

BERWICK RANGERS SUPPORTERS TRUST



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MAGAZINE



Berwick Rangers Supporters Trust

*Magazine No. 28
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FROM THE CHAIRMAN...

Welcome to our Summer, 2016 edition which we have dated as the month of issue, i.e. August. It's not the only innovation. We are now calling this publication a magazine rather than a newsletter as this better reflects its style and format. The biggest change of all is that we have gone into full colour.

Despite now living on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, Paul Smith of Viva Digital had continued to put our material together from afar. Paul is no longer able to do this. We'd like to thank him for all his hard work over the years.

Now, we have turned to Kevin Wyse of InHouse Design to do both the preparatory work as well as the printing. He offered a very

competitive rate for full colour production and the Trust Board decided to go for it. We hope you like the new look. Please tell us what you think of it. Without a franking machine, our postage costs have increased but by an amount the Board did not consider prohibitive. Remember, all copies to members in Berwick and its immediate vicinity are delivered by Trust volunteers at no cost.

On to the football. Thankfully, Cough did it. He got us away from the SPFL 2 danger zone helped by some judicious signings even if some were on loan. Blair Henderson's (and others') goals were important of course but it was the changes at the back which probably made the biggest impact.

There have been departures since the end of last season, some more expected than others, but unlike in summer, 2015 when some fans were very concerned about the lack of new signings, John Coughlin has been busy getting men to put pen to paper. It meant, for example, that only one trialist was amongst the 16 listed Berwick players for the second home pre-season friendly v. Gateshead.

Going back to the club AGM held in January, the suggestion that the two candidates to replace Brian Porteous as chairman should each make a presentation to shareholders, including Trust members, was not accepted. Instead, they would make such to their fellow directors before the vote was taken. The result of that vote, which does not seem to have been influenced in any meaningful way by the respective presentations, was that Len Eyre was elected as the new chairman. There were suggestions and speculation that there would also be a new vice-chairman before John Bell was re-elected unopposed. Brian Porteous commented that this would help provide continuity in the running of the club.

Challenged at the AGM about the club's lack of league success since relegation at the end of 2007-8, Brian pointed out that the club board can only do so much. It is not they who perform on the field. Everyone had high hopes of previous manager Colin Cameron. When his initial contract was up, there was no middle way. The choice was simply one between renewing it or not. The SFA will not allow managers to be hired merely on the basis of a handshake or a gentlemen's agreement even for short periods.



Ahead of this season, the Trust donated £900 to the club so that we can keep up our original two publicity boards inside Shielfield and maintain our full page programme advert for the season. The newer Trust board on top of the Main Stand was paid for by donation at the back end of last season; £200 towards its manufacture and a further £200 for display during 2016-17. Judged on Facebook 'likes' and comments our decision to award Berwick captain Jonny Fairbairn £500 towards the cost of his UEFA B licence course went down particularly well. We have also offered to pay a bill of around £800 for training equipment obtained during the close season. This constituted various items including some of those seen laid out on the pitch for use during the pre-match warm ups. This money will come out of what is left from the collection taken at the match we sponsored against Arbroath a year ago.

We have a major fund raising event coming up on Saturday, September 17th when the Sleeze Sisters will be appearing at the Black and Gold Club. Ian Beresford's piece inside gives more information. Tickets cost only £6 and we hope Trust members will support it if they can by coming along and/or spreading the word. I would stress that fancy dress is optional!

Michael

FOOT NOTE: For queries or comments about this magazine or to offer contributions for future editions, please e-mail trust@berwickrangers.org

Front cover photo by Alan Bell

LOOKING BACK AND FORWARD

with **RON KIRK**

Well how many of you foresaw the events of the second half of last season? No? Me neither. When I submitted my mid season review for the last newsletter, Rangers had just been thumped 5-0 at home by Clyde and their league status was in serious jeopardy. An end of season relegation play off looked inevitable. If he didn't know it before, new manager John Coughlin now knew the enormity of the task he had taken on. However, as I alluded to in my last article, a Clyde fan did offer a ray of sunshine as we left Shielfield that gloomy November afternoon by suggesting that Cough knew what it took to be successful at this level. Thankfully, Cough went on to prove that Clyde fan right with an astonishing

He did so by some astute recruitment during the January transfer window especially by utilising the loan system. Cough brought in Callum Crane and Jordan McGregor on loan from Hibs and they proved to be quality additions to the squad. Crane provided a much needed attacking threat down the left in Cough's favoured 3-5-2 system. McGregor helped to give some badly needed stability to the defence and chipped in with a couple of goals as well. Brian Martin was recruited from Musselburgh and became something of a fans' favourite with everybody wondering why he



Jordan McGregor (Photo by Alan Bell)

turnaround, especially at home, which eventually saw Rangers climb away from the relegation play off place to finish safely in the sanctuary of sixth spot.

How did Cough achieve such a turnaround?

had not broken into the senior ranks before. In addition, Dylan Stevenson and Sandy Cunningham were brought in on loan from Morton and Stirling Albion respectively. Although they did not have as much impact as the aforementioned trio, they still played their part in helping Rangers climb away from the foot of the table. Allan Walker was another new signing from

East Fife but his contribution was affected by a period on the sidelines injured although not before he had fired home the winner in an entertaining 3-2 home midweek win over Annan.

