

SEASIDERS



THE OFFICIAL 2025/26 MATCHDAY PROGRAMME SPONSORED BY:

CASE

WEALTH MANAGEMENT



VS
GORLESTON

SAT 3RD JANUARY, 1PM



CHAIRMAN: **TONY BARNES**



Happy New Year to one and all.

Welcome to The Martello Ground for what promises to be another exciting and closely fought game between two sides at the top end of the table, as table-topping Seasiders host sixth-placed Gorleston.

A warm welcome to today's match officials and to the players, coaches, committee members and supporters of Gorleston. I hope you all enjoy your brief stay with us, enjoy our hospitality, and have a safe journey back home later this afternoon.

It has been a great festive period for the Seasiders, with our two games to date seeing us notch nine goals and concede just two. It has been particularly pleasing to see our relatively new signing, Jose Santa De La Paz, in such fine goalscoring form, with a brace in each game. I can forgive the slow starts we have made in both matches – going a goal behind on each occasion before clicking into gear – but I would of course rather see us on the front foot straight from the off, as goal difference could well be critical come the end of the season.

The Grays game on 20 December saw a first-team debut for young Zac Tuvey between the sticks, and didn't he do well! An understandably nervy first few minutes were followed by several good saves during a closer game than the scoreline suggests. His confidence grew throughout, and he certainly looks capable of stepping into Harry's boots should the need arise again in the near future – well done, Zac!



It was a slightly disappointing crowd for the Christmas fixture, which resulted in fewer tickets being sold for the annual Xmas draw, but congratulations to Kate Daynes on winning the £500 cash prize, and well done as ever to Chris for organising this important fundraiser for the club.

After the game, it was great to join the players in the clubhouse for their Christmas dinner. Their Secret Santa was hilarious and really showed what a brilliant spirit there is among the squad. A massive thank you to our very own "Gordon Ramsay", Graham, for his time and effort in the kitchen – he served up a two-course meal that would rival any pub or restaurant in the town.

I must confess I wasn't looking forward to our trip up the A12 to Lowestoft last Saturday. Crown Meadow has never been a happy hunting ground for us, and when the game started I thought, "Here we go again," as there was only one side

in the game for the first 20 minutes – and it wasn't us! The impressive Aaron Bullent put the Trawler Boys ahead after 14 minutes, Harry made a tremendous save, and they also hit the woodwork. However, as the half-hour mark approached, the young home side seemed to start running out of steam and the Seasideers gradually took control. A brace of goals either side of half-time and a dominant second-half display followed, with Josh Hitter's cracking 20-yard volley the pick of the goals.



It was a great way to end 2025, and what a memorable year it has been for the club. Winning the Suffolk Premier Cup was a real highlight, and my thanks go to all of you who have contributed in one way or another to helping the club continue to thrive. We move into 2026 with confidence high as we look to defend the Premier Cup and also take the club into Step 3 football for the first time ever. If we succeed, we will do so as a whole club – not only the current players and coaches, but also those who came before and laid the foundations for Stuart and Jack to build upon.

Exciting times lie ahead. Let the new year begin with three points today before we set off on our travels, with three away games to come before returning here on 24 January – the day my wife and I fly off to Australia for a month. Not ideal during the season, I know, but family always comes first... especially as I'm not under contract!

Enjoy the game, and I wish you all a very happy and healthy 2026.

Tony

NEXT MATCH

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A portrait of Stuart Ainsley, a man with short brown hair and blue eyes, looking slightly to the left. He is wearing a dark jacket. The background is dark and out of focus.

STUART AINSLEY

SA



Good afternoon and welcome to the Martello Ground for today's league fixture against Gorleston — another really tough test for us against a side who have been in the play-off positions for most of the season.

I hope you have all had a great Christmas and New Year, and thank you to everyone who bought tickets for the Xmas draw, which raised a very welcome amount for the club.

I would also like to extend a warm welcome to the parents, coaches and players of Kirton Under 10s, who are the mascots for today's game. We hope you all enjoy the day with us.

Since my last set of notes, we have picked up six points over the Christmas period. We produced a really good performance at home against Grays, winning 5-1, with a couple of excellent finishes from both Ethan and Jose. A special mention also goes to young Zac Tuvey, who made his senior debut in goal for us in Harry's absence — I thought he was excellent.

We then visited Lowestoft last Saturday, a ground where I think we have failed to win for a fair few years, and came away with a 4-1 victory. We didn't start the game particularly well; however, I felt our experience and know-how came through against a fairly young side who were always going to be enthusiastic. Another couple of goals for Jose, who is flying at the moment, rounded off a very positive Christmas period for us.

On a sad note to finish, we unfortunately lost a family friend and a friend of the football club, Mick Banham, last week. Our thoughts are with Mick's family and friends at this difficult time.

I hope you enjoy the game.
Stu

TODAY'S MASCOTS

Today we welcome Kirton Under 10s who are the mascots for our game against Gorleston. They are sponsored by Creightive and Riches & Bullard Electrical.



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SEASIDER: **PHIL GRIFFITHS**



Not many people know this...

