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SPORT

Friendlies confirmed in July



Risborough Rangers FC

RISBOROUGH Rangers FC have confirmed their pre-season friendlies for the upcoming 2022/23 campaign.

The Reds will play seven matches during July with only two of their fixtures taking place at their B.E.P. Stadium in Horsenden.

The fixtures are as follows:

- Saturday, July 9, 3pm: Pitstone & Ivinghoe vs Risborough Rangers
- Tuesday, July 12, 7.30pm: Risborough Rangers vs Holmer Green
- Thursday, July 14, 7.30pm: Risborough Rangers vs Flackwell Heath (at John Collet School)
- Thursday, July 21, 7.30pm: Buckingham Athletic vs Risborough Rangers
- Saturday, July 23, 3pm: Risborough Rangers vs Chesham United
- Tuesday, July 26, 7.45pm: Risborough Rangers vs Barton Rovers
- Saturday, July 30, 3pm: Jersey Bulls vs Risborough Rangers

Captain departs for London

FORMER Amersham Town captain Paolo Deritis has joined Rayners Lane FC for the upcoming season.

Deritis, who played 34 times for the club last year as skipper, is the London side's first signing under new manager Scott Patmore.

The defender spent three campaigns with the South Buckinghamshire, where he played 57 times and scored twice.

He only played eight games during the 2020/21 season before all the divisions in the Non League were curtailed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Rayners Lane play in the Combined Counties Football League Division One and finished fourth last season.

A replacement that could work wonders?

By James Richings

AFTER Wycombe's 2-0 loss against Sunderland in the League One play-off final, manager Gareth Ainsworth confirmed that the club are working on 'personnel and characteristics' to replace Adebayo Akinfenwa.

The striker, 40, has officially retired from the game after six seasons with the club, which saw him score 61 goals in 250 appearances.

His departure means at the time of writing, the club only have two recognised senior strikers on the books in Sam Vokes and Brandon Hanlen, whilst the likes of Tjay De Barr, Connor Parsons, and Ali Al-Hamadi are part of the development team and spent time out on loan from Wanderers last season.

Of course, new faces joining the Adams Park club will be a given, so, who could be the perfect replacement for Adebayo Akinfenwa?

In my opinion, the answer is a player that is familiar with Wycombe Wanderers FC, and that person is Uche Ikpeazu.

When Wycombe confirmed the signing of Ikpeazu in 2020 ahead of their debut season in the Championship, there was a sense of excitement as he seemed to be one the vital pieces of Wanderers' survival puzzle.

However, numerous injury setbacks in the first-half of 2020/21 limited the Ugandan striker to just six appearances from the start of the season to the end of December, with every outing being as a substitute.

It wasn't until December 29, 2020 that he got his first start which was in a 2-1 home victory over Cardiff City, and a few days later on January 2, 2021, he got his first of six goals for the club in a 3-1 loss against Middlesbrough at Adams Park.

After a difficult start to the campaign for Ikpeazu and for Wanderers, 2021 saw why he was brought in from Heart of Midlothian.

His strength, his heading ability, his



Uche Ikpeazu (left) spent the 2020/21 season at Wycombe when they were in the Championship (PA)

work rate, his desire to win the ball, his constant messages of support to his teammates were just some of the factors in why Gareth Ainsworth wanted to sign the striker.

And despite relegation, he finished as Wycombe's top scorer and was linked with a move away which duly came, as Middlesbrough signed him 12 months ago, however, the transfer to the North

East has so far not worked out.

Signed by Neil Warnock who eventually left in November of that year, Ikpeazu in six months, scored three goals in all competitions across 22 games for the Boro with nine of those appearances being starts.

He was eventually shipped out by new manager Chris Wilder to Cardiff City on loan in January this year,

where he bagged three goals in 13 matches, but he only started one of those games.

It has now been reported by Teeside Live that Ikpeazu is deemed surplus to requirements and is able to leave the Riverside Stadium, and with Wycombe needing a striker to fill the boots of Akinfenwa, the striker returning to Adams Park could work for both parties.



Kevin Betsy (inset) left his role at Arsenal to take over at Crawley (PA)

Former fan favourite is named as manager

FORMER Wycombe Wanderers striker Kevin Betsy has been named the new manager of Crawley Town.

The 44-year-old, who enjoyed three separate spells with the Chairboys, left his role as Arsenal's Under 23 coach to take over the West Sussex club, following the departure of John Yems.

Yems was initially suspended by the club in April this year before he mutually agreed to terminate his contract the following month, due to accusations of using discriminatory

language and behaviour towards his players.

Betsy, who scored 26 goals for Wycombe, will take the reins in what will be his first managerial role in the EFL, following stints in the England youth set up between 2016 and 2021, as well as the Gunners.

Speaking on his new job, he said: "I am joining a club that has a great history that we should no doubt embrace, and we are also looking at an exciting new beginning on many levels both on and off the pitch.

"I am very much looking forward to meeting everyone at the club.

