

BERWICK RANGERS SUPPORTERS TRUST

Life in the Lowland League



www.berwickrangers.org



New Decade | New Goals | New Berwick Rangers

Berwick Rangers Supporters Trust

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Address:
c/o 10 Golden Square
Berwick-upon-Tweed
Northumberland
TD15 1BG

Telephone: 01890 860329

Fax: 01289 306980

E-Mail:
trust@berwickrangers.org

 [fb.com/berwickrangerstrust](https://www.facebook.com/berwickrangerstrust)

 twitter.com/berwickrst

Chairman:
Andrew Allan

Vice-Chairman:
Gordon Dickson

Secretary:
Isla Barber

Treasurer:
David Spence

Membership Secretary:
David Letham

Media Manager:
Brendan Thorburn



Committee Members:
Ronald Kirk
Stuart Lee
John Bell

Designed & Published by:
InHouse Design

Editor:
Andrew Allan

Photography:
Ian Runciman

FROM THE CHAIRMAN...



The subject matter of my first Trust Magazine piece as Chairman was heavily themed on change. Tumultuous change; whereby we found ourselves in a lower division, with a new Club Chairman and Directors, a new Board of The Supporters Club and my taking over from Michael Smyth at the helm of The Supporters Trust.

It seems change is becoming the norm at our Club, however for the good of our club, I sincerely hope that the mantra of our new

Club Board of New Decade, New Goals and New Berwick Rangers has longevity; we need a period of relative tranquillity to allow all new office-bearers to get through form, storm and norm to perform; praying that BRFC's future passage through Mr Tuckman's model for 'Group Development' doesn't get stuck again at storm.

Although I've found the recent boardroom events personally uncomfortable, The Trust Board and I have joined the vast majority in leaving the past behind (difficulties, not our proud history) as we continue to believe that, to move our club forward, 'Ay Been' should be a thing of the past, as should be any residual disunity.

With that in mind, The Trust is very pleased indeed that the early steps of a 'tri-partite' approach to moving our club forward, between the boards of The Club, The Supporters Club (SC) and The Supporters Trust (ST) from last year, has continued and gathers momentum. We are now talking together about a Joint Venture, offering a significant package of SC and ST shares to attract major investment, along with adopting best practice to improve both fan bodies to best effect for our Club.

To lay the foundation for that, a census form is included inside this magazine for ST members to consider the ST Board recommendations for the Joint Share Venture, and also to consider amalgamation of the SC and the ST; being fundamental changes to The ST, it's correct to seek the views of our membership. Please read, consider and respond.

To matters on the park, The Trust played an essential part in securing Yaw Osei's services by increasing a 6 month financial support offer to create a successful full years proposal, with The ST now providing the funding for the remainder of the season. This investment has seen our financial support for The Club outstripping previous season's £4.6k support, by over £1,000; bringing The Trusts fund-raising to over £100,000 since inception. My sincere thanks and congratulations to Trust Members past and present for your achievement in reaching this impressive milestone.

This season has confirmed how tough it is in the Lowland League, and painfully shown the delta between us and the wealthier clubs. We are all bitterly disappointed that a top 6 target has seen the reality of bottom 6. However it's not all about money; I saw at training that in Yano, Kevin and Darren we have a top management team in both enthusiasm, professionalism and role modelling; these boys can still play! They are strong and experienced people, steeped in our club history and with a deep passion to succeed; again not for personal motivations, but to

improve the future of our club. The dressing room is a good place, and we see more good players arriving; with good business being done with our outgoings.

The Trust AGM in October was another quiet affair, with the only extraordinary business being my seeking Trust Board support for my invitation to join the Club Board. Regrettably, this ultimately led to me vying for the record for The Shortest Berwick Directors Tenure award on January 8th. My thanks to Dennis McCreary for being our guest at AGM, and treating us to some brilliant stories from his 50 years at The Club; The Trust were delighted to mark that occasion with a gift of some well-deserved Scottish Water from up around the Dornoch Firth.

I remain immensely proud to Chair our Supporters Trust, of our achievements and how we are utterly transparent in what we do, what we collect and what we do with it <https://www.berwickrangers.org/sample-page/donations/>. Not only that, we rigorously share minutes of all Trust Board discussions; we never lose sight that we are accountable to you and all we do and say should be recorded and there to be challenged.

My sincere thanks to Gordon Dickson, Ron Kirk, David Spence, Stuart Lee, Brendan Thorburn, David Letham and John Bell, our volunteer Trust Board Members for their hard work, and to Isla Barber for her work as our Secretary. May I also thank The Pilot Inn in Low Greens for kindly hosting our Trust Board Meetings.

Last but not least, can I thank all contributors to this 35th edition of the Berwick Rangers Supporters Trust magazine, we hope you enjoy it..