2025 That was the year that was, it's gone so here we are with a new one **2026**, but how did we do last year?

We played a total of 52 competitive game in all competitions:

P	W	D	L	F-A
52	30	10	12	110-64+46

22 of those games were part of the 2024/25 season and 30 part of this campaign so far. Last season saw us lift The Suffolk Premier Cup, sadly not at Portman Road, but we are the current holders looking forward to a date with destiny at Hadleigh United where we will hopefully make progress. Last season we finished runners up to automatically promoted Brentwood Town and lost out in the semi-final play-off game here at the Martello ground to Brightlingsea Regent with over 1100 watching.

The Martello ground has proved to be a popular spot on Saturday afternoons and Tuesday

evenings, of the 52 games played 24 were home fixtures and they attracted a very healthy 11,814 supporters at an average of 492 per game. Hopefully this year we can break through that 500 average.

Charlie Warren remains the leading goalscorer for the year, despite departing to bigger and better things with Bolton Wanderers, Charlie is currently out on loan with Aldershot who are battling against relegation from the National League. Sam Ford ended the calendar year with 26, Charlie's brother Tom 20 and Josh (of the spectacular) Hitter on 17.

Hopefully 2026 will see some landmarks achieved with Callum Bennett requiring just 18 more appearances to chalk up 300 for the club. Josh Hitter needs just 10 to hit the 200 mark with Sam Ford requiring 23 more games to reach 200. Billy Holland on 162 and player manager Jack Ainsley on 161 could both get there in 2026 but probably not in this current season.

Onwards and Upwards



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Hi everyone, and welcome to the latest instalment of our away day reviews, bringing you the highs and lows of the “Away Day” experience following our club Felixstowe & Walton Utd around the country.

The contrasts of the previous 2 weekends were never more obvious than those experienced by all Felixstowe fans in the lead up to the trip to Witham Town. The 2-7 home defeat to Waltham Abbey was immediately consigned to the “bad day” cabinet, as the lads showed true bouncebackability to take the spoils in a hard-fought encounter in East London, defeating Redbridge 1-2.

And so it was with renewed optimism that I set off to collect Big Neil and Isaac for the relatively short car journey down the A12 to Witham. Earlier in the afternoon I had attended my sons Christmas nativity play, where the greatest story ever told was recreated by some 7-10-year-olds. Now it was time for some adults to also perform a miracle, and that was to play well on Withams difficult pitch.

Due to the afore-mentioned afternoon entertainment, and I use that term as a factual

reference, I decided to work from home after the gig finished, and so was fed and watered and ready to hit the road at 5.15pm. And thank the lord we did. Just after the Seven Hills junction the all too familiar sight of illuminated brake lights on the A14 filled our collective visions. For the next 45 minutes or so, we were moving at a snail’s pace, although I did see at least 2 snails go past us at one point, so perhaps a different analogy is required. Maybe that should read, for the next 45 minutes or so, we were moving slower than Doug French when it’s his round at the bar. Yeah, that works better.

The ping ping ping of modern technology soon filled the car, and drowned out my music offering of The Bracknall, which I think suited Neil and Isaac as they were not getting down and funky to it. The ping pings were, of course, various Seasiders en-route, warning us and others of the delays on the worst road in Suffolk, and offering various alternatives. To be fair, once you’re on that road and committed, the choices are limited, but the A137 towards Tattingstone was considered. Thankfully, just before we got on to the bridge,

as if by magic the traffic started to gather some speed, and before we knew it, we were at Copdock and heading south.

Witham Town FC is a lovely friendly club, with plenty of good people. It was cash only at the turnstiles or card payments in the bar, which like Stanway, is accessed from outside the ground itself. We decided on the former, as we do like to, occasionally, see the lads warming up. Much like racehorse enthusiasts, it is possible to tell how good the lads are feeling just by studying their posture and movements in the parade ring. I'm no expert but they looked like Derby winners to me.

Back out of the ground, re-admission tickets safely put in pockets, and we headed to the clubhouse. A decent sized place, smaller than Stanway, but adequate enough at this level. We grabbed some beers (and a coffee for the driver) and found a seat over with Jeff Peck near the dart board. Although by now it was approaching 7.30pm, the steady trickle of fans continued and a fair-sized queue had formed, service no doubt being slowed down by having to take payment for drinks and admissions.

Lorro and Jed arrived and joined us. They had travelled down with Phil and his wife Michaela/Mikila/Micaila. I have the actual spelling written down somewhere but, much like my re-admission ticket, I have no idea where I put it. Yes, that's me to a tee. Put my ticket somewhere safe and then spent the best part of 10 minutes trying to find it. Luckily the lady in the gatehouse remembered me, so I was able to go back in with the promise that I would produce it once located...



by my daughter Chloe (fast becoming a Seaside regular) and the same 2 Essex University friends that came to the draw with Stanway, Zayn (although I am now told it is Zane) and James. I did tell them that if it starts to look like they are jinxing us I would have to take action moving forward.

We took up residence as always behind the goal we attacked in the first half and settled in for 45 minutes of non-stop entertainment. Sadly, it did not appear. Witham Town came with a tactic. That was to stop the game, and spoil it, at every opportunity. I lost count of the number of times they had a player go down. I swear the left back had cramp after 8 minutes. We spotted Witham super-fan and Tik-tok user James Beardwell and the opposite end of the ground. Zayn, or Zane, was super impressed to be in the presence of such a famous person, and he went on to tell us that he followed the social media output of the muscle-heavy health and fitness content creator. He looked a little puzzled when we told him James only talked about football, and certainly not muscles or fitness regimes.

