

WINGATE & FINCHLEY

MATCHDAY | LEWES FC

SAT 15 NOV 2025 | 15.03 | MAURICE REBAK STADIUM

ISTHMIAN PREMIER DIVISION



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Hello and welcome to the Maurice Rebak Stadium! We hope that everyone associated with the club, the match officials and the staff, as well as the players and officials of Lewes enjoy their stay in N12 this afternoon.

Both matches between these sides finished in draws last season, with Lewes mounting a late fightback from 2-0 down at Summers Lane in December last year, and the Blues returning from the Dripping Pan with a point and a clean sheet in April.

Meanwhile, The Blues have a strong recent record against today's opponents, unbeaten in the last four meetings between the sides and have lost just one of the previous 11 meetings against the Rooks.

Today's match kicks off at the unusual time of 15.03 in aid of the national league's 3UP Campaign, with the organisation pushing for a three-up, three-down system between the National League and League Two. As a result, matches across the non-league pyramid will kick off three minutes after the conventional time.

On the topic of Threes - it was a trio of goals that saw the Blues brush aside Dulwich Hamlet on Tuesday Night, Left-Back-turned-striker Loic Hernandez bagging a brace, including an unstoppable bullet header into the top corner to open the scoring. Three points away from home once again for Ahmet Rifat's side, who seem to be making a habit of it!





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FOOTBALL
LEAGUE



Respect

LEAGUE RESPECT STATEMENT

“THE ISTHMIAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE STRONGLY SUPPORTS THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION’S STATEMENT THAT THERE SHOULD BE A ZERO-TOLERANCE APPROACH AGAINST ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION. ANY INAPPROPRIATE CONDUCT TOWARD OTHERS, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO THAT BASED ON AN INDIVIDUAL’S SEX, RACE, COLOUR, WEIGHT, SIZE, RELIGION AND BELIEF, NATIONAL ORIGIN, AGE, MARITAL OR DOMESTIC-PARTNERSHIP STATUS, DISABILITY, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, OR GENDER IDENTITY OR EXPRESSION, WILL NOT BE TOLERATED AND WILL BE REPORTED TO THE RELEVANT AUTHORITIES.

THE ISTHMIAN LEAGUE AND OUR MEMBER CLUBS ARE COMMITTED TO PROMOTING EQUITY AND EQUALITY BY TREATING ALL PEOPLE FAIRLY AND WITH RESPECT, BY RECOGNISING THAT INEQUALITIES MAY EXIST, BY TAKING STEPS TO ADDRESS THEM AND PROVIDING ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITIES.”

A VIEW FROM AFAR – PETER BROWN

THIS SEASON'S VIEWS FROM AFAR, BEGIN WITH THREE VERY LOOSELY CONNECTED STATEMENTS, TWO OF WHICH ARE TRUE AND ONE MADE UP; BUT WHICH ONE? THE ANSWER'S AT THE BOTTOM OF THE ARTICLE.

- DURING THE CRIMEAN WAR, LEWES HOUSED 300 FINNS CAPTURED AS PRISONERS OF WAR
- FINLAND HAS OVER 180,000 LAKES
- EVERTON'S NEW GROUND HAS DISPLACED BOLTON WANDERERS AS THE CLOSEST LEAGUE GROUND TO THE RIVER MERSEY

AND SO WE RETURN. IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME, FOR REASONS THAT WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN.

HOW GOOD IT WILL BE TO BE BACK AT THE MAURICE REBAK FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE EARLY SEPTEMBER. THERE WILL BE A NEW SEASON FEEL ABOUT THE PLACE, THE GRASS WILL HAVE BEEN CUT, THE VIEWS WILL STILL EXTEND ACROSS TO ALEXANDRA PALACE AND SUMMERS LANE WILL ONCE MORE BE HEAVING WITH EXPECTATION.

BUT I DIGRESS. SO SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE.

WHICH BRINGS ME TO MY POINT. SOME THINGS APPEAR TO HAVE NEVER CHANGED, ALTHOUGH IN FACT THEY ARE JUST COMING AROUND AGAIN. OUR VISITORS TODAY, FOR EXAMPLE, ARE MANAGED BY THE SAME MAN WHO WAS IN CHARGE WHEN THEY VISITED FOR THE FIXTURE LAST SEASON. CRAIG NELSON, OR PITTS, AS HE IS KNOWN, WAS IN THE DUGOUT THAT AFTERNOON AND WILL BE AGAIN, BUT IN THE MEANTIME SPENT A SHORT WHILE IN CHARGE OF NATIONAL LEAGUE SOUTH TONBRIDGE ANGELS BEFORE RETURNING TO THE DRIPPING PAN A FEW WEEKS AGO.

PERHAPS MOST SURPRISINGLY, AND I AM INDEBTED TO MY OLD FRIEND ADRIAN, WHO HAS BEEN KNOWN TO GRACE OUR TERRACES – WELL, HE DID ONCE, SLIGHTLY UNDER DURESS – FOR THIS RATHER EYEBROW RAISING FACT.