Another factor in Rangers' recovery was an upturn in a number of players' performances. In particular, the honour of captaincy had seemed to be too heavy a burden for Jonny Fairbairn to carry as he looked a shadow of the centre half we had seen previously. However, Jonny was back to his best in the second half of the season and, along with a much improved Robert Wilson, formed part of what was a mostly watertight defence. At the other end of the park, Blair Henderson, who by all accounts was almost released in January, started to find the net on a regular basis especially at Shielfield. As a consequence, he drew attention to himself

Astonishingly, Rangers won seven out of their nine home games during the second half of the last campaign and drew the other two. In the process, they conceded only five goals in total with six consecutive clean sheets and six wins to round things off. If you had forecast that whilst leaving Shielfield after the Clyde debacle you would have been led off by men in white coats to the nearest appropriate place of residence. By contrast, Rangers' away results tended to be overlooked because of their home performances. In nine away games in the second half of the season, only one win was registered. They drew two and lost the other six. Although only nine goals were conceded it has to be a concern that they only managed to score four and failed to score at all in six of the nine games. To be fair to John Coughlin, when it was all over, he did acknowledge that results away from home would have to improve.

Looking ahead, hopes are high following last season's second



Allan Walker (Photo by T.Mcluskie)

resulting in a number of other clubs seeking his services as the season drew to a close. Blair chose to further his football career at SPFL 2 rivals Stirling Albion and, whilst I am sure that we all wish him well, we will nonetheless hope that he misfires and fails to score in all four fixtures between the two sides this season.

half revival that the manager can put together a side that will make a sustained challenge for a top four place. He has retained most of last season's squad including the ever dependable Steven Notman whom it is believed had offers from elsewhere. Notty has signed a two year

contract which includes a deserved testimonial. As always as a new season dawns, new faces have arrived. Jordyn Sheerin has been signed from Livingston. Coughlin will be hoping that he can reproduce the form that saw him score 42 goals for Musselburgh two seasons ago. Steven Thomson, an attacking midfielder who has an eye for goal, has also been signed and Coughlin will be hoping that he can provide the goal threat that was lacking from Rangers' midfield last season. Kevin McKinlay and Lee Hamilton have been signed from Stirling Albion to play on either flank and Sean Brennan has been brought in from Hibs to challenge Kevin Walker for the goalkeeper's jersey. Coughlin has also utilised his contacts with Hibs to bring in on loan Sean Mackie and Ben Stirling. Though they are both only 17, hopefully they will prove to be useful additions to the squad.

The season kicked off with a revamped League Cup or Betfred Cup as it is now known. Rather than one off games which has been the format for the last 30 years or so, we are reverting back to the group stages albeit with a couple of twists. To those of us of a certain vintage, the League Cup group stages are nothing new. Indeed, one of my favourite Berwick games of all time was the final League Cup group game against Queen's Park in August 1981. Rangers not only had to win the game to top the group and progress to the Quarter Finals but had to win by a two goal margin. Roared on by a home crowd in excess of 1000, they won 3-0 to set up a Quarter Final against Aberdeen who were managed by a certain Alex Ferguson at that time.

The twists in the new format are that groups consist of five clubs playing four games, two at home and two away and a penalty shoot out after drawn games with the winner of the shoot out gaining an extra point. The eight group winners progress to the next round along with the four best runners up. Berwick were drawn with Kilmarnock, Albion Rovers, Clyde and Morton.

The Challenge Cup or Irn Bru Cup as it will be known has also been revamped. SPL clubs will enter their Under 20s sides and four Highland and four Lowland clubs will also take part. As a result, Rangers have been drawn to play Spartans at home although I doubt that this tie will spark anywhere near the interest the Scottish Cup clash between the two sides attracted 18 months ago. In another innovation, two clubs from Northern Ireland and two from Wales will enter at the last 16 stage but whether this will help to generate more interest in the competition remains to be seen.

In SPFL 2, Arbroath, Stirling and Clyde have probably been the most proactive on the signing front whilst Forfar and Cowdenbeath will be looking to bounce straight back up to League One. Elgin only lost once at home last season and are likely to be there or thereabouts again. Annan have lost a number of last season's squad which may undermine their ability to sustain a challenge this time. Montrose are likely to be stuffy and have retained the services of the impressive Gary Fraser who will always be a threat but most do not see them as serious challengers. Which leaves us with the new boys in the ranks. Edinburgh City defeated East Stirlingshire in the relegation play off but no one really knows how they will fare. Some expect them to be this season's whipping boys but we shall see. If nothing else, it allows Rangers' fans to revisit an old haunt in the shape of Meadowbank Stadium. Unfortunately, another old haunt, the Golden Gates public house across the road from the stadium which saw many pre match antics over the years, is no longer open. That said, Scotland's capital is not exactly short of quality drinking establishments and I am sure that the away fixtures there will be ones that Rangers' fans are looking forward to with some relish.

Enjoy the action and, as a former Trust chairman used to say, "Keep the faith".