Two James Beardwells, there's only two James Beardwells. Who knew? Not me.

The HT whistle sounded, to universal relief, with the scores at 0-0. Both sides lucky to get nil if truth be told. Things could only get better, was the common agreement of the faithful as we made our way round to the far end. The ground is a decent standard for a club of this size, with plenty of covered terracing behind each goal and a





covered grandstand close to the club shop and beer garden. During the interval Isaac and Shaun posed for photos with James (they really were starstruck) and we bedded down for the 2nd half. Sadly, no one brought a duvet though.

Witham continued to spoil, fall over and waste time, they had a point and were not letting go of it easily. The Uni 3 went off in search of food, having survived only on liquids since Friday I expect. Carl was behind the goal with us, as was another lad whom we did not recognise. Found out at the end that he was a Bradford City fan that was going to see The Bantams take on Port Vale, but the game was postponed, so being Ipswich based he came to see Felixstowe & Walton play instead.

With 76 minutes on the clock, the unthinkable happened. Much travelled Sam Bantick opened the scoring for Witham, and Big Neil sprinted off to collect his Golden Goal winnings. We have to take these tiny positives on a night like this, and £35 is akin to compensation, I guess. With time running out and the faithful beginning to fear the worst, Jose Santa De La Paz looked to have rescued a point, and within 90 seconds it was very nearly all 3 but a late chance to win it was spurned. Sadly, the enjoyment was short lived, and Witham

somehow managed to have 3 players queuing up to receive a pass to slot home a winner. The linesmans flag had been raised in the build up to the goal, so we were half expecting it to be ruled out, but astonishingly, the goal was allowed to stand. We were livid. Livid that is, until we were told that the flag was raised for a foul on a Witham player, but the referee had played a good advantage.

The final whistle sounded, Witham went on a lap of honour, and every player fist pumped every supporter that cared to wait around, whilst we bemoaned our luck and headed for the exit. Isaacs earlier invitation to have a post-match interview with James had turned into "I want to go home" so that's what we chose to do. Isaac's media career will just have to go on hold for the time being.



As we headed to the car, I remembered I should really locate my first born and say goodbye to her. A quick phone call later and we were soon saying our farewells in the rugby club car park whilst transferring an air-fryer from my car to hers. Hopefully she will use it soon.

The drive home was somewhat muted; defeat is never easy to accept when the tactics spoilt what could have been a very good game of football. Although as Vice Chairman Andy Clarke remarked, we never play well here.

Consecutive Saturday homes games await, before our next adventure, Lowestoft Town, 2 days after Christmas.

Thanks for reading, until the next time
Up the Seasiders

ISTHMIAN NORTH

DIVISION TABLE 2024/25

POS		P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
1	Felixstowe & Walton United	23	17	3	3	50	19	+31	54
2	Maldon & Tiptree	21	17	2	2	48	15	+33	53
3	Waltham Abbey	23	14	4	5	48	30	+18	46
4	Wroxham	24	12	7	5	35	24	+11	43
5	Stanway Rovers	23	11	7	5	44	22	+22	40
6	Gorleston	22	12	4	6	41	36	+5	40
7	Bowers & Pitsea	24	10	7	7	47	29	+18	37
8	Redbridge	24	11	4	9	40	35	+5	37
9	Witham Town	24	10	7	7	36	32	+4	37
10	Cambridge City	24	10	6	8	34	30	+4	36
11	Brightlingsea Regent	23	10	5	8	41	32	+9	35
12	Concord Rangers	24	9	5	10	36	34	+2	32
13	Tilbury	24	8	8	8	29	30	-1	32
14	Newmarket Town	23	9	3	11	41	35	+6	30
15	Mildenhall Town	22	9	2	11	32	42	-10	29
16	Lowestoft Town	23	7	5	11	35	48	-13	26
17	Walthamstow	24	6	7	11	29	34	-5	25
18	Grays Athletic	24	6	6	12	28	39	-11	24
19	Heybridge Swifts	24	5	5	14	18	41	-23	20
20	Takeley	21	5	4	12	18	42	-24	19
21	Downham Town	24	4	5	15	24	48	-24	17
22	Brantham Athletic	24	0	2	22	13	70	-57	2

LAST UPDATED: SATURDAY 27TH DECEMBER 2025 AT 17:24:40

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GRAYS ATHLETIC

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Saturday 20th December
Isthmian League North
Photos: Stefan Peck

LINE UP: Tuvey, Caley-Brown, Stevenson
Holland (C), Whight, Ainsley, Hitter
Aitkens, Mayhew, Santa De La Paz, García

SUBS: Lay, Brown, Ford, Cullum, Warren











OUR SQUAD

Introducing the Felixstowe
& Walton United playing squad
and management team of
2025/2026



JACK AINSLEY
PLAYER/MANAGER
Travis Perkins



STUART AINSLEY
MANAGER
Pat Haseman, Chris & Jayne Ryan



LEON OTTLEY-GOOCH
COACH
Meat Pies, Sausage Rolls



STUART STEVENSON
FITNESS COACH
Shirley Ainsley



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DEFENDER
[@_write_club_](#)



