

AFC Wimbledon US Dons Newsletter

Issue 23 – May/June 2007

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US Dons – News

Sorry for not getting a newsletter out last month. Too many things going! Well, our quest for promotion failed..... Would it have made a difference if we had played with a full team for the whole game? We will never know. It will be interesting to see what the new management team bring in and how they will handle the playing staff. In some of the things that have been said, I would expect a more consistent playing staff and hopefully not the revolving door we had the last season. Maintaining a consistent line-up will hopefully bring us some better results.

Question of the month! What kind of interest is there in sponsoring a kit, or socks, etc? I am sure we can expect a larger outlay for the team this year and any help we can give would surely be appreciated. Let us know, we will need to move quickly, so your responses would be appreciated.

It won't be long before the season is upon us again. Not much of an off-season anymore. Let's hope for an inspired off-season and a good crop of new players that will help us to promotion. They say third time lucky!

As always, we are looking for input from any of you. Any tid-bits to share, history of yourselves or the club that other members would find entertaining. Do you have any old memorabilia, that may interest your fellow Dons supporters, or any other tidbit that might interest your fellow supporters, please send them to me and I will get it published.

E-mail your responses to me at: davgarlinge@aol.com.

Don't forget to check out the club news on the official website. Also Paul Raymond's "Itmustbedons" website is a great source for Wimbledon news. For home games you can dial up "Radio Wdon" and listen to some interesting commentary as well as some interesting and little known statistics. The web-sites are listed at the end of the newsletter.

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David Garlinge (Limeydg).

AFCW News

A sad end to the season following another first round playoff defeat, this time to Bromley. Would it have been different if we had played with 11 players for the whole game? We will never know, but hope springs eternal and this coming season will see us reach our goal of promotion, I can feel it. Truth be known we lost our battle last year pretty much throughout the season. We just endured too many draws against lower level teams we should have beaten handily! And the draws just kept on coming all season, from the start right down to the end of the season, 15 draws out of 42 league games. It was this that brought the end to Dave Anderson's reign at the Don's. He could get the best out of the team in the cup games where we were underdogs, but just couldn't carry the same motivation into the league games. We always played down to the level of the teams we were playing. No disrespect to Dave Anderson, I agree with Erik Samuelson when he said Dave left the club better than when he arrived, but it was time to move on and make the next step. Dave's replacement should be the man to get us to that next step.

The Jamie Darlington affair ruined what were some excellent results in our various cup assaults, and we came away with nothing from the season. Who knows what heights we could have reached in the FA Trophy, but it should just give us more resolve for our next assault at the cups in the coming season.

The makeup of the Ryman Premier League is much the same for next year. We did not receive any of the clubs relegated from the Conference league; we had a crossover from the Southern League and promotions from the lower divisions. Biggest of all, we also lost our old nemesis, Hampton & Richmond, to promotion, so hopefully we should be well aware of what it will take to gain promotion this coming year. Looking at the league in general we should be favourites to gain outright promotion.

The new manager, Terry Brown, seems to be the ideal pick to carry us through to promotion next year. He already achieved the same success with Aldershot, and left then last year in a promising position for one of the top spots in the Conference South and possible promotion. And did he make the Don's faithful happy signing an old Don's favourite in Marcus Gayle, one of his earlier acquisitions at Aldershot. What a way to start! Terry has brought

with him, some of his old staff and is beginning to put “*his*” team together. He has released some of our old favourites (Steve Butler, to name one), lost some of the players we wanted to keep (to higher level football – D’Sane & Lorraine specifically) and bought in a few new faces (particularly in the mid-field, which is something that really needed strengthening). On top of this he has also, seemingly, made a commitment to our youth teams by signing a couple of the under 19’s for the first team (this is something DA failed to do). This is a commitment that could bode well for us in the future, in terms of both the first team as well as our goal to bring along young players and groom them for the future.

All in all it has been a busy post season for AFC Wimbledon and I think we can expect a little bit more activity before all is said and done, and the new season begins. The fixture list has not yet been published, but regardless of who we play in the first few games it will be imperative to get a good start and get the fanbase behind the team again. The crowds have diminished over the last couple of seasons and we need some old magic to bring them back.

Here’s looking forward to a new season and promotion on the horizon.

Let’s keep the faith!

