



Amateur Football Combination

Respect 

Spirit of Football

Respect 

www.amateurfootballcombination.com

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Annual Report Season 2010/11

Discipline and Spirit of Football

"It's unfortunate to begin on a negative note, but the 2009-10 season has been dominated by disciplinary issues, both at club and individual level. The league has faced a number of challenges, with half a dozen clubs called up before the League Executive, but on an individual level a number of assaults, with police involvement, and further serious issues.

Elsewhere within my report I shall outline the most serious cases, and the action taken, but I believe that it is time that we face up to the challenges of the modern day, and understand that football, and the environments we play in, have changed, and our approach needs to change accordingly.

Traditionally "AFA football" and by extension, our football, has been based to a large degree on trust – we work on the assumption that other clubs will run themselves efficiently and effectively, and within the "spirit of the game". However, increasingly this needs monitoring, particularly as many clubs become fractured, and "clubs within clubs". The need for the "Spirit of Football" campaign only emphasises this point – what most people may have considered second nature in terms of behaviour thirty years ago (and some still do) isn't necessarily to be taken for granted, and the campaign has always aimed to re-emphasise that point.

Administratively, we need to face up to the need for proper player registration. Far too many clubs simply don't know who is playing for them each week, and don't make any sort of check on the background of their players. Outside of the AFA player registration is the norm, and efficiently done – without a player's name, address and date of birth, he doesn't play for a club. We need to change, and adopt that attitude, and clubs need to be held to account for their members. Full-Time can assist us to manage it efficiently and quickly, and this will be a topic for next season.

At its essence any football league is comprised of a number of clubs who wish to play football against each other. The league should not be responsible for the individual policing of clubs, but should simply set a framework and set of agreed standards by which the clubs agree to play their football. If clubs are not prepared to abide by these, then we should be prepared to remove them from the league. Arguments such as "we've been members for 100 years" and so forth are irrelevant – what matters is how the club behaves now, and if the current club officers are not prepared to be appropriate guardians of the club's history, I'm afraid we need to make tough decisions."

Some of you may think there was a typo in the first paragraph, last season was not the 2009-10. In fact, all of the paragraphs above are taken from last year's Annual Report, and sad to say, they are all equally relevant this season.

There seemed to be no respite from disciplinary problems, with Old Josephians pre-Christmas, Old Aloysians and William Fitt post-Christmas creating huge workloads for the league and its officers (and only the officers of Old Josephians seeming concerned by the issues caused in their name). Sad to say, this took away time from subjects such as player registration, which might perhaps actually help to prevent these things in future, and enable us to track the problem players (and teams) that bounce from club to club. That is something we have to sort out for next season.

Whether we like it or not, our football is grassroots football, in the country's major inner city conurbation, and both clubs and league need to work harder to ensure the continuation of "our sort of football".

Playing in the Spirit of Football, Promoting Fair Play and Respect for All

I also note that last season I listed the eighteen clubs who, since 2006-07, had finished in the bottom six of the Spirit of Football marks, noting that six had left the league. Since then, the six have become nine, Marsh, William Fitt and Temple Bar adding to the list. Whither this year's bottom six of Temple Bar, Ravenscroft Old Boys (suspended a few years ago, and slipping back down), The Comets, Old Edmontonians, William Fitt (already gone!) and Lea Valley?

Three years ago the league decided to institute a specific Executive Meeting for interviewing problem clubs (usually, but not always disciplinary problems), and this year we had to hold two of them. As with last year, I think it's appropriate in this report to outline, in brief, the issues involved and the actions taken by the clubs:-

Old Josephians – had their 1st XI withdrawn early in the season, following a number of violent incidents. The club showed commendable proactivity in addressing the issue, expelling a number of members and requesting the team's withdrawal.

Old Wokingians – also requested the withdrawal of their 1st XI early in the season, having introduced a disciplinary code, and had the majority of players from the team refuse to sign it!

Temple Bar – Temple Bar resigned in March, when we pressed them for confirmation that they would be able to complete their season. The club had struggled to fulfil fixtures, and were short of players, and were consistently receiving poor Spirit of Football Marks – a factor probably related, and perhaps creating a self-perpetuating circle (poor behaviour means they can't recruit players, which means they kept those with a poor attitude, etc). The club hope to return in the future, but we would require and expect an improvement in behaviour were they to be accepted.