OLLIE CALEY-BROWN
DEFENDER
Les Soall



HUGH CULLUM
DEFENDER
Chris Walne - Doug French



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FORWARD
Kate & Chris Daynes



ZAK BROWN
FORWARD
Emirates Logistics Ltd



DAN GILCHRIST
FORWARD
George Ainsley



JACOB LAY
FORWARD
Adam Simmons



JOSE SANTA DE LA PAZ
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STEFAN PECK
PHOTOGRAPHER
Lorro, Jed and Neil



WINNIFRED SOALL
HOSPITALITY
Stan Baston



SEASIDERS PEN PICS

MANAGEMENT

Jack Ainsley – Manager

Rejoined for a second spell at the club from Stowmarket in 2023. Jack played professionally for ITFC after coming through their academy and went on to make four appearances playing under Roy Keane. Jack went on to have spells at Step 2 with Lowestoft and Step 3 with Leiston but is back at the Seaside as player/joint manager with brother Stuart.

Stuart Ainsley – Manager

Stuart joined the club for his second spell in 2014 from Lowestoft Town. Previous clubs include Chelmsford City, Canvey Island and AFC Sudbury. Stuart spent ten years at Ipswich Town, winning the FA Youth Cup in 2005. Having spent the last 11 years playing for Felixstowe, began his management career alongside brother Jack in May 2025.

Stuart Stevensen – Fitness Coach

After hanging up his boots Stuart joined Felixstowe Utd as a fitness coach/physio, then on to Trimley to help coach his son's team from the U8s-U16s. Stuart rejoined the Seaside to coach the U18s which lead him on to being part of the first team staff. Stuart is an FA level 2 coach and an FA level 1 mentor.



Leon Ottley-Gooch – First Team Coach

Leon signed for the club in 2020 and is another vastly experienced player at step 3 and 4 level. Previous clubs include Leiston, Bury Town, Hadleigh Utd and Stowmarket Town. Leon is very versatile but is predominantly a dynamic midfielder player. Was appointed first team coach in May 2025.

John Abbott – Physio

John is a vastly experienced physio, qualifying in 1992 and dedicating 37 years to the NHS. Previous football clubs include Enfield Town, Tottenham and Stevenage before taking early retirement to move to Felixstowe, where he joined the seaside in October 2024.

Alex Egelton – Goalkeeper Coach/Coach

Alex returned to Felixstowe last season having spent many years coaching within the youth and reserve setups at the club. Alex heads up the Goalkeeping section of the club and works with





the Youth section right through to the Seniors and is an important member of the First Team Management structure.

Doug French - Kit Man

Doug started his career in 1986 and played for East Anglian Customs, Walton United, Felixstowe United and Tattingstone, breaking his leg four times in the process. Whilst playing for Ipswich Wanderers vets, Doug finally hung up his boots. Having found his vocation in washing players dirty pants, Doug is excited for another season with the Seaside.

GOALKEEPER

Harry Wright

Harry started his career as a professional at Ipswich Town and left there in 2021 where he then went on to play for Fleetwood Town and Bury before

joining the Seaside in the summer of 2024. He has quickly become a firm fans favourite and works within the clubs Academy system.

DEFENDERS

Joe Whight

Joe came through the ITFC Youth system before playing for the likes of Needham, Bury and most recently AFC Sudbury where he captained their side. A left sided defender, Joe offers composure, a wonderful left foot and a toughness and desire to defend to the back line.

Ollie Caley-Brown

Ollie was signed in the summer of 2024 from neighbours AFC Sudbury and has played in recent years for Stowmarket and Leiston. An energetic and attacking full back who loves to get forward and create chances and with a wealth of higher level experience to boot.

Hugh Cullum

Hugh is a local lad who left Felixstowe's youth system and progressed through the Needham Market Academy. Hugh signed back with his local club in the summer of 2024 and has immediately impressed with his consistent and confident defending.

Hugo Akhuseyin

Hugo is an academy graduate that is now starting to flourish with his progression into the first team squad. A tough tackling and tenacious defender who likes to get forward.



Toby Stevenson

Ex-professional Toby scored a hat-trick on his debut for Charlton Athletic at 18 years old, the strong centre back or left back's previous clubs include Leyton Orient, Watford, Billericay and Braintree. An excellent defender at this level after joining the seashiders in early 2025.

Jack Wilkinson

Jack joined the Seashiders in October after having had a break from the game. He offers huge experience and versatility as a defender or midfielder which is a great asset to have in the squad, previous clubs include Stowmarket, AFC Sudbury and Needham Market.

Thomas Warren

Tom signed for the club in the summer of 2024 from Hadleigh United and played his first season for the Seashiders alongside his brother Charlie. Tom is an Athletic, strong and pacy full back or winger with a fantastic left foot and keen eye for a goal, scoring an impressive 17 goals in his debut season.

Callum Bennett

Callum returns to the club in 2025 after a brief spell away. Grew up at Ipswich Town Academy before spending a year at Notts County, returning back to local football with Bury Town in 2013, before signing for Felixstowe in 2014. Callum is in the top five for appearances made in the club's history.





MIDFIELDERS

Billy Holland

Billy started life at Ipswich Wanderers and has had spells at Needham, Leiston and AFC Sudbury. He's established himself as a mainstay in the centre of midfield. Players player and Supporters player of the year for the 22/23 season led to him being appointed captain the following year.

