

DUGOUT NEWS

ISSUE 2 • SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026 • FREE



SUSSEX FOOTBALL. UNFILTERED.

EVERY GOAL. EVERY UPSET. EVERY TALKING POINT.

FA VASE • FA TROPHY • ISTHMIAN • SCFL

ISSUE TWO: THIS BELONGS TO ALL OF US

709 downloads. One county. And a publication that belongs to everyone who keeps Sussex football alive.



BY MIKE MCCAFFREY · DUGOUT DIARIES

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002 · SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

When we released the first issue of Dugout News, I honestly did not know what to expect. I knew how much work had gone into it. I knew how many late nights, messages, photographs, match reports and last-minute changes were involved. What I did not know was whether people would actually download it.

Well, 709 of you did.

Seven hundred and nine downloads for the first-ever issue of a completely independent Sussex non-league football publication. No enormous marketing budget. No national media machine. No corporate investors telling us what we can and cannot say. Just a group of people who love local football coming together and creating something that represents our game.

I am incredibly proud of that number, but I am even prouder of what sits behind it.

Every download represents somebody who wanted to read about Sussex football. Somebody who cares about the players, managers, volunteers, supporters and clubs operating outside the professional spotlight. Somebody who understands that football does not begin and end with the Premier League.

It lives at grounds where volunteers arrive hours before kick-off. It lives in the clubhouse, behind the goal, inside the tea hut and on the terraces. It belongs to the people marking out pitches, washing kits, selling raffle tickets, running social-media accounts and keeping clubs alive when nobody else is watching.

That is who Dugout News is for.

Issue Two is another step forward. We have listened to the feedback, looked closely at what worked and pushed ourselves to make this edition even stronger. Inside, you can expect more reports, results, opinions, stories and characters from across the Sussex football pyramid. We will celebrate the goals and performances, but we also want to tell the stories that cannot be found in a league table.

That means giving space to the people who make our football what it is. The contributors with genuine knowledge of their clubs. The photographers standing in the rain to capture the moment. The media volunteers trying to post an update while also selling

programmes. The supporters travelling across the county and the players going to work on Monday morning after putting everything into ninety minutes on Saturday.

This publication is not being written by people looking down on non-league football from a comfortable press box. It is being created from inside the dugout, on the touchline and among the supporters.

That matters to me.

Sussex football can occasionally be a funny old place. There are rivalries, arguments and enough committee-room politics to keep Netflix going for another decade. We will not pretend everything is perfect, and anyone who has followed Dugout Diaries knows I am unlikely to suddenly become quiet when something needs saying.

But Issue Two is proof that, when it really matters, this football community can come together.

Clubs have shared our work. Contributors have trusted us with their words. Photographers have supplied brilliant images. Supporters have downloaded the publication and passed it around. People who would normally be competing against one another have helped build something designed to benefit the entire Sussex football community.

That is bigger than any one club, show or individual.

Dugout News is not here to replace the excellent work already being done. It is here to connect it, promote it and give it another platform. We want the smallest clubs to feel just as important as the biggest ones. We want a volunteer at Step 7 to open these pages and see their work treated with the same respect as somebody higher up the pyramid.

Most importantly, I want everybody involved to feel that this publication belongs to them.

We are still learning. We will make mistakes. There will probably be a missing comma somewhere that ruins somebody's Sunday morning. Someone will disagree with an opinion, somebody will want more coverage, and another person will tell me their striker's goal was definitely from 35 yards when the footage shows it was closer to 18.

That is non-league football. I would not change it.

What I will promise is that we will keep working, listening and improving. Issue One proved there is an appetite for something fresh. Issue Two is about building on that foundation and showing this was never intended to be a one-off novelty.

To every contributor, photographer, club official, player, manager, volunteer and supporter who helped us: thank you. To every one of the 709 people who downloaded Issue One: you helped turn an idea into something real.

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002

Now it is time to go again.

Welcome to Issue Two of Dugout News. Made in Sussex, built by the non-league community and created for everybody who believes our football deserves to be seen, heard and celebrated.

We are only getting started.

See you in the dugout.

Mike McCaffrey — *Dugout Diaries*

SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

EVERY SCORE THAT MATTERED

NATIONAL LEAGUE

Worthing 1-2 Forest Green Rovers

FA TROPHY · PRELIMINARY

South Park 2-1 Broadbridge Heath

FA VASE · 1st QUAL (SUSSEX)

Wick 4-1 Loxwood

Jarvis Brook 5-0 East Preston

Worthing United 4-0 Ringmer

Seaford Town 2-1 Halls Athletic

Hassocks 1-0 Petts Wood & H.

Saltdean Utd 2-2 Colliers Wood (3-0 pens)

Midhurst & E. 3-3 Warminster (5-3 pens)

Shoreham 1-1 Lancing (2-4 pens)

Pagham 1-0 Millbrook

Mile Oak 1-4 Banstead Athletic

SE Dons 4-0 Little Common

Newhaven 0-1 Guernsey

Horsham YMCA 1-5 Epsom & Ewell

Westfield 2-2 AFC Walcountians (3-5 pens)

Balham 6-1 Oakwood

Selsey 1-1 Hamworthy Utd (3-4 pens)

Today, 3pm: Roffey v Hollands & Blair · Bexhill Utd v Erith & Belvedere

ISTHMIAN · SUSSEX CLUBS

Eastbourne Borough 3-2 Brentwood

St Albans City 0-2 Lewes

Burgess Hill 2-2 Leatherhead

Aveley 3-2 Whitehawk

Chatham Town 3-1 Three Bridges

Bognor Regis 4-2 Windsor & Eton

Southall 3-1 Littlehampton

Peacehaven & T. 4-0 Whitstable

Hastings Utd 2-1 AFC Croydon Ath.

Margate 2-1 Crowborough Ath.

Punjab United 1-1 Eastbourne Town

Steyning Town 0-2 Ashford United

SCFL PREMIER

Eastbourne Utd 1-1 AFC Varndeanians (Fri)

Lingfield 5-3 Billingshurst

East Grinstead 0-1 Crawley Down Gatwick

Forest Row 1-3 Haywards Heath

SCFL DIVISION TWO

Chichester City B 17-0 Worthing Town

ASC Brighton Rangers 0-5 Hurstpierpoint

Copthorne 0-5 Upper Beeding

Ferring 3-0 Rudgwick

Southwater 0-1 Rustington

TD Shipley 3-1 Bosham

Storrington Community 1-2 Alfold

REALITY CHECK AT WOODSIDE ROAD

Worthing 1–2 Forest Green Rovers — the Rebels' first home league defeat in more than ten months, and the clearest sign yet of the world promotion has taken them into.

DUGOUT NEWS

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002 · SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

Worthing's first National League home game ended with a first home league defeat in more than ten months — and a few hard truths about life at Step 1.

It began perfectly. Just two minutes into the afternoon at Woodside Road, Jenks put the Rebels ahead and the ground believed. But Robbie Savage's Forest Green Rovers, relegated from the EFL not so long ago and built for this division, worked their way back into the contest and completed the turnaround to win 2–1.

Adam Hinshelwood did not hide afterwards, describing the afternoon as a "reality check". He is right — and it is worth being precise about what that means. Promotion has carried Worthing into a

different world, where the opposition are full-time, the punishments for mistakes are immediate and a two-minute lead guarantees nothing.

One defeat changes nothing about the scale of what this club has achieved. Woodside Road had not seen Worthing lose a home league game since last autumn; the club has climbed to the fifth tier of English football for the first time in its history. What Saturday confirmed is only that staying there will demand everything the climb did, and more.

The Rebels go again — and Dugout News will be there when they do.

CORBETT HAT-TRICK HEADLINES A 44-GOAL ISTHMIAN SATURDAY



BY DOUGIE

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002 · SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026



KAI CORBETT COMPLETES HIS HAT-TRICK FROM THE SPOT AT THE CONNECT MANAGEMENT STADIUM. PHOTO: EASTBOURNE BOROUGH FC X

Sussex's Isthmian League contingent supplied almost every kind of early-season drama on Saturday, 15 August: a hat-trick, two stirring comebacks, a two-goal lead overturned, a first-minute red card and a late equaliser on a landmark afternoon.

Across 12 league fixtures involving clubs from the county, Sussex sides collected five wins and two draws, suffered five defeats and scored 23 of the day's 44 goals. Nine matches saw both teams score, while only Lewes and Peacehaven & Telscombe kept clean sheets. The standout individual display belonged to Kai Corbett, whose treble carried Eastbourne Borough past Brentwood Town in a five-goal Premier Division contest.

The scale of interest was notable too. The ten matches for which attendance figures were published drew a combined 6,125 spectators, even without the Aveley figure. Chatham's crowd of 1,008 led the way, with Burgess Hill, Eastbourne Borough and St Albans all attracting more than 850. For a programme played while

the professional season was also gathering pace, it was another reminder of the appetite for non-league football across Sussex and beyond.

CORBETT TAKES CENTRE STAGE

Eastbourne Borough's return to Step 3 continued in exhilarating fashion as Corbett struck all three goals in a 3–2 victory before 911 spectators at the Connect Management Stadium.

Brentwood offered the first warnings, but Borough found the cutting edge in the 35th minute. Josh Rees released Corbett on the left, the forward moved inside and drove a low 20-yard shot into the bottom corner.

The visitors made three changes at half-time and quickly levelled. Freddie Sears worked the ball across goal, Lewis Carey could only parry and Bradley Sach converted the rebound. Eastbourne's response was decisive. Substitute Max Sheaf pierced the Brentwood defence and Corbett finished from a tight angle into the roof of the net shortly before the hour.

Rees had an effort cleared from the line before Darren McQueen was brought down by Aiden Prall, allowing Corbett to wrong-foot the goalkeeper from the penalty spot and complete his hat-trick. Sears reduced the deficit in the 88th minute after reaching a long ball ahead of Carey, but the Eastbourne goalkeeper denied him again when Brentwood threatened an unlikely equaliser.

The win leaves Borough unbeaten after three games, with seven points following a 2–2 draw at Aveley and successive 3–2 victories over Three Bridges and Brentwood. Eight goals scored and six conceded already suggest that entertainment will rarely be in short supply.

Corbett's treble was particularly impressive because each goal demanded something different: composure and accuracy from distance, a sharp finish from an awkward angle and then the nerve to convert a decisive late penalty.

Sheaf's second-half introduction was equally significant. His direct running helped Eastbourne regain control after Brentwood's leveller and provided the opening for Corbett's second. The final minutes exposed Borough's defensive vulnerability, but Carey's late intervention ensured the story remained Corbett's.

LEWES MAKE THEIR POINT AT ST ALBANS

Lewes produced Sussex's other Premier Division away win, beating previously perfect St Albans City 2–0 in front of 886. After a 4–0 opening defeat by Enfield Town and a goalless derby at Whitehawk, this was a disciplined and timely first victory.

Josh Spinks opened the scoring in the 21st minute. Charlie Walker was forced off after 29 minutes, but Lewes retained their shape. Calum Newson, introduced for Danny Bassett after 58 minutes, made the points safe in the 90th.

St Albans had won their first two fixtures, yet the clean sheet was as valuable as the goals. Louis Rogers and the defence have now gone 180 league minutes without conceding.

The Rooks' starting side included Jack Enkh, Andrew Briggs, Spinks and Tyrese Owen in front of Rogers, with Alfie Allen and Noel Fisher helping provide midfield protection. Having conceded four on the opening weekend, consecutive clean sheets represent a rapid correction.

Newson's impact also illustrated the value of the bench. Introduced with more than half an hour remaining, he gave Lewes fresh attacking energy before applying the late finish that removed any doubt.

It was not simply the result that will please Lewes, but the manner of it. The Rooks recovered from an early-season setback, absorbed the loss of Walker and managed a lead against opponents who had entered the afternoon with maximum points. Those are encouraging qualities for a team seeking consistency after a difficult opening day.

WHELPDALE AT THE DOUBLE FOR HILL

Burgess Hill Town and Leatherhead shared four goals before the day's largest Sussex crowd, 941, at the Homecall Carpets Community Stadium.

Chris Whelpdale twice put Hill ahead, scoring in the 20th minute and again five minutes after the restart. Mark Waters supplied Leatherhead's first equaliser on 32 minutes, before Anas Igozouln made it 2–2 just a minute into the second half.

The timing of Igozouln's goal was particularly frustrating for the hosts. Hill had emerged from the dressing room looking to build on Whelpdale's second, only to see their advantage disappear almost immediately.

Leatherhead shaded the first half and Hill were much stronger after the interval, making the draw feel simultaneously earned and frustrating. Both teams could leave believing they had done enough to win, while also recognising periods when they might have lost control of the contest.

Whelpdale's brace followed his extraordinary halfway-line strike in Tuesday's 3–0 victory over Whyteleafe. His influence has been central to Hill's recovery from their opening 2–0 loss at Brentwood, with four points collected from the following two matches.

For Burgess Hill, the attacking improvement is clear. They failed to score on the opening weekend but have since found the net five times in two home games. The next task is ensuring those goals produce the maximum return.

WHITEHAWK SURRENDER TWO-GOAL LEAD

Whitehawk endured the sharpest reversal of the afternoon. Two goals ahead at Aveley, the Hawks looked set to build on Tuesday's 0–0 draw with Lewes and collect their first league victory of the campaign.

Instead, Ollie Peters' 36th-minute penalty halved the deficit before half-time, changing the mood of the contest and giving Aveley belief when Whitehawk might otherwise have carried a comfortable lead into the interval.

Malachi Napa equalised three minutes after the restart, erasing Whitehawk's remaining advantage before the visitors had been able to settle into the second half. Jayden Robinson then completed the turnaround in the 83rd minute.

The timing of Aveley's goals made the comeback especially damaging. Peters struck before the interval, Napa scored immediately afterwards and Robinson's late winner left Whitehawk with little recovery time.

A 3–2 defeat leaves the Hawks with one point from three games. They have conceded five times, all in their two away defeats, while keeping a clean sheet in their only home match.

This one will sting because Whitehawk had placed themselves in such a commanding position. The performance showed they possess sufficient attacking quality to open a two-goal lead away from home, but it also exposed a failure to manage momentum after Aveley found a route back into the match.

Turning competitive displays into points is now the immediate requirement.

THREE BRIDGES STILL SEARCHING FOR FIRST POINT

Three Bridges lost 3–1 at Chatham Town in front of 1,008, leaving them without a point after their opening three Premier Division fixtures.

Carlos Richards almost gave Bridges an early lead from a tight angle, forcing Nathan Harvey to save before Jordi Robins cleared near the line. It was a warning that the visitors were prepared to attack rather than sit back against one of the division's stronger sides.

Chatham went ahead in the 26th minute through Bradley Stevenson's disputed penalty. The decision followed a challenge on Adam Leathers which appeared to some observers to have begun outside the area.

Ollie Evans doubled the advantage on 56 minutes, reacting first after Sam Roberts had produced a good save from James Wild's header.

Kevin Rivera gave Bridges hope in the 68th minute, cutting in from the left and scoring from 20 yards. The goal brought the visitors back into the contest and ensured Chatham could not coast through the closing stages.

Chatham substitute Kian Garlinge was dismissed in the 83rd minute, handing Three Bridges a late numerical advantage. However, rather than finding an equaliser, Bridges conceded again when Ben Allen's deflected finish settled the result four minutes later.

Three Bridges have lost all three league games, scoring five and conceding nine. The fixtures have been difficult and the performances have contained competitive spells, but encouraging passages must soon become points.

ROCKS ROAR BACK AT NYEWOOD LANE

Bognor Regis Town began their South Central campaign with a 4–2 win over newly promoted Windsor & Eton, twice recovering from behind before pulling clear in the final quarter in front of a crowd of 709.

Jack Mazzone put the visitors ahead after ten minutes, volleying in Tahir Carmichael's cross. The response took only two minutes, with Lennie Smith crossing accurately for Callum Laycock to head home.

Mazzone restored Windsor's lead on 25 minutes, sliding in his second from a right-wing cross. The visitors then passed up several opportunities to widen the margin during their strongest spell.

Those missed chances became increasingly important. In the 45th minute Laycock sent Kaya Tshaka through and he lifted his finish beyond Finley Purcell to make it 2–2 on the stroke of half-time.

The equaliser changed the complexion of the afternoon. Instead of heading into the dressing room behind after twice conceding, Bognor entered the interval level and with renewed belief.

The Rocks applied greater pressure after the break, with one powerful Josh Batt header cleared off the line. Luke Pardoe eventually put the hosts ahead from the penalty spot in the 76th minute after being brought down during another threatening run into the area.

Substitute Jake Cope added the fourth on 87 minutes, his low effort finding the net via the post and ending Windsor's hopes of another response. Pardoe was named man of the match after an influential performance which included the decisive penalty.

Manager Danny Hollands will have been encouraged by the range of contributors. Laycock combined a goal with the pass for Tshaka's equaliser, Pardoe repeatedly carried a threat from wide areas and Cope made an immediate case for further minutes after entering the game in the 68th minute.

Goalkeeper Tommy Scott also played an important role when Windsor were on top, preventing Mazzone and Alex Donville from turning a promising visiting spell into a decisive lead.