Andrew Allan
Chairman
Berwick Rangers Supporters Trust

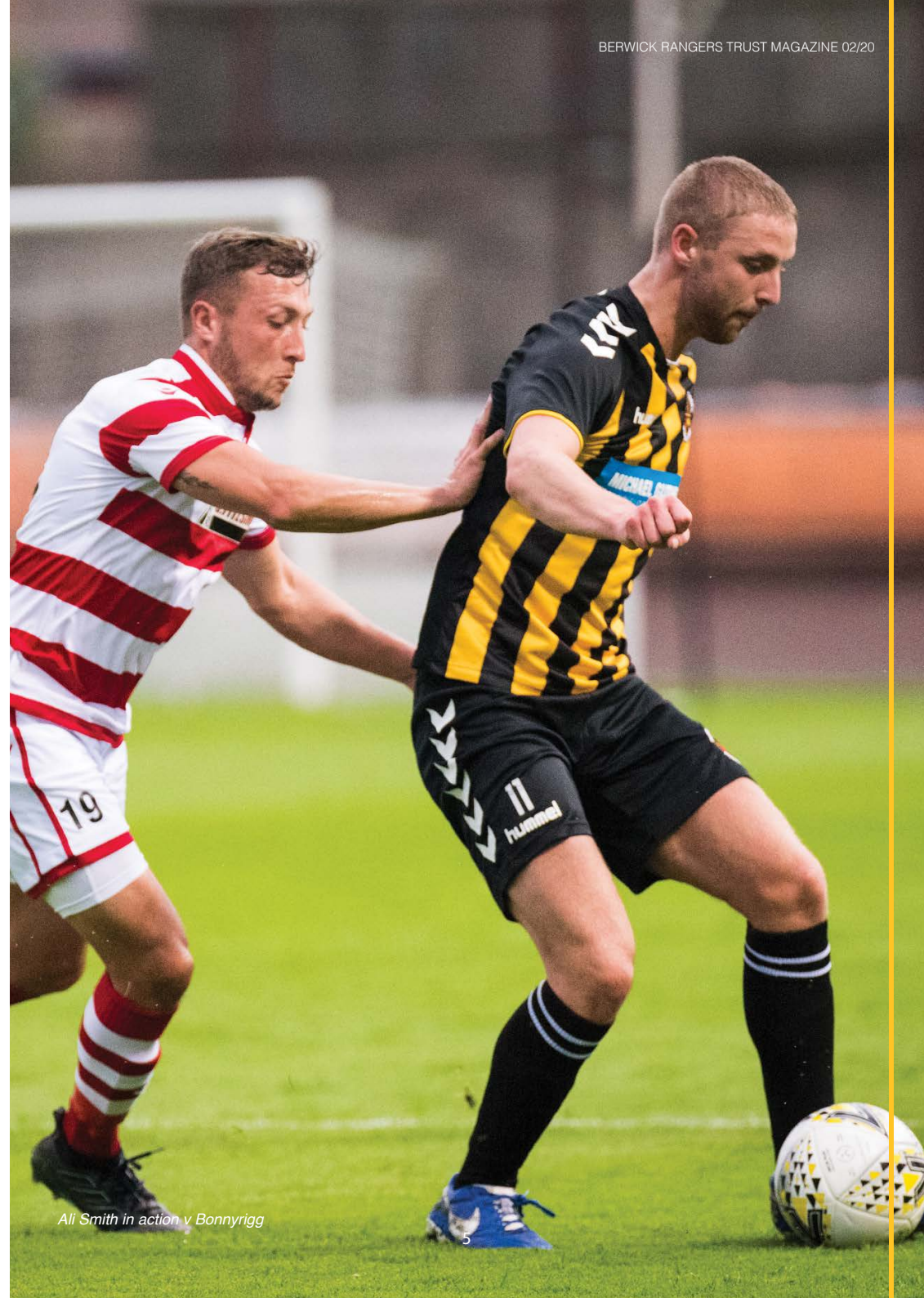
LOWLAND LEAGUE MISADVENTURES

by **RON KIRK**

Well, here we are again. It is time for another mid-season review although in this instance it is more like a two thirds review with Rangers, at the time of writing, having played 22 out of their 30 Lowland League features. Off the field, things have been happening in the Boardroom with the recent appointment of a new Football Club Board headed by former chairman, Brian Porteous. Whether the new Board will be able to arrest the slide that Rangers have been hurtling down in recent seasons only time will tell. I will however leave the Boardroom politics to one side and concentrate on the clubs failings on the pitch. As the season commenced, there was genuine optimism that the team, whilst unlikely to challenge the big spenders in the form of Kelty, East Kilbride and Shire for the league title, would be competitive and a finish in the top 6 was not an unreasonable expectation. Indeed, manager Ian Little was quoted as saying that we would definitely finish in the top 4. How he must wish that he hadn't made that rash prediction now. In truth, a top 6 finish was not an unreasonable expectation. The Football Club Board had made what effectively amounted to a League 2 budget available and I don't think that it is harsh to say that the team has massively underperformed. A number of players have simply not performed to the level required and 5 league wins from the 22 games played is a damning statistic. 4 of those wins have come against the clubs occupying the bottom 4 positions with only one win being registered against a club from higher up the league. With 6 away games remaining it looks like Rangers will finish in the bottom 6 rather than the hoped for and anticipated top 6.