Josh Hitter

Josh signed for us in 2021 having played his football at Step 3 side Leiston for the previous three seasons and gained a vast amount of experience at that level. Josh is a dynamic attack minded player who likes to arrive in the box late and score goals.

Noel Aitkens

Noel's signing for the club in 2020 caused a stir amongst the non-league world, joining from step 3 Leiston and being described as "the best midfielder in this area". Noel is quick, strong, can tackle, is athletic and can really play football!

Ethan Garcia

Ethan signed for Felixstowe in the summer of 2025 after a two year spell with Walsham Le Willows where he impressed many at step 5. Only playing football for four years, a tricky winger with an eye for goal.

Olly Martin

Olly is a product of the clubs academy after more than ten years in the youth set up. An energetic and committed midfielder with an eye for a pass.

FORWARDS

Sam Ford

Having spent a successful period with Arbroath that saw them just miss out on promotion to the Scottish Premiership, Sam spent the Summer with Hume City FC in Australia before returning to Felixstowe in 2022. Coming through ITFC and later West Ham's academy, Sam is a local talent who will provide real firepower in front of goal.

Josh Mayhew

Josh joined us from promotion winners AFC Sudbury. An experienced front man who has

been prolific at Step 4 and 5 with an impressive spell at Stowmarket yielding 136 goals in 173 games. Josh's physical presence brings a focal point to our attack as well as a being natural finisher who is a proven goalscorer at this level.

Zak Brown

A sought after and highly rated young striker with blistering pace and a great goal scoring record. At just 17, Zak penned a two year pro contract with ITFC where he was a regular marksman in the U23's. Zak started life in the Seasiders Youth sections and has returned to lead the forward line as the clubs No. 9.



Dan Gilchrist

Dan's non league career started at Canvey Island before relocating to Suffolk where he went onto play for AFC Sudbury in the FA Cup First Round, before moving onto Bury Town and Thetford where he had two impressive goalscoring seasons. A hard working attacking player with an eye for goal.

Jacob Lay

Jacob rejoins the club for his second spell, after leaving in 2020, Jacob has gained promotion from step 3 and played at step 2 last season for Needham Market. A tricky winger who has huge energy and workrate.

Jose Santa De La Paz

Signed for the club in October 2025. Jose is a quick and powerful winger or striker with an eye for goal and assists, with previous clubs including Newmarket Market, Bury Town, Needham Market and Ipswich Wanderers.





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Stevenson, Santa De La Paz (2), Hitter

1 4

Saturday 27th December
Isthmian League North
Photos: Stefan Peck

LINE UP: Wright, Caley-Brown, Stevenson
Holland (C), Whight, Ainsley
Hitter, Aitkens, Mayhew,
Santa De La Paz, Garcia

SUBS: Lay, Brown, Ford, Cullum, Warren











PLANES, TRAINS & AWAY DAYS

BY NEIL EDWARDS

Hi everyone, and welcome to the latest instalment of our away day reviews, bringing you the highs and lows of the “Away Day” experience following our club Felixstowe & Walton Utd around the country.

Just two days after Santa had come to visit us all in our homes (what a signing he has been) the travelling Seaside faithful were ready and looking forward to a day out by the sea, of all places.

We knew of several cars making the trip, the supporters’ bus was readied, and those daft souls that like an early start assembled at the railway station. Today’s rollcall at Felixstowe was Pete, Lorro, Isaac, Steve, Carl (debut trip with the train boys) and yours truly. And we were to be meeting up with Glyn and Mistley John at Ipswich.

The 08:28 train was sparsely populated, everyone was in good spirits, and perhaps relieved to escape the “routine” of Christmas. Lorro even remarked that this was his Christmas Day! He even brought a case of Cruzcampo along to mark the occasion.

A few Felixstowe people were also at Ipswich,

heading down to The Ally Pally for the afternoon darts session. Whilst I appreciate darts is an enormously popular sport, it doesn’t appear to be overly spectator friendly, but having never been, I am pleased to be proved wrong one day.

We found Glyn and loaded up with sausage rolls and coffee, and then begrudgingly made our way up the stairs and over to platform 4B. Every Lowestoft train I have ever boarded has been on platform 1, so I couldn’t help but think this was karma for all those mince pies and trifle. Mistley John had arrived from Manningtree over on 3 so his knees were spared.

The 09:16 was another quiet train, hardly surprising given the date and the time, although we did have to go to the very last carriage to find 8 seats and 2 tables together. Coats and hoodies removed, the train was hotter than a care home.

As we departed, John dropped the bombshell that none of us were aware of. 11am pitch inspection. My first remark, it hasn’t rained for a few days, clearly still traumatised from Mildenhalls abandoned, and then postponed, fixtures. Frost was Johns reply. It was frostier than a Mrs Burrows



stare at 5am apparently (my words, not his) and as the train started to head past frosty fields towards Woodbridge, you could almost hear the air leave our lungs as we all exhaled with deflated togetherness. The whitish fields were definitely a cause for concern, but the sun was out, surely the pitch would be frost free for 3pm. But would it be frost free for 11am, that was the issue here. Was the inspection precautionary? Would they re-inspect at 1 if needed? Are Woodbridge at home should we need a Plan B? All of these questions, and more, were thrown around the rear of carriage A, until John piped up. Nah, only kidding boys. No pitch inspection.