Bognor's response after twice falling behind was the defining positive. Their defending will require attention, but four goals and three points represented a highly satisfying return to league action.

LITTLEHAMPTON BEATEN AT SOUTHALL

Littlehampton Town's league opener ended in a 3–1 defeat at Southall.

Liam Ferdinand gave the hosts the lead after 39 minutes, but Lateef Olanrewaju Oladokun levelled for the Golds only three minutes later. That rapid response ensured Littlehampton entered the break on level terms and appeared to have weathered Southall's best first-half spell.

Ferdinand struck again on 71 minutes, restoring the home side's advantage and completing his personal double. Tyler Hayles made the result safe seven minutes from time.

Southall collected their first points following two defeats. Littlehampton must now turn the promise of their quick first-half reply into a more complete performance.

Their ability to answer the opening goal was encouraging, but the second half showed how quickly a competitive match can escape once the opposition regains control. The opening home fixture will provide an opportunity to respond.

PEACEHAVEN MARK RETURN IN STYLE

Peacehaven & Telscombe made the most emphatic start among the South East sides, sweeping Whitstable Town aside 4–0 before 301 spectators at the Sports Park.

The visitors' Harrison Pont was sent off inside the opening minute, immediately transforming Peacehaven's first league fixture back at Step 4 following promotion.

Connor Tighe capitalised twice, opening the scoring after seven minutes and converting a penalty in the 12th. Harrison Parker added a third on the half-hour, leaving the contest effectively settled by the break.

Whitstable prevented further damage for most of the second half, but Cal Edwards completed the scoring in the 84th minute.

Playing against ten men for virtually the entire afternoon brought its own responsibility. Peacehaven still had to move the ball quickly, avoid complacency and turn their numerical superiority into clear chances.

Three goals inside the opening half-hour did precisely that. The quieter period after the break was understandable with the points secure, while Edwards' late fourth ensured there was no loss of concentration at the finish.

Peacehaven could scarcely have asked for a stronger statement on their divisional return: four goals, a clean sheet and three points.

More demanding afternoons will follow, but beginning life back at Step 4 with such authority should give the promoted side considerable confidence.

HASTINGS RECOVER FROM EARLY SETBACK

Hastings United also opened with a home victory, beating AFC Croydon Athletic 2–1 in front of 625.

Josh Williams put the visitors ahead in the 18th minute, presenting Hastings with an early test of their composure. The response was convincing, with the hosts reversing the game before half-time.

Callum Erskine equalised on 32 minutes and Max Walsh struck what proved to be the winner nine minutes later.

There were no further goals despite both benches being used extensively, and Walsh collected a late booking after making the decisive contribution.

Recovering from an early setback and then managing the second half offered a useful first-day template for a side seeking a more stable campaign.

Hastings did not require a spectacular late intervention or another surge of goals. Once ahead, they protected their advantage and made the two decisive first-half moments count.

CROWBOROUGH EDGE OUT MARGATE

Crowborough Athletic were beaten 2–1 at Margate despite briefly restoring parity.

Finn O'Mara headed the hosts in front after 18 minutes, before Rushaar Samuel-Smikle equalised seven minutes into the second half.

The reset lasted only four minutes. Connor Wilkins scored in the 56th to restore Margate's advantage, and Crowborough could not find a second reply in front of 464 spectators.

Those four minutes between Samuel-Smikle's equaliser and Wilkins' response decided the afternoon. Crowborough had worked their way back into a difficult away fixture but were unable to stabilise immediately after scoring.

It was a narrow defeat rather than an alarming one, although the next challenge is to sustain the momentum generated by positive passages instead of surrendering it so quickly.

EASTBOURNE TOWN DENIED LATE ON

Eastbourne Town were minutes away from spoiling Punjab United's historic Step 4 league debut but had to settle for a 1–1 draw at the Steve Cook Stadium.

Town kicked uphill in a cautious opening and Leon Greig almost embarrassed debutant goalkeeper Jacob Russell with an ambitious long-range attempt.

Punjab then created the clearer openings. Roman Campbell shot over from 12 yards following an attacking throw before heading narrowly wide from a Chris Edwards cross.

The visitors punished those misses shortly before half-time. Punjab failed to clear a long ball into the danger area and Alfie Rogers beat Russell at his near post.

The hosts threatened an immediate response, with Jack Hopkins firing wide and Harry Ottaway shooting narrowly past the post, but Eastbourne survived and carried their advantage into the interval.

Town could have doubled the lead after the restart, but JJ Walker directed a free header wide when presented with a clear opportunity.

Eastbourne sought to contain the home side and attack on the counter, but Punjab winger Will Johnson-Cole became increasingly influential down the left.

On 80 minutes, Johnson-Cole's precise cross found Edwards at the far post and the defender guided his header into the top corner.

Punjab nearly won it when another Johnson-Cole delivery narrowly eluded Edwards, while Eastbourne also sent late half-chances wide.

A draw was a fair conclusion, giving the hosts a landmark point on their league debut and Town something tangible for a controlled, if ultimately incomplete, away display.

ASHFORD UNITED END STEYNING'S AFTERNOON

Steyning Town's return to Isthmian League South East football ended in a 2–0 defeat against Ashford United, a result confirmed via the updated league table, with scorer details still to be published. The Barrowmen's attention now turns to their FA Trophy first qualifying round tie at home to Moneyfields on 29 August.

A COUNTY CAMPAIGN ALREADY GATHERING PACE

The county's final ledger—five wins, two draws and five defeats—was respectable.

Eastbourne Borough and Bognor showed resilience, Lewes supplied defensive authority and Peacehaven announced their return with four goals. Whitehawk's collapse and Three Bridges' continued wait for a point supplied the warning.

There was also a broader early-season pattern. Established Step 3 clubs are already dealing with the pressure of three matches in eight days, while Bognor, Littlehampton and the South East teams were only beginning their league programmes following FA Cup commitments.

That imbalance makes direct comparisons premature. Some clubs are already being forced to manage fatigue, injuries and squad rotation, while others are only discovering how their summer preparations translate into competitive league football.

What Saturday provided was an opening snapshot. Sussex possesses individual match-winners, attacking quality and substantial support, but also several sides still learning how to manage decisive moments.

The margins will tighten as August continues. On this evidence, however, the county's Isthmian season will not be short of goals, incident or compelling stories.

LEAGUE TABLE

AFTER SATURDAY 15 AUGUST 2026

#	CLUB	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS
1	Carshalton Athletic	3	3	0	0	6	1	+5	9
2	Dartford	3	3	0	0	6	3	+3	9
3	Leatherhead	3	2	1	0	8	4	+4	7
4	Eastbourne Borough SUSSEX	3	2	1	0	8	6	+2	7
5	Dulwich Hamlet	3	2	0	1	9	3	+6	6
6	Enfield Town	3	2	0	1	8	4	+4	6
7	Welling United	3	2	0	1	7	4	+3	6
8	Chatham Town	3	2	0	1	7	5	+2	6
9	St Albans City	3	2	0	1	5	4	+1	6
10	Burgess Hill Town SUSSEX	3	1	1	1	5	4	+1	4
11	Aveley	3	1	1	1	5	5	0	4
12	Lewes SUSSEX	3	1	1	1	2	4	-2	4
13	Ramsgate	3	1	0	2	6	6	0	3
14	Brentwood Town	3	1	0	2	4	4	0	3
15	Maldon & Tiptree	3	1	0	2	2	8	-6	3
16	Cray Wanderers	3	0	2	1	2	3	-1	2
17	Wingate & Finchley	3	0	2	1	3	5	-2	2
18	Cheshunt	3	0	2	1	0	2	-2	2
19	Whitehawk SUSSEX	3	0	1	2	2	5	-3	1
20	Whyteleafe	3	0	1	2	2	7	-5	1
21	Stanway Rovers	3	0	1	2	1	7	-6	1
22	Three Bridges SUSSEX	3	0	0	3	5	9	-4	0

1ST: PROMOTION · 2ND-5TH: PLAY-OFFS · BOTTOM FOUR: RELEGATION

DUGOUT DATA HUB
DUGOUT 90 · STAY HYDRATED LADS



ISTHMIAN LEAGUE · 2026/27

SOUTH CENTRAL DIVISION

LEAGUE TABLE

AFTER SATURDAY 15 AUGUST 2026

#	CLUB	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS
1	Winchester City	2	2	0	0	9	0	+9	6
2	Southall	2	1	1	0	5	3	+2	4
3	Bognor Regis Town SUSSEX	1	1	0	0	4	2	+2	3
4	Hendon	1	1	0	0	3	2	+1	3
5	Bedfont Sports	1	1	0	0	2	1	+1	3
6	Raynes Park Vale	1	1	0	0	2	1	+1	3
7	Jersey Bulls	1	1	0	0	1	0	+1	3
8	AFC Portchester	2	0	2	0	1	1	0	2
9	Kingstonian	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
10	Moneyfields	2	0	1	1	3	4	-1	1
11	Westfield (Surrey)	2	0	1	1	1	5	-4	1
12	AFC Stoneham	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
13	Ashford Town (Mx)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
14	Cobham	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
15	Hartley Wintney	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
16	Hayes & Yeading Utd	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
17	Binfield	1	0	0	1	2	3	-1	0
18	Ascot United	1	0	0	1	1	2	-1	0
19	Harrow Borough	1	0	0	1	0	1	-1	0
20	Windsor & Eton	1	0	0	1	2	4	-2	0
21	Littlehampton Town SUSSEX	1	0	0	1	1	3	-2	0
22	Egham Town	1	0	0	1	0	5	-5	0

1ST: PROMOTION · 2ND-5TH: PLAY-OFFS · BOTTOM TWO: RELEGATION

DUGOUT DATA HUB
DUGOUT 90 · STAY HYDRATED LADS

LEAGUE TABLE

AFTER SATURDAY 15 AUGUST 2026

#	CLUB	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS
1	Sittingbourne	2	1	1	0	3	2	+1	4
2	Margate	2	1	1	0	2	1	+1	4
3	Peacehaven & Telscombe SUSSEX	1	1	0	0	4	0	+4	3
4	Sheppey United	1	1	0	0	4	0	+4	3
5	Ashford United	1	1	0	0	2	0	+2	3
6	Hastings United SUSSEX	1	1	0	0	2	1	+1	3
7	Cray Valley (PM)	2	0	2	0	1	1	0	2
8	Faversham Town	1	0	1	0	2	2	0	1
9	Sevenoaks Town	1	0	1	0	2	2	0	1
10	Eastbourne Town SUSSEX	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
11	Punjab United	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
12	Deal Town	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
13	Herne Bay	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
14	Merstham	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
15	South Park	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
16	Crowborough Athletic SUSSEX	1	0	0	1	1	2	-1	0
17	AFC Croydon Athletic	2	0	0	2	2	4	-2	0
18	Steyping Town SUSSEX	1	0	0	1	0	2	-2	0
19	Horley Town	1	0	0	1	0	4	-4	0
20	Whitstable Town	1	0	0	1	0	4	-4	0

1ST: PROMOTION · 2ND–5TH: PLAY-OFFS

DUGOUT DATA HUB
DUGOUT 90 · STAY HYDRATED LADS

PEACEHAVEN 4-0 WHITSTABLE — THE TYE'S PERFECT RETURN

A 40-second red card, a Tighe double and a proper Cal Eds goal — opening day at the Sports Park, from the terraces.



BY WILLG · @WILLGU05

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002 · SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

Peacehaven made a strong start to life back in the Isthmian South East after ten years away, beating Whitstable Town 4–0 on the opening day.

The game changed almost immediately. Inside 40 seconds Connor Tighe was played in on goal and brought down, leaving Whitstable a man short for the rest of the afternoon. From there Peacehaven were firmly in control.

They dominated possession in the first half and scored three times. Tighe got the first with a lovely finish into the bottom corner after being played through. The second came when Cal Eds beat his man and won a clear penalty, which Tighe tucked away into the bottom right. The third was messier: a corner led to a scramble in the box and Harrison Parker was on hand to slot it past the keeper.

It could easily have been more by half time, but Peacehaven were comfortable. Whitstable's only real threat came from set pieces. For the home side, Charlie Curran and Cam Wiltshire ran the midfield for

the first half, putting in two excellent shifts.

Whitstable came out differently after the break and were the better team for large parts of the second half, which is no small feat with ten men. They had a few half chances but never really looked like scoring. The game became scrappy, with plenty of fouls from both sides.

The points were sealed when Eds kept hold of the ball, beat two players, cut inside and bent one into the corner from outside the box — a proper Cal Eds goal to make it 4–0.

Tighe was man of the match for his two goals on Peacehaven's return to this level. A solid opening day win for the home side, while Whitstable can take some credit for how they responded after going down to ten so early.



MAN OF THE MATCH CONNOR TIGHE —
SPONSORED BY DUGOUT DIARIES. PHOTO:
PEACEHAVEN FC X

SHOOT-OUT DRAMA, STATEMENT VICTORIES — AND TWO SUNDAY TIES STILL TO COME



BY DOUGIE

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002 · SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026



VASE WEEKEND IN SUSSEX. PHOTO: TOMMY MCMILLAN (@TOMMYMC93289518)

Sussex's clubs experienced almost every emotion available during a packed opening weekend in the Isuzu FA Vase.

Across Friday and Saturday, 16 first-round qualifying ties involving Sussex sides produced 60 goals in normal time, five penalty shoot-outs and nine county winners. There were emphatic victories for Jarvis Brook, Worthing United and Wick, late drama at Hassocks, and successful shoot-outs for Saltdean United, Lancing and Midhurst & Easebourne.

The weekend is not finished, either. Roffey face Hollands & Blair at Horsham FC today, while Bexhill United's tie against Erith & Belvedere is also being played this afternoon, albeit at the Kent club's Acclaim Handling Community Stadium in Welling.

Every first-round qualifying winner receives £550, while losing clubs collect £160. Those progressing will return for the second qualifying round on Saturday, September 12, when £725 will be available to each winning club.

FRIDAY NIGHT: WICK TAKE DERBY HONOURS

Wick 4–1 Loxwood

Wick provided Sussex's first success of the weekend by defeating fellow Southern Combination side Loxwood 4–1 on Friday evening.

The tie remained competitive during the opening half. Wick reached the interval 2–1 ahead, leaving Loxwood within one goal of forcing their way back into the contest.

The hosts took control after the break, however, scoring twice without reply and eventually registering a convincing three-goal victory. It was an impressive response from Wick in a match that carried the additional pressure of being a county derby and the first Sussex tie of the round.

Wick's reward is a second-qualifying-round trip to Hythe Town on September 12. Loxwood, meanwhile, became the first Sussex club eliminated from this season's competition.

JARVIS BROOK MAKE HISTORY IN FIVE-GOAL FIRST-HALF BLITZ

Jarvis Brook 5–0 East Preston

Jarvis Brook's first home appearance in the FA Vase became an afternoon that will be remembered at the Lime Kiln Playing Field for years.

All five goals arrived before half-time as Charlie Baitup, Liam Edwards and Jimmy Hoy joined William Street, who scored twice, on the scoresheet. It was an extraordinary opening 45 minutes from the hosts, who effectively settled the all-Sussex tie before the interval.

The second half did not produce further scoring, but that was of little concern to Jarvis Brook. Their work had been completed during a ruthless first period in which five separate scoring contributions — Street's double and three other individual goals — overwhelmed East Preston.

An attendance of 101 witnessed the historic result. The clean sheet was another encouraging feature for Jarvis Brook, who resisted any temptation to allow the contest to become unnecessarily open after the restart.

For East Preston, it was a painful afternoon. They had already suffered defeats against Dial Square and Arundel during the opening weeks of the campaign, and conceding five times before the break left them with an impossible recovery task.

Jarvis Brook now travel to Welling Town in the second qualifying round, carrying both confidence and a memorable first FA Vase home victory with them.

WORTHING UNITED DOMINATE DERBY WITH RINGMER

Worthing United 4–0 Ringmer

Worthing United delivered another of the weekend's standout Sussex performances, beating Ringmer 4–0 at the Robert Albon Memorial Ground.

Dean Sherwood opened the scoring with a 25-yard free kick after just two minutes, Danny Kingston powered home a header from Ahmed Kamil's delivery four minutes later, and Liam Appleton forced home a third before the interval. Kingston completed both the scoring and his brace from the penalty spot late on, with the relentless Kamil — involved in three of the four goals — named man of the match. Worthing United were clinical when their opportunities arrived and equally effective in preventing Ringmer from establishing any sustained attacking rhythm.

The result continued United's excellent start at home. They defeated Loxwood 3–1 in their opening Division One fixture and have now scored seven goals in two home matches while conceding only once.

A home tie against Arundel awaits in the next round. That guarantees further Southern Combination representation while giving Worthing United an opportunity to build on one of the most convincing results of the weekend.

SEAFORD LEAVE IT LATE AT THE CROUCH

Seaford Town 2–1 Halls Athletic

Seaford Town progressed through a dramatic finish against Halls Athletic, with Callum Connor scoring both of the home side's goals.

The decisive moment arrived late in the contest. With the tie balanced at 1–1 and the possibility of penalties drawing closer, Connor struck again to complete his brace and send Seaford through.