In manager Ian Little's defence, he was slightly snookered behind the 8 ball back in the summer. Following the club's inevitable relegation there was a delay of a few weeks before he was officially appointed manager. During this time other clubs were signing players in preparation for the season ahead. The delay in confirming his appointment left the club several weeks behind in player recruitment. In addition, the club's participation in the Betfred Cup which kicked off in early July left Little with virtually no time to prepare and it was no surprise that heavy defeats against Premiership, Championship and League One Clubs in the shape of Livingston, Ayr, Falkirk and Stranraer were duly suffered.

The opening game of the Lowland League season saw former manager and player, Robbie Horn, bring his newly promoted Bonnyrigg Rose side to Shielfield on an overcast late July Tuesday evening. Bonnyrigg boast a number of former SPFL players within their ranks including a number of ex Berwickers such as Lee Currie. Rangers started the game well and took an early lead and came close to doubling their advantage before Bonnyrigg turned things around in a devastating 8 minute spell which saw them find the net 4 times. During this spell Rangers simply could not live with the pace and ferocity of the Bonnyrigg attacks. To their credit, Rangers kept battling away and goals either side of half time brought them back into the game at 4-3 but a free kick drilled home by Lee Currie from inside the box after Sean Brennan was penalised for handling a pass back saw Bonnyrigg run out 5-3 victors. Despite losing, the general feeling was Bonnyrigg were likely to be one of the better sides in the Lowland



Ali Smith in action v Bonnyrigg

League and so it has proven as they are currently going toe to toe with big spending Kelty in the race for the title and the promotion play off place.

Unfortunately, Rangers have only been able to replicate that level of performance on a handful of occasions. They performed admirably in the 1-0 home loss to Barry Ferguson's expensively assembled table topping Kelty Hearts side containing a number of ex SPFL players only succumbing to a 30 yard worldie free kick. They also put in a decent shift against BSC Glasgow another team who have a number of ex SPFL players in their squad and who are still on the periphery of the title race should the top two slip up, only losing to a debateable penalty after playing 75 minutes with 10 men. On the whole the major problem has been that Rangers yet again lack a cutting edge in front of goal. At times they have been neat and tidy without carrying any real goal threat. That was epitomised in the game against Stirling University at Forthbank Stadium just before Christmas. Rangers enjoyed the bulk of possession in the second half during which time they had the students pinned back in their own half for large periods. Despite this domination, they failed to test the Students Keeper once and there was a degree of inevitability that the students would score from the free kick they won on the edge of Rangers penalty area in a rare sortie out of their own half with about 10 minutes to go.

Rangers have not enjoyed any luck in the various cup competitions in which they are now able to compete. The Scottish Cup draw was not kind to them. After receiving a bye to the second round as a result of their league status the year before, Rangers were drawn away to old League two foes Elgin City. Apart from a nightmare journey, the prospects of winning

through to a possible money spinning draw in the following rounds were slim and despite putting up a brave performance Rangers eventually lost 3-1. Thanks to their new found Lowland League status, Rangers now compete in the Football Nations Qualifying Cup and the South of Scotland Cup. Despite First round victories in both competitions against Spartans and Newtongrange Star, Rangers crashed out in the Second round of both tournaments. A 4-1 defeat away to a Kelty Hearts side brimming with players of SPFL pedigree was perhaps not surprising but a 2-1 defeat away to East of Scotland side Tranent was a real disappointment and provided an early indication of Rangers impotence as an attacking threat.



Our first ever Lowland League goal hits the net

In my look ahead to this season in the last newsletter, I suggested that things on the field would probably get worse before they get better. However, I also suggested that Rangers would improve as the season progressed. Well, I got that one wrong didn't I. If anything, Rangers have got progressively worse as the season has progressed. If I had written this review after 20 games I could perhaps have suggested that although there have been some disappointing results and performances, Rangers have not really been outplayed or suffered any heavy defeats. However, Rangers last 2 games have seen



Ali Forster drives in on goal against Gala

them lose heavily away to BSC Glasgow and at home to East Stirling. Whilst both of these clubs are two of the better sides in the League, the gulf between Rangers and both clubs was somewhat alarming. Admittedly, the recent loss of Ricky Miller, Daryl Healy and Joao Balde, who were arguably 3 of Rangers better players, has not helped but the loss of Miller and Healy to East Kilbride shows where the club currently stand in terms of player recruitment and retention. The decision to sell Miller and Healy was really a no brainer as both would have been free to leave in the summer anyway but the fact that both players expressed a desire to move to a club which doesn't have the history or fan base that Rangers enjoy says it all really about where Rangers are as a club at the moment.

Going forward, it is no secret that Rangers will operate on a greatly reduced playing budget next season. How many of the current squad will be prepared to sign on again for

lesser money remains to be seen but as they have massively underperformed this season anyway then that may not be too much of an issue. The difficulty is that the club are unlikely to be able to attract players of better quality and there is a real risk that next season may be even more of a struggle. The task of putting a competitive team together lies with the management team. That begs the next question. Is the current managerial team the one to take the club forward? That is a question the new Football Club Board will have to consider during the coming weeks because it has to be said that if the players have massively underperformed then so have the management team. The message to fans issued by the Board after the recent debacle at home to East Stirling suggests that the management team have been set targets for the remainder of the season. It will be interesting to see what happens should they fall some way short of meeting those targets.