A WEEKEND IN THE NORTHERN LEAGUE

BERWICK RANGERS KICKED OFF THEIR PRE-SEASON PROGRAMME WITH A 'TOUR' TO PLAY TWO NORTHERN LEAGUE CLUBS. IAN THOMPSON REPORTS.

A game played on the first weekend of July is normally an opportunity to leave the house without a jacket. Anyone making such a decision would soon be regretting this upon arriving at the windswept home of Consett F.C. Even with the 3G surface, the healthy following of 'Gers supporters wouldn't be seeing much in the way of passing football.

After a reasonably even opening to the game, Consett (kicking into the wind) broke the deadlock when a deep cross to the back post was headed in via the underside of the crossbar to the delight of the outnumbered home support. Within minutes, Berwick equalised courtesy of a debut goal for Steven Thomson. Played in down the right wing, he cut inside and turned his marker inside out before blasting the ball from a tight angle into the top corner of the net.

Half time score 1-1.

Consett have mastered the art of playing into the gale force wind and utilised long crossfield passes (similar to Annan at Galabank) to apply pressure on the visitors' goal. One such attack led to a corner which, when swung into the box, was diverted past Kevin Walker at the near post. Berwick's best chance to draw level was an injury time scramble in the box which led to the ball being scuffed narrowly wide of the post, ensuring Consett held on for a 2-1 win.

The pitch and weather conditions the following day were the complete opposite. A bumpy grass pitch and some over-zealous tackling from Ryton and Crawcrook Albion provided a totally different challenge. Darren Lavery opened the scoring in the first half with a low

shot across the Albion 'keeper from the edge of the box. The home side came close to levelling with a shot from 40+ yards when their right sided midfielder spotted Sean Brennan off his line. However, a flying save to tip the ball over the bar ensured a 1-0 lead at the interval.



Photo by Gemma Thompson

The second half saw the use of rolling subs in response to some tough tackling. Michael McKenna and Thomson were both replaced only to re-emerge from the dugout to provide cover for other players who received knocks as the game progressed.

The weekend and the win were rounded off when A. Trialist broke free of the home defence and lifted the ball over 17 year old goalkeeper Tom Chrostowski to make it 2-0.

The general consensus amongst the away fans was that the chance to visit new grounds is much more appealing than a potential 6th or 7th visit to another SPFL 2 club. Special thanks must go to Ryton and Crawcrook Albion for the welcome they gave us and the post-match curry, rice and chips provided to those who returned to the clubhouse after the match.

A PYRAMID BUILT ON SAND?

At first glance, there may seem little connection between Edinburgh City winning promotion from the Lowland League to the SPFL and another club from Scotland's capital, Craigroyston, deciding to leave the East of Scotland League to throw in their lot with the Juniors.

For most Berwick Rangers fans, the East of Scotland League may be of peripheral interest especially since Rangers Reserves themselves departed from it a few seasons back. Yet, its clubs still provide a useful service for Berwick in taking Under 20s team players on loan so that they can play regular weekend football as well as midweek Development League games. Last term, such loans included Daniel Pattenden to Duns, Regan Graham and Kieran Ingram with Coldstream, Ethan Anderson at Burntisland Shipyard and goalkeeper Craig Cockburn with Tynecastle F.C. Thus, these lads were gaining experience in a competition which is effectively within Scotland's pyramid system, one rung below the Lowland League.



Above, a Duns player in possession against Leith Athletic (Photo by Alan Raeburn)

This season, for the first time, the LL is up one to its optimum number of sixteen clubs. Bottom dogs Threave Rovers dropped back to the South of Scotland League but EoSL sides Civil Service Strollers and Hawick Royal Albert come in. Neither won the East League last year (Leith Athletic did) but both meet the licensing requirements necessary for membership. Pertinently, yet again, there was no serious interest from Junior clubs in becoming Lowlanders. True, that in its three years' existence, the LL has recruited west of Scotland sides East Kilbride, BSC Glasgow and Cumbernauld Colts but all came from other football domains.

However, the EoSL has been the biggest source of clubs for the Lowland competition. No fewer than eleven of this season's starters came directly from it and Edinburgh City, too, were former members. One reason Craigroyston left was a belief that the EoSL needed to find more teams to compensate for so many departures and inherent in that was criticism that the League management was not doing enough to that end. To be fair, the EoSL has its own standards. Local clubs Coldstream, Duns and Eyemouth United have all carried out important ground improvements in the last couple of years. The days of admitting teams playing on roped off fields and with a half mile walk from changing rooms to pitch have gone. Old Shielfield-based Tweedmouth Rangers (featured in our Winter 2014 edition) have also come in so the traffic is not all one way though post League AGM, Spartans pulled out their Reserves and even later, Duns, who only rejoined the league five years ago, withdrew for this season at least, blaming difficulties in recruiting players. This left eleven teams for 2016-17.

There is a touch of irony about Craigroyston going Junior (as Easthouses Lily did the year before) because the club was formed

in the mid 1970s with the specific purpose of playing in the EoSL. All the same, dissatisfied clubs leaving must be one of the unintended consequences of the introduction of the pyramid system which some might argue, was a rushed job anyway. A crucial question is whether Scotland can ever have a real pyramid whilst the Senior/Junior split in non-league football persists. Though it may not be perfect, in contrast, England's system is all through, helped by the fact that its own big divide between professional and (sh)amateur clubs was abolished years ago.