CAST YOUR MIND BACK, IF YOU CAN, TO THE YEAR 2002; FOR SOME OF MY POTENTIAL READERS, THIS WILL APPEAR TO BE ANCIENT HISTORY AND EYES WILL BEGIN TO GLAZE OVER AS YOU TRY TO POSITION THE YEAR ALONGSIDE SUCH EVENTS AS THE GENERAL STRIKE, THE FOUNDING OF THE NHS AND THE BATTLE OF AGINCOURT. IN FACT AT THAT TIME, TONY BLAIR WAS PRIME MINISTER, GEORGE W BUSH WAS US PRESIDENT, ENGLAND WERE KNOCKED OUT BY BRAZIL IN THE WORLD CUP QUARTER FINALS AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, WINGATE AND FINCHLEY WERE PROMOTED FROM THE ISTHMIAN LEAGUE DIVISION 3, HAVING FINISHED 7TH – PROBABLY BEST NOT TO ASK.

A VIEW FROM AFAR – PETER BROWN

LEWES THAT YEAR REACHED THE FIRST ROUND OF THE FA CUP AND WERE DRAWN AT HOME TO THE MIGHTY STOKE CITY, WHO WERE THRILLED AT THE PROSPECT OF THE TEAM COACH WENDING ITS WAY THROUGH THE STREETS OF THE TOWN AND BRINGING A TOUCH OF LUXURY AND GLAMOUR TO EAST SUSSEX. SADLY, THEY WERE TO BE DEPRIVED OF THE PLEASURE OF A VISIT TO THE SOUTH DOWNS AS THE MATCH WAS SWITCHED TO THE FAR MORE BEAUTIFUL AND ATTRACTIVE POTTERIES.

ANYWAY, THE MANAGER OF EVERTON IN 2002 WAS DAVID MOYES, THE MANAGER OF CHELTENHAM TOWN, AS YOU WILL ALL REMEMBER WAS STEVE COTTERILL AND OF CELTIC IT WAS MARTIN O'NEILL. OBVIOUSLY, WITH THE PASSAGE OF YEARS THAT HAVE PASSED SINCE THEN MUCH HAS CHANGED IN THE WORLD. YET WHO ARE THE MANAGERS OF THOSE THREE CLUBS? WELL, THEY ARE THREE CHARACTERS CALLED DAVID MOYES, STEVE COTTERILL AND MARTIN O'NEILL!

WHICH STATEMENT IS UNTRUE? IT'S THE THIRD ONE, STOCKPORT COUNTY WERE PREVIOUSLY THE CLOSEST TO THE MERSEY.



IN PICTURES – DARTFORD (AWAY)



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Wingate & Finchley

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Isthmian League – Premier Division

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19:45



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WINGATE & FINCHLEY – CLUB HISTORY

WINGATE AND FINCHLEY FOOTBALL CLUB CAN TRACE ITS ROOTS BACK TO THE FORMATION OF FINCHLEY FOOTBALL CLUB IN 1874 MAKING IT ONE OF THE OLDEST CLUBS IN THE COUNTRY. FOUNDED BY PA JACKSON, WHO ALSO WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN THE CREATION OF THE CORINTHIANS, THE LONDON FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION AS WELL AS LATER SERVING AS SECRETARY OF THE FA, FINCHLEY BECAME FOUNDER MEMBERS OF THE ATHENIAN LEAGUE IN 1912 AFTER SPELLS IN THE LONDON LEAGUE AND NORTH LONDON LEAGUE. THEY FINISHED FOURTH IN THE MAIDEN SEASON, HIGHER THAN SUCH LUMINARIES AS GRAYS ATHLETIC, CHELMSFORD CITY AND ENFIELD.

HOWEVER THEIR STAY WAS CUT SHORT DUE TO THE ONSET OF WORLD WAR ONE AND THEY WOULD ONLY RETURN FOR A LONE SEASON IN 1929 BEFORE RETURNING TO THE LONDON LEAGUE AND FORGING SUCCESS. THE CLUB'S FIRST PIECE OF SILVERWARE WAS WON DURING THE 1934-1935 SEASON WHEN THE LEAGUE CUP WAS CAPTURED, WITH THE TASTE OF ACHIEVEMENT FORMING FINCHLEY WENT ON TO WIN THE LONDON LEAGUE IN 1936-1937 BEFORE WORLD WAR TWO SCUPPERED THEIR WINNING STREAK.

IT WAS IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE CONFLICT THAT SAW MAJOR HARRY SADOW, FRANK DAVIS, GEORGE HYAMS AND ASHER REBAK FORM A JEWISH FOOTBALL CLUB BELIEVING THE FIELD OF PLAY WAS A GROUND OF BATTLING THE IGNORANCE OF ANTI-SEMITISM. SO IN 1946 WINGATE FOOTBALL CLUB BEGAN LIFE IN THE MIDDLESEX SENIOR LEAGUE. THE CLUB WAS NAMED AFTER GENERAL ORDE C. WINGATE WHO DESPITE NOT BEING JEWISH HIMSELF OVERSAW THE CREATION OF THE ISRAELI ARMY DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR. THE CLUB ENJOYED EARLY SUCCESS AND BY 1952 THEY WERE PROMOTED TO THE LONDON LEAGUE.