ST ANDREWS BERWICK RANGERS SUPPORTERS

by DAVID LETHAM

Well what a season it's been so far. Not the position in the league where I thought we would be at this time of year. Boardroom shuffles too to add to the overall picture of chaos from an outsider looking in.

I'm asked questions about Berwick Rangers all the time at work. it's like some sort of BBC comedy drama series. I'm sure some people don't actually believe me when I tell them what's been going on over the last couple of years.

I sat down at Christmas with a guy from Argentina and talked football. Explaining the league structure and promotion/relegation (slightly different in each league) and premier league spit then adding in the Berwick story had him looking rather baffled. In the end I had a small audience and several diagrams on a whiteboard...

Still we carry on and offer support where we can to the club and local community. St Andrews Berwick Rangers Supporters made several donations over the festive period, Help the Homeless in Glasgow, Several shoeboxes for the Berwick shoebox appeal and a donation to the people's kitchen in Newcastle. We were match ball sponsor for the home game against East Kilbride. We are currently at time of writing trying to arrange hospitality for 10 people from the Northstar centre in Berwick, we are hoping to make this an annual event for them. Again it could be seen as some good community engagement for the club.

I'm hoping we can expand efforts a little and get the club and fans involved with community

engagement. A foodbank collection at Christmas should be a simple enough thing to arrange. Each fan brings a little something and then the club take it to the foodbank. It's an easy way to quickly support the local community and is a good story for the local paper. Surely we can arrange that, we usually take 2 to 3 crates to the foodbank so that's a start right there.

We now need to sit back and see what the season and the coming seasons have in store. The Lowland league is an incredibly difficult league to get out of, teams getting stronger, more teams wanting in and only one promotion spot that involves two playoffs making it even harder. Imagine winning the league then having 4 more games to play to gain promotion. Quite an ask for any club.



Mr Letham Sr. soaking up the crowd atmosphere at the Caledonian Braves stadium

WHAT COULD I POSSIBLE WRITE?

by STUART BELL

NOTHING EVER HAPPENS AT THIS CLUB...

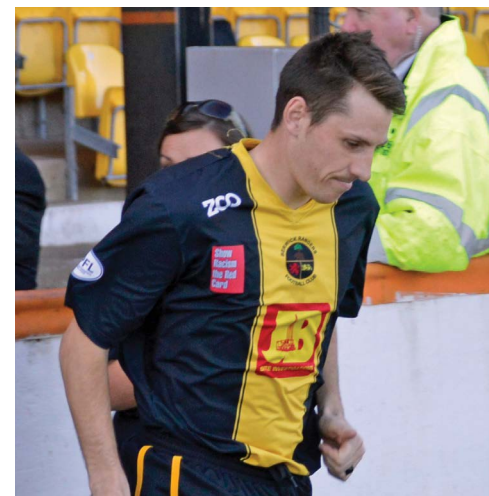
I have to confess that I'm all over the place on the recent Boardroom changes, and that is true of many things that have coloured my support of our great club over 40 years. Sometimes the mood swings are rapid, sometimes huge, and recently both.

I was happy to slag off a grotty pub in a column in the Fanzine "From the Grove to the Harrow" but quickly reduced to grovelling in the National Press when the owner, who had since spent half a million quid doing the place up, rang me and threatened to rinse my bank account if I didn't retract.

On another occasion, nursing a monstrous hangover, I was happy to have a lie down on the grass near the Pilot Inn on a lovely, sunny, spring day. Warm and dreamy, I then got extremely miffed when woken by some small boys poking me with sticks to see if I was still alive. (Fair play to them, though - it was 20 to 3)

On the pitch, I wasn't alone in all but celebrating promotion, Europe and a place in the FA cup final when we went into an unassailable lead at Stirling, only to be sunk into instant despair by clueless ref Nick Walsh, wearing Saltire underpants, who sent off Paul Currie for purring contentedly. We couldn't hold on and

now we are playing pub football, whilst Paul Currie has failed to crack a smile since and Nick Walsh will do the 2022 World Cup final, assisted by the Emir of Qatar and Jono Gall.



Paul Currie still not cracking a smile

Coming up to date, I now find myself as chief defence counsel in the court of Facebook, for John Bell. It's mental to be honest, because I am happy there has been a change at the top and I welcome the new optimistic vibe and the new Directors. We desperately need new funding and at least the new regime opens up possibilities and fosters some hope for the future. What sticks in my craw though is the

notion that John Bell was responsible for delivering a terminal illness to the club. If we want culprits, or people sleeping at the wheel, I reckon we can more fairly start with previous Chairmen and those responsible for the 2018 Coup. Slashing the player budget and adding the Latin for "No probs lads, there's always Albion Rovers" to the club crest was THE catalyst for our relegation for me. (Wonder what happened to the Manager, Robbie Horn? Wouldn't surprise me if he went somewhere else at a similar level and put together a decent team).

Just writing this, I can hear the usual suspects

muttering to themselves.”Gawd, is that bloody idiot from Redcar still going on and on and on about JB? Did you know that they’re brothers?”