As for Edinburgh City, will the capital support a third SPFL club? Last season, their average home gate for LL matches was around 130. Many Berwick supporters remember Meadowbank Thistle (whose home ground is now City's) but they eventually moved to Livingston. Some of those same fans fear that

“Local clubs Coldstream, Duns and Eyemouth United have all carried out important ground improvements in the last couple of years.”

City will compete with Berwick for players from Edinburgh and the Lothians but we co-existed with Meadowbank for many seasons and don't forget that East

Stirlingshire, whom Edinburgh City have replaced, also signed many men from those areas.

And what of 'Shire? Their already modest attendances are likely to suffer further now they have dropped down and, as a non-league club, might they find the cost of continuing to rent Stenhousemuir's Ochilview prohibitive? One imagines that they will be hoping to bounce back to the SPFL at the end of this campaign. Some may be unsympathetic towards them in view of the number of times they finished bottom of the Scottish League and that now another club has been promoted in their place is proof that the pyramid system is working. Yet, the temptation remains to ask if Scotland's football pyramid is built on sand. Mind, those in Egypt actually are and they have been standing for 5,000 years!

MICHAEL SMYTH

SPFL DEVELOPMENT LEAGUE

The second half of Berwick Rangers' Development team's season started with the wrong kind of bang! Despite fielding five first team squad members (a figure matched by their opponents), they crashed 7-0 to eventual Development League East champions Stirling Albion. Sadly, the scoreline from the Forthbank Astro was a true reflection of the game. Sandy Cunningham was one of the home stars on the night and watching manager John Coughlin moved smartly to arrange for him to come to Shielfield on loan. Cunningham may have been out of favour as regards Albion's first team but another who interested the Berwick boss, Moses Olanrewaju, wasn't going anywhere else as he was on the cusp of a call up to the senior squad.



A Stenhousemuir player attempts to tackle Berwick's Regan Graham (Photo by Alan Bell)

A particularly wet winter restricted the number of home games able to be staged on Shielfield so next up, Berwick hired New Murrayfield Park, home of West Lothian Juniors Blackburn United, for the visit of Cowdenbeath. This time, Berwick were amongst the goals. Two in their 5-0 win came from Bulgarian trialist Alax Dimitrov. The following match, away to Raith, was to be his last. He was unhappy with his own performance in Berwick's commendable 1-1 draw but was most taken by the fact the game was played in such a large and impressive stadium as Stark's Park.

Berwick's Under 20s then won 2-1 at Ochilview against Stenhousemuir where the scorers were Barry Hogg and Daniel Watt, both of whom were training with the first team before the end of the season. Next, Berwick almost snatched an improbable draw at Alloa but were foiled by a last minute goal in a 3-2 defeat before going on a three match unbeaten run at Shielfield starting with a draw with Stenny. East Stirling were beaten 3-0 and, in between, defender Dean McConnell's only goal of the season secured a 1-0 success over Stirling

Albion. Despite the mauling in January, this was actually the second win of the campaign over the 'Binosaurs'.

To help the Kirkcaldy club, Berwick generously conceded home advantage and made a third visit to Stark's Park to

play Raith. Rovers won 2-1 and went on to finish as league runners-up. On returning to play on the plastic at Blackburn, Berwick again beat Cowdenbeath (3-2) thanks to a goal from Charlie Denton in the dying seconds. It was the same scoreline on 3G in Tranent for the final 'home' match but it was Forfar who emerged winners. By now, Berwick were already assured of fourth place in the eight team league but Forfar's victory saw them finish 13 points ahead of them in third spot. Berwick's final position accurately summed up the balance of their season....nine wins,



Daniel Watt in possession against Stenhousemuir at Shielfield (Photo by Alan Bell)

three draws and nine losses (30 points) from 21 games.

There was one match to come. The boys--without any overage or established first teamers---travelled to Tyneside for a midweek friendly against Newcastle United Academy. Some of their opponents had played for a Magpies XI against a stronger Berwick combination in a December friendly at Shielfield. Newcastle won that game 3-1 so it was no surprise that this time the result was 8-0 in the black and whites' favour. The pace of the Development League games may appear fast but the way the Newcastle lads played was something else. As striker Daniel Watt commented, they were quick to punish mistakes and once the ball was lost to them, it was hard to get it back.

Daniel, voted 'Players' Player of the Year' by teammates, is still on board for this season after making his senior debut in the final stages of the last SPFL game of the season

at Montrose. Barry Hogg, who took the 'Player of the Year' award, also got first team game time again at season's end and has signed a new contract.

The club has restructured its coaching set up for this season. Derek McKenzie comes in as Head of Youth Coaching with his son Daniel, Neil Oliver, Mark Taylor and Fergus Myer also involved. Myles Allan, who was co-coach with Oliver last season, stays with the club but in a different capacity.

The Development League East has seven entrants this season with the Ochilview-based pair East Stirlingshire (no longer in the SPFL) and Stenhousemuir dropping out. Livingston return after a year's absence and will be Berwick's first opponents in an away game at the beginning of September. The following week, Rangers are down for a home match against reigning champs Stirling Albion.