COME ON YOU DON’S

Guest Column:

Thanks to Robert Smith and the WDSA for once again sharing some articles for the guest column. This article is an exclusive WDSA interview with club chairman Erik Samuelson and his views on the new manager, Terry Brown, the Dave Anderson legacy, the fall-out over the point's appeal, living with the ground debt, the club's most pressing problem: keeping the fans and thoughts about a return to Merton.

What impressed you (and the selection panel) the most about Terry Brown during the interview process and was he the standout applicant?

Erik: He has “been there, done that”. Terry and Stuart Cash brought a good understanding of the current players’ strengths and weaknesses – easily the best of the interviewees in this respect. They clearly work as a team. They presented a well-structured analysis of what is needed to get promotion. It’s a good cultural fit with the club. Yes, Terry was a clear-cut winner.

Can we expect another revolving door policy with players coming and going this summer like in recent seasons and are you in a position to say which players are definitely staying?

Erik: I hope we will get more continuity than in the past. There are always changes when a new manager comes in. I hope that we will be able to retain all the back four (some are out of contract, so it isn’t under our control); we have taken up our options on Luke Garrard and on Wes Daly (although Wes is unsettled); Richard Jolly remains on contract and we are trying to keep Roscoe D’Sane, for whom we didn’t have an option. It looks as if Steve Ferguson will stay as well, but things change fast in the summer.

A season that offered great promise (leading the RPL and FAT progress) in the end failed to deliver promotion out of the RPL. How do you assess the season in terms of the relatively new club’s development and future prospects?

Erik: Personally, I feel we stalled a little bit this season. We spent a lot more money on the team this year and Dave Anderson said, quite often, that we had the best team in the league. So, missing out on promotion in a year when all the other title contenders also struggled for consistency, was very frustrating. I think we now need to make sure that we put everything in place to make sure we get promotion next season, or make it as sure as possible, given football’s continuing ability to be unpredictable. As for our prospects, my recent visits to other clubs (most recently Exeter, FC United and Stockport) have reinforced my view that we can survive (and maybe even thrive) if we can get into the league - the problem is getting the money to get through the conference. But that is looking some distance ahead – first we need to get out of the Ryman League.

What do you see as the legacy Dave Anderson left the club after his three years in charge?

Erik: Dave left the club in good condition. The squad he had built up was a strong one and a young one as well. He introduced a level of professionalism and discipline that was much needed and took us on several steps further from what we needed to get going in the first couple of years. His openness and honesty made him very straightforward to deal with and I was very sad that he wasn't able to take us up and continue with the club for a longer period. We talked several times about changes that were needed for the coming season and my one regret is that I wasn't able to persuade him to make those changes earlier; had he done so I think we'd have gone up and he'd still be here.

Given The rights and wrongs of the case, what administrative procedures are the club putting in place so to not have a repeat of the international transfer form bungle?

Erik: All new contracts and registrations for the first team will now be reviewed and counter-signed before being submitted to the league/FA. I am also considering asking the FA for international clearance on every player, even if they don't look as if they could possibly have been playing overseas. I expect that they would find this a nuisance but it might hurry up the creation of an accessible database that we could interrogate directly.

Do you expect a prickly relationship with the Ryman League next season after the outcome of the club's successful appeal against the points deduction?

Erik: The honest answer is I hope not, but yes we've approached the league and suggested that we meet – they seem open to the idea so let's hope we can mend a few fences.

What particular qualities are the club seeking in appointing a replacement for Dave Anderson. What areas within the club's playing structures would you like to see improved?

Erik: This is what we laid down for the ideal candidate:

Primary requirements (“must haves”)

Convince us he is capable of delivering promotion in year one.

Have a strong drive for success.

Wants to win every game (as opposed to not losing every game)

Can understand and fit into the club's ethos.

Secondary requirements (some of these are subsets of the “must haves”)

Commitment to development of the young players.

Man-management skills. We don't want a “teacup thrower”.

High ethical standards.

Commitment to community involvement.

Willingness to support commercial activities and require the staff and players to do likewise.

A willingness to build on what we've already got, not tear down everything and start again.

We want winning football, but we want it to be attractive too.

Able to deal with the pressures of being our manager.

Areas of improvement? Well, a clear and visible link between U19 and reserves. I think we made good progress with this during Dave's time but it needs more work. As a part-time manager he was restricted by time whereas I hope that Terry being full-time will make this sort of thing easier to deliver. I also want the younger players to believe that they have a real chance of progressing into the team and I think Terry will deliver this.

Was there any consideration given to leaving the Isthmian League and moving to the Southern League (Premier Division), given what occurred this season?