Anyhow, let’s have a look at the futty. Now I have to say that this league is becoming increasingly tedious. The results are hugely predictable. We can beat teams below us and will lose to anyone in the top 9. It is more or less automatic. The quality on show though, is for me, marginally better than last year. Although we continue to leak horrible goals, at least we miss some sitters - something we could only dream of under Johnny Harvey. (Now, there is your reason to get rid of John Bell)

As I finish writing this, we have just loss 4-1 at BSC Glasgow, another predictable hammering. The only saving grace in this one being Ciaran Brian’s red card, purely because

he’s leaving anyway. Now, a couple of weeks ago, that result would have unleashed a barrage of abuse and electronic bile towards both the Chairman and Manager but, understandably I suppose, there is silence.

By the time you read this, if results haven’t picked up, I reckon the knives will be back out for Ian Little. His record is poor given this year’s budget and he is maybe fortunate that the bullet was taken for him by the Chairman. But to return to the flip-flopping theme in the first paragraphs, I have occasionally thought that Yano is a slow burner, and given time - if he can hang on to the nucleus of this young team - maybe he can build something a bit special in the coming seasons.

Definitely could possibly be true. Or maybe not.

The always dynamic Ali Forster closing down against BSC Glasgow



IT’S COMPLICATED

by GORDON BAXTER

30 years ago, when a plane crashed you would often see the reason for the crash attributed to “human error”. We now live in somewhat more enlightened times, and even the mainstream media now appreciate that just because the pilot touched it last, doesn’t mean that they are to blame. In most instances the crash is merely the result of an accumulation of several smaller failings, often over an extended period of time, that finally gets tipped over the edge by something the pilot did (or didn’t) do.

If only football was so enlightened. We are where we are, and it’s not just the result of things that have happened in the last nine months, despite what several people would have you believe. If we look at the facts, you can see we’ve been on a slippery slope for a while. The table below shows how Berwick performed in SPFL2 after its formation in 2013-14. There’s only been one season where we’ve won more games that we’ve lost, and that was the first one! Things got steadily worse as the goals dried up, and even when we scored 50 goals in 2016-17, we were leaking them at the back.

It’s always been tough in the bottom division, even before the advent of the SPFL2 re-organisation, and I don’t just mean at Berwick. It’s worth having a read of Ronald Ferguson’s “Black Diamonds and the Blue Brazil”, which chronicles the trials and tribulations of Cowdenbeath (the town and the football club) over the years, and Jeff Connor’s “Pointless” which gives the an outsider’s fly-on-the-wall view of the goings on at East Stirlingshire’s over one season in SPFL2.

Cowdenbeath’s survival owes at least as much to the stock cars as it does to the football side of things. Keeping clubs going costs a lot of money, even at this level, and is reliant on the goodwill of a host of volunteers. And I’m just talking about survival, rather than progress. Look at the grounds in SPFL2: a lot of them are pretty run down, because the club’s spending the money on player’s wages, and other essentials like pitch maintenance, and utility bills. So it’s not easy running a club and making the books balance particularly when you remember that the board—who don’t get paid--as well as the players are part-timers. And, at the end of the day, a lot of it is about the money.

| Season | Pos. | P | W | D | L | F | A | GD | Pts |
|---------|------|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|-----|
| 2013-14 | 5 | 36 | 15 | 7 | 14 | 63 | 49 | 14 | 52 |
| 2014-15 | 8 | 36 | 11 | 10 | 15 | 60 | 57 | 3 | 43 |
| 2015-16 | 6 | 36 | 14 | 7 | 15 | 35 | 50 | -5 | 49 |
| 2016-17 | 8 | 36 | 10 | 10 | 16 | 50 | 65 | -15 | 40 |
| 2017-18 | 8 | 36 | 9 | 10 | 17 | 31 | 59 | -28 | 37 |
| 2018-19 | 10 | 36 | 5 | 4 | 27 | 27 | 91 | -64 | 19 |

It's well-documented that we find it hard to attract players to Berwick. We can't pay a premium on player salaries that would offset the need to travel for an hour or two just get to a home game. Life became harder when the board slashed the playing budget, and there was the failed coup, both of which were factors in Robbie Horn's departure. It's nice to

sacked sooner? Yes, in my opinion, but there were a number of fans who donned their black and gold tinted specs after the mid-week win against Peterhead, and thought that maybe that was going to be the turning point in our fortunes after all.

So here we are, top of the bottom of the Lowland League. When you look at where we were at the start of the season, with barely a team, let alone a squad, that's actually not as bad as the doom-mongers would have you believe. If you look at the performances, too, we've never really been outclassed, apart from that cup game against Kelty.

It's not going to be easy to get back into SPFL2, and anyone who thinks we deserve to, as of right, is deluded. Just look at East Kilbride, for example, who have had things all their own way in the Lowland League for a few seasons: even they are struggling this season and won't make the play-off against the Highland League winners. I also have no doubt there will be a few more teams fall through the trapdoor over the next few seasons. So we're not alone.