William Fitt – William Fitt offered their resignation from the league in March. The club had been called before Executive in previous seasons for poor behaviour, and were heading towards another hearing, when we had a complaint that 30 minutes after the conclusion of an away game, human excrement had been found on the floor in their changing room. Asked for a report, the club simply denied any responsibility without providing any details and when asked to appear before the Executive, the club refused, and offered their resignation. This was accepted.

Old Aloysians – Old Aloysians were called before the league in March, following on from a series of violent offences, abandonments, late kickoffs and with their administration shambolic, the club having accumulated around £1000 in fines to league and county. The amount of time spent chasing them up is simply unacceptable, particularly when it's to ensure they aren't planning on using players who have assaulted referees, and the club will need to take some serious steps to sort out their issues if next season isn't to see them with further problems.

Old Edmontonians – Old Edmontonians were finally called up in March, after ongoing issues with their 1st XI. The side had consistently received a series of the lowest Spirit of Football marks we've seen, and generated numerous complaints, and yet the club continued to support them and wanted to "work with them". By February, enough was enough, following an assault on a referee, and we'd reached the stage where we felt we needed to consider the expulsion of the whole club, if they felt the 1st XI shouldn't be removed.

The club's acceptance of this was somewhat limited, with some sense of being afraid to take the action which was clearly needed, but the request to withdraw their 1st XI was accepted, though immediately the manager, Gareth Barnett, approached the league about entering as a new club next season, which we declined.

Fulham Compton Old Boys – were called up in May, although aside from one isolated disciplinary issue (an assault, which is being dealt with by the Metropolitan Police), the main issues were administrative, and surrounding facilities and hospitality. The latter points we hope are isolated, with the club having had to cope with two separate club-house fires early in the season, and generally the points made by the league were well received, and offered confidence for the future.

Old Uffingtonians – were also called up in May, with most of the issues involving Spirit of Football, match day administration and organisation – late kickoffs, hospitality etc. The club seemed to be receptive to advice, and are working through a transitory period with new people involved, trying to

find their feet, and we hope with some guidance the club will sort things out, and provide a better match day environment as well as improved discipline.

Nat West Bank – since the club joined the league there have been problems with Nat West, not surrounding discipline, but club selection and organisation, with numerous cancellations after the 7pm deadline, and a virtual disregard for other clubs. This season had proved a nadir, although the club's claim that this was down to one individual was somewhat wide of the mark. They are under strict conditions for next season, and if there are further cancellation issues we will be requiring them to withdraw at least one side from the league.

Old Danes and Old Manorians – Neither club was called before the league, but both clubs are in the second season of conditions, and both have made progress, albeit with more to be done.

Old Tenisonians – also made significant progress following on from last season's issues, though there are still some reservations. The promised "expulsion" of nine members (to the 2010) became impossible due to club rules (without ever producing convincing evidence) and the club have now backtracked with two of them. There is still work to be done for the club in having everyone buy into the same concept, and one still has concerns that there is an element, currently keeping quiet, who may not buy into the improved attitude we hope the rest have adopted.

By my count, although twelve clubs are named above, that leaves eighty seven other clubs with whom there are no significant issues at all. That's something we need to remind ourselves of, although whether it is right for so much time and energy to be spent on a minority, and whether this detracts from the other aspects of the league unduly we should continue to monitor.

Leyton County should also be mentioned. The club had two abandonments, which led to reaching AFA Stage 3. The club were pretty close to being called up as well, but a combination of positive responses from them, and simple lack of time for the Executive (!) meant they escaped a call-up, but they'll be monitored closely from the start of next season.

The following clubs reached stages 1/2/3 of the AFA Disciplinary Code:-

Stage 3: Bealonians*, Globe Rangers, Leyton County, Old Uffingtonians

Stage 2: Chertsey Old Salesians, Enfield OG, Old Aloysians, Old Isleworthians, Old Josephians, Old Minchendenians, RBL Loughton, University of Herts

Stage 1: Albanian, Birkbeck, Clapham OX, Hale End, Mill Hill County, Old Bromleians, Old Buckwellians, Old Edmontonians, Old Ignatian, Old Manorians, Old Meadonians, Old Parmiterians, Old Salvatorians, Old Tenisonians, Old Thorntonians, Old Uxonians, Old Vaughanians, Southgate County, Wood Green

- Technically Bealonians only passed Stage 3 if their adult sides are counted without youth teams.

Abandoned Games

October 9: Leyton County III vs Latymer OB III (3 North). Abandoned by referee due to threats and abuse from Leyton County players. Leyton County charged and found guilty by the AFA.