MEANWHILE FINCHLEY, BACK IN THE ATHENIAN LEAGUE, WERE IN THE MIDDLE OF THEIR GLORY YEARS WITH THE 1952-1953 SEASON PROVING TO BE THE PINNACLE. THAT YEAR SAW THEIR PROGRESSION TO THE THIRD ROUND PROPER OF THE FA CUP. DEFEATED ALONG THE WAY WERE CHELMSFORD CITY, KIDDERMINSTER HARRIERS (1-0 AT AGGBOROUGH) AND CRYSTAL PALACE (3-1 AT SUMMERS LANE) BEFORE THE FINCHES WERE FINALLY BEATEN 2-0 AT GAY MEADOW AGAINST SHREWSBURY TOWN.

DESPITE AN AMATEUR CUP SEMI-FINAL APPEARANCE, LOSING TO BITTER LOCAL RIVALS HENDON AT HIGHBURY IN 1965, A SENSE OF DECLINE WAS STARTING TO EMERGE. A SWITCH TO THE ISTHMIAN PREMIER LEAGUE FAILED TO STOP THE HALT, AND IN 1980-81 FINCHLEY WERE RELEGATED TO THE SECOND DIVISION.

WINGATE BY NOW HAD BECOME A SENIOR CLUB AND WERE COMPETING IN THE ATHENIAN LEAGUE. MANY PLAYERS HAD BECOME MEMBERS OF THE MIDDLESEX FA REPRESENTATIVE SIDE AND ALSO PARTOOK ON BEHALF OF GREAT BRITAIN IN THE MACCABIAH GAMES. DISASTER STRUCK THOUGH IN 1972 WHEN THEIR HALL LANE GROUND IN HENDON WAS LOST TO THE M1 EXTENSION AND DESPITE A SHORT GROUND SHARE WITH FINCHLEY FC THE CLUB REVERTED TO JUNIOR FOOTBALL.

WINGATE FINALLY RETURNED TO THE SENIOR GAME WITH A BRIEF MERGER WITH LEYTON FC. THIS PARTNERSHIP PROVED TO BE UNSUCCESSFUL AND DESPITE A 1984-1985 LEAGUE CUP VICTORY, IRONICALLY DEFEATING FINCHLEY IN THE FINAL, BOTH CLUBS WENT THEIR SEPARATE WAYS.

WINGATE & FINCHLEY – CLUB HISTORY

IN 1991 WITH FINCHLEY STRUGGLING IN THE ISTHMIAN LEAGUE SECOND DIVISION AND WITH MOUNTING DEBTS IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT A MERGER WITH WINGATE WOULD TAKE PLACE IN THE SUMMER. AFTER EXTENSIVE REFURBISHMENT AND A NAME CHANGE OF THE SUMMERS LANE GROUND IN HONOUR OF LONG TIME WINGATE SUPPORTER HARRY ABRAHAMS, WINGATE AND FINCHLEY TOOK TO THE FIELD FOR THE START OF THE 1991-1992 SEASON.

SUCCESS WAS IMMEDIATE AND DESPITE STARTING LIFE IN THE SOUTH MIDLANDS LEAGUE THE CLUB WERE QUICKLY COMPETING IN THE ISTHMIAN LEAGUE AND BY SEASON 2003-2004 WERE MEMBERS OF THE NEWLY FORMED DIVISION ONE NORTH.

IN RECENT SEASONS THE CLUB HAS CONTINUED ITS GROWTH. A BRIEF FLIRTATION WITH THE SOUTHERN LEAGUE WAS SHORTLY FOLLOWED BY THE ARRIVALS OF MANAGER MICHAEL STONE AND CHAIRMAN ARON SHARPE. NOW BACK IN THE ISTHMIAN LEAGUE A YOUTHFUL SQUAD ACHIEVED SEVENTH POSITION IN THE FIRST DIVISION NORTH IN THE 2008-2009.

STONE SADLY LEFT THE CLUB IN 2009 AFTER BEING OFFERED THE POST OF ASSISTANT MANAGER AT CONFERENCE GIANTS RUSHDEN AND DIAMONDS. THE CLUB'S FIRST TEAM MANAGER IN TIME FOR THE START OF THE 2009/10 SEASON WAS FORMER OSWESTRY TOWN MANAGER AND TOTAL NETWORK SOLUTIONS LLANSANTFFRAID MIDFIELDER DAVID NORMAN. AT THE END THIS SEASON THE CLUB FINISHED IN A RECORD HIGH POSITION OF 3RD IN THE RYMAN DIVISION ONE NORTH, MAINLY THANKS TO A RECORD RUN OF 17 MATCHES WITHOUT DEFEAT FROM THE TURN OF THE YEAR, A RUN WHICH INCLUDED 13 WINS. THE CLUB REACHED THE PLAYOFFS BUT LOST OUT TO ENFIELD TOWN IN THE SEMI-FINAL 3-2 IN AN INCREDIBLE MATCH. THIS PAVED THE WAY FOR WHAT WAS TO BE A MONUMENTAL AND UNFORGETTABLE 2010/11 SEASON.