I hope it's self-evident by now that it's important to see the bigger picture, which is often overlooked (and not just in football, either). The reason we are where we are, is down to a combination of reasons that have happened over a long period of time. Despite all this, I remain cautiously optimistic. We're slowly turning the ship around. We still need to find new ways to generate income, if we're going to seriously compete. And by "we", I mean everyone who follows Berwick. Well, we've got to find some way to pay for that 25 goals a season striker, haven't we?

Berwick's situation was made even worse with so many junior clubs joining the SPFL pyramid system. That just meant there was even more competition to sign players from the incoming clubs that had chairmen with deep pockets. We saw all this coming—didn't we?—but did little or nothing to prepare for it.

The board (yes, it was a board decision) appointed Johnny Harvey, and we all know how that turned out. Should he have been



Will Calum Smith be our thirty five goals a season striker??

see he's gone from strength to strength since returning to Bonnyrigg, who are pushing Kelty for the Lowland League title.

"JOHN"

by MICHAEL CONBOY

My best mate of almost 30 years is called John and I am an ever-cynical balding middle age man, wow what an opening line! If the rest of the support group are comfortable shall we begin....

John and Baldy two names I have heard on many occasions in Leeds shouted to us on a night out, funny how I get the sticky end of the stick.

In all seriousness I am talking about Berwick's loan signing of Joao "John" Balde, I always keep an eye on new players coming but since the move to the Lowland League it seems to be more of a movement out of players. I call it a "move" to the Lowland League as I hope this is just a temporary arrangement for a couple of seasons then we'll will be back

shining the proverbial light in the SFL.

"John" as he is so fondly known, was a welcome addition to the Berwick Rangers squad in anticipation of their first campaign in the Lowland League.

With a successful preseason run of games, but no training camp in sunnier climes for these Hardy young professionals. A run in the sand dunes and some tactical work on the wind-swept beaches of Gods Countries stunning coastline, rugged to the extreme, beautiful to the core.

Signed by Rangers football club at 16 years old from The Spartans, a rival in the Lowland League who are currently 6th in the table. With a call up from his national team Portugal



John in action

for the under 18 squad John looks a very exciting prospect.

The young attacking midfielder was first seen at Shielfield Park when he featured in the Rangers Under 21 team in the Tunnocks Caramel Wafer Cup. The score being 1-2 to Rangers U21's a penalty from Mebude and a goal from McPake both in the first half, In the second half Purves gets a goal back for Berwick in the 71st minute. Unfortunately, the Black and Gold fail to get anything from the cup game.

"Can we have a rewind" as Craig David once said, did someone mention Tunnocks Wafer Caramel Wafer bars?



The up and coming Berwick-upon-Tweed

Just to clarify that is Craig David by the way and not David Craig who played for Preston North End and now a some what prolific face of Sky Sports football.

Had we stopped discussing the "Tunnocks"? what a stunning confectionary, I would quite willingly scale the oxygen depraved summit of Everest in Bonington's blister ridden walking boots and rusty crampons for the said Scottish confectionery, and with a cup of tea, Yorkshire may I add is second to none.

I could literally run through a load of stats and try analyse all of John's performances, but to do that would somehow seem to patronise the hardcore fans who attend Shielfield week in, week out. The weather doesn't faze them unless the pitch is waterlogged or frozen which is in the lap of the footballing gods.

In that case a walk back to The Angel to catch a televised game at teatime and settle in for the 3.00pm live scores.

Being a Yorkshire lad, but I guess not so much of a young lad these days my attendance at Berwick home games has been pretty much three home games a season. I call them my away days as we arrive at Leeds stations at 8.30am and don't get back to Leeds the following day until 2.00pm.

The Berwick v Dalbeattie Star game on the 26th October, being my first home game of the season, or should I say "away day".

I won't do a massive travel log Judith Chalmers style review, as I am pretty sure I have done that in previous ramblings and I can almost hear the groans and pages turns over to something less boring instead.

But and this a really big but, we are not talking Kardashian big, but I would like to mention a few establishments that helped us on our way, so in no particular order or merit, The Curfew, The Angel Inn and The Black and Gold.

I must say that Berwick is definitely an up and coming town from what I have seen over the last few years. The Mule on Rouge, another new place I would like to visit. I have been buying and collecting records since I was a young boy, headphones on listening to The Beatles Please Please Me. Life, career, relationships get in the ways of the things we hold dear.

Guess who is back? Mr Mid Life Crisis!! Mr Vinyl, Mr Writer as the Stereophonics once sang. But to be fair it could be so much worse. Harley Davidson, Leather jacket, cross dressing. But to be fair could really see myself on a Harley doing 70 on the M62 in a blonde wig and floral dress.

I need to slam my pint of Belhaven Best down on this wooden table in The Angel Inn as this tale has gone way off-piste, so much so the snow drift meets the ski lift.

As Judith would report at this point, we are well oiled and the locals are not getting restless just tales of Friday night in the local bars over the river. The walk from the Angel to the Black and Gold is a mere two step as we turn right with the pleasant aroma of fish and chips guiding the way like the pied piper. A pre match at the bar and we turn around to see one of the lads from the Angel. His identity remains intact, but he is an AFC Wimbledon season ticket holder and a top bloke if he is reading this. I am hopefully meeting up with him for the Edinburgh game as my regular football sidekick is unavailable for the trip. As time is ticking on, we don't get to chat, just go our separate ways into the ground.