November 11: Old Aloysians V vs Old Parmiterians IV (3 North). Abandoned by referee due to mass brawl – Old Aloysians charged and found guilty by AFA.

January 22: Leyton County I vs Old Pauline I (Senior 2). Abandoned by referee after Leyton County player refused to leave field on being sent off and abused referee. Leyton County charged and found guilty by AFA.

March 5: Old Aloysians V vs Old Edmontonians II (3 North). Abandoned by referee after Aloysians walked off claiming poor refereeing. Old Aloysians charged and found guilty by AFA.

Bans of 112 days and over

Steven Christian: Wood Green I vs Clapham OX I (Senior 1, September 11) - 112 days for violent head to head butting.

Luke Stevens: Old Josephians I vs Old Hamptonians III (Senior 3S, September 18) Racial abuse 112 day ban, £100 fine, 5pts against club record. Player kicked out of club.

Mark Archer: Leyton County III vs Latymer OB III (3 North, October 9). Threatening referee and causing game to be abandoned. 112 day ban, £75 fine, 5pts against club record. Player kicked out of club.

Mike Archer: Leyton County III vs Latymer OB III (3 North, October 9). Threatening referee and causing game to be abandoned. 112 day ban, £75 fine, 5pts against club record. Player kicked out of club.

Daniel Hirst: Old Isleworthians I vs Old Dorkinians I (Senior 3S, October 9). Assaulted Dorking player in bar after match. 112 day ban, £75 fine, 4pts against club record. Player banned indefinitely.

Colin Smith: Old Isleworthians I vs Old Dorkinians I (Senior 3S, October 9). Assaulted Dorking player in bar after match. 112 day ban, £75 fine, 4pts against club record.

Daniel Rodas: Old Aloysians V vs Old Parmiterians IV (3 North, November 11). Causing abandonment. 112 day ban, £75 fine, 5pts against club record.

Jamie Robs: Old Aloysians V vs Old Parmiterians IV (3 North, November 11). Assaulting match official. Sine Die ban.

Hugh Sparks: Old Vaughanians II vs Old Salvatorians III (Inter West). Assaulted player, breaking jaw in two places. Sine Die ban, £150 fine, 5pts against club record.

Ryan Elson: Leyton County vs Old Pauline (Senior 2, January 22). Causing a match to be abandoned. 154 day ban, £100 fine, 9pts against club record.

Jason Turpin: Old Edmontonians I vs Old Minchendenians II (Inter North, February 12). Assault on a referee (poked ref in cheek). 182 day ban, £150 fine, 5pts against club record.

Jamie Rodriguez: Old Aloysians V vs Old Edmontonians II (3 North, March 5). Assaulting match official. 182 day ban, £150 fine, 5pts against club record.

Majid Akram: Old Uffingtonians II vs Fitzwilliam OB (Inter West, March 19). Abusing referee during/after match and threatening him. 119 day ban, £50 fine, 5pts against club record.

Running the AFC

Enough of the negative aspects of the league, time to turn to the many positives. Once again, I wish to take the opportunity to pay tribute to the army of volunteers who run the league, and also our clubs. About thirty officers, involved in the various committees, are responsible for the running of the league, some of them in the day-to-day administration (the League Match Secretaries and Referees Secretaries) and others within the committees, offering their wisdom, experience and arguments! Andy MacRae, Francis Mariani and Mick Kelly were all good additions, offering a club perspective and keeping the likes of myself on my toes.

I'd also like to pay tribute to Martin Armstrong, Ben Roberts and James Whitmarsh. Between the three of them they've taken over Rob Gibbs role within Spirit of Football, and despite having large shoes to fill, the transition has been relatively smooth.

The final "thanks", should go to Brian Watts. Brian steps down after being on the Executive since the league's inception, and in particular has been a support and guide to myself, with all things web-based and "Full-Time" since we started. Without his encouragement, I don't think our communications would be where they are, and we owe him many thanks for all of his time and effort.

However efficient the league may (or may not) be, if we don't have a small army of dedicated and efficient club officers, that is pointless, so it's also right to draw attention and offer thanks to the Club Secretaries, Fixture Secretaries, Chairs, Treasurers and sundry other officers. I hope your clubs appreciate you, because without good clubs, we don't have a good league.