THE CLUB WAS QUICKLY BECOMING THE MOST PROGRESSIVE NON-LEAGUE CLUB IN THE AREA, THANKS TO SHARPE'S FOCUS ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT. BOBBY AISIEN HAD PROGRESSED FROM HADLEY WOOD AND WINGATE TO EARN PROFESSIONAL CONTRACTS, AND IN 2011 OVER 20 OF THE U16-18 AGE GROUP REPRESENTED THEIR COUNTY. SIX BOYS AT U16'S WERE GIVEN SCHOLARSHIPS WITH PRO SIDES AND THE CLUB DEVELOPED INTO A COMMUNITY CLUB WITH A MENCAP DISABILITY INITIATIVE, WORK WITH SCHOOLS, AND IT ENTERED ITS FOURTH YEAR OF THE FLEX EDUCATIONAL SCHEME.

A CONSISTENT LEAGUE SEASON FOR THE FIRST TEAM SAW THE SIDE MATCH THEIR PREVIOUS 3RD PLACE LEAGUE FINISH AND EARN A SECOND CRACK AT THE PLAYOFFS. IN THE SEMI-FINAL HARLOW TOWN WERE BEATEN 4-2 AFTER EXTRA TIME, AND PROMOTION TO THE RYMAN PREMIER DIVISION WAS WON WITH A 118TH MINUTE WINNER OVER BRENTWOOD TOWN IN EXTRA TIME OF THE FINAL - THE BLUES WINNING 3-2 ON THEIR HOME TURF.

THIS VICTORY WAS THE MIDDLE LEG OF A REMARKABLE AND UNIQUE TREBLE. EARLIER THAT SEASON THE CLUB HAD LIFTED THE RYMAN LEAGUE CUP HAVING BEATEN DULWICH HAMLET 2-0 AT IMBER COURT, AND LONDON SENIOR CUP SUCCESS WAS TO FOLLOW SHORTLY AFTERWARDS WHEN HENDON WERE CONVINCINGLY BEATEN 3-1 IN THE FINAL.

WINGATE & FINCHLEY – CLUB HISTORY

SUCCESS FLOWED THROUGHOUT THE CLUB THIS YEAR, WITH THE YOUTH TEAMS ALSO BUILDING ON THEIR PREVIOUS SEASON'S WORK AS THEY PROGRESSED SUPERBLY. THE U18'S WON THE MIDDLESEX COUNTY CUP, AND AT U15 LEVEL THE LEAGUE TITLE AND THREE CUP TROPHIES FOLLOWED (TWO COUNTY CUPS AND THE LEAGUE CUP). EVEN THE UNDER 10'S WERE GETTING IN ON THE ACTION AS THEY LIFTED THE SPRING CUP!

THE FIRST SEASON IN THE RYMAN PREMIER DIVISION IN 2011/12 SAW THE SIDE SECURE SAFETY IN THIS NEW LEVEL WITH A COMFORTABLE MID-TABLE FINISH, ENDING UP CLOSER TO THE PLAYOFFS THAN FROM RELEGATION. THE FINAL THIRD OF THE SEASON SAW BREAKTHROUGHS FOR YOUTH PLAYERS LIRON MANNIE AND DAVID SMOUHA WHO BOTH PLAYED BIG ROLES IN THE FIRST TEAM SQUAD. MEANWHILE THERE WAS HUGE CUP SUCCESS AT YOUTH LEVEL YET AGAIN; THE UNDER 18'S WON THE AFA CUP, BEATING VALLEY PARK AFTER EXTRA TIME, AS WELL AS THE LONDON COUNTY CUP. THE UNDER 17'S WON A DOUBLE AS THEY BEAT THURROCK IN THE EJA LEAGUE CUP FINAL TO ADD TO THEIR EARLIER AFA CUP SUCCESS HAVING BEATEN BETHWIN 8-1! THE UNDER 16'S ALSO GOT IN ON THE ACTION SECURING THEIR AFA CUP TITLE BEATING WOODFORD FC, WHICH THEY ADDED LATER ON SECURING THEIR EJA (HERTS) LEAGUE TITLE.

SUCCESS OF THE YOUTH SIDES PROMPTED THREE PLAYERS - ROSS WEINREB, NATHAN SOLLOSI AND JOE SHARPE - TO EARN SELECTION TO THE GREAT BRITAIN MACCABI TEAM FOR THE WORLD GAMES IN ISRAEL DURING JULY 2013. MEANWHILE THE BARNET MENCAP DISABILITY SIDES GREW IN STRENGTH AS THEY ENTERED THE FOURTH SEASON WITH THE CLUB, WITH THREE SIDES NOW COMPETING IN THE CAMDEN STEP LEAGUES. THE YEAR ENDED ON A HIGH AS MCDONALDS JOINED IN LUCRATIVE SPONSORSHIP DEAL.