A chilly but sunny October afternoon perfect conditions for an afternoon at the match if you wrap up warm. We take our seats; I like to sit on the lower tier my eye line level with the players. That's my eye line, not eye liner if anyone has any other ideas!

With the bright but welcoming sunshine directly in my eyes, woolly hat pulled down and finger smudged glasses I can still appreciate John's little turn and long shot that hits the cross bar, lovely turn and movement from him.

On the 44th minute a great goal from Forster again a high ball hitting the under side of the cross bar opening Berwick's account 1-0 the home side.

The half time whistle blows and we make our way back to the Black and Gold with a smile on our faces for a well-deserved warm and halftime pint. There is little mileage in telling you what we order to drink as it's the usual. As we start to thaw out AFC Wimbledon appears, he looks frozen, red nose with the cold hands in pockets. He orders a pint and joins us for a chat. We cover all manner of conversation in

the 15-minute break from the National Team, Gareth Southgate to Jersey of all places! Hang on a minute we sued to go to Jersey on our holidays as kids, I would elaborate be the Bell Haven best has now kicked in.

Due to the pleasantly engrossing conversation and pint we find now find ourselves late for the second half. Banging on the steel gate to get back into the ground we hear a roar, as we get in, we realise the roar was for a Berwick goal from Purves and the Ger's are now 2 nil up!

We don't take our seats in the stand as we don't want to miss any of the action, we stand on the cold grey shard stones which are now glistening in the afternoon sun.



On route to the match

54 minutes in a nice little ball across and a pass into my man John, he taps the ball nicely into the back of the net 3-0 Berwick.

There are no more goals to report, what a sensational result for Berwick 3 goals and to see the lad Balde score makes evening beers in the Angel and the Curfew taste even better than usual and the curry in the Magna Tandoori never fails to disappoint.

FROM THE HEART

by **DEREK BELL**

On behalf of The Trust and all our supporters, I'd like to thank Derek for his hard work in running and managing The New Black & Gold Dream social media feeds. Thank you Derek, and for taking more time and effort in writing this for our magazine.

When I started the New Black and Gold Dream Facebook page it was born out of frustration at the situation the club found itself in but also partly out of hope. Hope that we would rise the challenge of getting back to the league set up and hope that a new board and leadership would see the club re-energised and ready to face the significant challenges ahead on and off the pitch. Oh well, best laid plans and all that.

As we all know we now enter a new year back where we started with boardroom upheaval and disappointment on the pitch. It's like a live game of snakes and ladders where we always end up on a snake.

From the comments on the page I would say that most fans entered the season with a feeling of goodwill towards the board, the manager and the players but that quite quickly started to change. Most of us were able to put the BetFred results in context and while no-one liked getting thrashed we made excuses about a team just coming together and the cup coming too quick for them, and in the end it was irrelevant it was all about challenging for promotion. The home loss to Bonnyrigg in the first league game was disappointing but we could take some solace from the fact we scored and that there was a decent crowd. Very quickly that changed as we suffered a real mixed bag of performances through August and September. Performances on

the pitch were showing only minor signs of improvement and crowds looked sparse. By now concerns were being raised about finances and the long term future of the club.

On the page posts remained uncensored allowing a free flow of discussion and perhaps more encouragingly avoiding personal abuse – which was always a prime aim of the page, moving away from anonymous abuse and having people stand up and express their opinion under their own name. Some may argue that this allowed alliances to form especially as a decision was made early on that John Bell should not contribute to the page. I don't hold with that view, but further to that even if it is the case I don't see it as a bad thing.

Sadly, off the pitch concerns became the pre-dominant source of discussion, every result that pushed us further away from the top and nearer the East of Scotland would lead to more criticism of the board and less of the performance.

I would like to have seen the board given longer but I do believe there were mistakes made which had to be addressed. I don't doubt that they working hard and trying to turn things round but they were failing to communicate this to supporters. There were no good news stories coming out of Shielfield and there was the appearance of nothing being done to address the issues around future financing. As we faced the clear reality of further seasons in the Lowland there seemed to be little evidence of a long-term plan to resolve the financial concerns around the club. This isn't to say that there were no plans just that fans didn't know what they were and as such started to lose faith. If

we'd been top of the league and heading for a potential promotion it may have been ignored but we weren't and it wasn't.

I'm part of the generation of football fans that never really trusts Chairmen or owners of clubs even when times are good, we expect them to be corrupt, incompetent or in it for their own ends. I don't believe for a second



Captain Brennan takes a high ball against Falkirk in the Betfred

John or the other members of the board were in that mould. He was a long standing loyal supporter who only wanted what was best for the club. However, I think it would be naïve to say mistakes weren't made – the social media struggled a bit which I think was inevitable when run by volunteers, and heaven knows from my efforts at running the various NBAGD empire it's not easy, and we seemed to wait a long time to confirm Little's appointment and the building of the team was a laboured process.