It was an important result for a Seaford team that has already demonstrated an ability to negotiate tight matches. Rather than allowing the pressure of a level cup tie to dictate their play, they continued searching for the winning opportunity and were rewarded near the end.

Connor's double accounted for all of Seaford's attacking output, but the result also required concentration at the other end. Once the second goal arrived, Town successfully managed the closing stages and avoided the uncertainty of a shoot-out.

Seaford will host Chipstead in the second qualifying round.

TROAK BECOMES HASSOCKS' LATE HERO

Hassocks 1–0 Petts Wood & Holmesdale

Jack Troak scored an 86th-minute winner as Hassocks edged past Petts Wood & Holmesdale at the Beacon.

For long periods, the match appeared destined for penalties. Hassocks worked hard defensively but found clear opportunities difficult to create against disciplined opposition.

The breakthrough finally came with four minutes of normal time remaining. Troak's late intervention changed the entire complexion of the afternoon, giving the Robins a lead they protected through the closing minutes.

A 1–0 cup victory may lack the spectacular scoreline recorded elsewhere, but the manner of the performance offered plenty of encouragement. Hassocks remained patient, kept a clean sheet and found a way to win when the match had entered its decisive phase.

Their reward is another home tie, this time against Abbey Rangers, in the second qualifying round.

SALTDEAN PERFECT FROM THE SPOT

Saltdean United 2–2 Colliers Wood United — Saltdean won 3–0 on penalties

Saltdean United and Colliers Wood United produced one of Saturday's most dramatic ties at Hill Park.

Luke Marshall and Alfie Mitchell were recorded as Saltdean's goalscorers during a 2–2 draw in normal time. Neither side could establish a decisive advantage, and with FA Vase replays no longer

part of the competition, the tie went directly to penalties.

What followed was a remarkably one-sided shoot-out. Saltdean converted three kicks and prevented Colliers Wood from scoring any of theirs, winning 3–0.

That outcome reflected a combination of composure from Saltdean's takers and outstanding work by their goalkeeper and defensive unit. Keeping a team scoreless across a shoot-out is unusual and turned an evenly contested 90 minutes into an emphatic conclusion.

Saltdean will travel to Forest Row in the next round, creating another all-Sussex tie and guaranteeing at least one of the clubs a place in the first round proper.

MIDHURST SURVIVE SIX-GOAL THRILLER

Midhurst & Easebourne 3–3 Warminster Town — Midhurst won 5–3 on penalties

There was even more drama at The Rotherfield, where Midhurst & Easebourne and Warminster Town shared six goals before the Sussex side prevailed 5–3 in the shoot-out.

The fluctuating nature of a 3–3 cup tie meant neither team could afford to relax. Every advantage was challenged, and the outcome remained uncertain through to the final whistle.

Goalkeeper Ellis Grant then made the crucial intervention during the shoot-out, saving one of Warminster's penalties. With Midhurst's takers maintaining their composure, Henry Searle stepped forward to score the kick that completed the 5–3 victory.

It was an especially valuable result because Midhurst had to recover mentally from conceding three times in normal play. Shoot-outs often favour the team arriving with the greater momentum, but Midhurst were able to reset quickly and execute all five of their kicks.

They now face an away tie at Whitchurch United on September 12.

LANCING WIN THE COASTAL SHOOT-OUT

Shoreham 1–1 Lancing — Lancing won 4–2 on penalties

The derby between Shoreham and Lancing also required penalties after the sides finished level at 1–1.

The shoot-out belonged to Lancing. They converted four times and restricted Shoreham to two successful kicks, securing a 4–2 victory.

The result was particularly significant given Lancing's difficult start to the season. They had lost their opening Premier Division matches and were beaten 6–0 by SE Dons in the FA Cup. Winning a close derby under pressure therefore represented both cup progress and a potentially important confidence boost.

For Shoreham, elimination was cruel after a match in which almost nothing separated the teams over 90 minutes. One successful penalty either way can alter the entire story of a shoot-out, and Lancing proved more assured when it mattered.

Croydon will provide Lancing's opposition in the second qualifying round.

PAGHAM SQUEEZE THROUGH

Pagham 1–0 Millbrook

Pagham continued Sussex's successful afternoon by defeating Hampshire side Millbrook 1–0.

It was a tight contest in which a single goal proved sufficient. Pagham combined that breakthrough with a clean sheet, denying Millbrook the equaliser that would have taken the tie to penalties.

The Lions have made a positive start to the campaign at their Covers Arena home, and this was another disciplined result. Cup football frequently rewards sides capable of controlling narrow advantages, and Pagham successfully managed the most delicate of leads.

They will remain at home in the second qualifying round, where Newport (Isle of Wight) are scheduled to provide the opposition.

SUSSEX EXITS AGAINST POWERFUL OPPOSITION

Mile Oak 1–4 Banstead Athletic

Mile Oak were eliminated after Banstead Athletic recorded a 4–1 victory. The visitors' attacking efficiency gave Mile Oak an increasingly difficult task, and although the Sussex side found the net, they were unable to slow Banstead's momentum.

Banstead progress to visit Rochester United.

SE Dons 4–0 Little Common

Little Common faced one of the most difficult assignments of the round against SE Dons and were beaten 4–0.

SE Dons had already shown their quality by defeating Lancing 6–0 in the FA Cup a week earlier. They maintained that form with another convincing performance, leaving Little Common unable to establish a route back into the tie.

The London side now travel to Greenways.

Newhaven 0–1 Guernsey

Charlton Gauvain's tenth-minute goal decided a closely fought match at Newhaven.

Guernsey struck early and then protected the advantage for the remaining 80 minutes. Newhaven had substantial time to search for an equaliser, but the visitors defended their penalty area effectively and completed the clean sheet.

The difference was ultimately one early finish. Guernsey now await the winners of today's Roffey versus Hollands & Blair tie.

Horsham YMCA 1–5 Epsom & Ewell

Horsham YMCA's afternoon ended in a heavy defeat after Epsom & Ewell pulled away during the closing stages.

Blessing Homebessa completed a remarkable late hat-trick, scoring in the 81st minute and again in the second and fifth minutes of stoppage time. Those three goals transformed what had been a more competitive scoreline into a 5–1 final result.

The late collapse will be particularly frustrating for YMCA. Once Epsom's third goal arrived, the visitors exploited the additional spaces created as the hosts attempted to recover.

Westfield 2–2 AFC Walcountians — Walcountians won 5–3 on penalties

Westfield's first-ever FA Vase tie ended in shoot-out heartbreak. Dylan Phillips volleyed the hosts ahead inside six minutes, and captain Bradley Pritchard's second-half penalty had the Westies 2–1 up with 17 minutes remaining, before Walcountians levelled late through a rebound and converted all five of their kicks to win the shoot-out 5–3.

The visitors earned a second-round trip to Rusthall — but the historic afternoon, and how close Westfield came, will be remembered at the club. Jack Stapley's full report from inside the ground is later in this issue.

Balham 6–1 Oakwood

Oakwood suffered the heaviest Sussex defeat of the round, losing 6–1 at Balham's Imperial Fields home.

Scoring six times underlined Balham's superiority, while Oakwood's consolation did little to alter the direction of the tie. Balham will visit Larkfield & New Hythe next.

Selsey 1–1 Hamworthy United — Hamworthy won 4–3 on penalties

Selsey came within one kick of progressing after holding Hamworthy United to a 1–1 draw.

Jack Kinge-Phillips headed Hamworthy in front after 17 minutes, but Selsey recovered and forced the contest to penalties. The shoot-out remained tight before the visitors edged it 4–3, with Hamworthy goalkeeper Knibbs emerging as the decisive figure.

Selsey can take encouragement from competing so closely with strong Wessex League opposition, but the narrowness of the defeat will make it no less painful.

TWO MORE SUSSEX TIES TODAY

The county's first-round qualifying programme concludes with two 3pm kick-offs today.

Roffey host Hollands & Blair at Horsham FC's Fusion Aviation Stadium rather than their usual Bartholomew Way home. The winners will face Guernsey, who booked their place by defeating Newhaven.

Bexhill United are officially the home club against Erith & Belvedere, but the tie is being played at Erith's Acclaim Handling Community Stadium in Welling. Bexhill cannot use the Polegrove during the cricket season, meaning they must attempt to progress while playing on their opponents' ground.

The winners of that match will travel to Tooting Bec.

With nine Sussex clubs already safely through, today offers Roffey and Bexhill the opportunity to increase the county's second-qualifying-round representation to 11. Both ties must be decided on the day, with penalties to follow if the scores are level after 90 minutes.

For the successful sides, Wembley remains a distant dream. The final will be played on Sunday, May 16, 2027. At this stage, however, the immediate prize is another national cup occasion on September 12 — and the knowledge that Sussex has already made a substantial impression on the opening weekend.

WORTHING UNITED 4-0 RINGMER AFC

Sherwood 2' · Kingston 6', 82' (pen) · Appleton 26' — Man of the Match: Ahmed Kamil



BY GLEN SOUTER

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002 · SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

Worthing United booked their place in the next round of the FA Vase with an emphatic 4–0 victory over Ringmer AFC at Lyons Way.

The Mavericks made a dream start, taking the lead after just two minutes. Dean Sherwood stepped up from 25 yards and produced a superb free kick to give the Ringmer goalkeeper no chance.

United doubled their advantage only four minutes later. Ahmed Kamil caused havoc down the flank before delivering for Danny Kingston, who powered home a six-yard header to make it 2–0 inside six minutes.

The hosts continued to dominate, with the relentless Kamil at the heart of everything. A flowing move involving the striker opened Ringmer up again in the 26th minute, allowing Liam Appleton to force home a scrambled finish and send United into the break with a commanding three-goal advantage.

Ringmer attempted to respond after the interval, but United remained disciplined and determined to protect their clean sheet while continuing to threaten at the other end.

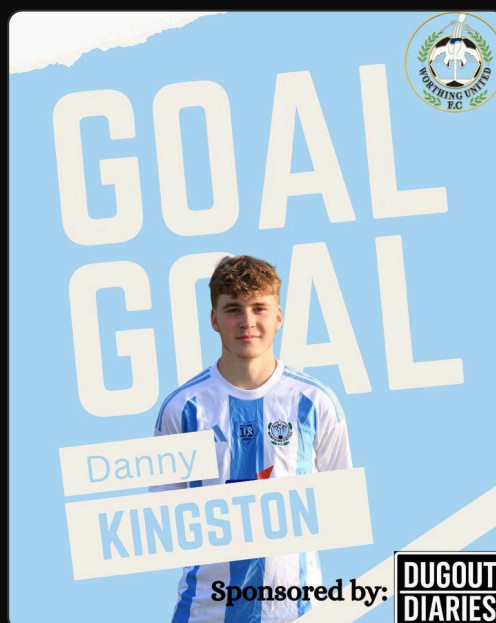
The fourth arrived in the 82nd minute when Kamil was brought down inside the penalty area following another dangerous run. Kingston stepped up and confidently dispatched the spot kick, completing his brace and wrapping up a comprehensive 4–0 victory.

It was an excellent all-round performance from the Mavericks—four goals, a clean sheet and safe passage into the next round of the FA Vase.

Ahmed Kamil was deservedly named Man of the Match after playing a major role in three of United's four goals and terrorising the Ringmer defence throughout.

Full-time: Worthing United 4–0 Ringmer AFC **Goals:** Sherwood 2', Kingston 6', Appleton 26', Kingston (pen) 82' **Man of the Match:** Ahmed Kamil

UP THE MAVERICKS!



TWO FOR KINGSTON. PHOTO: WORTHING UNITED

X

WESTFIELD 2-2 AFC WALCOUNTIANS — HEARTBREAK FROM THE SPOT

Walcountians win 5-3 on penalties as Westfield's first-ever Vase tie goes the distance.



BY JACK STAPLEY

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002 · SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026



BATTLE AT WESTFIELD: THE WESTIES, IN YELLOW AND GREEN, IN THE THICK OF IT ON A ROASTING AFTERNOON.

Westfield's first-ever venture into The FA Vase ended in heartbreaking fashion as AFC Walcountians prevailed on penalties after an entertaining 2-2 draw on a roasting afternoon at Westfield.

Both sides played their part in an open, competitive cup tie, but it was the visitors who kept their nerve from the spot to progress, despite Westfield feeling they had done enough to earn their place in the next round.

FIRST HALF

Walcountians started brightly, with Joe Dicken and Liam Ward both blocking in front of new signing Ford Robertshaw early on, but it was the Westies who struck first after just six minutes.

Brad Pritchard delivered a beautiful ball into the box, where George Murphy cleverly let it run for Dylan Phillips, who smashed an unstoppable volley beyond the keeper to send the Westies dreaming of a cup fairytale.

The goal settled both sides and what followed was an entertaining battle between two teams keen to play football. Walcountians enjoyed plenty of possession, while Westfield looked equally dangerous, with both sides attempting to play out from the back and pass through the lines.

The visitors levelled after 13 minutes from a well-worked short corner. The ball eventually fell to a Walcountians forward, who poked home at the near post. Westfield will feel disappointed with the manner of the goal, having defended the situation well initially.

George Murphy, making his debut, was already causing problems. Picking the ball up inside his own half, he embarked on a brilliant run, dancing past four defenders before seeing his effort saved. A square pass to Dylan Phillips would perhaps have been the better option, with Phillips waiting in front of an open goal, but there were certainly plenty of encouraging signs from the debutant.

Buckley was next to go close, letting fly from around 25 yards and forcing the Walcountians goalkeeper to scramble, with the effort narrowly clearing the crossbar.

The visitors continued to see plenty of the ball and created a couple of opportunities of their own, but Ford Robertshaw was equal to everything thrown his way.

Half-time: Westfield 1–1 AFC Walcountians

SECOND HALF

The second half began with Ford producing an excellent reaction save at the back post, although the flag was raised shortly afterwards.

That moment appeared to kick Westfield into life, and the hosts produced a superb 20-minute spell of pressure and domination.

George Murphy fired wide after excellent work from Harry Murphy and Brad Pritchard to win the ball back high up the pitch. Dylan Phillips then came agonisingly close to adding his second, stinging the goalkeeper's hand with another powerful 25-yard volley.

Westfield's pressure finally told when a Walcountians defender was adjudged to have handled the ball inside the box.

With the captain's armband on for the day, Bradley Pritchard stepped up and calmly dispatched the penalty with aplomb to put the Westies 2–1 ahead with 17 minutes remaining.

Westfield looked set to see the game out, but Walcountians refused to go quietly.

In the 88th minute, Westfield lost possession high up the pitch and the visitors broke forward with numbers. A perfectly weighted slide-rule pass from Walcountians' number seven released their forward one-on-one with Ford.

The Westfield goalkeeper produced another brilliant save, but unfortunately the rebound fell straight back to the striker, who made no mistake from close range to tap into an empty net.

With no further goals, the tie went straight to penalties.

Full-time: Westfield 2–2 AFC Walcountians

PENALTIES

For the second time in a week, Westfield found themselves facing a penalty shootout.

Ridgers, Pritchard and G. Murphy all converted from the spot for the Westies, but unfortunately Stapley saw his penalty saved.

Walcountians showed tremendous composure, converting all five of their penalties to win the shootout and book their place in the next round of the FA Vase.

PLENTY OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Ultimately, Westfield will feel this was a game that got away from them.

The Westies had chances to win the match in normal time and, particularly during that excellent spell in the second half, looked the more dangerous side. But that is cup football — sometimes it comes down to the finest of margins, and on this occasion those margins went the visitors' way.

Despite the disappointment, there were plenty of positives to take. The improvement from the opening-day defeat to Oakwood has been significant, with greater confidence on the ball, a real willingness to play through the lines and plenty of attacking threat.

There were also encouraging performances from debutant George Murphy and new goalkeeper Ford Robertshaw, while the character shown by the whole side throughout a demanding afternoon was clear to see.

The FA Vase journey may have ended at the first hurdle, but there are certainly signs that this Westfield side is heading in the right direction.

Congratulations to AFC Walcountians on the victory, and we wish them nothing but success in the FA Vase going forward.



NO WAY THROUGH: WESTFIELD PRESS FOR THE WINNER. PHOTO: GRIZZLY PICS

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002

SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

BROADBRIDGE HEATH DENIED BY 94TH-MINUTE SOUTH PARK WINNER



BY DOUGIE

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002 · SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026



THE BEARS' CLASS OF 2026/27 — OUT OF THE TROPHY IN STOPPAGE TIME, AND STRAIGHT BACK AT SOUTH PARK ON TUESDAY. PHOTO: BROADBRIDGE HEATH X

Broadbridge Heath suffered a heartbreaking start to their 2026/27 Isuzu FA Trophy campaign as Ross Stepney's 94th-minute header gave South Park a 2–1 preliminary-round victory at Whitehall Lane.

The Bears were the only Sussex club required to enter at this earliest stage of the competition and looked well placed to carry the county flag into the first qualifying round after Sal Marino headed them in front four minutes before half-time. South Park responded through Bailee Cain in the 75th minute, however, before Stepney struck deep into added time to complete the comeback.