Erik: This isn't our decision – it is an FA decision based on geography. So it isn't an option open to us, even if we wanted to do so – and I don't think we do.

What is the current situation about a move from Kingston back into Merton? Is it under consideration and have any sites been investigated. If not what are the future plans for the "Fans Stadium"?

Erik: This is all part of what is being covered by the strategy review. We are not currently considering a move into Merton as there are no realistic sites, based on a review about 4 years ago. The strategy review is asking Dons Trust members (the only ones with a vote) if they want to renew efforts to find somewhere in Merton or if they prefer to invest in Kingsmeadow for the foreseeable future (or any alternative approach they might suggest). Meanwhile, we are progressing plans to implement the new planning permissions we own, as they expire in about 22 months' time.

Given the club's membership and crowd numbers appear to have plateaued, what measures does the club intend to take to increase support to fund the proposed rise up the leagues?

Erik: The best way of increasing attendances is to play winning football. And I think Terry will deliver that. But we are also making entrance to the terraces free for U16's next season (the loss of income is covered by a sponsor); Reducing season ticket (but not Matchday) prices for 16-21 year olds, to try to retain fans as they go to Uni, etc.; Publishing our survey of why former season ticket holders didn't renew (this report is, at last, imminent); Carrying out more initiatives like the "each one, reach one" last season; improving our communications to fans, by re-energising the "Official Site" and also trying to reach the people who aren't on the internet or e-mail; Improving the facilities, so that fans like the experience when they do come. For example, refurbishing the horrible toilets in the Tempest End.

What do you regard as the most pressing problems for AFC Wimbledon as a club?

Erik: Finding a way to pay for our move up through the leagues and the associated ground improvements we need to make. Part of this is getting the fan base back up to former levels.

What is the projection for paying off the ground debt and given that restriction is the club in a position to offer more funds to the incoming manager to bolster the playing squad to meet the challenges of other cashed-up RPL teams next season?

Erik: In my opinion, people see debt as a bad thing. I don't. We have a ten year mortgage from Barclays and we have, so far, only drawn down 225,000 pounds of the 600,000 pound facility. We will need to draw more down as we improve the ground and probably take a further loan as we seek to implement the planning permissions. Parts of my approach to this is to demonstrate to Barclays that we run things well and are good payers – merely paying it all off in two years (say) doesn't give us the track record we need.

Has there been a target set for the new manager to meet within his contract period?

Erik: If you mean promotion, then yes, we want him to get us promoted in year one!

Oh, by the way, congratulations .. you won a "Corkie" award for "Wimbledon executive of the year"!! (you'll see it in the newsletter (WDSA newsletter))....

Erik: Blimey Thanks Very Much.

Erm, you're staying, aren't you?

Erik: Yes, of course, although I'm in need of a holiday!!

Fundraising Activities

A couple of newsletters ago, there were several positive responses in favour of trying to sponsor a player's kit for the upcoming season. Time is running short and as you can tell from the interview with Erik, any and all support is dearly needed by our club.

To fund a kit costs 200 pounds, approximately \$400. With our membership, that would equate to about \$10 per member. If we can't collect the funds to support a full kit, there are other options like socks and goalie gloves which are cheaper.

This is the year to help push our club to a higher level, let's all stand up and get behind our club and help make a difference! We can't engage in the day to day activities but we can let them know we care and still support our club!

We sponsored a kit two years ago, let's show our support again. If you want to send me \$10, my address is listed below and I will handle the process of setting it up with the club. All money received will be sent to sponsor to the value we have contributed. If there is a shortfall, I will make up the difference. We will be listed in the club matchday programs as "US Dons" for our sponsorship.

Any other ideas for fundraising? Send them on to me and I will publish them in the newsletter to share with the membership.

Contacts

Here we will list contact information for those of you who want to share. Who knows, in our travels we may be in a fellow supporters area and get together for a beer and chat. Sign up is optional.

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Websites of interest

Official Website - contains schedule, results and game reports:

www.afcwimbldeon.co.uk

WISA: www.wisa.org.uk

Tony Kempster's site: www.tonykempster.btinternet.co.uk

Paul Raymond - ItmustbeDons: www.itmustbedons.com

Ryman League: www.isthmian.co.uk

DonsOnline: www.donsonline.co.uk

Radio WDON: www.wdon.com

NEW chat-room (Old Centrals): <http://www.afcwgb.co.uk/gb.php>