Well, as you can imagine, this news was treated with a mixture of relief and, well, let's just say we would have ensured he landed safely when we threw him off the train at some middle of nowhere mid-Suffolk outpost. It's true, you never really know someone until they threaten your footie fix. For the rest of the day, Mistley John was renamed Manningtree Dave. If John is his real name. We did not know anymore. The damage was done.

The train continued through the beautiful Suffolk landscape, carrying excited fans of the county champions to our destination, Englands most Easterly town, Lowestoft. As many of you will know, I lived in Lowestoft until the age of 13 until the family moved back to Felixstowe, my late mothers hometown. Father was the Lowestoft man.

Saxmundham was quiet, Haverhill deserted and Brampton, well little old Brampton looked like it could be erased from the maps, and no one would notice. Unbeknown to us, Lorros lad Jed boarded at Beccles, having left on the 06:28 to do a park run or something. And yet, we're

the mad ones!!!!

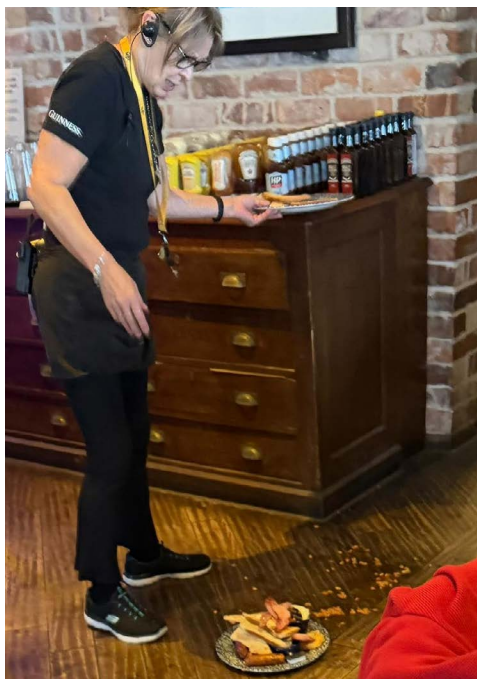
The sight of The Wherry Hotel and Oulton Broad's Nicholas Everitt Park (many a Thursday night as a child watching the power boat racing there) meant that our outward journey was nearing its completion, and a trip under the newish third river crossing, The Gull Wing Bridge, drew excited noises. Either that or everyone was in urgent need of the stations facilities.

We prepared to leave the train, which was now Norwich bound, and I am pleased to say Manningtree Dave asked if the hoodie in the overhead storage was mine as we were about to get off. I had only unwrapped it 48hrs earlier. I am a liability at times.

Our favourite pub chain, the cheap but rarely cheerful JD Wetherspoons, are wise enough to tap into the areas need, and have a fairly decent sized pub directly opposite the station, The Joseph Conrad. Jozef was a Ukrainian born Polish sailor



The scarf before it had to come down



that first arrived in England at Lowestoft, where he learnt his literary genius talking to the locals. I assume my old school was not open back then.

The pub was a typical Spoons, pack 'em in, serve 'em cheap. We went about finding some empty tables and rearranged the furniture to make space enough for a dozen souls to sit around and chat football for 3 hours. Beers flowed, food was consumed (Glyn had a delightful looking eggs benedict and Stevie Isaacs got a couple of pizzas for the table) Shaun appeared, having decided against the train in favour of the drive, and later we were joined by Martin and his wife, and also Tottenham Steve.

A couple of sour notes do need reporting, however. Firstly, we were asked to remove the F&W scarf we had draped over the fireplace surround. The fireplace is not used, and we can only assume it was a fire hazard, despite the fact that Christmas decorations that Poundland declined were everywhere. And secondly, a poor waitress came towards our tables and managed to drop an entire full English breakfast all over the floor. I am pleased to say it wasn't an order from us, but I could not help but think to

myself, do they operate the 5 second rule here?

As usual with Spoons, the toilets had their own postcode, so my trip to answer nature's call took a while. Longer than usual in fact, because in the other bar upstairs sat my daughter Chloe, my niece Amy, and her twin girls and their cousin. I believe the upper bar a little rowdier than when I arrived. Maybe encouraging 3 excitable children to do the 6-7 chant/meme/thingy wasn't my greatest idea of the day. But it did make me chuckle.

We had all just about got our rounds in, when it was my turn. Lorro helped me on the app, otherwise anything could arrive, and we waited patiently. A few minutes earlier a rousing rendition of Sea-Sea-Seasiders had rung around the buildings lower floor, and possibly breached the ceiling to the upper level, followed by a Red Army. Most fellow drinkers looked over and laughed, I dare say they thought we were a bit peculiar in our own way. What we did not expect, however, was for a young waitress to be sent over and tell us to stop singing. The last time I has been told to stop singing in a pub was also a Spoons, The Cricketers in Ipswich, but this was 2-3 days after the first Covid lockdown had been eased, so perhaps that was more understandable. I think Isaac may have been with me that day too, his dad certainly was.

We told the lass that yes, the singing would cease, and we serenaded her with a final verse as she left. Hardly the crime of the century, I hear you say. And yet, a few minutes later someone else was over, asking who had made the app order.



'Twas I, I immediately replied, only to be told that the debit would be refunded to my card in 3-5 working days, and no more service would be granted, and that we are to leave.