ONLY IN ITALY

GORDON DICKSON TAKES A BOAT TO A MATCH IN VENICE.

I've often worked on the maxim that any journey could provide an opportunity to watch twenty two men kick a ball around a similar green space to that which I'm used to at home. Sometimes this is planned, on other occasions it is a chance event that shouldn't be missed. My 2nd wedding anniversary trip to Venice was one of the latter.

I've been to a few games in Italy over the years and, in my experience, it's a place that presents a more unique range of football related events than any other country I've been to. So far, I've made a donation to charity to get into a Serie B game, had my wife (to be) shouted at because she had a ticket for the game (apparently women don't pay to get in), seen a 20 minute running terrace battle where neither the game was stopped nor the police intervened, seen a bonfire at the San Siro and, at Napoli, flares being ignited from the posh seats. Much of what happens in Italy

cannot be condoned and the activities of certain supporters' groups are extremely distasteful to say the least. To be fair to the authorities, you can't get near a higher league Italian game

without your named ticket and a form of ID – usually the passport. Nevertheless, even without the less acceptable side, Italy has the football culture that never fails to surprise and intrigue.

It was with this frame of mind that a match in Venice (Venezia) looked to be an appealing opportunity.

Now a little bit of geography. Venice is an island in a lagoon, joined to the mainland by a causeway that carries a railway line and a road, both of which immediately stop at landfall. After that there are no wheeled vehicles. The place is essentially a maze of canals and narrow streets where the only form of transport is water borne. There are taxis (small boats), buses (bigger boats), ambulances (yellow boats), police (blue boats) and white van man (white boats). The football ground is at the opposite end of the island to the causeway, therefore if you don't want to walk the 4km then the only way to get there is by water. It's also the biggest piece of green grass on the island by quite a way.

The stadium itself is the second oldest still in use in Italy. It is bounded by a marina and the obligatory canal, making it possibly the closest stadium to water, although Arbroath (when the tide is in) or Fulham (the River Thames) may dispute the point. It's also, bizarrely, hosted a rugby league international in the past.

Venezia FC are one of those clubs with a history of bust, reformation and amalgamation. Most recently in 2014 which meant that for the 2015 season they have been playing in Serie D (Veneto). A league they had won the previous week and where the celebration of the tifosi led the authorities closing the stadium for the rest of the season, only to be successfully appealed by the club two days before this final game of the season. To bask in the championship glory, a crowd of 3000 assembled to acclaim their heroes. Prior to the kick off each player in the squad entered



the field to be applauded by the faithful. This quickly became a tedious affair and the scoreboard operator seemed to agree as they were quickly two or three players behind the announcer. Halfway through the process they gave up as the screen turned black.

The game turned into a rather one sided affair as the home team scored four without reply. The mandatory sound of Freddie Mercury belting out “We are the champions” immediately

followed the final whistle. As we left the main stand we passed the “car park”, a couple of water taxis and someone’s gondola. The setting, like the city, is a bit surreal and none the less worse for it. There are moves to relocate to the mainland and this does make sense given the inaccessibility of the location and the value of the site in a city where development opportunities are non-existent. Nevertheless, despite the logic, something inside me thinks that a stadium that you can only get to by boat is a precious piece of football history. Only in Italy.



The stadium car park (Photo by Gordon Dickson)

FROM HOME PARK TO HAMPDEN

The term 'a football fairy tale', much loved by sports journalists, was most recently applied to the progress made by Iceland and Wales during Euro 2016. Last season, the experiences of one Berwick Rangers player could also be considered as something of a fairy tale.

Goalkeeper Mark Walters spent almost six years with East of Scotland League club Coldstream. Prior to that he was with home town Eyemouth United in the same league. At the age of 29, he thought any prospect of playing in the SPFL was gone until, in the summer of 2015, he received a surprise phone call from one of Rangers' coaching staff, Neil Oliver. He told him there was the chance of a trial with the Shielfield club.

At the time, Mark had six months left of an eighteen month semi-professional contract at Home Park but had already put in a transfer request. A couple of (English) Northern League clubs were showing interest in a man who, despite his team being thrashed 9-1, was offered good money to move north and sign for Coldstream's 2011 Scottish Cup conquerors, Wick Academy. "It was only 2-1 at half time but the floodgates opened in the second half." Even so, he was applauded off at the end by the home fans before the Caithness club offered him around £400 a week. The transfer was never a serious possibility not least because his wife, Julie, would not have wanted to move.



In contrast, Mark had no hesitation in accepting that trial with Berwick. Manager Colin Cameron made it clear he had to prove himself. He played part of pre-season friendlies at home to North Shields and Dunfermline but it was his performance over 90 minutes in a 3-0 defeat by Hibernian which made up Berwick minds to offer him a contract. Two days later he signed even though aware he would start as no. 2 keeper to Kevin Walker.

Straightaway, he noticed a big difference in the tempo of training sessions compared to those at Coldstream. On a typical night, he and Walker would spend approximately 40 minutes with goalkeeping coach Jonathan Craig before rejoining the other players.

Surprisingly, playing at Hampden Park (in a goalless draw against Queen's Park in March) was not the highlight of his season.