THE FOLLOWING SEASON, 2012-13, WAS A DIFFICULT ONE FOR THE FIRST TEAM. EARLY SEASON POOR FORM LED TO THE DEPARTURE OF NORMAN IN NOVEMBER AS EX-NORTHWOOD BOSS GARY MEAKIN CAME IN. THE CLUB FLIRTED WITH RELEGATION ALL SEASON UNTIL A MOMENTOUS 3-2 VICTORY OVER LOWESTOFT TWO DAYS BEFORE THE FINAL DAY SECURED SURVIVAL. HOWEVER NORMAN REJOINED THE CLUB IN THE SUMMER AS DIRECTOR OF FOOTBALL, AS VETERAN DEFENDER DANIEL NIELSEN WAS PUT IN PLACE AS HEAD COACH. MEANWHILE A NEW UNDER 21 DEVELOPMENT SQUAD WAS SET UP TO COMPETE IN THE INAUGURAL RYMAN U21 LEAGUE.

THERE WAS CONTINUAL SUCCESS FOR THE YOUTH SIDES. THE U17'S ADDED THE LONDON COUNTY CUP TO AN EARLIER EJA LEAGUE TITLE, THE EJA CUP AND THE AFA CUP. THESE WERE ALSO FOLLOWED UP WITH THE LEAGUE REGIONAL PLAYOFF TITLE. THE U16'S WON TWO CUPS IN THIS SEASON, THE EJA AND AFA TROPHIES.

IN 2014 THE SIDE FACED ANOTHER RELEGATION FIGHT IN THE LEAGUE, WHICH WAS LOST ON GOAL DIFFERENCE ON THE FINAL DAY OF THE SEASON DESPITE A 5-0 VICTORY OVER BILLERICAY TOWN. HOWEVER, WHEN WORKSOP TOWN PULLED OUT OF THE SOUTHERN LEAGUE DUE TO FINANCIAL PROBLEMS, WINGATE & FINCHLEY WERE THE FIRST IN LINE TO EARN THE REPRIEVE BACK TO THE RYMAN PREMIER DIVISION.

WINGATE & FINCHLEY – CLUB HISTORY

THE 2014-15 SEASON RESULTED IN A RECORD FINISH OF 12TH PLACE IN THE RYMAN PREMIER LEAGUE, AND AT THE END OF THE SEASON NORMAN DEPARTED, TO BE REPLACED BY SIMON LANE AS DIRECTOR OF FOOTBALL. HOWEVER FOR THE START OF 2016 HE WAS REPLACED BY FORMER NORTHERN IRELAND INTERNATIONAL KEITH ROWLAND AND THE SIDE FINISHED IN A STABLE 13TH POSITION. IN AUGUST 2016 THE STADIUM AT SUMMERS LANE WAS RE-NAMED AFTER WINGATE FC CO-FOUNDER MAURICE REBAK WHO HAD PASSED AWAY IN FEBRUARY OF THAT YEAR AGED 95.

THE 2016-17 SEASON SAW THE CLUB SET A NEW RECORD, FINISHING IN 5TH PLACE IN THE RYMAN PREMIER LEAGUE AND QUALIFYING FOR THE END OF SEASON PLAYOFFS. A LAST-MINUTE DEFEAT AT BOGNOR REGIS TOWN IN THE SEMI-FINAL ENDED THE SEASON, BUT THIS WAS A MAGNIFICENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SAW THE BLUES WIN THE LEAGUE'S TEAM PERFORMANCE OF THE YEAR AWARD.

A NINTH-PLACE FINISH FOLLOWED IN 2017-18 AS THE BLUES NARROWLY MISSED OUT ON A SECOND SUCCESSIVE PLAY-OFF BERTH. THERE WAS SUCCESS FOR THE UNDER 23 SIDE WHO WON THE ISTHMIAN DEVELOPMENT LEAGUE NORTH DIVISION AT A CANTER. OVER THE SUMMER THE CLUB EMBARKED ON AN EXTENSIVE STATE-OF-THE-ART REFURBISHMENT OF THE STADIUM, FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 1991'S MERGER, GIVING THE CLUBHOUSE A MUCH-WELCOMED OVERHAUL AND MAKING THE STADIUM ONE OF THE MOST IMPRESSIVE IN NON-LEAGUE FOOTBALL.

THE SUBSEQUENT THREE SEASONS SAW A PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY BOTH ON AND OFF THE PITCH, WITH SHORT MANAGEMENT STINTS FOR EX ENGLAND INTERNATIONAL NICKY SHOREY, EX PREMIER LEAGUE STALWART GLEN LITTLE AND EX WEST HAM ACADEMY AND WINGATE & FINCHLEY FAVOURITE STEVE CLARKE, FOLLOWED BY TWO NULL AND VOID SEASONS UNDER THE STEWARDSHIP OF SPENCER KNIGHT DUE TO THE COVID PANDEMIC. HOWEVER, DURING THIS PERIOD THERE WERE STILL MANY SUCCESSES, INCLUDING U18S WINNING COUNTY CUP IN CONSECUTIVE SEASONS AND THE LONDON CHAMPION OF CHAMPIONS TROPHY, U23 DEVELOPMENT SQUAD BEING VICTORIOUS IN HERTS LEAGUE CUP FIELDING A SQUAD LARGELY MADE UP OF UNDER 18S, WHILE BOTH U13S AND U12S SECURED LEAGUE TITLES.