It was a particularly painful reversal for Broadbridge Heath because they had won by the same score at the same ground in last season's FA Trophy. This time they were moments away from taking the tie to penalties when Stepney delivered the decisive blow.

Heath leave the competition with the £400 payment allocated to preliminary-round losers, while South Park receive £1,500 and advance to an away tie against Bognor Regis Town on Saturday 29

August. The result also means that seven Sussex clubs will begin their Trophy campaigns in the first qualifying round, all with home advantage.

SOUTH PARK 2–1 BROADBRIDGE HEATH

The bare result tells the story of a late defeat, but it does not fully reflect how close Broadbridge Heath came to advancing.

The Bears created opportunities to establish control before the interval, with Mason Doughty twice denied by South Park goalkeeper Danny Bracken. Those saves became increasingly important as the afternoon developed. One goal from either chance could have changed both the score and the tactical direction of the contest.

South Park carried a threat of their own. Tom Jackson sent a 25-yard free-kick into the side netting, while George Vincent directed a glancing header narrowly past the post. The exchanges suggested an evenly balanced knockout tie rather than a match in which either side could afford to play with caution.

The breakthrough arrived in the 41st minute through Marino. Broadbridge Heath used a long throw to deliver the ball into a crowded penalty area and Marino won the decisive aerial contest, directing his header beyond Bracken to give the visitors the lead.

Set pieces and long throws can be invaluable in early-season cup football. Teams are still developing their rhythm in possession, but a well-delivered dead ball or rehearsed restart can create a clear opportunity without requiring a long passing move. Heath's opener was a reminder that direct play does not have to mean hopeful play when the delivery and movement are coordinated.

More importantly, the timing appeared ideal. Scoring four minutes before the interval allowed Broadbridge Heath to enter half-time with a lead and left South Park needing to alter the contest. For the Bears, the task became one of retaining their attacking threat while managing territory and preventing the hosts from building sustained pressure.

South Park emerged knowing that their Trophy campaign could disappear unless they found a response. Broadbridge Heath remained in front for half an hour after the restart, but the earlier Bracken saves meant there was never a two-goal cushion to protect.

The equaliser came in the 75th minute. Cain reacted first when the ball broke loose and finished to restore parity. It was precisely the type of goal that can transform a knockout tie: not necessarily the product of an elaborate move, but a reward for remaining alert when possession became contested around the penalty area.

With no replays in the FA Trophy, both teams knew a draw after 90 minutes would lead directly to penalties. That creates a difficult balance during the closing stages. Push too aggressively and space can open at the other end; become too cautious and the opponent is invited to take control.

For most of the remaining period, penalties appeared increasingly likely. Then, in the fourth minute of added time, Stepney headed the winning goal. The timing left Broadbridge Heath with virtually no opportunity to respond.

From South Park's perspective, it was a display of persistence. They went into the interval behind, stayed within one goal and found a way back before producing the final act of the afternoon.

From Heath's viewpoint, it was the cruellest possible conclusion to a tie in which they had led and created enough chances to believe progression was within reach.

BRACKEN'S SAVES CHANGED THE TIE

The goals will naturally dominate the headlines, but Bracken's contribution should not be overlooked. His two saves from Doughty kept South Park close enough to recover.

Goalkeepers can determine knockout matches without saving a penalty or producing one spectacular intervention in added time. Sometimes the defining work happens earlier, when the scoreline still appears comfortable and the full importance of a stop is not yet obvious.

Had Doughty converted either opportunity, Broadbridge Heath could have established the two-goal advantage that their overall performance needed. South Park would then have been forced to take greater risks, potentially leaving even more room for Heath to counterattack. Instead, Bracken ensured the hosts remained one moment away from equalising.

Doughty should still take encouragement from repeatedly finding positions from which he could threaten the goal. The next step is converting that movement into an end product.

For Marino, the afternoon provided an immediate personal positive: a competitive goal, scored away from home in a national cup competition, even if the team result overshadowed it.

At the other end, Cain and Stepney showed the value of contributions arriving from different sources. Cain was alert to the loose ball for the equaliser and Stepney attacked the decisive header when the tie was almost out of time. Their goals transformed South Park's afternoon from elimination into a place in the next round.

EXACT REVENGE FOR LAST SEASON

There was an unavoidable sense of role reversal at the final whistle. In September 2025, Broadbridge Heath visited the same opposition at the same venue in the first qualifying round and returned to Sussex with a 2–1 victory.

That win launched the Bears' best FA Trophy run. They went on to beat Bedfont Sports 2–1 in the second qualifying round before welcoming Isthmian Premier Division opposition Billericay Town.

Heath competed strongly in that third qualifying-round tie and reached half-time level at 1–1, but two late Billericay goals produced a 3–1 defeat.

Reaching that stage represented meaningful progress for a club that only won promotion from the Southern Combination Premier Division in 2023. It demonstrated that Broadbridge Heath could compete beyond their own level and gave their supporters a national cup journey extending into October.

This season's Trophy experience ended at the first hurdle. The contrast is sharp: last year, Heath won 2–1 at Whitehall Lane and used the result as the foundation of a three-match run; this year, South Park won 2–1 and earned the right to continue their own campaign.

The result also represented a response for the Surrey side after they had been knocked out of the FA Cup by Virginia Water a week earlier. Broadbridge Heath entered Saturday in a similar position following a 1–0 home defeat against AFC Greenwich Borough in the FA Cup extra preliminary round.

For the Bears, two national cup eliminations before the league season has properly gathered speed will be frustrating. Yet the margins were narrow in both cases: one goal against Greenwich Borough and a winner four minutes into stoppage time at South Park.

The important task is ensuring disappointment does not become early-season negativity. The evidence from Saturday suggests Heath can create opportunities and compete effectively against teams at their own level. Turning that competitiveness into results will depend on greater efficiency in both penalty areas.

AN IMMEDIATE OPPORTUNITY FOR REVENGE

Broadbridge Heath will not have to wait long to see South Park again. The clubs meet in the Isthmian League South East Division at the Air Engineering Stadium on Tuesday evening, only three days after their Trophy contest.

That unusually quick reunion gives Chris Simmons and his staff an immediate chance to apply lessons from the cup tie. South Park will arrive with confidence, but they will also know that Broadbridge Heath led for 34 minutes and twice forced Bracken into important saves.

The psychological challenge is significant. Heath must retain the positive aspects of Saturday's performance without allowing the 94th-minute goal to dominate their thinking.

South Park, meanwhile, must guard against believing that one late victory guarantees another. Cup progression does not provide league points, and Tuesday begins at 0–0.

Selection decisions will also be interesting. Managers rarely want to overhaul a side that has performed well, but a second meeting in such a short period allows each coaching staff to adjust pressing triggers, set-piece organisation and individual match-ups with unusually recent evidence.

For Broadbridge Heath, a league victory would not restore their place in the Trophy, but it would provide an immediate shift in momentum. For South Park, another positive result would reinforce the belief generated by their comeback.

SEVEN SUSSEX CLUBS WAITING IN THE FIRST QUALIFYING ROUND

Although Broadbridge Heath's campaign is over, Sussex will have seven representatives in the first qualifying round on Saturday 29 August. Remarkably, every one of them has been drawn at home.

Bognor Regis Town v South Park

Bognor Regis Town will host South Park, giving the Rocks the first opportunity to end the Surrey club's run.

South Park's comeback against Broadbridge ensures they will travel to Nyewood Lane with confidence, but Bognor's home support and familiarity with their surroundings should make this a very different examination.

The Rocks will also have the benefit of reviewing Saturday's match. They know South Park can be vulnerable to direct deliveries and aerial pressure, but they have also been warned that the Sparks remain dangerous until the final whistle.

Peacehaven & Telscombe v Merstham or Ashford Town

Peacehaven & Telscombe will face the winner of Sunday's preliminary-round fixture between Merstham and Ashford Town (Middlesex).

The delayed identity of their opponent creates a small scouting complication, although Peacehaven will have two weeks to prepare once the tie is settled.

Home advantage at the Sports Park should provide confidence, particularly if Peacehaven can use the surface and dimensions of their own ground to establish control early.

Crowborough Athletic v Ashford United

Crowborough Athletic welcome Ashford United in an all-Isthmian South East contest.

With both teams accustomed to the same competitive level, there should be few surprises. Small details such as discipline, set-piece delivery, second balls and finishing are likely to decide the outcome.

Crowborough's home support could become particularly important if the tie remains level entering its final stages.

Eastbourne Town v Bedfont Sports Club

Eastbourne Town host Bedfont Sports Club at the Saffrons.

Town will be determined to make home advantage count after being handed a tie against opposition from outside their regular league programme. That element of unfamiliarity can make national cup matches particularly interesting, with both teams required to adapt quickly.

An early goal would help Eastbourne settle, but Saturday's result at South Park demonstrated that scoring first provides no guarantee of progression.

Hastings United v Hendon

Hastings United face Hendon at the Pilot Field in one of the round's most attractive Sussex ties.

Hastings will view home advantage and the Pilot Field atmosphere as opportunities to establish early momentum, but Hendon possess enough experience to make this a serious test.

For United, a strong Trophy run could add another dimension to their season and give supporters the prospect of meaningful national cup football as autumn approaches.

Littlehampton Town v Raynes Park Vale

Littlehampton Town meet Raynes Park Vale at the Sportsfield.

The Marigolds have avoided a difficult away journey and will hope to use their attacking energy to put Raynes Park under pressure from the opening stages.

However, knockout football rewards control as much as aggression. Littlehampton will need to balance their desire to attack with the defensive concentration required to avoid giving their visitors an easy route into the contest.

Steining Town v Moneyfields

Steining Town welcome Moneyfields to the Birchwood Ground.

The Barrowmen's return to Isthmian League football gives them an opportunity to test their progress in a national knockout competition. Moneyfields will provide demanding opposition, but Steining's home surroundings and support should make this a tie they approach with confidence.

THE RULES AND PRIZE MONEY

The competition rules leave little room for uncertainty. There are no replays, so any match level after 90 minutes will be decided by kicks from the penalty mark.

Winners in the first qualifying round receive £1,500 and advance to the second qualifying round. Defeated clubs receive £400 and see their Trophy campaigns end.

The payments increase as clubs progress. Second qualifying-round winners receive £2,250, followed by £2,450 for third qualifying-round winners and £3,000 for success in the first round proper.

The eventual winners at Wembley will receive £60,000, with the runners-up collecting £30,000.

At Step Four, even the early payments can be valuable. Cup prize money can assist with travel, equipment, ground improvements and everyday operating costs. Progression also creates the possibility of an attractive home tie, increased attendance and additional commercial income.

Home advantage across all seven first qualifying-round ties therefore gives Sussex a genuine opportunity to build a strong presence in the next stage.

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002

It is not a guarantee—South Park have just demonstrated how quickly a tie can turn—but avoiding travel and playing in familiar surroundings should help.

FINE MARGINS DEFINE THE OPENING WEEKEND

Only three goals were scored in Saturday's sole Sussex-involved FA Trophy tie, but the timing of those goals produced a complete knockout narrative.

Broadbridge Heath led from the 41st to the 75th minute, a period of 34 minutes. South Park then needed only the closing quarter-hour and added time to transform elimination into victory. The winning goal arrived approximately 19 minutes after the equaliser, deep into stoppage time.

Marino became the first Sussex scorer in this season's FA Trophy, but Cain and Stepney ensured he would also be the county's last scorer in the preliminary round. Bracken's two saves from Doughty provided the hidden foundation for the comeback.

For Broadbridge Heath, the immediate emotion will be disappointment. They were ahead, had chances to increase the lead and stood seconds away from penalties. Once that frustration settles, however, the focus must move to Tuesday's league rematch and the long campaign ahead.

For Sussex football more widely, attention now turns to 29 August. Seven clubs, seven home ties and seven opportunities to continue along the road to Wembley.

The county's first representative may have fallen in painful circumstances, but its wider FA Trophy story is only beginning.

SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

FOUR-GOAL NTIM LIGHTS UP REDUCED PREMIER WEEKEND



BY DOUGIE

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002 · SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

Kwesi Ntim delivered the outstanding individual performance of the Southern Combination League Premier Division weekend, scoring four times as Lingfield defeated Billingshurst 5–3 at Whyteleafe.

With most Premier Division clubs involved in FA Vase first-round qualifying ties, only three league fixtures were played on Saturday, 15 August. They produced 13 goals, two away wins and Lingfield's eight-goal thriller. Friday night's meeting between Eastbourne United and AFC Vardeanians completed the weekend programme and raised the combined total to 15 goals in four matches.

The four published attendances added up to 689. Eastbourne United attracted the largest crowd with 271, followed by 224 at East Grinstead, 132 for Forest Row's game at Three Bridges and 62 at Whyteleafe for Lingfield against Billingshurst.

NTIM HITS FOUR AS LINGFIELD WIN EIGHT-GOAL THRILLER

Lingfield collected their first league victory of the season in spectacular fashion, beating Billingshurst 5–3 and moving onto four points from three games.

Ntim set the tone by converting two early penalties, the second arriving after only 15 minutes and finding the same corner as his first. The striker completed his hat-trick two minutes into the second half to put Lingfield 3–0 ahead and apparently in complete command.

Billingshurst refused to disappear. Tom Edwards reduced the deficit in the 59th minute, but Lingfield restored control and stretched their advantage to 5–1. Ntim finished the afternoon with four goals, while Reon Donkor supplied the hosts' other strike.

The closing stages were far less comfortable than Lingfield would have wanted. Edwards scored his second in the 81st minute and substitute Ben Cole struck just a minute later, transforming 5–1 into 5–3.

There was not enough time for Billingshurst to complete an extraordinary recovery, but the late goals prevented Lingfield from enjoying a relaxed finish.

For the Lingers, this was an emphatic response to a difficult start. They opened with a 5–1 defeat at Hassocks before drawing 2–2 with Forest Row. Ntim's finishing provided the cutting edge that had

previously been missing and moved Lingfield onto four points.

Billingshurst remain on one point after three games. They have been competitive, losing by a single goal against Bexhill United and drawing with Horsham YMCA, but have now conceded eight. Scoring three times away from home was encouraging; allowing Lingfield to establish such a large advantage was decisive.

SUBSTITUTE LAWS SETTLES LOCAL DERBY

Crawley Down Gatwick earned their first victory of the league campaign with a 1–0 win at East Grinstead Town before 224 spectators at the Vistavis Community Stadium.

The local derby remained goalless through the first half, with neither side able to turn a tight contest into a clear advantage. The breakthrough arrived in the 68th minute through Crawley Down substitute James Laws.

Laws had been introduced from the bench and supplied the decisive moment in a match containing little margin for error. Crawley Down protected the lead through the final 22 minutes to claim a valuable clean sheet and move onto four points from three league fixtures.

The Anvils began with a 1–1 draw at Newhaven and then lost a five-goal contest 3–2 against Roffey. Following the defensive frustration of that defeat, shutting out East Grinstead represented an important correction.

For the Wasps, the concern is increasingly obvious. East Grinstead have collected one point from three league matches and are still waiting for their first Premier Division goal.

A goalless draw at Haywards Heath was followed by successive 1–0 home defeats against Guernsey and Crawley Down.

The margins remain small—East Grinstead have conceded only twice—but football ultimately rewards goals and points rather than competitive scorelines. Their defensive base is sound; the urgent task is to find greater threat at the opposite end.

HEATH MAINTAIN UNBEATEN START

Haywards Heath Town continued their unbeaten opening with a 3–1 victory over Forest Row at Jubilee Field, Three Bridges.

The result moved Heath onto seven points from three games following their opening goalless draw with East Grinstead and a 2–1 win away to AFC Varndeanians.

With five goals scored and only two conceded, last season's runners-up have again made a purposeful start.

Centre-back Josh Rapson was selected as Haywards Heath's man of the match after a dominant defensive performance. The official fixture submission had not listed individual scorers when this report was compiled, but the scoreline reflected another controlled away display from a side already demonstrating strength at both ends of the pitch.

Forest Row remain without a league victory. They were beaten 3–0 at Midhurst & Easebourne on the opening day before collecting a 2–2 draw against Lingfield.

Saturday's defeat leaves Forest Row with one point from three matches, six goals conceded across their two losses and an immediate need to turn competitive spells into a complete 90-minute performance.

Haywards Heath, meanwhile, continue to look like one of the division's early benchmarks. Seven points from three matches is a strong return, but their next league fixture against fellow seven-point starters Eastbourne United should reveal more about both teams' opening form.

TEN-MAN UNITED FIGHT BACK ON FRIDAY NIGHT

Eastbourne United and AFC Varndeanians opened the weekend by drawing 1–1 at the Oval Arena 3G in front of 271 spectators.

Varndeanians went ahead in the 36th minute and carried that advantage into half-time. The official match record lists the goal as an opposition strike without naming the scorer, but the visitors had given United their first home setback of the league campaign.

The game produced a striking sequence shortly before the hour. Eastbourne's Charlie Ball was sent to the sin bin in the 57th minute, temporarily reducing the hosts to ten players, but only a minute later Sam Scott scored the equaliser.

Scott was subsequently voted United's man of the match.