It came months before when, with Walker suspended, he made his senior competitive debut at Forthbank against Stirling Albion. Furthermore, it was a winning start, 3-1 to Rangers. He also played the full 90 in the second away game to Clyde which Rangers lost 2-1. Including three times coming off the bench, he made a total of six first team appearances, eight if two City Cup Finals are included. He was though, disappointed that he never started in a home league match.

Regarding Hampden, he did not feel nervous about playing in such a large and famous arena. "John Coughlin patted me on the back

as we ran out by way of encouragement. You just focus on what's happening on the grass though just when you imagine that time is flying, a look up at the giant electronic scoreboard at the other end makes you realise there has only been 15 minutes play."

Mark also made 16 starts for Berwick's Development League team, providing an old head and a sense of security at the back for the Rangers' youngsters. Team spirit was good, the lads were keen and he enjoyed playing with them. In fact, when fixtures clashed with first team training, he would volunteer to play instead.

It was in one of those games, at Bannockburn v. East Stirlingshire, that he suffered his only footballing injury of the season, a swollen knee after it was raked by an opponent's studs. Coach Myles Allan took him off as a precaution. Of more serious concern was when he was bitten by an Eyemouth dog as he did his rounds as a postman in his day job. Three stitches and a tetanus jab were required.

It was not unusual for him to arrive home from a Development League match as midnight approached and would be up again at 5:45 a.m. to start work. Saturdays are a normal working day for posties. When Berwick were at home, he would usually complete his shift in time to get the 9 miles down the road to meet up with teammates as scheduled. He only made it to away fixtures through a combination of swapping shifts and taking a total of ten days out of his annual leave.

What about the managers? "Colin Cameron still wanted to play so training tended to revolve around him. Coughlin is 'old school' but easy to talk to. A good motivator but very demanding. He had to be." At the time the current boss returned to the club, it was in dire straits. "We were losing games we shouldn't have been losing."

Mark nominated Blair Henderson as his player of the year because of the important goals he scored which helped steer the team to safety.

Otherwise, Ewan McNeil would have been his choice. He added, "Brian Martin, Jordan McGregor and Callum Crane were very important signings."

A new, improved contract was offered by Berwick Rangers for 2016-17 but John Coughlin said there would be no Development League games as he wants to use the Under 20s to bring on a young keeper. With Walker still first choice, there was talk of going out on loan. Difficulties over the applicable rules and regulations ruled out a Lowland League club and bearing in mind his Saturday Royal Mail duties, there would be logistical problems if he went to a Junior club further afield. For Mark 'game time' is more important than the money



*Mark in Development League action for Berwick at Alloa
(Photo by David Glencross)*

and so, reluctantly, he turned down the new contract.

Since then, he played in a couple of pre-season matches for Gala Fairydean Rovers but a move back to Coldstream seemed the most likely option when he spoke to us.

A fan of Glasgow's Rangers, another disappointment was that his one year of senior football did not bring the opportunity to play at Ibrox. He had also always taken an interest in Berwick Rangers and will continue to do so. He left the club on very good terms, satisfied he proved he could play at SPFL level. Perhaps a fairy tale to relate to his children Leah, 11, and Shay aged five?

SPREADING THE WORD

Dale McCrea is a member of Berwick Rangers Digital Media and Communications team. Here he gives his thoughts on recent developments as the club seeks to improve communication with supporters and other interested parties.

Over the past six months, the club have finally put work in to allow itself to become a more transparent organisation.

It's been a source of great personal frustration for me that the club have effectively invited criticism from fans as a result of poor communication over recent years. Not only does poor communication harm fan relations, but simply put, it is a missed opportunity to increase revenue.

In an era where things have greatly improved behind the scenes at Shielfield Park, it seemed nonsensical to me that the club didn't have the structure in place to build relations with fans, both current and prospective.

So when in February the club created a working group in an attempt to begin to put the right foundations in place for increased, improved and more effective communication with supporters it felt a long time coming.

Yet successes of the working group can already be shown. We have enlisted the help of club legend Eric Tait to relaunch Berwick Rangers TV to great success. We've fixed a broken website, increased both the quality and quantity of our web content, launched a new online club store and Periscope channel, created a digital media

policy for staff and volunteers, and for the first time since I started supporting the club at least, we're actually demonstrating our appreciation of our sponsors.

Logical processes have finally been implemented, too. It's fair to say John Coughlin brings with him a much more personable and willing approach than his predecessor. Whereas team news used to arrive by messaging the club's physio on Twitter, we now maintain regular contact with the manager. John has control over what is revealed and perhaps more importantly, what isn't. For the first time, we have contact details for all our players and coaches for interviews.

The effective utilisation of the club's digital platforms provides a multitude of benefits. Whilst the most obvious of those is that fans feel closer to the club, there are also commercial benefits.

By implementing a communication strategy, we have introduced genuine value to our digital communication. Newcastle Airport agreed a deal to become our social media sponsor, the Red Lion, Berwick, and Safe Remedies have sponsored Berwick Rangers TV and we've also introduced a host of new website sponsors.

There's never been a better time to get involved with Berwick Rangers. Off the park things are on the up – let's just hope that they remain that way on it, too.