We still need to continue to recruit and involve people from the clubs – not only do we need to ensure that the league has a voice from the "coal face", but it's also important to make sure that those who are potentially the next generation of league officers see how we run, and what is involved, so that we are continually building for the future, and ensuring that the load of running the league doesn't fall on a small number of people. All of those above, and many others, deserve our thanks for their time and commitment over the last twelve months.

The season also saw a first at county level – after a degree of badgering, the first “League Development Forum” was held, with Andrew Hailwood (Leagues Development Manager at the FA) attending, and running a successful evening on transition from youth to adult football, and we hope these will be a frequent feature, with many other potential areas of interest, both at league and club level. I hope that in future seasons, we can spend less time fire-fighting, and more time trying to actually move the league forward.

Spirit of Football and Discipline

Increasingly, our Spirit of Football marks are guiding the league, and guiding the clubs on what is, and isn't acceptable behaviour. We continue to run the Spirit of Football Campaign in parallel with the FA's Respect Programme, though 2010-11 certainly didn't see the professionals setting an example – quite why the Premier League has its own “Get On With The Game” campaign rather than embracing “Respect” is curious, and it's ironic to see clubs wearing Respect badges when they enter UEFA competitions. Perhaps the talk of the top divisions having a new focus for 2011-12 will transpire, because no-one can have any doubt that they set the tone for all grassroots football.

Awards

Congratulations should go to Citigroup, Old Pauline and UCL Academicals, winners of this year's Spirit of Football Awards. Congratulations also to Old Guildfordians, winners of the AFA Wilkinson Sword, to Old Whitgiftians, winners of the Ken Elbourne Club Hospitality and Old Tenisonians, winners of the Ken Fletcher Club Development.

AFC Dinner

The 2011 Dinner was, to most I've spoken to, considered to be one of the best in living memory (albeit with the caveat that “living memory” of a function involving consumption of copious alcohol may be limited!). There remains the challenge of the price of tickets, but if the league is to have an Annual Dinner to present its trophies, it will be expensive (catering for the size of the league, our choice of venues is limited) and increasingly it seems most clubs will only turn up if they've won a trophy. We are proposing that from next season, clubs will be required to buy two tickets as part of their subscription, as the current level of chasing to get clubs to commit is unsustainable.

New Clubs

We only had one new club last season, Somerville Old Boys (Somerville College, Oxford University) who have been a fantastic addition. Fifth in Spirit of Football, top twenty in all other categories, and having the decency not to walk into the league and run off with a league title, they're a perfect addition.

Next season sees the addition of Wandgas, featuring some old members of Fulham Compton and using a fantastic facility in Raynes Park.

The issue of player movement continues to be a problem, and for those running multi-team clubs there is still a challenge. Whilst only one trophy (6 South, from Old Suttonians, subject to an AFA Appeal) was withheld, I think a number of clubs would struggle to put hands on hearts and claim their 4th XI isn't stronger than their 3rd XI (and so forth) and this does nothing for the “football for all” ethos. We need to continue to press home the message about running a club, and selection, properly.

Bad Weather

Three seasons in a row now we've had bad weather, with disruption this season as bad as the season before, so once again it's to the credit of the fixture secretaries (league and club) that every game was played, without too much bullying and threats (at least, not that I was aware of!).

What it does highlight is the increasing issue of cup competitions, and length thereof. The major fixture problems are always caused by those sides who enter three cups, particularly when those such as the AFA and London Old Boys Cups are so large – a side can play in ten team division, lose in the first round of three cups, and have just 21 games, whereas three cup runs can translate it to 35+. One of the areas of consideration and consultation for next season needs to be the management of this. Should we, for example, start the season earlier, for all sides, or perhaps those entering three cups, or perhaps not allow clubs to enter more than two.

Referees

Thanks to the efforts of Bob Coates and his team, our refereeing panel continues to grow and strengthen. Amongst the various London counties our name and reputation improves year on year, and we find more referees joining the league, and our coverage improving. The “neutral assistants” experiment was generally successful, certainly in terms of recruiting referees, and we are recommending we run it again next season.

The league continues to be superbly served by its panel of referees, and by the referees’ committee and our congratulations should go to Chris Beament, John Hayes and Jason Peters, recipients of the AFC’s McCarthy Awards for 2010-11

Representative Team

The season saw a mixed bag of results, with a win over the London Legal League and a thrilling 4-4 draw against the Arthurian League, but losses against the Southern Amateur League and Yorkshire Old Boys, as well as against the Surrey Intermediate Elite League, in the FA Inter League Cup (the renamed NLS Cup) made for a disappointing season. After a sterling effort, Rory Vermeulen and Paddy Rumley step down, with many thanks for their outstanding efforts over a number of seasons.

