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HARROW RECORD

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM HARROW SCHOOL

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OLD HARROVIANS CLAIM ARTHURIAN LEAGUE CHAMPIONSHIP FOR ONLY 2ND TIME IN THEIR HISTORY

The Old Harrovian footballers once again returned from their summer holidays with the Holy Grail of the Arthurian League Championship appearing as elusive as ever. Despite an improved season 2002/3, the team still only managed to finish sixth out of the ten teams, their highest place in the Premier Division so far.

There were no major changes to the side on the pitch: the introduction of centre-back Rowley Higgs (last seen wearing dreadlocks) added some competition for places at the back, but otherwise the squad remained intact.

Off the pitch however, things were very different. The arrival of Roman Abramovich at Chelsea impacted on the Arthurian League when the Russian magnate decided to buy up and expand the sports fields in Cobham, where several sides (including Harrow) had been based for many years, to turn the land into Chelsea's new state-of-the-art training facility. This led to a mad scramble to find suitable new venues for matches, but thanks to the excellent co-operation of the School, the OHs were found a new home down at the far end of the Phil pitches, where both the 1st and 2nd XI played all their home matches for the season.

Preparation of the new playing surface at the School would not be completed until mid-October however and the team were therefore forced to play their first four games away from home. This immediately put the side on the back foot.

Lancing away was played on a bumpy dust-bowl of a pitch and with neither side being able to create any chance of note, a 0-0 draw looked inevitable. That was until a minute from time, when a late challenge on James Harper in the Harrow goal went unpunished and the ball trickled into an empty net. It was a cruel way to begin the

season and things didn't improve quickly.

Forest away followed, perhaps the hardest fixture in any season and, despite a superb effort, the team again went down by a single goal, conceding two late strikes in the final ten minutes to lose 2-1. No points from the first two games and the side were rooted to the foot of the table.

A 3-3 draw at Highgate was rescued thanks to a late strike from Harry Hoffen, but the Harrovians had again thrown away a lead and morale was low. A thumping 5-1 victory over Shrewsbury partially restored confidence, but the Salopians were a desperately poor side and destined to struggle throughout the season.

The first meeting of the season with arch rivals Eton coincided with the opening game to be played on Harrow soil. With both teams having struggled in the first few weeks of the season, a good result was a must. Sadly, Harrow, suffering from injuries and a number of absentees, laboured throughout and scraped a 2-2 draw thanks to a lucky free-kick from Paul Molloy, who found the top corner of the net from 45 yards out when attempting a cross.

Defeat in the Arthur Dunn Cup then followed at Shrewsbury: a vastly depleted Harrow side made the long journey north to face a team made up almost entirely of semi-professional players and the 2-0 scoreline was no disgrace. But overall the side was struggling: out of the Cup and having scraped together only four points from the first five league games, an upturn in fortunes was badly needed.

The next four games, all at home, duly provided it in the form of four excellent wins. Westminster were dispatched 5-2, Cholmleians (fielding an outfield player in goal) conceded seven, and Brentwood were then beaten 2-1 in a tight contest. The most

remarkable win was against Shrewsbury however, as Harrow lined up with no fewer than seven first team regulars missing. Despite this notable handicap, another excellent performance was produced and the side rallied from a goal down, thanks in no small part to a superb display from left-winger Piers Bourke and a tremendous finish for the second goal from Rupert Hoffen.

With momentum building and the team moving into mid-table, the return fixture away at Eton five days before Christmas was crucial. Sadly, the team, with all the 'galacticos' once again available, chose to have a collective off-day and produced its worst display of the season in a 2-0 defeat. Much of the hard work of the previous month had been undone and the title now appeared to be a long shot.

The Christmas break, as so often is the case, seemed to fire Harrovian spirits and two thumping wins in January once again put the side back into title contention: Bradfield were dismissed 7-3 at home, although the gulf between the sides was far wider, and, in one of the performances of the season, Brentwood were hit for six on their own ground – the comment from one of the Brentwoods as the teams went off at half-time that 'This lot are rubbish – how can they be above us in the table?' could have been a contributing factor. Whatever the reason, the team now genuinely believed it was in with a chance.

With Lancing, Charterhouse and Forest the remaining contenders for the League, the visit of Lancing to the Hill was the biggest game of the season so far. Harrow had to win to maintain their hopes, for Lancing anything but defeat was a good result. With Harrow playing superbly in the first half, a 2-0 lead was gained and things looked rosy. Despite conceding a goal ten minutes into the second



BUSY SCHEDULE ALSO FOR 2ND XI AND VETS XI

There was disappointment for the 2nd XI sadly, as Ed Thorn's energetic leadership of the team ultimately ended in relegation from Division Four. Although this was an unfortunate conclusion to the season, it was highly encouraging to see a number of new faces appear for the side and hopefully a core group of players can now be established to lead the team back to success next season.