IN THE SUMMER OF 2021, CLUB LEGENDS AHMET RIFAT (DIRECTOR OF FOOTBALL) AND MARC WEATHERSTONE (MANAGER) WERE APPOINTED AS A NEW MANAGEMENT TEAM AFTER NEARLY 1000 FIRST TEAM APPEARANCES BETWEEN THEM. LATER IN THE 2022/23 SEASON AHMET RIFAT WAS TO TAKE SOLE CHARGE.

SEASON 2023/24 WILL GO DOWN ON RECORD AS ONE OF OUR FINEST IF NOT THE FINEST. FINISHING IN 4TH POSITION WITH A RECORD HALL OF 76 POINTS AND SCORING 78 GOALS. AHMET RIFAT'S CHARGES MADE IT TO THE PLAY OFFS ON THE LAST DAY OF THE SEASON WITH A 3-0 WIN OVER CARSHALTON.

WE FACED LOCAL RIVALS ENFIELD TOWN IN THE PLAY OFF SEMI FINALS AT THE QE II STADIUM. WE NARROWLY LOST A VERY TIGHT MATCH 1-0 IN FRONT OF A CROWD OF 2,225 THAT NIGHT. A FINE SEASON WAS ENDED, BUT WHAT MEMORIES IT BROUGHT.

2024/25 SAW A REVAMPED SIDE COMPLETE A STABLE MID-TABLE FINISH.

TODAY'S VISITORS – CLUB HISTORY

LEWES FOOTBALL CLUB WAS FORMED FOLLOWING A MEETING OF LEWES PRIORY CRICKET CLUB AT THE ROYAL OAK PUB ON 23 SEPTEMBER 1885. MANY FOOTBALL CLUBS WERE BEING FORMED IN THAT DECADE, PREDOMINANTLY EITHER BY FACTORIES OR BY CRICKET CLUBS WANTING SOMETHING TO DO OVER AUTUMN AND WINTER. OF COURSE THEY CHOSE TO PLAY HOME MATCHES AT THE DRIPPING PAN (JUST A FEW HUNDRED YARDS FROM THE PUB) BECAUSE THAT WAS ALREADY WHERE THEY PLAYED CRICKET, SINCE THEIR INCEPTION IN 1831. INDEED, THE SECOND EARLIEST RECORDED MATCH ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD TOOK PLACE IN LEWES IN 1694. HOWEVER, PLAYING FOOTBALL ISN'T GREAT FOR A CRICKET WICKET AND THE CRICKET CLUB FINALLY UPPED STICKS IN 1937 TO A NEW GROUND JUST DOWN THE ROAD.

FOR THE FIRST EIGHT YEARS, LEWES FC PLAYERS WORE LIGHT GREEN SHIRTS WHICH WERE DESIGNED TO REFLECT THE SCENERY OF THE SURROUNDING SOUTH DOWNS, BUT BLACK AND RED FINALLY BECAME THE CLUB COLOURS IN 1893.

THE CLUB HAS PLAYED AT THE DRIPPING PAN EVER SINCE, APART FROM A COUPLE OF SEASONS PRIOR TO THE FIRST WORLD WAR WHEN THE CLUB WAS BANISHED TO THE ADJOINING CONVENT FIELD. THE EARLY YEARS OF THE CLUB PRODUCED ONLY MEDIOCRE RESULTS AND SUCCESSES WERE FEW AND FAR BETWEEN. IN 1920, LEWES BECAME FOUNDER MEMBERS OF THE SUSSEX COUNTY LEAGUE.

OUR WOMEN'S TEAM WAS NOT FOUNDED UNTIL THE 2002/3 SEASON, BUT MORE OF THAT LATER...

1960S

PROGRESS WAS SLOW AND DESPITE FOUR RUNNERS-UP PLACES, BY THE 1960S LEWES HAD ONLY ONE SUSSEX RUR CUP WIN TO THEIR NAME. IN 1965, THE CLUB'S FORTUNES CHANGED DRAMATICALLY, WINNING THE COUNTY LEAGUE TITLE FOR THE FIRST TIME WITH A MASSIVE NINE-POINT LEAD OVER RUNNERS-UP LANCING, AS WELL AS BOTH THE RUR AND SUSSEX SENIOR CUPS.

LEWES BECAME MEMBERS OF THE ATHENIAN LEAGUE AND AFTER WINNING THE DIVISION 2 TITLE IN 1968, PROMOTION TO THE PREMIER DIVISION WAS GAINED JUST TWO YEARS LATER WHEN THE DIVISION 1 TITLE WAS SNATCHED FROM BOREHAM WOOD, WITH A FURTHER SUSSEX SENIOR CUP TRIUMPH ADDED IN 1971. SIX YEARS LATER, THE CLUB ENTERED THE NEWLY EXPANDED ISTHMIAN LEAGUE.