Which has led us to where we are now with a new board and a returning chairman. There can be no doubt that they have sought to address what were seen as some of the issues. Social Media has gone from been minimalist to what is close on a constant bombardment – I'll admit that not everything that is posted is to my taste, however, it has raised the profile of the club and it has engaged with fans and promoted the club. There is a

more obvious promotion of the commercial side and the initial impression is that this is appearing successful within its own terms. The board have pledged new initiatives to bring people back to the club and to embed it within the local community. No easy task as I remain unconvinced by how much the people of Berwick actually appreciate the club or care about it. But being a more pro-active club may change that. Some supporters will feel we have heard all this before from previous boards and nothing ever changes but time will tell if the energy that has been brought in can continue long term and if it will succeed.

It will all become easier if we can start to have some success on the pitch. I think there is a realism at boardroom level that it's going to be a long haul to get out of the Lowland but that it is not unrealistic to at least expect to be competing nearer the top than the bottom. From the comments on the page it would seem to me that supporters are going with it and that there is a positive feeling around the place. In the end though it's about football and what we need is a team on the pitch that challenges and that's often the hardest part of the task. We can only hope the various plans and activities can bring in funds which will allow us to build a team that can challenge.

The page itself continues to work reasonably well (less so the other elements in all honesty) and it will remain totally independent and will allow everyone a space to freely express their views. The board will face the same level of scrutiny and criticism if necessary. Although I'd like to think it will also get praise from fans where praise is due (even if that goes entirely against my old fashioned views of boards!). I said when the page was set up that the aim was to be a critical friend and that remains the case.

It's been a lively few months and there is no reason to believe it's going to be any less so during 2020.

IT IS WHAT IT IS

by **TWEMPIE LEE**

It's a long time since I was present at a kangaroo court; many years ago and many thousands of miles away I was the recipient of one. I just managed to escape the hangman's noose; oh happy days but it was good grounding. So the 6th of January made me shiver (sounds like a Don McLean song...) as I was present at another one. It didn't click initially, but I did wonder why there were an awful lot of strange faces at the AGM, with a fair amount of them I can't remember seeing (or not very often seen) at a Dream Team match.

What unfolded, though not initially, was drama that I don't think many people could have imagined. It made Corrie Street, Emmerdale and 'Deadenders' plots pale into insignificance. It was a good soap opera, if you like that sort of thing and I could go on..... suffice to say I hope the new regime (now they have a board of Directors in place) do manage to get the funding together needed to take The Rangers back up the leagues. The way that Kelty, Bonnyrigg, East Stirlingshire and East Kilbride etc seem have the money to spend suggests it's a rich man's world (Abba song anyone ..?) and will take some doing.

Away from the boardroom, matters on the pitch are a concern. We were playing catch-up from day-one trying to get a decent team together, which resulted in a slow start to the season as the team took a while to gel. Results, especially at home, could have been a lot better however we eventually started

to improve. Some of the football we played was the best I've seen here for years but we just seemed unable to finish teams off, with the many chances we created and how few ended up in the net.

We do need a striker; Daryl wanted away but at least we got some money for him as opposed to nowt come May. Ken Bowron, Warren Hawke, Darren Lavery; someone of



Is the Lowland League a Rich Man's World?

that ilk is what we need - the January Sales are on and I'm praying like mad!!

After the soap opera, I was speaking to Malcolm Reed about various subjects, including the support of, and supporting The Dream Team. I was reminded of what his father (Jim, one time BRFC Chairman) had once said to my dad many many years ago 'Colin, it's a shame we didn't have a thousand fans like your Stuart'. I was proud to hear that, but at the time I felt it was a little over the top!

During the 60's and 70's, I was in the army, posted in the Middle-East and Africa and

so missed an awful lot of football but Dad did send me The 'Tiser every week to keep me up to date. It's fair to say however a lot of my workmates got to know about Berwick Rangers; especially after January 28th 1967. I used to spread the word good and proper! This brings me to another 'incident'

Picture the scene, a tented Canadian Army training area in New Brunswick Province, after a hard days graft building roads and bridges for their army in the hot Canadian sun. We retire to the canteen after a shower and an evening meal for some liquid refreshment. We used to get football scores sent over from Blighty via our Army Signal Group, which was always neatly written and posted on the notice board, next to the bar; it was better than the local papers! So, 'Twempie' Lee, Ginge Evans (a Toffees man) and Joe Pollitt (a Citizens fan) used to sit there all night long talking football

and during one of these Bug Ginge asked me a big question. "Would you still pay to see BRFC (no 'Dream Team' in these days) OR accept a free ticket to see 'The Toon' play Man Utd or Hibs play Rangers" The answer was "no contest!" and Ginge said I was a true football fan of my beloved team; I bought him another Moosehead beer for his troubles.

It all comes back to the beginning for me, less in-fighting and more pulling together in the same direction from everybody, for the good of the club. We are not the only club in the doldrums; good examples are Chester, Wrexham and especially Notts County. Let's keep working hard supporting our team and we'll hopefully get out of this mess. For real fans, it is what it is, so keep smiling and let's get on with it.



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