Neither side found a winner, leaving United on seven league points following earlier victories over Wick and Little Common. They have scored ten goals and conceded only three in those three fixtures, although their FA Cup defeat at Littlehampton provided an interruption between the league wins and Friday's draw.

Varndeanians move onto four points. They began with a 3–2 win at Horsham YMCA, were narrowly beaten 2–1 by Haywards Heath and have now taken a point from another of the division's strongest starters.

EARLY CONTENDERS BEGIN TO EMERGE

The restricted programme prevented major conclusions, but it reinforced several early themes.

Haywards Heath and Eastbourne United both remain unbeaten on seven points, Crawley Down have secured their first win, and Lingfield possess one of the division's most dangerous finishers in Ntim.

At the other end of the weekend's results, Billingshurst and Forest Row have one point apiece, while East Grinstead's failure to score has left them with the same return despite three closely contested matches.

With the FA Vase accounting for most of Saturday's schedule, the table remains uneven and August verdicts should be treated cautiously.

What can already be said is that the SCFL Premier Division has lost none of its unpredictability. An eight-goal contest, a substitute winner, a ten-man equaliser and two unbeaten early leaders made sure a shortened weekend still delivered plenty to discuss.



RETAINED IN THE SUMMER — FOUR GOALS IN AUGUST. PHOTO: LINGFIELD FC X



SOUTHERN COMBINATION LEAGUE · 2026/27

PREMIER DIVISION

LEAGUE TABLE

AFTER SATURDAY 15 AUGUST 2026

#	CLUB	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS
1	Eastbourne United	3	2	1	0	10	3	+7	7
2	Haywards Heath Town	3	2	1	0	5	2	+3	7
3	Roffey	2	2	0	0	11	2	+9	6
4	Guernsey	2	2	0	0	4	0	+4	6
5	Bexhill United	2	2	0	0	4	1	+3	6
6	Newhaven	2	1	1	0	3	2	+1	4
7	AFC Varndeanians	3	1	1	1	5	5	0	4
8	Crawley Down Gatwick	3	1	1	1	4	4	0	4
9	Lingfield	3	1	1	1	8	10	-2	4
10	Hassocks	2	1	0	1	6	3	+3	3
11	Pagham	2	1	0	1	5	3	+2	3
12	Midhurst & Easebourne	2	1	0	1	4	2	+2	3
13	Seaford Town	2	1	0	1	1	2	-1	3
14	Wick	2	1	0	1	—	—	-3	3
15	Horsham YMCA	2	0	1	1	3	4	-1	1
16	East Grinstead Town	3	0	1	2	0	2	-2	1
17	Billingshurst	3	0	1	2	5	8	-3	1
18	Forest Row	3	0	1	2	3	8	-5	1
19	Lancing	2	0	0	2	0	6	-6	0
20	Little Common	2	0	0	2	1	12	-11	0

DUGOUT DATA HUB
DUGOUT 90 · STAY HYDRATED LADS

DIVISION ONE OPENING STATEMENTS

Matthew looks back at the Division One opening round, played on 8/9 August — most of the division was on FA Vase duty this Saturday.



BY MATTHEW ROGERS · THE SNLF SHOW

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002 · SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

A brief look at the opening round of fixtures in the SCFL Division One.

Last weekend saw the start of the 26/27 SCFL Division One season get underway, and already there is plenty to talk about. There were teams with a point to prove, plenty of new faces, and title contenders ready to hit the ground running. There's a long season ahead, but starting well is something which cannot be undervalued.

Let's start by taking a look at a team that found themselves relegated at the end of last season, Shoreham FC. Shoreham were a team that struggled massively last season, particularly in defence, but with a brand new season in a lower division ahead of them, there would have surely been optimism at the club. That optimism however, would be short lived. After two minutes, away side Selsey FC went 0–1 up courtesy of Tony Raymond Halsey, the worst possible start for Shoreham. Just two minutes later the score was doubled as Frederick Chipp-Smith made it 0–2; the demons of last season very much still present for Shoreham as the defence just could not keep the ball away from the net. Things went from bad to worse for the home side as in the 7th minute Frederick Chipp-Smith scored again to put the score at 0–3, even by last season's standards, this was a poor performance from Shoreham. Things settled down after that, with the score remaining at 0–3 until late on, when in the 86th minute Selsey substitute Ben Collins scored to make it 0–4, before a consolation goal from Shoreham's Alessandro Luca Hardev Colombini bought us to our final scoreline of 1–4. It's just the first game of the season, so for alarm bells to ring would be something of an overreaction, but it simply can't be denied that this game couldn't have gone much worse for Shoreham, especially the opening 10 minutes. I'm sure everyone will be watching closely to see how they respond!

Another team that's new to Division one this season, this time coming up not down, is Hailsham Town FC, having earned promotion from Division 2 after a sensational 25/26 season. A tricky test awaited in the form of Dorking Wanderers B, a tough team to anticipate given the possibility of some first-teamers making their way to the team sheet on occasion. Hailsham went behind early, with Dorking's Leo Bines scoring in the 20th minute to put the score at 0–1. Hailsham were not deterred however, and a huge second half

performance in front of a very impressive 260 fans saw them turn things around thanks to a brace from Tyler Pearson to see things finish 2–1. To come from behind in the first game after promotion shows real character, something that is going to be incredibly important across what should be a very tight season.

On we go to the highest scoring fixture of the opening round, Arundel vs Ringmer. I had this down as a tricky fixture for Ringmer, who I am predicting will struggle this season after a lacklustre second half to their last campaign, and the loss of their manager. However, Ringmer gave a good account of themselves, despite the eventual scoreline they did not make things easy for the home side. Arundel raced into an early lead after a brace from Liam Brady made it 2–0 after just 18 minutes, showing real quality to control the game. Not long into the second half, Daegan Walsh scored to make it 3–0 to the home side, who looked to be running away with it. Ringmer however, did not give up, scoring in the 69th and 76th minute with goals from Lamin Sey and Jack Craig to really put the pressure on the home side. With the score at 3–2, the game could really have gone either way, before finally, in the 80th minute, Arundel put themselves 2 goals ahead once more thanks to a headed goal from Oliver Claydon off the bench. And so it finished, 4–2, a great match of football in which both teams showed their determination and quality. Despite getting nothing from the game, I reckon Ringmer will take plenty of positives as they look ahead to the next league game.

Next up, the team which all of us on The SNLF show put to win the league (no pressure), Infinity FC. After coming so close last season before playoff heartbreak in the final (again), the club will undoubtedly be hoping to avoid the playoffs altogether and secure the top spot of the table. They had a tough fixture at home to Mile Oak, and really had to work hard to secure all 3 points. For much of the match, it looked as though both teams were going to have to settle for a point in a goalless draw. That was until Evan Jamie Harris rifled it home in the 88th minute to secure a massive 3 points for Infinity, Mile Oak had no real chance to reply, and the score finished 1–0 to the home side. They never stopped pushing and were rewarded for their efforts, exactly the sort of mentality needed if they want to go all the way this season.

There were a couple of unknowns for us this season, one of which being Dial Square FC, a team that we may have written off too early. Their season couldn't have started any better, as just 3 minutes into their match against East Preston, Daniel Martin Cenzano scored to put his team 1–0 up. At this point it looked as though it was set to be a high scoring affair, but that proved to be the only goal of the game. East Preston just could not get into the game and never really troubled the keeper all that much. An important 3 points for Dial Square, who won't be getting underestimated any longer!

Perhaps my most surprising result of the afternoon came from the match between Reigate Priory and Guildford City. Guildford were another team new to the division for this season, and another team that may just have gone under the radar and been underestimated by ourselves at The SNLF. I had Reigate Priory down to do well this season, to get promoted via the playoffs in fact, but they were off the pace in this opening fixture. It was a quiet first half which saw the scores level and goalless, but the second half saw two goals from Luke Mitchell secure all 3 points for Guildford City as the score finished 0–2. Reigate have recruited well this summer, and manager Dale Wyatt will be looking to bounce back quickly after this disappointing start to the season.

A team that are perhaps owed an apology, Oakwood FC. Predicted to come right down at the bottom of the table by pretty much all of us on The SNLF show, they had a point to prove and they did so in style. They controlled the match against Westfield FC, and a goal either side of half time from Jacob Todman saw them cruise to a strong 2–0 finish. It won't be an easy season, and I see this being a very important 3 points which gives them plenty to build on.

Worthing United are a team many are predicting to be right in amongst it at the top of the table this season, and they certainly started strong against a new-look Loxwood side. After just 16

minutes United saw themselves up 2–0 thanks to goals from Liam Appleton and Daniel George Kingston, and they never really looked back. Loxwood kept pushing and were rewarded with a goal from Lewis Huggins in the 75th minute, but any hope of a comeback were quickly dashed as Ahmed Kamil scored for the homside to instantly restore the two goal cushion just one minute later. And so the score finished 3–1, with United starting as they mean to go on. Work to do at Loxwood to get the team gelling, but some positives to take.

Clanfield are another new face for Division one this season, and their match against Saltdean most definitely peaked in the first half. Four goals saw the scores sit at 1–3, with Dan Chandler scoring the only goal of the game for Clanfield, and Jesse Burbidge, Luke Burbidge, and Charlie Yeates getting on the scoresheet for Saltdean. A rude introduction for Clanfield, who would have been hoping to make home advantage count ahead of some long-distance away days.

And finally, last but by no means least, we have Jarvis Brook vs AFC Walcountians. A match between two teams I would say should be quite evenly matched across the season, predicting a safe, mid-table finish for both. On the day however, Walcountians were in full control from start to finish, with two goals from Charlie Alex Moore, as well as one from Calum Reeves, helping their team cruise to victory. Jarvis Brook managed what would just prove to be a consolation goal from Charlie Baitup, which saw the score finish at 1–3. Plenty to improve upon for the home side, who will be looking to bounce back quickly.

So there we have it, a look at every match from the opening round of fixtures, some upsets, some disappointing defeats, and plenty of talking points. What's your stand out fixture from the opening round?



SOUTHERN COMBINATION LEAGUE · 2026/27

DIVISION ONE

LEAGUE TABLE

AFTER SATURDAY 15 AUGUST 2026

#	CLUB	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS
1	Arundel	2	1	1	0	6	4	+2	4
2	Selsey	1	1	0	0	4	1	+3	3
3	AFC Walcountians	1	1	0	0	3	1	+2	3
4	Saltdean United	1	1	0	0	3	1	+2	3
5	Worthing United	1	1	0	0	3	1	+2	3
6	Guildford City	1	1	0	0	2	0	+2	3
7	Oakwood	1	1	0	0	2	0	+2	3
8	Hailsham Town	1	1	0	0	2	1	+1	3
9	Dial Square	1	1	0	0	1	0	+1	3
10	Infinity	1	1	0	0	1	0	+1	3
11	Dorking Wanderers B	2	0	1	1	3	4	-1	1
12	East Preston	1	0	0	1	0	1	-1	0
13	Mile Oak	1	0	0	1	0	1	-1	0
14	Ringmer AFC	1	0	0	1	2	4	-2	0
15	Clanfield	1	0	0	1	1	3	-2	0
16	Jarvis Brook	1	0	0	1	1	3	-2	0
17	Loxwood	1	0	0	1	1	3	-2	0
18	Reigate Priory	1	0	0	1	0	2	-2	0
19	Westfield	1	0	0	1	0	2	-2	0
20	Shoreham	1	0	0	1	1	4	-3	0

DUGOUT DATA HUB
DUGOUT 90 · STAY HYDRATED LADS

CHICHESTER HIT 17 AS HURSTPIERPOINT MAKE FLYING RETURN



BY DOUGIE

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002 · SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

The Southern Combination League Division Two season exploded into life on Saturday, with 38 goals across the seven fixtures confirmed by Sunday morning. That total was distorted by an extraordinary afternoon at Oaklands Park, where Chichester City B defeated Worthing Town 17–0, but the other six games still averaged three and a half goals each. Opening day also brought a hat-trick, a ten-man winner, a comeback and only two matches in which both teams scored.

Chichester supplied the result that will travel well beyond the division, but Hurstpierpoint's 5–0 win at ASC Brighton Rangers was arguably just as significant in its own way. The visitors were playing their first league game since returning to the SCFL and immediately demonstrated that they intend to be competitive rather than merely make up the numbers.

Upper Beeding also won 5–0 away from home, Ferring's Jack Lanigan claimed the first Division Two hat-trick of the campaign and Rustington overcame a red card to snatch a late victory at Southwater. TD Shipley had to recover after Bosham took the lead before eventually winning a four-goal contest at Dragons Green.

Five of the seven winners kept clean sheets, with three home and four away victories. Alfold completed the winners' list with a 2–1 victory away to Storrington Community.

CHICHESTER CITY B 17–0 WORTHING TOWN

There is no sensible place to begin other than Oaklands Park, where Chichester City B produced one of the most remarkable scorelines the Southern Combination League is likely to see all season.

Joshua Irish led the rout with six goals and Josh Hall struck five. Oliver Clarke and Matthew Noble both scored twice, while Joshua Castle and Lukas Micevicius completed the scoring. Castle delivered the final blow in the first minute of added time, placing a composed finish into the corner to make it 17–0.

Six Chichester players scored, but Irish and Hall's numbers were exceptional. Their combined 11 goals exceeded the entire goal total in every other confirmed fixture. Irish personally outscored all six of the other winning teams, while Hall matched the totals recorded by Hurstpierpoint and Upper Beeding.

The result did not emerge from nowhere in terms of Chichester's attacking potential. City B finished fourth last season after scoring 107 league goals, with Hall contributing 26 and Castle another 17. The pair have therefore carried their established output into the new campaign, but the immediate impact made by Irish takes an already dangerous attacking group to another level.

The spread was as encouraging as the total. Four players scored at least twice, showing that City's threat does not rest on one centre-forward. For Worthing, who conceded 122 league goals last season, the priority is preventing this result becoming psychologically damaging. Restoring defensive distances and protecting central areas must come before everything else.

One result does not decide a season, particularly on its opening weekend, but a plus-17 goal difference gives Chichester a substantial early advantage. It may matter if positions are decided by narrow margins much later in the campaign. More importantly, this performance sends a warning to the rest of the division that last season's fourth-placed side appear determined to attack the promotion places.

ASC BRIGHTON RANGERS 0–5 HURSTPIERPOINT

Hurstpierpoint could not have asked for a more convincing return to SCFL competition as they dismantled ASC Brighton Rangers 5–0 at Sussex County FA headquarters in Lancing.

Sam Hayter scored twice, with Jack De Leburne, Joe Hooper and Harry Dunne also finding the net. Hayter and De Leburne picked up where they had left off in the club's previous campaign before Hooper and Dunne added the late goals that transformed a secure victory into a genuine opening-day statement.

Returning sides can need time to adjust to a different competition, but Hurstpierpoint looked comfortable immediately. Four scorers shared the goals, the defence protected a clean sheet and Hooper and Dunne's late contributions showed that the visitors retained their attacking ambition after the points were effectively secure.

Rangers will be disappointed by both the margin and their failure to score. Last season they finished ninth and found the net 74 times, with Antoine Sharpe contributing 27 goals. They were capable of

causing significant problems going forward, but their 65 goals conceded also pointed to defensive vulnerability. Saturday's result reopened that concern in emphatic fashion.

The immediate challenge for ASC is not to overreact. Their next fixture is another home game, this time against Bosham, and offers an opportunity to produce a response in familiar surroundings. Hurstpierpoint travel to Copthorne knowing that another composed performance would turn an excellent introduction into genuine early momentum.

COPTHORNE 0-5 UPPER BEEDING

Upper Beeding matched Hurstpierpoint's winning margin by defeating Copthorne 5-0 at Roffey FC, Copthorne's home venue for the new campaign.

Will Gilbert scored twice, with Luke Usherwood, Connor Angood and Adam Davies adding one apiece. Four separate scorers, five goals and a clean sheet represented an outstanding afternoon for a team that finished seventh last season.

Last season Beeding scored 56, conceded 58 and collected 42 points. This display immediately addressed the negative side of that goal difference: Gilbert supplied the cutting edge, while goals from Usherwood, Angood and Davies suggested Beeding possess several routes to goal.

Copthorne began a new chapter with a heavily changed side and a different home base. Those factors provide context, although the first objective must be to establish a settled spine and reduce the spaces opponents can attack between the lines.

Their next fixture is at home to Hurstpierpoint, meaning Copthorne immediately face another side that scored five on opening day. It is a demanding assignment but also a chance to show that Saturday was an early setback rather than an indication of what lies ahead.

Upper Beeding face a different examination away to TD Shipley, where their defensive organisation will be tested by a side that scored four in its opener.

FERRING 3-0 RUDGWICK

The individual performance of the weekend outside Chichester belonged to Jack Lanigan, who scored all three goals in Ferring's 3-0 victory over Rudgwick at the Glebelands.

Two of Lanigan's goals came from coolly taken penalties before he completed his hat-trick with a cultured effort from open play.

Lanigan appeared 17 times and scored five goals for Ferring's under-23 side last season. Opening the new senior campaign with a hat-trick therefore represents a significant step in his development and provides another example of why a functioning pathway between youth, development and first-team football matters at this level.