Non League Paper

The season saw a number of problems with the Non League Paper, eventually leading to us losing the column. The issues were twofold, the lack of a reliable contributor, able to meet the paper’s deadlines, but also the lack of contributions from clubs (making the job so much harder). After a number of occurrences when we failed to submit a column, leaving the Non League Paper high and dry without any copy on a Saturday night, they pulled the plug on us.

Charter Standard

Progress with Charter Standard continues slowly, though we have at least got as far as surveying clubs to find out what criteria they can’t currently check off.

On the Pitch

Despite a poor winter, every game was played, and the Premier Division saw the tightest season in the league’s history. Old Meadonians emerged as winners, with Old Suttonians a mere twelve points behind, and doubtless considering themselves somewhat unlucky to be relegated! Bealonians and Old Parmiterians finished second and third, but half the division had genuine title hopes for much of the season. Old Belgravians joined Suttonians in relegation, meaning both promoted sides from the previous year went straight back down.

Senior One saw last year’s third and fourth placed teams, Old Salvatorians and UCL Academicals promoted, the latter as champions, whilst Clapham Old Xaverians suffered their second relegation in a row, along with Sinjuns Grammarians. Enfield Old Grammarians, relegated twice in recent years won Senior Two, whilst Economicals joined them in promotion, highlighting a strong season all round for the club.

Senior Three North and South were won by Old Woodhouseians and Dorkinians, with UCL Academicals Reserves and Old Tenisonians joining them in promotion, the former by a single point, the key result being a 3-2 win away to Old Challoners in November, powered by an emergency call-up for an unheralded (and promptly dropped) left back (modesty forbids me to name!).

Outside of the Senior Divisions, congratulations to Old Minchendenians II, Kings Old Boys, Old Salvatorians III, Mayfield Athletic, Economicals II, Old Salvatorians IV, Old Parmiterians III, Old Tenisonians II, Old Manorians III, Albanian IV, Old Bromleians II, Old Manorians IV, Latymer Old Boys III, Economicals IV, Old Salvatorians VI, Lea Valley II, Old Grantonians, Old Minchendenians IV, Old Suttonians VI, Mayfield Athletic II, Old Bromleians III, Lea Valley III, Fulham Compton Old Boys V, Ravenscroft Old Boys III, Old St Marys III and Old Thorntonians IV, although Old Suttonians had their trophy withheld, with their 5th XI finishing bottom of the division above.

There is one final side I wish to highlight, Old Josephians II. As documented elsewhere, early in the season the club took the decision to expel the “top half” of their club, due to poor behaviour.

Throughout the season, their 2nds struggled, failing to win a single game, but they played on regardless, and hopefully will see things pick up next season.

Summary

For the second season running, I feel my summary has been somewhat negative, but I feel it's necessary to highlight the problems, and dangers we all face.

90% of the clubs, and 99% of the players in our league present no problems whatsoever, they want to go out on a pitch on a Saturday, pretend they're as good as Lionel Messi, hopefully not get fouled quite as much, and walk off after an enjoyable 90 minutes, hopefully having won. It may well be the highlight of the week, but it's not the be-all and end-all.

For those of us at administration level, whether it be league or club, we have similar aspirations – we want things to run smoothly, we want to enjoy it, and we want people to remember we're volunteers, and we do it in our spare time.

The league does have challenges – clubs are becoming more fractured and we see “clubs within clubs”. Hospitality remains an issue, what is acceptable and expected by players and referees, and we need to continue to adapt to the modern world, particularly with issues of registration, so we are tracking and monitoring the 1% of players who do cause problems, and those with the wrong attitudes.

The Amateur Football Combination remains a wonderful league, with a level of sportsmanship that is the envy of much of the country, catering for a wide variety of standards of player. As lucky as I am, to travel around the country for the Football Association, talking about League Administration and running leagues, I'm always proud and happy to be able cite the AFC as a well run league.

The vast majority of those involved in our football want to see our standards maintained, if not improved, so over the summer I would ask every club, officer, and player, to take stock, and play their part in ensuring that the 2009-10 and 2010-11 seasons mark a turning point, and that from 2011-12 we see things improve, and see many (if not all) of the issues that give us cause for concern dwindle.

Danny McConnell (Hon. Secretary) – June 2011