Reality check. We are in Lowestoft. We are in a Spoons. And we are asked to leave. The shame was evident on our faces, as we made our way to the doors, only to be roundly applauded by most of the customers at the bar. Come back soon, you've made our day, etc etc. So it wasn't customer complaints.

It's not a long walk from the station square to Crown Meadow. This was my old stomping ground as a kid. Hours upon hours playing cricket in the back yard, just 200 yards from the ground. I saw several games there as a nipper, but the two that stick out is when Bobby Robson brought his Ipswich Town side, and The FA Cup, for a pre-season friendly in the summer of 1978, and an FA Cup 1st Round match against Cambridge United. I remember saving my pocket money up to get a 50p ticket, and every shop within a square mile was boarded up. Cambridge won 0-2, and I was home in time to see Dickie Davies mention the score on World of Sport. I still recall now wondering how they knew so quickly, the game had finished less than 2 minutes ago (I could run back then)

We arrived at the ground, which has not changed much from the outside, and squeezed ourselves through the turnstiles. Match ticket offered, and programme purchased, and off to the bar we went. It was still my round, and the £22.83 I had paid in Spoons was now eye-wateringly higher. Carl had been on spirits all morning, doubles I believe, and was starting to look jaded, and in need of his second wind. The fresh air offered that opportunity and we headed over to the far end of the ground to enjoy the first half and were well behaved in the company of Ethan Garcias brother and friends.

The hosts took an early lead, but by half time we had turned the game on its head with goals from Toby and another from Santa. A further goal from the new man and a rocket from Josh Hitter, from about 25 yards, sealed a magnificent 1-4 win. It was F&W's first win at Crown Meadow this century and means that in the past 16 months we have beaten all 5 of the Suffolk Non-League

giants. i.e. Bury Town, Needham Market, Leiston, AFC Sudbury and now Lowestoft Town. Perhaps there is now a "Big 6"?

At the final whistle, I said my farewells to my daughter, she was driving home, and we made our way back to station square for food, for most, and a drink for those of us on a liquid diet. Manningtree Dave, Pete, Glyn and I went back to the scene of the earlier expulsion and happily order some beers whilst we waited for the 18:06 train, whilst the others went down the food route.



We got our train home, probably all slept for various parts of the journey (Carl for most of it) and discussed the game in great detail. It was like doing a 1000-piece jigsaw. Carl later said he only saw one goal. He can come again.

Back to civilisation just before 20:30pm, escorted Isaac to Sainsburys where he met up with his young family, signed him over, and had a walk home. Was there a temptation to grab a crafty one on the way for Pete and me. Yes, there most certainly was. Did we stop off for a crafty one? No. We said our farewells and shut our doors on a most magnificent 2025.

Here's to 2026. Who knows what it will bring. Promotion? Retention of the Premier Cup? Hopefully both of those, but 100% guaranteed there will be plenty of laughs and frivolities along the way.

Thanks for reading, and a Happy New Year to everyone involved with this great football club.

Up the Seasiders

THE OTHER SIDE: GORLESTON



Gorleston Football Club were always considered to have been formed in 1884, making them one of the oldest clubs in Norfolk.

Initially they wore Crimson Shirts and Blue Shorts earning the nickname of the Cards.

Their first competitive game was on 10/11/1888 when they played Beccles Caxton in the Suffolk Senior Cup, losing 1-0. In 1889 they moved to their spiritual home of the Recreation Ground playing their first game there on 09/11/1889 beating Yarmouth St Pauls 2-0.

It was in 1903 Gorleston adopted new colours of light green shirts and white shorts.

The first trophy for The Greens came in the 1906/07 season when they won the Norfolk Junior Cup. The next season they became founder members of the Great Yarmouth Borough League and became champions in that first season.

The club then immediately applied for membership of the Norfolk and Suffolk league, which was granted, thus gaining them senior status. In their first season they finished third.

The Greens progressed between the wars to become one of the most successful clubs in East Anglia, winning the Norfolk and Suffolk League title seven times, the first in 1921, and lifting the Norfolk Senior Cup on eight occasions, the first in 1922, when they beat Lynn Town 1-0 in the final.

In 1925/26 they did the double of League Champions and Senior Cup winners.

Needing a new challenge, Gorleston became founder members of the Eastern Counties League in 1935. However, their only honour before the outbreak of the second world war was the Norfolk Senior Cup in 1938 when they beat Yarmouth 3-0 in the final.

Following the war it was the 1951/52 season when Gorleston gained national fame. They held third division Leyton Orient to a 2-2 draw in the first round proper of the F.A. Cup. Several thousand fans turned up at the Recreation Ground



to see the replay which was a goalless draw. The third and decisive game was a memorable cup-tie held at Arsenal's Highbury. At one stage Gorleston were 4-1 down but staged a remarkable comeback before eventually losing 5-4.

The following season the Greens completed a treble in what was their most successful season. They won their first Eastern Counties League championship and the Norfolk Senior Cup again. They completed the unique treble by winning the East Anglian Cup. They also finished runners-up in the League Cup.

The League Cup was eventually won for the first and only time in 1956 when Spurs A were beaten 3-1 in the final. They again reached the F.A. Cup 1st round proper in 1957/58 season, but this time they were well beaten by Gillingham 10-1.