Photo by Caledonia Photo

A large blue sign with white and yellow text that reads "Newcastle International Your Airport". The sign is positioned in the foreground, partially obscuring a view of a stadium field and stands in the background.

Newcastle International Your Airport

COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES AT BERWICK RANGERS F.C.

HERE, FOLLOWING ON FROM DALE McCREA's ARTICLE, BERWICK RANGERS DIRECTOR GRAHAM BELL OUTLINES COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES AT THE CLUB.

Since joining the board towards the end of last year my remit has been to develop the commercial area of the club, particularly through use of digital platforms.

The club has always performed well in this area, generating around a quarter of our turnover from commercial deals. However, it was recognised that we were failing to take advantage of digital opportunities, which is where the future of commercial activity lies.

The reality is that the club currently depends on a successful Scottish Cup run to move into profit. Performance in this league, or indeed the league above makes little difference to our revenue.

By utilising digital platforms to remove the barriers in supporting the club in a manner over and above gate receipts, we enhance the opportunity to increase the commercial contribution to our turnover. By doing this, the club can move from a financial position whereby we are overly reliant on

good fortune, to becoming self-reliant and of a more financially stable ilk.

The first challenge was to develop a print and digital version of a Commercial Opportunities Brochure. This highlights a number of ways fans can extend their support of the club, emphasising every opportunity, from an extra £1 per week through a Weekly Scheme entry to our main sponsorship package. It's important we offer something for everyone.

By uploading this to the web, we hope that many of our exiled supporters will be able to back the club from afar. Recently, we've also added a new online store, with products ranging from stationery to season-long sponsorship deals; so again, we're meeting the desires of all.

Elsewhere, we've built a database of over 1000 supporter email addresses, which has allowed us to increase and improve communication. We've introduced regular newsletters which allow us to

highlight special offers.

We've also built separate databases of current, lapsed and prospective sponsors who can be contacted individually or in groups with use of a piece of software called MailChimp.

For the first time, we are attracting sponsors of our social media platforms, with blue-chip companies such as Newcastle International Airport showing their support.

However, our greatest successes continue to derive from our own supporters recommending Berwick Rangers to friends & business colleagues. You can help by picking up a copy of our brochure from the club shop or downloading from our website.

I'm more than happy to visit any potential sponsors either with you or on your behalf. Just email me at club@berwickrangers.com or call me on 07773 311 156.



Blair Henderson in balletic pose against East Stirling at Shielfield (Photo by Alan Bell)

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Berwick Rangers Supporters Trust Player of the Year for season 2015-16 was Blair Henderson. Voter 'turnout' at just over 30% was slightly down on last time but in the end, the big striker was a clear winner.

The previous season's choice, midfield man Stevie Notman, made the early running with a number of voters adding that he was their pick due to his consistency over the course of the campaign. Stevie featured on the front cover of our last issue because, at a time when the team was really struggling, he continued to put in wholehearted performances. However, towards the end of the voting period, there was a groundswell of support for Blair. For some, it was simple. His goal haul (17 in the league plus one in the Petrofac Training Cup) was what ultimately led to Rangers preserving their SPFL status without being involved in a play off with Lowland Leaguers Edinburgh City.

Captain Jonny Fairbairn came third in the poll. Brian Martin picked up a number of

nominations, testament to the big impression he had made despite only joining Berwick from Juniors Musselburgh Athletic in January. Similarly, Hibs' loanees Callum Crane and Jordan McGregor were favoured by others. Another departee, Ewan McNeil, now with Clyde, had his backers, too.

Henderson has, of course, now left Berwick and signed for SPFL 2 rivals Stirling Albion so, like McNeil, we should see him back at Shielfield again this season. He was presented with his award on Saturday, April 23rd after Rangers' 2-0 home win over newly crowned SPFL 2 champions East Fife, a game in which, fittingly, he again scored. Trust secretary Isla Barber handed over the trophy during Berwick Rangers F.C.'s presentation ceremony held in the Black and Gold Club.

The Trust is once more grateful for the support of Shoe Care of Hide Hill in Berwick who stock a wide range of sports medals and trophies both for individuals and teams.

MY KIND OF TOWN

TRUST MEMBER STUART BELL EXPLAINS HOW HE BECAME A FAN OF BOTH BERWICK RANGERS AND THE TOWN IN WHICH THEY PLAY.

I live in Redcar, which essentially closed down earlier this year when a circus troop of politicians, businessmen, and some clueless hangers-on contrived to shut the steelworks after 100 years of providing the raw material for iconic structures all around the world.

To add insult to injury, Michael Heseltine was wheeled out to oversee the regeneration task force, hastily cobbled

happily struggled over the line with a last day draw at home to Brighton. Kerching!

But I've never supported the Boro. As a kid I went with my brother up to Roker Park to support Sunderland, idolising the likes of Charlie Hurley and Jim Baxter, then later Billy Hughes, Dennis Tueart and the immortal Dick Malone.

When Boro fans ask me which team I now support and I say "Berwick Rangers", they usually respond with 2

fag end of 1979 with a few mates. I liked it and came back on my own a few weeks later and for the first time in my life a publican recognised me and welcomed me back.