Ferring finished sixth last season, scoring 68 but conceding 62. Joe Sadler led their league scoring with 19, so another reliable attacking option would make them less predictable. The clean sheet should

please Ferring almost as much as Lanigan's hat-trick after defensive lapses prevented a talented side from climbing higher last season.

Rudgwick will be especially frustrated by conceding two penalties. Whatever the precise circumstances, multiple spot-kicks usually point to defenders being forced into difficult decisions inside their own area. Last season they conceded 86 league goals and finished 13th, so improving their defensive record was already a priority before Saturday.

Rudgwick's next scheduled league match is away to TD Shipley on 29 August, while Ferring host Brighton Electricity next weekend. Lanigan has already ensured future opponents will pay close attention to him.

SOUTHWATER 0-1 RUSTINGTON

Rustington's 1-0 victory at Southwater was the lowest-scoring match of the day, but it may have revealed more about character than any of the emphatic wins elsewhere.

The visitors were reduced to ten men with the contest still goalless. Rather than retreat completely and settle for survival, they remained organised and found the decisive moment through Felix Gwara in the 80th minute. Gwara broke the deadlock before the Blues protected their advantage through the closing stages.

Winning away after losing a player, keeping a clean sheet and scoring late demonstrated concentration and collective discipline. Rustington protected the spaces between defence and midfield without surrendering all attacking threat.

They entered the season with strong foundations after finishing in the leading group last year. Matthew Wilson scored 22 league goals and Jack Newhouse added 18, but it was Gwara who delivered the first decisive contribution of the new campaign. That depth will be important if Rustington are to challenge again.

Southwater will regret failing to make the extra player count. They needed to move the ball quickly and stretch the pitch, but Rustington's organisation asked questions they could not answer.

Southwater host Worthing Town next, a fixture that offers an immediate opportunity to register their first goals and points. Rustington travel to Storrington Community, where the confidence gained from this ten-man victory should be valuable.

TD SHIPLEY 3-1 BOSHAM

TD Shipley's 3-1 victory over Bosham at Dragons Green was one of only two Division Two games in which both sides scored and the only one won by a team that had fallen behind.

Bosham took the lead and showed far more attacking ambition than the sides beaten heavily elsewhere. However, their own post-match assessment acknowledged that defensive errors allowed Shipley to turn the contest around and move clear. TD responded like a side accustomed to winning matches, recovering their composure and scoring three times to secure the points.

Shipley were among last season's leading teams and Adam Campbell-Stone finished as the division's top scorer with 33 league goals. Saturday's scorer information had not been published at the time of writing, so it would be wrong to attribute the four goals without confirmation. What can be said is that the Dragons retained the attacking capacity that made them such a force during the previous campaign.

There is also room for criticism. Shipley conceded only 42 league goals last season, so conceding at Dragons Green will give the management something to examine. Promotion challenges cannot depend on regularly needing three goals to win.

Bosham can take some encouragement. They finished 14th last season with only 21 league goals, so scoring away at one of the division's strongest sides represents progress. The problem was game management after moving in front: defensive errors allowed Shipley back into the contest and eventually left Bosham empty-handed.

TD now welcome Upper Beeding in one of next weekend's most interesting fixtures. Both teams scored freely on opening day, although Beeding arrive with a clean sheet and Shipley do not. Bosham travel to ASC Brighton Rangers in a meeting between two teams seeking their first points.

STORRINGTON COMMUNITY 1-2 ALFOLD

Alfold completed the opening-day picture with a 2-1 win at the Recreation Ground, confirmed via the verified Dugout Data Hub table after the public feeds had failed to publish a final score.

Alongside the Shipley-Bosham contest, it was one of only two matches of the day in which both sides scored. For Storrington, a one-goal home defeat leaves plenty to build on — and a response to seek when Rustington visit next weekend.

WHAT THE OPENING-DAY NUMBERS TELL US

The seven confirmed matches produced 38 goals at an average of just under five and a half per game. Chichester's 17 accounted for 44.7 per cent of the entire total. Remove that exceptional result and

the average across the other six games was still three and a half goals.

Chichester City B, Ferring and TD Shipley won on their own grounds; Hurstpierpoint, Upper Beeding, Rustington and Alfold collected their points on the road. There were no draws.

Five winners kept clean sheets: Chichester, Hurstpierpoint, Upper Beeding, Ferring and Rustington; Shipley and Alfold were the exceptions after conceding to Bosham and Storrington respectively. Only seven of the 38 goals came in matches where both sides scored, reinforcing how decisive the winning performances were.

The scorer distribution also produced several striking numbers. Irish, Hall and Lanigan combined for 14 goals between them. Chichester supplied six different scorers, Hurstpierpoint and Upper Beeding each had four, and Rustington needed only Gwara's single late intervention.

It is far too early to declare promotion contenders on the evidence of 90 minutes. Chichester will not score 17 every week, Hurstpierpoint will face tougher periods and the sides beaten heavily have ample time to recover. Nevertheless, opening day offered several meaningful clues.

Chichester possess frightening attacking depth. Hurstpierpoint have returned with confidence and ambition. Upper Beeding appear balanced, Ferring may have uncovered another exciting young scorer, Rustington have resilience and TD Shipley retain the ability to recover and overwhelm opponents.

For Worthing Town, ASC Brighton Rangers, Copthorne, Rudgwick, Southwater and Bosham, the next weekend now becomes about response. One defeat is manageable; allowing it to shape the next performance is the greater danger.

Division Two has delivered drama, goals and major talking points before the table has even settled into place. If opening day is any guide, the 2026/27 campaign will not be short of stories for Dugout News to follow.



SOUTHERN COMBINATION LEAGUE · 2026/27

DIVISION TWO

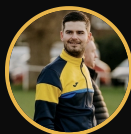
LEAGUE TABLE

AFTER SATURDAY 15 AUGUST 2026

#	CLUB	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS
1	Chichester City B	1	1	0	0	17	0	+17	3
2	Hurstpierpoint	1	1	0	0	5	0	+5	3
3	Upper Beeding	1	1	0	0	5	0	+5	3
4	Ferring	1	1	0	0	3	0	+3	3
5	TD Shipley	1	1	0	0	3	1	+2	3
6	Alfold	1	1	0	0	2	1	+1	3
7	Rustington	1	1	0	0	1	0	+1	3
8	Brighton Electricity	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
9	Storrington Community	1	0	0	1	1	2	-1	0
10	Southwater	1	0	0	1	0	1	-1	0
11	Bosham	1	0	0	1	1	3	-2	0
12	Rudgwick	1	0	0	1	0	3	-3	0
13	ASC Brighton Rangers	1	0	0	1	0	5	-5	0
14	Copthorne	1	0	0	1	0	5	-5	0
15	Worthing Town	1	0	0	1	0	17	-17	0

DUGOUT DATA HUB
DUGOUT 90 · STAY HYDRATED LADS

COPTHORNE 0–5 UPPER BEEDING — FROM THE BEEDING CAMP



BY RYAN

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002 · SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

A tough afternoon at Roffey awaited the new-look Beeding side.

After a five-minute onslaught from the hosts we settled quickly, and opened the scoring in the 7th minute with two of the new signings combining — Luke Usherwood assisting Will Gilbert, who calmly slotted past the goalkeeper. 1–0 Beeding, and our keeper had already made three really good saves.

Three or four minutes later we had a free kick from about 25 yards. Will stepped up and scored a beauty. 2–0.

The game got feisty, and Copthorne were very lucky not to be down to ten men when we broke through and our forward was fouled twice as he was about to tap home.

A deep free kick added to Copthorne's woes: Will picked out the nippy Luke O'Neil, who toe-tapped past two players before finding Connor Angood, who made no mistake. 3–0.

A corner soon after brought the fourth — Adam Davies, our very own Tree, smashing a header home just before half-time. 4–0.

The second half was more of the same. Copthorne couldn't deal with the pace out wide, tried playing a high line, and their goalkeeper came to the rescue several times — it could have been eight or nine at this point.

Late on we ran through again, and at the second attempt Luke Usherwood — another new lad — smashed home to make it 5–0.

Recap: Will Gilbert 2 goals, 2 assists · Connor Angood 1 goal · Adam "Tree" Davies 1 goal · Luke Usherwood 1 goal, 1 assist · Luke O'Neil 2 assists.

A great result for Beeding, who are on the road again next week at TD Shipley.

Ryan.

WESTFIELD 0-0 RINGMER — OUT 11-10 AFTER A 13-ROUND SHOOT-OUT

Peter Bentley Cup Round 1 — 26 penalties, one tie, and the cruellest of midweek exits.



BY JACK STAPLEY

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002 · SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

Westfield and Ringmer AFC produced a tense Peter Bentley Cup Round 1 contest under the lights, with the Westies enjoying long spells of pressure and the better chances across the 90 minutes, only to be denied by inspired goalkeeping and fine last-ditch defending. The tie finished 0-0 before Ringmer edged through 11-10 on penalties.

FIRST HALF

Westfield started the brighter of the two sides, forcing the early momentum through efforts from Jacob Shelton and Harry Murphy. The home side then looked to have a major opening when Bradley Pritchard played Dan Tewkesbury clean through on goal, only for Ringmer centre-back Pullen to haul him back. With Tewkesbury seemingly clear as the last attacker, Westfield felt the challenge warranted more than the yellow card shown, particularly with replays suggesting there were no covering defenders.

The resulting free kick was well struck, but Ringmer goalkeeper Moger was equal to it, producing a strong save to keep the score level. Westfield continued to ask questions and created a number of promising situations, but the final touch continued to evade them.

As the half developed, Ringmer grew into the game and began to threaten on the break. Jon Saunders was called into action after Westfield gave possession away, saving well in a one-on-one situation to ensure the Westies were not punished. Pullen was then fortunate to avoid further punishment around the 30-minute mark after a high boot caught Stapley, but the defender remained on the pitch.

Westfield finished the half back in control, with Tewkesbury firing over when well placed, but despite the pressure and controversy, the sides went in level at the break.

Half-time: Westfield 0-0 Ringmer AFC

SECOND HALF

The second half followed a similar pattern, with Westfield continuing to create openings while Ringmer remained dangerous whenever they could spring forward. Willett fired over from 25 yards as the hosts searched for the breakthrough, before Cullen dragged wide when played through for Ringmer at the other end.

Tewkesbury, Ridgers and Murphy all went close for the Westies as the pressure built, but Ringmer continued to stand firm. With 20 minutes remaining, Westfield changed shape and pushed players higher up the pitch, opening the game up and increasing the tempo. Tewkesbury, Kaleijye and Stapley all had opportunities from set pieces as Westfield pushed hard for a late winner.

With five minutes left, Westfield thought they had finally found the breakthrough when Tewkesbury turned the ball home after excellent work from Murphy, only for the goal to be ruled out for offside, with Murphy judged to have broken the line too early in the build-up.

The best chance of the game arrived in the 88th minute. Stapley met a corner with a superb header that looked destined for the net, but Moger produced a point-blank save before Ringmer's right-back completed the clearance from underneath the crossbar.

Penalties came and went with the score 4-4 going into sudden death. Ringmer hit the bar and Ward dragged wide on the 8th penalty, and after going round both sides, Ringmer scored and Stapley missed on the 13th round of penalties to take Ringmer through to round 2 and a home tie vs Eastbourne United.

SUMMARY

Westfield can take plenty from the performance, having created enough chances to win the tie in normal time and defended well against Ringmer's breaks. However, cup football can be unforgiving, and after 90 goalless minutes it was Ringmer who held their nerve from the spot to advance to the next round.

TAKING CHARGE AT 17

With the management team gone and a squad of Under-18s stepping up, Horsham YM's teenage caretaker reflects on a Vase tie that showed what this group is made of.



BY ARCHIE CRAMER

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002 · SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

Firstly, I'm massively grateful to Liam Giles and Harrison Williams for giving me the opportunity to be involved around the first team at Horsham YM before their departure. At just 17 years old, being able to work alongside them, experience the first-team environment and learn from them has been invaluable for me, and it's something I'll always be thankful for.

To then be given the opportunity to take charge of the first team at just 17 was a huge honour and an experience I'm incredibly grateful for. With the management team leaving and a number of players also moving on, we always knew Saturday's FA Vase tie against Epsom was going to be a massive challenge. In a very short space of time, I had to put a side together, with a large number of our Under-18s stepping up alongside a few older players.

I couldn't be prouder of how the lads responded. We went into half-time at 1-1 and were still right in the contest at 2-1 down until the 77th minute. For such a young and newly assembled side to compete for that long against strong opposition is a massive credit to every

player involved. We matched their energy and competed really well, but towards the end tiredness began to show and Epsom were able to take advantage with some late goals. I don't think the final scoreline reflected just how competitive the game was for such a long period.

More than anything, I'm immensely proud of the effort, attitude and togetherness the players showed. For so many young players to get the opportunity to represent the first team in a big competition is something they can take a huge amount from, and hopefully it gives them even more belief in where their football can take them.

Our attention now turns to Tuesday. We'll be looking to bring a few more players into the group and strengthen the side, but Saturday showed there is already a lot to be positive about. It has been a difficult period for the club, but the response from the lads was excellent and everyone involved can be proud of the way they represented themselves.

DIVISION TWO: UNTAPPED POTENTIAL, OR A COMFORT ZONE?



BY THE SUSSEX SCOUT

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002 · SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

There is a growing debate within SCFL Division Two about whether too many players are becoming settled at a level that should represent a stepping stone rather than a destination.

While the league continues to offer a competitive and important platform for grassroots football, there is increasing evidence that a number of individuals possess the ability to play at a significantly higher standard but are not making the step up.

That concern was underlined in stark fashion this weekend when Chi B recorded a 17–0 victory over Worthing Town.

While heavy defeats are not unheard of at this level, a margin of that size is exceptionally rare and immediately raises questions about competitive balance. In fact, across the last three SCFL Division Two seasons, only two other matches have seen a winning margin of 15 goals or more, highlighting just how extreme this result was in context.

A scoreline of that magnitude is not simply a reflection of one bad day; it points to a wider issue around preparation, depth, and whether some players and teams are being consistently challenged enough to aid development.

As one local coach, speaking anonymously, put it: "When you see results like that, you have to ask whether everyone on the pitch is being pushed to their limit—or whether some are just comfortable being there."

Importantly, the issue is not a lack of talent. Week after week, Division Two produces players with clear technical ability, physical strength, and football intelligence that would not look out of place in Division One or even higher in the non-league pyramid.

Several managers in the division have privately acknowledged that "at least five or six players in most squads could comfortably play a level up," yet those moves rarely materialise.

The problem appears to lie more in ambition, mindset, and opportunity. For some players, the appeal of familiar teammates, minimal travel, and a more relaxed environment outweighs the

uncertainty that comes with trials, competition for places, and higher expectations.

Others prioritise guaranteed weekly minutes over the risk of stepping into a more demanding setting where game time is not assured.

This creates a cycle where capable players remain at a level beneath their potential. One SCFL Division One assistant manager noted:

"We regularly look at Division Two, but often the players we identify either don't want to move or don't push themselves to be seen. The talent is there—it's just not always being tested."

Clubs at higher levels are actively searching for players who can make an impact, but too often they are forced to recruit from elsewhere because the talent within Division Two is not being fully exposed or encouraged to progress. As a result, the gap between ability and environment continues to widen, not because players lack quality, but because ambition is not always aligned with potential.

Coaches and managers also play a significant role in this dynamic. While some are proactive in encouraging players to progress—arranging trials, making contacts, and supporting upward movement—others are understandably reluctant to lose key individuals who contribute heavily to their own success. In a tightly contested division, retaining top performers can be the difference between mid-table and promotion contention, even if it limits a player's long-term development.

Ultimately, football at this level should be about progression. Division Two is designed to be a platform, not a comfort zone. If players genuinely believe in their ability, they should be testing themselves at the highest level available to them, rather than settling for convenience or familiarity.

Until that mindset shifts more widely across the division, SCFL Division Two will continue to be defined not just by the talent it produces, but by the significant amount of it that remains underutilised—players who could, and in many cases arguably should, be playing higher.

THE BATTLE BEHIND THE BADGE



BY DUGOUT DIARIES

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002 · SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

A player can score the winner on Saturday, laugh in the clubhouse and post a smiling picture online. By Sunday night, that same person can be sitting alone, wondering how everything became so dark.

That is the uncomfortable reality football still struggles to discuss.

Non-league football is brilliant at creating community. It gives people somewhere to belong and something to look forward to. But beneath the badges, banter and matchday photographs, people are fighting battles most of us never see: depression, addiction, drugs, gambling, debt and thoughts they are frightened to say out loud.

I am not writing this as a trained professional. I am writing it as someone who has lived it.

My own struggles began long before Dugout Diaries. Childhood trauma left me with PTSD and depression, and for years I tried to silence what was happening inside my head. Cocaine, weed and gambling became ways of escaping. They did not solve anything. They simply buried the pain temporarily while creating even bigger problems around it.

Addiction lies to you. It tells you that the next bet will recover the money, the next line will make you feel confident and the next escape will finally quieten your mind. Before long, you are no longer chasing enjoyment. You are chasing five minutes where you do not have to feel like yourself.