"Together, we can look to Crawley Town to be a club that people enjoy coming to watch and that players and staff love coming to work every day.

"Crawley will be a positive place to bring our local community together and attract the next generation of supporters globally to the club.

"I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Arsenal, all of the staff and players for a wonderful time at the club."



George Baldock (right/playing for Sheffield United in the Premier League in the 2020/21 season), make his debut for Greece on June 2 (PA)

International appearance

A PROFESSIONAL footballer from Buckingham has made his international debut for the Greek National Team.

George Baldock, who was born in the town, made his inaugural appearance for the 'Galanolefki' (the Sky Blues and Whites) on Thursday, June 2, as Greece defeated Northern Ireland 1-0 at Windsor Park in the Nations League where he came on as a 90th minute substitute.

The 29-year-old then made his full international bow for Greece three days later, as he played the full 90 minutes in their 1-0 win over Kosovo on June 5.

Baldock, who hails from north Buckinghamshire, had never played international football at

any level prior to this month, but he was eligible to represent the European country due being of Greek descent through his grandmother.

The right-back started his professional career with Milton Keynes in 2009 where he played 125 times for the Whites, whilst enjoying five separate loan spells away from the club, before moving to Sheffield United in 2017.

He played an important role in the club's promotion to the Premier League in 2019 and despite their relegation from the division in 2021, he played 70 games as a top-flight player, scoring twice.

His older brother, Sam, is currently at Oxford United.

Who is getting your vote for 2021/22?



Who will win it in 2022? (PA)

FANS can now vote for Wycombe Wanderers' player of the season.

The campaign saw the Chairboys just miss out on promotion to the Championship as they fell to a 2-0 defeat against Sunderland in the League One play-off final.

Despite falling at the final hurdle, the 2021/22 season will be a year to remember for Gareth Ainsworth's men for many reasons.

It was the first full season that fans were able to return to the stands following the Covid-19 pandemic, average attendances at Adams Park reached an all-time high, 83 points were accumulated which is the highest for the club in a League One campaign, and they reached their third play-off final in seven years.

On the pitch, Wycombe defeated Charlton Athletic at the Valley for the first time in their history, they picked up four points from Oxford United which hadn't happened since the 2005/06 season, and they kept 18 clean sheets.

So, despite missing out on a place in the second tier of English football, there are many positives to take from the season that has just ended.

The club now want fans to tell them who they think should be crowned Wanderers' player of the season in an online vote.

All the players that are on the list have played more than 10 times for the Chairboys this season.

Just before the campaign ended, Sam Vokes was named as the club's Player's Player of the season award.

Previous winners of the mentioned accolade above include:

- 2020/21 - Josh Knight
 - 2019/20 - Anthony Stewart
 - 2018/19 - Curtis Thompson
 - 2017/18 - Adebayo Akinfenwa
 - 2016/17 - Adebayo Akinfenwa
 - 2015/16 - Michael Harriman
 - 2014/15 - Alfie Mawson
 - 2013/14 - Josh Scowen
 - 2012/13 - Stuart Lewis
 - 2011/12 - Stuart Beavon
 - 2010/11 - Nikki Bull
 - 2009/10 - Craig Woodman
 - 2008/09 - Craig Woodman
 - 2007/08 - Scott McGleish
 - 2006/07 - Jermaine Easter
 - 2005/06 - Matt Bloomfield
- To cast your vote, go to www.wffc.com/news/2022/june/08/vote-for-your-202122-player-of-the-season.

Supporter thanks Chairboys faithful



A Wycombe fan thanked other supporters for their commitment in following the club this season (PA)

A WYCOMBE Wanderers fan has penned an emotional letter thanking all of the supporters who travelled up and down the country getting behind the team during the 2021/22 season.

The campaign, which saw the club play 59 competitive games, ended in heartbreak at Wembley Stadium in the League One play-off final, as the Chairboys fell to a 2-0 loss against Sunderland.

And even the North East side secured the third and final place in next season's Championship at Wanderers' expense, supporters had a lot to smile about as not only did the club achieve its highest points tally in League One, but it was also the first full campaign since 2018/19 that spectators were able to watch the team live in the flesh without any interruptions.

This came after two stop-start seasons due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which saw the club's remaining fixtures for the 2019/20 get cancelled (excluding the play-off matches), and all of the matches in the 2020/21 in the Championship get played behind closed doors, apart from three games.

And Kieren Hearn, who has been following the Chairboys for several years and hosts a post focusing on the club, wanted to share his gratitude to all the other fans that got behind the club over the last nine months.

In his letter, he said: "When we look back in four or five years'

By James Richings

time, I don't know about you but I would say it was dramatic.

"From not knowing whether or not we were going to make the play-offs in the first place, with the bumpy ride to the finish going down to that final day at Burton, followed by that massive uphill task against MK.

"We held our nerve in the second leg, but when the final whistle went at stadium MK there were handshakes and when the bear hugs and chanting started.