1980S

PROMOTION TO DIVISION 1 SOON FOLLOWED ALTHOUGH TWO SIXTH-PLACE FINISHES IN 1982 AND 1989 WERE THE HIGHEST POSITIONS ATTAINED IN DIVISION 1. DURING THAT TIME, LEWES REACHED THE FINAL OF THE SUSSEX SENIOR CUP ON THREE OCCASIONS, AND WON THE TROPHY IN 1984/85.

DISASTER STRIKES FOR THE ROOKS IN 1990/91

1990S

LET'S BE HONEST, THE NINETIES WEREN'T GREAT FOR MUSIC OR THE ROOKS. DISASTER STRUCK IN 1990/91 WHEN LEWES WERE RELEGATED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THEIR HISTORY. AN IMMEDIATE RETURN AS RUNNERS-UP TO PURFLEET FOLLOWED, BUT THAT SUCCESS WAS SHORT-LIVED AND RELEGATION IN SUCCESSIVE YEARS MEANT THAT BY THE 1994/95 SEASON THE CLUB WAS DOWN IN DIVISION THREE.

THE SLIDE CONTINUED AND THE FIRST SEASON IN THE BASEMENT DIVISION WOULD HAVE BEEN THE LAST IN THE LEAGUE IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR COVE WHO CONVENIENTLY PROPPED-UP THE LEAGUE AND SAVED LEWES FROM AUTOMATIC DEMOTION.

TODAY'S VISITORS – CLUB HISTORY

THE CLUB SURVIVED RATHER THAN THRIVED UNTIL THE 1998/99 SEASON WHEN JIMMY QUINN JOINED AS MANAGER, AND AT THE FIRST ATTEMPT MISSED OUT ON PROMOTION BY JUST ONE PLACE. MIDWAY THROUGH THE 1999/2000 SEASON MARTIN ELLIOTT AND A NEW BOARD OF DIRECTORS STEPPED IN AND IMMEDIATELY THE FORTUNES OF THE CLUB BEGAN TO IMPROVE, WITH THE CAPTURE OF THE SUSSEX SENIOR CUP IN 2001 FOLLOWING VICTORY OVER BOGNOR REGIS.

NOUGHTIES (2000S)

THERE WAS MIXED NEWS ON THE PITCH. THE PINNACLE OF THE MEN'S TEAM'S ACHIEVEMENT, AND WHAT A PINNACLE, WAS TO GAIN PROMOTION TO THE TOP OF THE NON-LEAGUE PYRAMID IN 2007/8. HOWEVER, THE ROOKS ONLY LASTED ONE SEASON IN THE TOP FLIGHT AS THE GLOBAL CREDIT CRISIS HIT AND FUNDS DRIED UP. THE ROOKS' NEW ECONOMIC REALITY SAW THEM DROP DOWN THE DIVISIONS.

HOWEVER, A BRAND NEW WOMEN'S TEAM WAS STARTED BY JACQUIE AGNEW FOR THE 2002/3 SEASON WITH THE SUPPORT OF THEN CLUB CHAIRMAN TERRY PARRIS. THE TEAM UNDERWENT A DRAMATIC RISE FROM PARK FOOTBALL TO THE WOMEN'S COMBINATION, THANKS TO ADDED SUPPORT FROM LOCAL BUSINESSMAN RON MOORE.

2010S

BEHIND THE SCENES, A GROUP OF SIX SUPPORTERS CALLING THEMSELVES ROOKS125 WERE WORKING HARD TO TAKE THE CLUB INTO COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP HAVING WITNESSED THE SERIOUS FINANCIAL PROBLEMS THAT HAD BEFALLEN THE CLUB, DESPITE THE OWNERS' BEST EFFORTS.

(ROOKS125, FROM LEFT IN IMAGE: ALEX LEITH, PATRICK MARBER, NICK WILLIAMS, BEN WARD, ED RAMSDEN, CHARLIE DOBRES).

FINALLY ON JULY 8TH 2010, LEWES FC WAS OFFICIALLY TRANSFERRED OUT OF PRIVATE OWNERSHIP INTO A MASS-OWNERSHIP COMMUNITY BENEFIT SOCIETY CALLED LEWES COMMUNITY FOOTBALL CLUB, CONSISTING OF BENEFACTORS AND MEMBERS OF THE FORMER MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE.

THE SIX MEMBERS OF ROOKS125 FORMED THE INAUGURAL EXECUTIVE BOARD, WORKING AS VOLUNTEERS TO INSTALL IMPROVED WORKING PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES DURING THE SEASON BEFORE PLANNING TO OPEN UP THE WIDER OWNERSHIP OF LCFC TO ALL THE CLUB'S SUPPORTERS IN 2011/12. THE FIRST CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMUNITY CLUB WAS APPOINTED IN 2013 WITH CLUB LEGEND TERRY PARRIS TAKING UP THE POSITION ONCE AGAIN. TERRY WAS SUCCEEDED BY STUART FULLER IN 2015. ALL BOARD POSITIONS NOW ARE ELECTED BY THE WHOLE OWNERSHIP BASE.