My life eventually reached its lowest point with a near-fatal overdose. I was found outside Tesco by my friend Mello, taken to A&E and later sectioned at Meadowfield Hospital, where I remained for more than a month.

I could dress that story up, but there is nothing glamorous about it. There is nothing rock and roll about addiction, hospital wards or watching the people who love you wonder whether you will survive. Sarah stood by me during a period when I could barely stand myself. Recovery did not happen overnight, and it was not one heroic moment. It was painful, gradual and built from hundreds of small decisions to keep going.

That is partly why football means so much to me now.

Non-league football gave me a community, a voice and an opportunity to turn some of that pain into something useful. Through Dugout Diaries, I have spoken to people inside the game who are carrying far more than a kit bag. Players worried about being

released. Managers living with constant criticism. Volunteers dealing with financial pressure. Supporters using Saturday afternoon as their only escape from a difficult week.

Football can save people, but we must stop pretending football people are indestructible.

The changing-room culture can make honesty difficult. Someone says they are struggling and the automatic response is often a joke or a quick instruction to "man up." Banter is part of football, and I love it, but there is a line between having a laugh and making somebody feel that admitting pain is weakness.

Gambling is another issue the game cannot ignore. Betting is wrapped around football so tightly that losing money can start to feel like part of the matchday experience. For someone already struggling, the Saturday accumulator can quickly become secret accounts, borrowed money and desperate attempts to win back losses. Drugs can follow a similar path: something social becomes something necessary, and something necessary eventually takes control.

Clubs do not need to become hospitals or counselling centres. But every club can create an environment where asking for help is treated with the same respect as reporting a physical injury. Appoint somebody trained to listen. Check on the player who suddenly stops attending. Speak privately to the volunteer whose behaviour has changed. Put support information where people can actually see it.

Most importantly, ask twice.

"How are you?"

"Yeah, fine."

"No, seriously—how are you?"

That second question might be the moment somebody finally tells the truth.

I survived, rebuilt my life and now try to help others experiencing depression through football. I am not ashamed of where I have been. It is part of me, but it no longer controls me. If telling my story makes one player, manager, volunteer or supporter realise they are not alone, then it is worth every uncomfortable word.

Football celebrates comebacks every week. Mine did not happen under floodlights, and there was no crowd cheering when I began rebuilding. But it remains the biggest result of my life.

Check on your teammates. Check on your mates. Check on the loud one, the quiet one and the person who always appears to be laughing.

Behind every badge is a human being.

See you in the dugout.

I made it through. You can too.

If you are struggling, tell somebody today. Samaritans can be called free at any time on 116 123. For urgent mental-health support, call NHS 111 and select the mental-health option. If you or somebody else is in immediate danger, call 999 or go to A&E.

MY NAME IS CHRIS — AND THIS IS WHY I FOLLOW MY LOCAL NON-LEAGUE CLUB



BY CHRIS · EAST GRINSTEAD TOWN

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002 · SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

The club in question is East Grinstead Town FC. But before I get into that, a little backstory.

Growing up, I wasn't much of a football fan at all, but I was always overhearing conversations at school about clubs like Chelsea, Manchester United, Liverpool and Arsenal. Back then they were the big four, and the majority of people in my school year supported one of those teams even though they weren't from those areas — with a couple of Crystal Palace and Brighton fans dotted about, of course.

In the end, I just got bored of being asked who I supported when I didn't have an answer. So I went with the easy option at the time: Chelsea.

Yes, yes — glory hunter! But over time football became more and more a part of my life. Every single day I became almost obsessed, watching as many matches as I could and learning about players, managers and clubs, past and present.

Fast forward to 2018, when I met my best mate Kieran in a new job. One week I asked him what he was doing at the weekend and whether he fancied going out — you know, being young lads, we wanted to go and have a drink. He told me he was off to watch “the Grin”. What do you mean? That's when he told me we had a local non-league football club. Bear in mind I was 20, 21 years old at this point — and I had no idea we had one.

So came Saturday morning — January 6th 2018, to be exact. Four of us went in the car, stopping off at the services to grab beer and food for the journey to Hythe Town. My first real football away day.

At the ground I met a couple more of the Grinstead boys, some of whom had been going to watch the club for over a decade. I heard stories about players and managers we've had, and a bit of the history of the club. At full-time we'd lost 3–2 — but that result aside, I absolutely loved it. I fell in love with it.

And since then, it's only ever been Grin.

I kept going to as many matches as I could on my weekends off — even pulling sick days just to go and watch them, which I still do from time to time, because that's how much it means to me. It's not Premier League standard, it's not Champions League quality, but it's

football at its rawest and most real. It's a level where you can get close to the players, stand where you want, have a drink at the ground — and afterwards you're sat there having beers with the players themselves.

We've had some incredible fixtures in the time I've been supporting the club. My favourite has to be the FA Cup tie at home on a Tuesday night against Worthing, when Leigh Dynan was our manager. I'm pretty sure Worthing hadn't lost a game that season at that point — they were flying in the division above — until they came to us. 1–2 down, 2–3 down, 3–3... the game had everything. And after all of that, we beat them on penalties. I've never experienced such emotion, jubilation and relief in my life.

That fixture sits alongside plenty of others: the derby-day wins against Three Bridges; beating champions-elect Ramsgate at home to become one of only two teams to beat them in their title-winning campaign; the 3–2 against Whitehawk that knocked them out of the play-offs; and the trip to Fleet Town when we were 1–0 down in the 70th minute, came back to win 2–1 in the 85th, and got the coach home with the players afterwards, singing karaoke and forgetting about all your problems for a while.

Don't get me wrong, there have been some very bad times too. Last season, for example, when after 13 years in the Isthmian South East we were relegated in quite horrific fashion — and plenty of other disappointing cup exits and seasons besides.

But one thing that will never change is my love for this football club, the happiness it has given me, the sense of belonging and a real second family. That's what it's all about. You can keep your half-time shows at the World Cup, your state-owned clubs, all the politics and money-driven rubbish we see now at the top level of the game.

Football is not a television show.

And down here in non-league... that's the beautiful game. It's a level gaining more popularity all the time — clubs with higher attendances, bigger exposure, and communities coming together to support their local.

And that is why I love my local football club.

"FOOTBALL IS NOT A TELEVISION SHOW. DOWN HERE IN NON-LEAGUE... THAT'S THE BEAUTIFUL GAME."

THE GRIN THIS SEASON

Relegated from the Isthmian South East last season after 13 years at Step 4, the Wasps have opened their SCFL Premier campaign with one point from three games — a 0–0 draw at Haywards Heath followed by 1–0 defeats to Guernsey and Crawley Down Gatwick — and are still waiting for their first goal. Full coverage in Dougie's SCFL Premier round-up, earlier in this issue · Next up: a Peter Bentley Cup trip to Jarvis Brook, Tue 25 August.

LET THE COACHES COACH. LET THE MANAGER MANAGE.

Badges and philosophies are everywhere in non-league football. But are being a good coach and being a good manager actually the same thing?



BY PAUL WISE

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002 · SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

There seems to be an increasing trend in non-league football, and certainly around the Southern Combination League, for clubs to appoint what I would describe as "coaching managers".

These are often highly qualified coaches. UEFA B badges are becoming increasingly common at our level, and you'll even find people with UEFA A qualifications working around Step 5 and Step 6 football.

Now, before anyone gets the wrong idea, I'm certainly not against qualified coaches. Far from it. Good coaching is hugely important and there are some excellent coaches working at our level.

But are being a good coach and being a good manager actually the same thing?

Personally, I don't think they are.

Given the choice, I prefer a manager who surrounds himself with a good coach or, ideally, a group of good coaches. Let the coaches coach. Let the manager manage.

There is a difference.

PHILOSOPHY OR PRAGMATISM?

My issue with some coaching managers is that I sometimes feel the philosophy comes before the players.

A coach develops a way he believes football should be played. He wants his side playing out from the back, dominating possession, building through the thirds and playing what we've all come to describe as "the right way".

That's absolutely fine --- if you have the players capable of doing it.

But what happens when you don't?

This is where, for me, a manager thinks slightly differently.

Rather than looking at his players and asking, "How do I get these players to play my way?", a manager should be asking, "What is the best way of winning football matches with the players I have?"

That might mean playing through the thirds. It might mean going more direct. It might mean sitting deep and counter-attacking. It might mean pressing high. It might even mean changing from week to week depending on the opposition, the pitch and the conditions.

For the life of me, I cannot understand watching a team struggle week after week, making the same mistakes while trying to play a certain way, and then continuing to do exactly the same thing because that is supposedly the "right way to play football".

In my opinion, there is only one right way to play football.

The way that wins you the game.

HOW MUCH CAN YOU REALLY COACH AT STEP 6?

There is another reality we sometimes seem to forget when talking about coaching at this level.

This isn't professional football.

At Step 6, you might get your players for an hour and a half of training each week. Even then, how often do you actually have everybody there?

Players work. They have families. People are injured. Someone gets stuck at work. Someone else is away. Another player can train one week but not the next.

That is the reality of non-league football.

So how much can you genuinely improve a senior player's technical ability in that environment?

If you have a 26-year-old centre-half who has spent his entire footballing life being technically limited, are you really going to turn him into a ball-playing centre-half with 90 minutes of training a week?

I'm not convinced you are.

But you can make him fitter.

You can make him sharper.

You can organise him.

You can work on his positioning, your defensive shape, distances between units, pressing, transitions and set pieces. You can make sure he knows exactly what his job is on a Saturday and exactly what the player next to him is going to do.

And surely that is where the limited training time available at this level can have the biggest impact?

That doesn't mean you stop trying to improve players technically. Of course you don't. But there has to be an understanding of the level you are working at and what you can realistically achieve in the time available.

Perhaps that is another difference between coaching and managing.

The coach can sometimes see the player he wants someone to become. The manager has to recognise the player he already has and work out how best to use him.

ARE WE OVER-COACHING YOUNG PLAYERS?

That leads me onto something else I've increasingly wondered about.

Are young players being over-coached?

We seem to be producing more and more players who have grown up playing a very technical, possession-based style of football. Keep the ball. Play through the thirds. Be comfortable in possession. Build from the goalkeeper.

Again, none of those things are bad.

But are we becoming so obsessed with producing technically educated footballers that we are forgetting to prepare them for what senior football actually looks like?

Because Step 5 and Step 6 football can be a completely different world.

A young player might have spent years being taught to receive the ball in certain areas, play in a particular structure and make technically correct decisions.

Then he steps into senior football on a freezing cold Tuesday night in January, on a heavy pitch, with the wind blowing sideways, against a 30-something-year-old centre-half whose main intention for the first ten minutes is to make absolutely certain he knows he is in a game.

Suddenly football looks very different.

At this level, technical ability matters. Of course it does.

But so does physicality. So does aggression. So does resilience. So does understanding how to compete.

Sometimes you've got to win the first ball.

Sometimes you've got to win the second ball.

Sometimes you've got to put the ball in Row Z.

Sometimes the pitch means you simply cannot play the football you wanted to play.

And sometimes you have to find a way of winning an ugly football match.

Are we teaching young players enough about that side of the game?

IS THE NEXT GENERATION BECOMING SOFT?

It's a provocative question, but I think it's worth asking.

Are we producing technically better footballers, but mentally softer ones?

And perhaps an even bigger question is whether that side of a footballer can actually be coached.

You can coach somebody's positioning.

You can coach patterns of play.

You can improve somebody's first touch.

You can coach when and where you want a team to press.

But can you coach someone to desperately want to win?

Can you coach someone to stick their head where it hurts?

Can you coach someone to keep going when they're cold, wet, tired and losing?

Can you teach somebody to dig in for the final ten minutes when you're under pressure and your backs are against the wall?

Can you actually coach someone to be, for want of a better phrase, a man in a man's game?

Or is some of that simply programmed into you?

I don't know the answer.

But I do know that when I watch football at this level, the teams with the most technically gifted players don't always win.

Quite often, the team that understands the level better does.

WHAT IS THE MANAGER ACTUALLY THERE TO DO?

Ultimately, I think this whole debate comes down to one question.

What is the job of a manager at Step 5 or Step 6?

Is it primarily to develop footballers and implement a footballing philosophy?

Or is it to win football matches?

Obviously, the perfect answer is both.

If you can develop players, play attractive football and win games at the same time, fantastic.

But what happens when those things conflict?

If your philosophy isn't working, do you change the players or change the philosophy?

And if you don't have the budget or pulling power to recruit the players capable of playing your way, surely good management means adapting?

There will be coaches who completely disagree with me. They will argue that abandoning a philosophy when things become difficult is exactly why teams never develop technically. They'll say players need time to learn a system and clubs need patience if they want to build something.

And there is undoubtedly some truth in that.

But while you're waiting for it all to click, somebody else has just taken the three points.

That is why, personally, I still favour the traditional setup.

Give me a manager who understands players, recruits well, knows how to build a dressing room, can make difficult decisions and understands what is required to win at the level.

Then let him surround himself with the best coaches he can find.

Because having qualifications and knowing how you want football to be played undoubtedly makes you a coach.

I'm just not convinced it automatically makes you a manager.

WHAT DO VOLUNTEERS ACTUALLY DO FOR NON-LEAGUE FOOTBALL?



BY BETH CHAPMAN · ROFFEY FC

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002 · SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

What do volunteers do for non-league football? It might sound like a stupid question to ask. They get jobs done — the things supporters and others don't think of when they picture match day, from the committee that decides how the club runs, right down to the person in charge of where your car goes in the car park.

This article is about a few people I know in my football world, and how much they mean to the clubs they give so much of their time to.

First of all, I want to recognise Steve Ratcliffe from Horsham YMCA. I spent a lot of time alongside Steve during my spell at YM a few years ago, and he is an example of doing the most for very little back. Not only does he turn up to every game and support the boys on the pitch, he is also the loudest voice encouraging progress and ambition within the club — always on the manager's side, always striving for the best.

Another mention when it comes to chairmen is Roffey FC's Phil Gibbs. Phil loves Roffey, and win, lose or draw he will always find the positives to keep heads high when things aren't going well. At the end of the day, it is so crucial for non-league teams to have a good chairman at the helm — without one, a club can very easily fall to pieces. The same goes for the entire group that makes up a football committee, so shout out to all of you.

Next up, the groundsmen — and this one will be slightly biased, because my example is my own dad, Sam Chapman, the man I thank most for getting me into non-league football. He, alongside Julian Miller at Roffey FC, spends hours a day on the pitch — and I mean

hours. I'm pretty sure that between them they cover a full working week: watering, cutting and seeding to make the surface the best it can be for the players. All of it managed around family life, and all of it given wholeheartedly. With the extreme heat we've been experiencing recently, it's these guys who keep the pitches in Sussex football safe to play on.

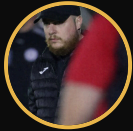
Now the match day team. Clubs are always looking for more match day volunteers, and trust me, it's such a fun environment to be part of — so if you love your non-league football, get involved. There are stewards, the people on the gate making sure everyone pays their way in, the people behind the bar serving drinks. And a crucial role is the kitchen team — sometimes just one person, like the legend that is Gill, who has been behind some of the best post-match meals in Sussex since years before I was born. There's plenty of space for more volunteers, and every club needs them to keep Sussex football alive.

And lastly, I need to talk about myself, and those who do what I do. Social media teams matter for keeping engagement strong and getting people involved. Social media — and I know this for a fact — keeps groundhoppers and people who aren't aware of their local clubs interested, and often brings them through the gate. We keep players feeling special too, whether it's man-of-the-match posters or highlight reels of their goals.

All in all, us Sussex volunteers work our socks off. So I want to finish this article by saying: thank you, well done, and keep going.

THE REALITIES OF SUSSEX MANAGEMENT

From Jarvis Brook to AFC Uckfield Town to Pagham — and what really keeps the heart of the Sussex pyramid beating.



BY REES

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002 · SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

My journey through Jarvis Brook, AFC Uckfield Town and Pagham — and what really keeps the heart of the Sussex football pyramid beating

HOW THIS COLUMN CAME ABOUT

When Mike contacted me to ask if I'd write a column for his new venture, I knew straight away what I wanted to talk about.

I wanted to tell a story about what Sussex football has taught me — and share a bit about my journey through the county's football pyramid.

I'm still a relative newcomer to Sussex football management compared to some of the longer-serving custodians who've been shaping the game here for years. But that's exactly why I wanted to write this piece — to show what it's like stepping into this world, learning from it, and becoming part of it.

WHY I WANTED TO TELL THIS STORY

Sussex football has shaped me — not just as a coach, but as a person. It's a world built on graft, community, and people who care far more than outsiders ever realise. I've been lucky enough to work at clubs with real identity, real history, and real heart. And through every chapter — Jarvis Brook, AFC Uckfield Town, and now Pagham — I've learned something new about what it truly means to manage in this county.

This article isn't about glorifying my journey. It's about showing the reality of Sussex football through the experiences I've lived, the people I've worked with, and the communities that keep the game alive.