"The dream of ending the season at Wembley wasn't a dream anymore however it ended in frustration and tears.

"We should be proud of them they battled through overcome the pressure to get to Wembley throughout the regular season.

"I hope you have a great summer wherever you are in the world and make it one to remember.

"And like me, watch for the start of next season.

"I leave you all with sincere thanks."

The 2022/23 league season will start in July, with the fixtures being released this month.

This campaign will see the Chairboys take on Bristol Rovers, Forest Green Rovers, Port Vale, Exeter City, Derby County, Barnsley and Peterborough United.

Seven teams they didn't face in the 2021/22 season.

SPORT

When Akinfenwa rejected Chelsea

0963-2336



The match will be played in August

Another friendly confirmed

A WYCOMBE Wanderers team from the development squad will take on Worthing in a friendly after the 2022/23 league season will begin.

The Chairboys will travel down to West Sussex on Tuesday, August 2 with the match kicking off at 7.45pm.

The fixture will be Wanderers' fourth friendly of the summer after they confirmed matches against Bracknell Town, Chesham United and Aylesbury United respectively.

All the games will be played away from home with all the game featuring trialists and development players.

They will take place on the following days:

- Friday, July 8, 7.45pm: Bracknell Town vs Wycombe Wanderers
- Friday, July 22, 7.30pm: Chesham United vs Wycombe Wanderers
- Friday, July 29, 7.30pm: Aylesbury United vs Wycombe Wanderers*
- Tuesday, August 2: Worthing vs Wycombe Wanderers

Flackwell's pre-season matches

FLACKWELL Heath FC will play six pre-season matches in July as they get ready the new campaign.

The South Bucks side, who play their home games at Wilks Park, will have two of their games at home with three of their matches being played on the road.

One of the games will be held at the John Colet School in Wendover.

The fixtures are as follows:

- Tuesday, July 5: Long Crendon vs Flackwell Heath
 - Thursday, July 14: Flackwell Heath vs Risborough Rangers (to be played at John Colet School)
 - Saturday, July 16: Flackwell Heath vs Binfield
 - Tuesday, July 19: Flackwell Heath vs Aylesbury Vale Dynamos
 - Tuesday, July 26: Flackwell Heath vs Aylesbury United
 - Tuesday, July 30: AFC Stoneham vs Flackwell Heath
- For more information, visit www.flackwellheathfc.co.uk.



Adebayo Akinfenwa (pictured in 2021) was linked to a move to Chelsea in 2018 but publicly 'turned down' the PL giants on Twitter (PA)

By James Richings

THIS summer will be the first in seven years that Adebayo Akinfenwa will not return to Adams Park.

The much-loved EFL hero and Wycombe Wanderers legend has now officially retired from the game, in which spent six successful seasons with the Chairboys, scoring 61 goals in 250 appearances.

However, in very unique circumstances, the 'Beast' was linked to joining one of the biggest clubs in English football, but he publicly 'declined' the chance to move to a European powerhouse.

'For the love of chicken'

It was January 2018.

Wycombe Wanderers were enjoying a fine season in League Two as

they fought for promotion to League One.

They were sitting in the play-off places of England's fourth tier when an extraordinary rumour started to circulate.

Three leagues above them in the Premier League saw Chelsea, who were the reigning champions, struggle in the top-flight.

Then manager Antonio Conte had splashed out an eye-watering £60m on striker Alvaro Morata, who was having tough time in front of goal.

Diego Costa was on his way out and with Michy Batshuayi being inconsistent with his performances before being loaned out to Borussia Dortmund, the Italian boss was looking around for a classic number nine to help fire Chelsea to success.

Some of the names that were being

linked to joining the club included Peter Crouch, Andy Carroll and Christian Benteke who at the time, were playing for Stoke City, West Ham United and Crystal Palace respectively.

There was also another name that was getting mentioned...Adebayo Akinfenwa.

Whilst it was never confirmed, rumours through the grapevine were linking the Beast to West London, as Bayo's attributes ticked all of Conte's boxes.

He can head the ball, he is strong, he is a threat in the box and most importantly, he can score goals.

However, Akinfenwa, who was in his second season with Wanderers, quickly quashed the speculation due to one important dealbreaker.

In a Twitter post, the Liverpool fan jokingly said: "Woke up hearing the

Chelsea rumours, I'm flattered but I've heard Conte don't allow chicken at the training ground sorry can't do it! #ForTheLoveOfChicken."

It is highly unlikely that the source of this incredible story will ever be revealed, and whilst no transfer materialised, both clubs would go on to have happy endings for the 2017/18 season.

Chelsea, who opted to sign Arsenal's Olivier Giroud, would go on to win that year's FA Cup by defeating Manchester United 1-0 in the final, whilst Wycombe gained promotion to League One with a 2-1 victory away at Chesterfield.

It was one of the most incredible and unexpected transfer rumours in recent times, and I do wonder how different life would be if Conte allowed chicken to be served at the Cobham Training Ground.