The Veterans continued to fulfil a large number of fixtures at the Bank of England

Ground in Roehampton, although success in the two Vets cups once again proved vaguely elusive.

Another fine Easter Tour was organised by Piers Bourke, this time to Amsterdam. The exclusive residence of the Hans Brinker Youth Hostel provided a luxurious base from which the party of 15, including schoolboys Freddy Brunt and Alex Stafford, could explore the cosmopolitan offerings of the city. There were also two games of football played, both of which were won in style.

As the club continues to go from strength to strength, the need for fresh blood is stronger than ever. Any Harrovians, past or present, who would like to play friendly but competitive football on Tuesday evenings or at weekends should get in touch with club secretary Paul Molloy – contact details, plus all other club information, including tour photos, match reports and training times are available at www.ohafc.com

half, Harrow held firm and the visitors looked to have run out of ideas with time almost up. Then disaster: Lancing scored after a long goal kick wasn't properly cleared and the scores were level at 2-2 with only injury time remaining.

Harrow immediately charged upfield and the ball arrived at the feet of the mercurial Bourke: beating his man, he chipped the 'keeper, then watched as the ball rolled agonisingly towards an empty goal. A last-ditch clearance from the Lancing left-back appeared to have saved the visitor's skin as the referee's whistle blew, apparently for full-time.

To the amazement of everyone present including, it must be said, the Harrow team

and its supporters, the referee actually awarded a goal and after the ensuing chaos, the game ended with a 3-2 win for Harrow.

With fortune undoubtedly smiling on the team, a sense of destiny prevailed and the team suddenly looked not only capable of winning the league, but confident that they would do so: Westminster were beaten 1-0 away on a shocking pitch thanks to a superb strike from Harry Hoffen and an excellent goalkeeping display from James Harper, Bradfield were destroyed 8-2 away thanks to a hat-trick from skipper Quentin Baker and some stunning football and Forest, despite going ahead with only a minute left, were held 4-4 on the Hill thanks to David Lederman curling in a free-kick with the last kick of the game.

With a month-long break until the final game, the team waited for other results to roll in. By the last Saturday in March their closest rivals had all thrown away enough points for Harrow to be crowned champions of the Arthurian League, a tremendous achievement.

The final game against Charterhouse on the Hill proved to be a fitting send-off. Suffering from a celebratory hangover, the team conceded two soft goals in the first five minutes to the dismay of the numerous supporters who had come to cheer the side on. But in true Harrovian fashion, a spectacular display of attacking football then followed and goals from Rupert Hoffen, Lederman (2) and Baker (2) secured a comprehensive 5-2 victory.

The team ended the season with a record of played 18, won 12, drawn 3, lost 3; scoring 63 goals in the process, a remarkable feat, especially considering the return of one point from the first three matches. The football played won respect from all opposition and it was particularly gratifying to receive praise from a number of the referees for the manner and style with which the team played. The support received by the team was also fantastic with a number of people journeying to watch the team on a regular basis – many thanks are due to them. FRED WOOLLEY

Below: Old Harrovians in action in the Arthurian League



THE 1ST XI CHAMPIONSHIP SQUAD

Goalkeepers: James Harper (*Moretons 1990*³), Robert Worthy (*The Grove 1968*¹), John Frederick (*The Head Master's 1979*³)

Defenders: Tim Dalton (*Newlands 1992*³), Obi Umenyilora (*The Grove 1990*³), Nick Warner (*The Head Master's 1984*³), Charlie Tweddle (*Elmfield 1991*³), Rowley Higgs (*The Grove 1993*³), Ed Arghabant (*Newlands 1997*³), Andy Butler (*The Knoll 1981*³)

Midfielders: Quentin Baker (*Moretons 1989*³) (capt), Paul Molloy (*The Park 1991*³), David Lederman (*Newlands 1988*³), Piers Bourke (*The Grove 1992*³), John Wyn-Evans (*The Head Master's 1975*¹), Ed Thorn (*Druries 1982*¹)

Strikers: Harry Hoffen (*Rendalls 1990*³), Rupert Hoffen (*Rendalls 1988*³), Jamie Waugh (*The Park 1987*³)