TAKEAWAY

Managing in Sussex football isn't glamorous. It's graft, loyalty, late nights, long drives, rebuilding squads, losing sleep, celebrating small wins, and fighting for every point. My journey — from assistant at Jarvis Brook → assistant at AFC Uckfield Town → first-team manager → being part of the management team at Pagham FC in the SCFL Premier — is just one example of what Sussex football really demands.

JARVIS BROOK — LEARNING THE CRAFT UNDER JACOB BALDWIN

I started my coaching journey at Jarvis Brook, stepping in as assistant manager to Jacob, a man who had already built something special.

Before I arrived, the club had just completed one of the most successful periods in its history — winning the league, winning the county cup, and establishing a culture that every village club dreams of.

During my time there, we added to that success with two league cups and, most importantly, a historic promotion to Step 6 — the first in the club's history.

But the trophies weren't the biggest thing I took from Jarvis Brook.

Jacob taught me how to build a squad that fits the club, how to manage personalities, how to create standards in a grassroots environment, how to win without resources, and how to keep a club grounded even when it's flying.

Jarvis Brook wasn't where I proved myself. It was where I learned what "good" looks like.

AFC UCKFIELD TOWN — THE FIGHT AGAINST THE INEVITABLE

My next chapter was AFC Uckfield Town, and it began under Alex Harris, who brought me in as his assistant. I had a handful of games under him — enough to see the scale of the challenge.

The club was already in trouble. Confidence gone. Squad fractured. Relegation almost certain.

When Alex stepped down, Ryan Huckle took over, and I stayed on as his assistant. Again, only a handful of games — but enough to understand the club's reality.

Together, Ryan and I rebuilt the squad from scratch. New players. New standards. New identity.

When Ryan left for an EFL opportunity, I was promoted to first-team manager. I carried the rebuild forward, but the early-season damage was too deep. The points lost before we arrived were too heavy to recover.

At first, however, it felt like we were experiencing somewhat of an instant turnaround.

We scored 12 goals in my first two games — almost matching the same number the club had scored in the previous 20 matches.

The football changed overnight. The mentality changed overnight. The performances changed overnight.

But the league table didn't.

AFC Uckfield Town taught me that I can fix performances faster than I can fix league tables, that relegation battles are emotional, that players need belief before shape, and that Sussex football can be brutal.

This was the chapter that hardened me — the one that proved I could manage under pressure, not just in success.

PAGHAM FC — A NEW CHAPTER IN THE SCFL PREMIER

Now comes the chapter that defines my future: Pagham FC, one of the SCFL Premier Division's most iconic clubs.

Joining Lemmy, Arn, and Jamie isn't just a move — it's a statement, showcasing my own personal ambition. It's stepping into a club with identity, ambition, and expectation.

Pagham aren't a rebuild or a rescue job. Pagham are a project. And a really exciting one at that!

A coastal identity, a ground where atmosphere matters, a fanbase that expects competitiveness, and a league where every game is a battle.

Lemmy has put together a very exciting squad but it wasn't that which drew me in following him reaching out to me in the summer.

It is the standards he sets. The environment he's created. That's what excited me! Add to that the fantastic people in the background making sure everything runs smooth and making sure that all he has to worry about, is winning football matches!

This is where my Jarvis Brook grounding and Uckfield resilience combine. This is where I apply everything I've learned. This is where I step into the SCFL Premier not as a newcomer — but as a manager/assistant/coach shaped by the people, places, and experiences that define Sussex football.

THE PEOPLE WHO KEEP SUSSEX FOOTBALL ALIVE

All of this learning culminates here. My biggest learning out of all my experiences is that Sussex football isn't built on individual stories — it's built on the people who give the game its heartbeat.

It's built on:

- the managers who stay late after training
- the coaches who turn up early to set cones out
- the committees who run clubs like they're protecting a legacy
- the volunteers who mark pitches in the rain
- the groundsmen who keep surfaces playable against all odds
- the secretaries who deal with endless admin nobody ever sees
- the supporters who stand behind the rail week after week
- the players who graft after long shifts and still give everything
- the communities who keep clubs rooted in their towns and villages

These people are the reason Sussex football works. They're the reason clubs survive tough seasons. They're the reason promotions feel historic. They're the reason relegations hurt. They're the reason managers/assistants/coaches like me even have a platform to grow.

Without them, there is no Jarvis Brook story. No AFC Uckfield Town fight. No Pagham project. No SCFL Premier Division.

Sussex football is built on ordinary people doing extraordinary things — quietly, consistently, and with pride. My journey is just one thread in a much bigger tapestry.

RESPECT WORKS BOTH WAYS



BY WILD WEATHERMAN

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002 · SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

Referees are crucial to football. Without them, there is no game. They deserve respect, protection and support. But respect has to work both ways.

Football has always been built on emotion and passion. Players make mistakes, managers make mistakes and referees make mistakes. That is football. The problem is that the modern game increasingly expects referees to enforce a mountain of complicated rules while their own consistency and understanding are often questioned.

Dissent, delaying restarts, technical areas, substitutions, sin bins, goalkeeper behaviour and player approaches are now governed by an endless list of regulations. Yet too often, referees appear quicker to punish than to communicate, educate or understand the situation.

The worrying question is not whether referees make mistakes — they always will. It is whether enough is being done to develop them.

Young players are being punished for frustrations that could be managed through communication. Managers are penalised for questioning decisions. Sin bins can turn disagreements into confrontations rather than resolving them. Too often it comes down to ego — a refusal to explain a decision or have a reasonable conversation with a player.

Football does not need referees who simply know more rules. It needs referees who understand the game, communicate effectively and apply those rules consistently.

Protecting referees is essential. But protecting them from criticism cannot come at the expense of accountability. If standards are expected from players, the same standards must apply to officials.

WHAT ARE YOU OFFERING OTHER THAN THE FOOTBALL?



BYLINE TO BE CONFIRMED

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002 · SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

We all know there is no single formula for improving the matchday experience. Every club is different, with its own ethos, community, facilities, culture and social setup. What works for one club may not work for another.

That doesn't mean clubs shouldn't be looking at what they already have and asking themselves a simple question:

What are we offering people other than the football?

Fresh ideas and new blood are essential if clubs are going to keep moving forward. Building a regular and loyal fanbase isn't just about getting people through the turnstiles once; it's about creating an environment where supporters want to come back, bring friends and become part of the club.

That also creates something equally important off the pitch: volunteers, sponsors, community involvement and a pathway for people to become invested in the club. Ultimately, all of that helps keep the gates up and those vital income streams coming in.

MARKETING IS MORE THAN POSTING ON YOUR OWN PAGE

Clubs can produce all the fancy graphics, videos and social media content they like, but if that content only reaches the people who already follow the club, how much new ground are they really covering?

Marketing needs to go further.

Local Facebook groups, community pages, football groups, local media, WhatsApp groups and other social platforms can all help spread the word. And clubs shouldn't be afraid to encourage supporters, volunteers and players to share content themselves.

You have to get outside your own comfort zone.

If you have a big fixture coming up, a local rivalry, an important game, a special event or something happening around the ground, tell people about it. Give them a reason to talk about it and, more importantly, a reason to come along.

VALUE MATTERS

There is also a difficult conversation to be had about the cost of watching non-league football.

We can all say that more people should support their local club, but people are still spending their hard-earned money to attend. If the price of admission is high, the overall experience has to feel like it's worth it.

That's not necessarily about having a pristine stadium or a huge budget. A club doesn't need to pretend to be something it isn't.

But if you're charging people for the privilege of attending, you need to think about what they're getting for their money.

And sometimes it's the simple things that make the difference.

A burger and a pint for a tenner. Clear ticket information. Published admission prices. Food and drink prices available before people arrive. A matchday offer. A club shop or merchandise. A programme or something to take home. A local initiative. A half-time competition. A special fixture. A rivalry.

None of these things individually are going to transform a club, but together they start to create an experience.

GIVE PEOPLE SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT

Football gives you plenty to work with.

Stats. Head-to-head records. Rivalries. League positions. Promotion battles. Relegation fights. Former players. Local history. Milestones. Big fixtures. Special occasions.

Use them.

The football is your main attraction, but everything surrounding it is the window dressing on the shop front.

You want people thinking: "That looks like a good day out."

You want them talking about the club before they arrive, enjoying themselves while they're there and having something to talk about afterwards.

Most importantly, you want people who aren't currently attending to feel like they're missing something.

That's where creating a sense of occasion becomes so important.

SO, WHY AREN'T MORE LOCALS COMING?

We often hear the same argument: "More local people should be supporting their local football club."

I agree.

But that works both ways.

Before asking why more locals aren't coming, clubs need to ask themselves what they are doing to attract them in the first place.

What is the offer? How is it being presented? Is the club visible within its own community? Are people aware of what's happening on matchday? Does the experience justify the price?

And, perhaps most importantly, are you giving people a reason to choose your club over everything else they could be doing on a Saturday afternoon?

DUGOUT NEWS · ISSUE 002

Non-league football has something that the professional game can struggle to offer: accessibility, community, personality and the feeling that you are genuinely part of something.

Clubs need to make the most of that.

The 90 minutes on the pitch will always be the main event.

But if we want bigger gates, stronger clubs and healthier non-league football, we need to start thinking about everything that happens before, during and after those 90 minutes.

Because the question isn't simply: "Why aren't people coming to watch our football?"

It should be: "What are we offering them that makes them want to come?"

SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 2026

WHERE TO BE NEXT

FA TROPHY · 1st QUAL · SAT 29 AUGUST — SEVEN SUSSEX HOME TIES

Bognor Regis Town v South Park

Peacehaven & Telscombe v Merstham or Ashford Town (Mx)

Crowborough Athletic v Ashford United

Eastbourne Town v Bedfont Sports

Hastings United v Hendon

Littlehampton Town v Raynes Park Vale

Steyning Town v Moneyfields

FA VASE · 2nd QUAL · SAT 12 SEPTEMBER

Hythe Town v Wick

Welling Town v Jarvis Brook

Worthing United v Arundel

Seaford Town v Chipstead

Hassocks v Abbey Rangers

Forest Row v Saltdean United

Whitchurch United v Midhurst & Easebourne

Lancing v Croydon

Pagham v Newport (IoW)

SCFL DIVISION ONE · TUE 18 AUGUST

Mile Oak v Hailsham Town (7.30pm, Mile Oak FC)

Reigate Priory v Infinity (7.30pm, Horley Town FC)

Westfield v Shoreham (7.30pm, Knight & Davey Community Stadium)

AFC Walcountians v Oakwood (7.45pm, The Reg Madgwick Stadium)

Arundel v Dial Square (7.45pm)

Dorking Wanderers B v Guildford City (7.45pm, Meadowbank)

Ringmer AFC v East Preston (7.45pm, Kings Academy Ringmer)

Selsey v Jarvis Brook (7.45pm, High Street Ground)

Clanfield v Loxwood — **postponed**

Saturday Senior Cup: Clanfield First v Tadley Calleva First (7.45pm)

SCFL DIVISION ONE · SAT 22 AUGUST · 3PM

East Preston v Dorking Wanderers B

Guildford City v Westfield (*Guildford Spectrum*)

Hailsham Town v AFC Walcountians (*The Beaconsfield*)

Infinity v Dial Square (*Sidlesham Rec*)

Loxwood v Selsey

Mile Oak v Arundel

Oakwood v Worthing United

Saltdean United v Reigate Priory (*Hill Park*)

Shoreham v Clanfield

PETER BENTLEY CHALLENGE CUP · TUE 25 AUGUST · 7.30PM

Jarvis Brook v East Grinstead Town (*Lime Kiln Playing Field*)

Little Common v Hailsham Town

Pagham v Selsey

Saltdean United v Lancing (*Hill Park*)

Wick v Arundel (*at Bognor Regis Town FC*)

ALSO COMING UP

Tue 19 Aug: Broadbridge Heath v South Park (Isthmian league rematch, Air Engineering Stadium)

Peter Bentley Cup R2: Ringmer v Eastbourne United

£725 to every FA Vase second-qualifying-round winner · £1,500 to every Trophy 1QR winner



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LIVE WEDNESDAY 8pm

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CLUBS' FINANCES STRUGGLING? PADEL IS THE NEW 3G REVENUE STREAM.

3G pitches transformed non-league club finances a decade ago. The next untapped revenue stream is padel — and the two partnership models on the following pages show how your club can get on board with PadelKings: a 50/50 partnership, or a 10% profit share.

**TWO MODELS. ONE NEW INCOME STREAM.
DETAILS ON THE NEXT TWO PAGES.**



VENUE PARTNERSHIP · THE 50/50 MODEL

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£30,000 per court to enter a true 50/50 partnership.

WHY PARTNER WITH PADEL KINGS

- ◆ **A true 50/50 partnership** — you own half of the venue's limited company, not just a slice of the takings.
- ◆ **We fund the balance** — Padel Kings provides the rest of the build cost and the construction team.
- ◆ **Genuinely passive income** — your 50% profit share is paid to you as the venue trades.
- ◆ **Premium brand & design** that commands higher hire rates and loyal, repeat players.
- ◆ **Transparent reporting** — monthly accounts and equal say on the big decisions.
- ◆ **Low cost of entry** — just £30,000 per court secures your equal stake.
- ◆ **Fully built & operated for you** — design, staffing, bookings, coaching, marketing and maintenance all handled.
- ◆ **Fast payback** — your contribution is typically recovered inside the first year.
- ◆ **Year-round revenue** — every court under canopy, trading 364 days a year.
- ◆ **A growing national brand** behind you from day one.

THE FINANCES — YOUR 50% SHARE

Courts	Your contribution	At 60% occupancy			At 80% occupancy		
		Revenue	Profit	Your 50%	Revenue	Profit	Your 50%
3	£90,000	£562,017	£412,017	£206,008	£749,355	£599,355	£299,678
4	£120,000	£749,356	£549,356	£274,678	£999,140	£799,140	£399,570
5	£150,000	£936,695	£686,695	£343,348	£1,248,925	£998,925	£499,462
6	£180,000	£1,124,034	£824,034	£412,017	£1,498,710	£1,198,710	£599,355

Basis. Illustrative, ex-VAT and pre-Corporation Tax; projections, not a guarantee. Per-court revenue £187,339 at 60% occupancy and £249,785 at 80% (rate card £80 peak / £60 off-peak per hour, £110 / £80 per 1.5 hours, ~70% at the 1.5-hour rate, 06:00–22:00, 364 days). Running costs allowed at £50,000 per court per year; profit = revenue – running costs, split 50/50. Payback on your contribution ≈ 5 months at 60% occupancy, ≈ 3.6 months at 80%. Padel Kings contributes the balance of the build in-kind for its 50%. Final terms subject to survey, costing, contract and independent advice.



VENUE PARTNERSHIP · THE PROFIT-SHARE MODEL

A 10% Profit Share for Zero Investment

Your only outlay is the planning application. Nothing else.

£0

build investment from you

10%

of venue profit, to you

Passive

we build & run everything

What you provide

- ◆ **The planning permission application — and its cost.** Obtained in your name (fees, drawings and any consultancy). We advise on what's needed and support the submission throughout.
- ◆ **The site** — occupied under a lease or licence for the term. It stays yours throughout.
- ◆ **Electric and water to the boundary** — separately metered and paid by us.

What Padel Kings provides

- ◆ **100% of the build cost** and the construction team.
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- ◆ **Every running cost** of the venue, plus your 10% profit share paid as it trades.

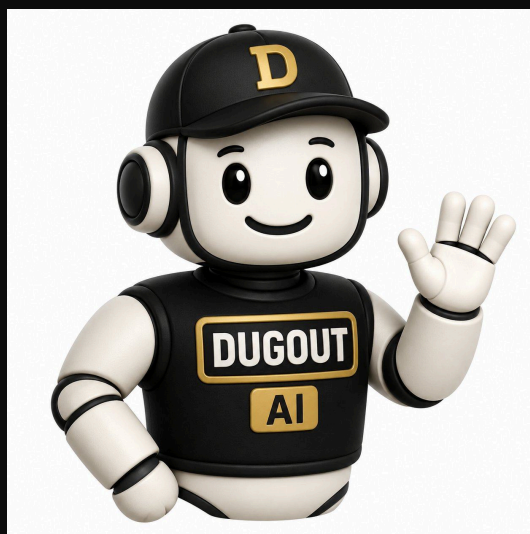
THE FINANCES — YOUR 10% PROFIT SHARE

Courts	Your 10% share — at 60% occupancy	Your 10% share — at 80% occupancy
3	£41,202	£59,936
4	£54,936	£79,914
5	£68,670	£99,892
6	£82,403	£119,871

Your only cost is the planning application itself — typically a few thousand pounds covering the fees, drawings and any consultancy, which you arrange. Beyond that you invest nothing: every figure above is a share of profit paid to you for the life of the partnership.

Basis. Illustrative, ex-VAT and pre-Corporation Tax; projections, not a guarantee. Figures show your 10% share of venue profit, stated after all build funding, staffing and running costs — all borne by Padel Kings. Per-court revenue £187,339 at 60% occupancy and £249,785 at 80%; running costs allowed at £50,000 per court per year. The land remains your property at all times. Final terms subject to survey, costing, contract and independent advice.

DUGOUT NEWS



**SUSSEX FOOTBALL.
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