It was the late and legendary Eddie Collins in the Free Trade who engaged me in conversation and having never been spoken to in an even vaguely affectionate way in any of the Teesside hovels I frequented, I was impressed.

37 years on, Eddie is still to blame. He was the reason I came back to watch the Buckley Brothers, Mark Cameron, and the world's shortest 6-footer Hugh Douglas, but there has also, been much to applaud. Promotion obviously, the astonishingly energetic (if technically crap) Spartans cup-tie, the other Rangers and a series of folk heroes spring immediately to mind.

There will always be ups and downs in football but a permanent up for me is Berwick-upon-Tweed. I love the town – it's beautiful – and have made some good friends along the way too. It's neither Scottish nor Geordie, and it sure isn't Cowdenbeath or Coatbridge. Or Crewe.



Stuart was disappointed to miss Berwick's 1-1 pre-season draw against Hibs (Photo by Alan Bell)

together on the back of a beermat in Whitehall. Alan Partridge would have been better. (Monkey tennis anyone?) However, there was one bit of good news that brightened Teessiders' lives and that came in the form of Middlesbrough Football Club who, after looking like they'd canter away with promotion to the Premier League,

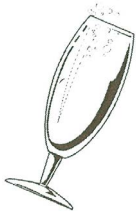
questions. Who? Why?

I started falling out with the Mackems when I realised that a small portion of my entry fee was going towards Barry Venison's curly perm, and after a few trips to the likes of Rochdale (good pies), York (good pubs) and Crewe (good grief), I ended up watching Berwick at the

BERWICK RANGERS ACADEMY

In conjunction with Northumberland College, the club is aiming to form Berwick Rangers Football Academy ahead of the new academic year. The idea is not only to develop skilled youngsters but also semi-professional players with the potential to play for Berwick Rangers' first team. There will be Recruitment Information Sessions for

potential applicants and parents/guardians on Tuesday, August 9th and Tuesday, August 23rd (6-8 pm) and on Thursday, Sept. 1st (6-9 pm), all in the Conference Room at Shielfield Park. For further information or to register interest, please e-mail **Simon. Dutson@Northland.ac.uk**



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DETAILS OF A FORTHCOMING TRUST-ORGANSIED EVENT IN THE BLACK AND GOLD CLUB AT SHIELFIELD

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Call 01289 304110 or 07732 323676 for more info

HERE AND THERE

POETRY REQUEST

Some of you will recall an article in Issue 25 (Winter 2014) about a collection of poems penned by Spittal resident Kenny Blackett published in a book entitled 'Twenty Two Years Later'. Football was the subject of some of them including one about a match in 1964 between East Fife and Berwick Rangers at (old) Bayview in Methil. Rangers won 4-3. Their goalkeeper that day was Dave Somerville and the fourth verse was about an incident involving him and a spectator who threw a soaking wet ball at him!

Dave found out about Kenny's book and contacted the Trust asking if we could help him obtain a copy. We were able to oblige and at no cost as Kenny distributes his books free of charge. However Dave, who now lives in Nairn, made a generous donation to Trust

funds by way of thanks.

At the time he made contact, Berwick were in real trouble in the league table but Dave was correct in his belief that eventually, we would get out of the woods. He said he enjoyed his time with the club though sometimes still feels back pains caused by an injury received in a friendly game at Ashington.

He signed for Berwick Rangers in early January, 1964 and made his first team debut in a Scottish Cup tie against Kirkcudbright club St.Cuthbert Wanderers which Berwick won 5-2. It was one of four senior competitive appearances in that season and he made a further nine in 64/65 before being released in April, 1965.



CITY CUP 2016-17

With Edinburgh City now in the SPFL it seems unlikely that Berwick Rangers will be guaranteed a place in this season's East of Scotland City Cup Final. The two clubs will probably be joined by the finalists of the Football Nation (East of Scotland Qualifying Cup) in the semi final draw. East Kilbride are current holders of the City Cup after beating Berwick 2-0 at Shielfield on April 19th.

ROUGH...JUSTICE?

Reece Donaldson's midfield 'challenge' on Sandy Cunningham at Ochilview on April 2nd that resulted in a dislocated shoulder, prematurely ended the season for Berwick's young on-loan player from Stirling Albion. 'Assault' might be a more appropriate description of Donaldson's action for which he was extremely fortunate to receive only a yellow card. Perhaps fitting then that he was the player who, on the same ground, conceded the penalty in the 2nd leg of the SPFL 2 play-

off that led to East Stirlingshire losing their League place. Donaldson brought down Edinburgh City's Ross Allum. City skipper Dougie Gair tucked away the 87th minute spot kick to give the Lowland League champions a 2-1 aggregate win.

THE HAND OF BRIAN

Will the hand of Brian Martin enjoy a slot in Berwick Rangers folklore akin to that of Diego Maradona's in Argentinian soccer? Brian used his to stop an almost certain equaliser in the dying seconds of the home match against Stirling Albion in March. He was sent off but the resultant penalty was missed leaving Berwick with a 1-0 win, a fourth successive clean sheet and three vital points as they clawed their way out of the SPFL 2 danger zone.

*Brian Martin. Berwick's Diego Maradona?
(Photo by Allistair Grieve)*



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Walker (Photo by T.McLuskie)

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