ON THE PITCH, RESTRICTED RESOURCES SAW THE MEN'S TEAM DROP TWO LEAGUES, DOWN TO THE RYMAN LEAGUE SOUTH (NOW CALLED THE ISTHMIAN LEAGUE) BEFORE PROMOTION SAW THEM RISE TO THE ISTHMIAN PREMIER LEAGUE WHERE THEY ARE CURRENTLY PUSHING FOR ANOTHER PROMOTION, BACK TO THE NATIONAL LEAGUE SOUTH.

HOWEVER, THE WOMEN'S TEAM ENJOYED A METEORIC CLIMB UP TO THE FA WOMEN'S PREMIER LEAGUE (SOUTH), GAINING PROMOTION FROM THE COMBINATION LEAGUE BY WINNING EVERY MATCH BUT ONE, WHICH THEY DREW. IN 2014, LEWES LADIES, AS THEY WERE THEN CALLED, MOVED FROM BEING AN INDEPENDENT ENTITY TO BEING INTEGRATED INTO THE CLUB.

TODAY'S VISITORS – CLUB HISTORY

TIN JULY 2015, THE CLUB OPENED A STATE-OF-THE-ART 3G ALL-WEATHER FACILITY ADJACENT TO THE DRIPPING PAN, FOR THE WHOLE COMMUNITY TO USE AS WELL AS ALL LEWES FC TEAMS TO TRAIN ON. THEN, IN 2017, THE CLUB ANNOUNCED THE ADVENT OF EQUALITYFC, WITH THE WOMEN'S TEAM BEING ALLOCATED EQUAL RESOURCES AND ESTEEM TO THE MEN'S TEAM. EQUAL PLAYING BUDGETS, EQUAL RIGHTS TO THE MAIN CLUB PITCH AND TRAINING GROUND, EQUAL EVERYTHING.

IN 2018, THE FA DECIDED TO RECONSTITUTE THE TOP TWO WOMEN'S ELITE LEAGUES AND, FOLLOWING AN EXHAUSTIVE PROCESS, LEWES FC WERE SELECTED TO JOIN THE NEW LEAGUE FOR THE 2018-19 SEASON. FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS, THE TEAM BECAME WELL ESTABLISHED AMONGST MANY PREMIER LEAGUE BACKED SIDES.

THE 2023-24 SEASON PROVED A BRIDGE TOO FAR FOR LEWES FC WOMEN AS OTHER TEAMS STARTED TO INCREASINGLY BRING TO BEAR FUNDING FROM THEIR LARGER MEN'S CLUB. A SECOND RELEGATION SPOT HAD JUST BEEN INTRODUCED AND LEWES FOUND THEMSELVES THERE AS THE WHISTLE BLEW AT THE END OF THE FINAL MATCH. THE TEAM ARE NOW ESTABLISHING THEMSELVES BACK IN THE NATIONAL LEAGUE SOUTH AND THE BOAT HAS BEEN STEADIED BY A NEW MANAGER AND COACHING TEAM.

UNFORTUNATELY, THIS RELEGATION SAW AN END ALSO TO ALMOST £500K OF CENTRAL FA FUNDING AND TV REVENUE AND THE CLUB HAD TO BEGIN THE 2024-25 SEASON WITH CONSIDERABLE BUDGET AND STAFF REDUCTIONS ALL ROUND.

A NEW MEN'S TEAM MANAGER WAS APPOINTED. BUT, DESPITE A PLAYING BUDGET DRASTICALLY BELOW PREVIOUS SEASONS, THE TEAM HAD ITS BEST EVER START IN LIVING MEMORY, WINNING ITS FIRST FIVE MATCHES, AND CONTINUING TO CHALLENGE AT THE TOP OF THE LEAGUE.

THE CLUB IS STILL BUSY BUILDING FOUNDATIONS FOR AN EXCITING FUTURE.

IN 2022, THE FINAL TWO MEMBERS OF THE ORIGINAL ROOKS125 COMMUNITY TAKEOVER GROUP REACHED THEIR 12 YEAR DIRECTOR TERM LIMIT AND STEPPED DOWN, AND THE NEXT GENERATION OF ELECTED, VOLUNTEER DIRECTORS TOOK THE HELM.

IN THE SAME YEAR, THANKS TO A PREMIER LEAGUE GRANT OF £750K TO SUPPORT WOMEN'S FOOTBALL, THE DRIPPING PAN PITCH WAS FINALLY RELAID, TRANSFORMED INTO A STATE-OF-THE-ART GRASS-HYBRID PLYING SURFACE WITH BUILT IN SPRINKLERS.

AND THE FURTHER ADDITIONS OF NEW TOILET BLOCKS, A SUPERB NEW DIGITAL SCOREBOARD (THANKS TO CLUB SPONSOR XERO), LOU'S GARDEN (THANKS TO LOU) AND A TEN-FOOT-TALL STATUE OF TWO 18TH CENTURY BI-SEXUAL FEMALE PIRATES (THIS IS LEWES), HAVE KEPT THE DRIPPING PAN AT THE TOP OF EVERY FAN'S MUST-VISIT FOOTBALL GROUND LIST.

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MATCH OFFICIALS

REFEREE: NEIL FYFIELD

ASSISTANTS: ANDREW TOOLEY, LUKE BURFORD