritted teeth, Chelsea put on most of the pressure, especially in the first half, and had some very near misses. Having said that, very quickly, Carlisle could have scored twice in the last 10 minutes when they turned on some exhibition stuff.

Carlisle crept into the First Division practically unnoticed—except by those clever clogs who yesterday morning were tipping them as the team most likely to go down. "Nobody tipped us to come up last season," said Mr Ashman afterwards. "I see that all the big fish we left behind are again being tipped to come up. Everybody could be wrong once more."

They have no stars, no reserves, no loot, no crowd (an average of 8,000 is a huddle, not a crowd) and, until yesterday, none of the Chelsea swanks would have recognised any Carlisle player if he'd met him

Treat for the lads

Chelsea	0
Carlisle United	2

by Hunter Davies

in his porridge (an old Border saying). What Carlisle have is a team style. It is to be hoped the television people give them some space to be seen—though BBC's Grandstand started badly yesterday lunchtime by naming Frank Clarke as Carlisle's star to watch and putting up a photograph of Frank Clark of Newcastle United.

Carlisle confounded Chelsea by building up from the back, never panicking, and never belting it—a collective calmness exemplified by Chris Balterstone, the man of the match. He played in hte back four last season, but yesterday moved up to midfield, making way for new signing Parker from Coventry.

John Gorman, Carlisle's nearest thing to a star, did many star things, such as galloping overlaps and interchanging with Balderstone, which were a joy to watch. Hughie McIlmoyle, back with Carlisle for the third time, linked well with Frank Clarke—who went off

injured in the second half—but tired towards the end.

Carlisle's attack can be a bit thin at times and with injuries it could be in real trouble by the end of the season. But their midfield and their back four youngsters are going to swallow some bigger and better sh than Chelsea could produce yesterday.

Chelsea have got £200,000 players and a brave new neo-brutal £2m shland, while Carlisle have got sheep and the excitement of £250 from this season's sponsored matches. Carlisle made Hay, while their sun was shining, look a very moderate player and in the second half he disappeared. Houseman has been brought back so far, from winger to fullback, that next week he'll probably be goalie.

Chelsea these days play a physical game, bulldozing their way into the box and banging away, which is typical of so many English teams I don't want to watch. Carlisle with far less individual skills, played to their talent as a unit and produced pure football. They have arrived triumphantly in the First Division, having crept quietly all the way from the Fourth. If they can do it there is hope for everyone.

Carlisle is good for football. Some good football, as we shall see this season, will come from Carlisle. End of commercial.

Weather: sunny. **Pitch:** firm.
Goals: Green (1min), 0-1; O'Neill (76min), 0-2.
Chelsea (4-3-3): Bonetti; Locke, Houseman, Hollins, Droy; Harris, Kember, Hay; Garland (sub. Cooke, 75min), Garner, Sissons.
Carlisle United (4-3-3): Ross; Carr, Gorman, O'Neill, Green; Parker, Train, Balderstone; McIlmoyle, Clark (sub. Martin 60min), Laidlaw.

The copy deadline for HTB! 337 will be notified in your weekly VHTB!

Matchday picture credits to Richard Parkes, Mark Fuller and the CUFC media team

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