By the end of the fifties the club faced severe financial problems and were forced to withdraw from the Eastern Counties League back into the Norfolk and Suffolk league. In the mid-60's Gorleston became founder members of the Anglian Combination. They successfully rejoined the Eastern Counties League in 1969 after winning the Anglian Combination Premier Division title, along with the Norfolk Senior Cup, beating Downham 2-1 in the final.

In the ensuing 15 seasons the Greens won the Championship on 3 occasions in 1972/73, 1979/80 and 1980/81 and didn't finish lower than 8th.

In 1982/83 they won the East Anglian Cup for the second time beating Bishop Stortford in the final. It was also this season when the club moved from their spiritual home on Gorleston Recca to Emerald Park. The new purpose built stadium was built on part of the Magdalen Playing field on the outskirts of Gorleston.

The cost of the move to Emerald Park saw the Greens in financial difficulties once more and this had an effect on the field. League runners up in 1983 and Senior Cup winners a year later signalled the end of a winning period in the clubs history.

Following the move Gorleston were £150,000 in debt and it was only considerable good will from the bank and other creditors that kept the



club afloat.

The next few seasons saw the Green's fortunes dip as they could no longer afford to pay for the top players and had to rely on local lads playing for fun. Subsequently, they were relegated to the first division in 1993/94. In the 1994/95 season the Greens missed promotion by two points and were finalists in the Norfolk Senior Cup. But, they bounced back the next season to the Premier Division after winning the Jewson League Division one title.

Creditable performances followed and culminated in runners up for season 2000/01 and winners of the Norfolk Senior Cup for the fourteenth time.

Sadly the end of the 2004-05 season saw Gorleston relegated again to the Ridgeons First.

The following two seasons saw us struggle and finish in the lower reaches of division one.

In the season 2008/09 saw the 125th anniversary of the club starting with a prestigious friendly against Norwich City.

Former Norwich City Vice-Chairman and our club president, Jimmy Jones, was awarded the MBE in the Queens 2009 Birthday Honours list.

The 2009/10 season saw promotion missed by just one place but the following season saw success winning the division one k.o. cup, the league cup and promotion back to the premiership.

2011/12 saw the team win the Norfolk Senior Cup. It was a sad season however as our club president and 'Mr. Gorleston', Jimmy Jones, died, therefore unable to see his beloved Greens lift the Senior Cup. New chairman, Mr. Alan Gordon took up the reigns.

2013/14 saw The Greens finish fourth and win the Norfolk Senior Cup for the 16th time. The Under 18's also brought silverware to Emerald Park, winning the East Division for the first time in the club's history and also reaching the Thurlow Nunn youth cup final. The club were saddened to lose a great friend, manager and coach, Glyn Hopkins, who passed away in November 2014.

In 2015/16 the priority for new manager, Ricci Butler, was to maintain premier league

status. The Reserve team, managed by Scott Butler, re-joined the Anglian Combination League with great success, finishing champions and not losing on route. also winning the CS Morley Cup.

2016/17 saw the first team reach the 4th round proper of the FA Vase. The Reserves gained a second successive promotion and retained the CS Morley Cup.

The Reserves made it four titles in a row in 2018/19 and gained promotion to Anglian Combination Division 1, also adding the Norfolk Junior Cup to their impressive title tally. The Under 18's took the honours in the East Division.

After a poor start to the 2019/20 season manager Stewart Larter resigned and the Chairman was quick to appoint brothers Ricci & Scott Butler as joint 1st team managers. This proved to be a very challenging season for them both and also for us all as Covid struck near the end of the season declaring the season null and void. Sadly in March 2020 Alan Gordon, chairman of Gorleston FC, passed away. He will be fondly remembered by the whole club and we are so proud of his achievements whilst at the helm

With Covid very much still disrupting fixtures, football took a back seat with only a handful of matches being played in 2020/21 but we did gain our 17th victory in the Norfolk Senior Cup Final.

2021/22 Football was back and what a season. The Chairman, Jamie Humphries, together with our joint managers, Ricci and Scott Butler, put a strong squad together and a commanding start to the season set out our intentions with 6 straight wins. A two-way tussle for the league title went down to the wire with Gorleston winning on the last day of the season to pip Wroxham to the Thurlow Nunn Premier Division Trophy by one point. Sadly this was to be our last ever game at Emerald Park.

2022/23 saw The Greens play at Step 4 for the first time in the clubs history, in the Isthmian Football League North Division, in a ground share with Lowestoft Town FC. Manager Scott Butler was replaced by Darren Cockrill and assistant Ollie Willis who, after many challenges, secured the clubs league status and went on to win the Norfolk Senior

Cup for the 18th time.

The Reserves finished runners up in their league and were promoted to the Anglian Comb Premier Division and senior football.

Season 2023/24 saw Gorleston move to a new home at The Wellesley in Gt Yarmouth and a mid-table finish was achieved. The Reserves won the Anglian Comb Premier Division so were promoted into the Thurlow Nunn First Division.

2024/25 saw The Greens finish in their highest ever position, with their most ever points at Step 4 and also were just four minutes away from a place in the first round proper of the FA Cup.

PLAYER PROFILES

Antoni Bort - sponsored by *Ady Miller*
Goalkeeper. Debut on 25/09/2024. Up to the end of last season had made 29 appearances, keeping 10 clean sheets.

Jake Jessup - sponsored by *Darby & Liffen*
Goalkeeper. Debut on 05/12/2020. Up to the end of last season had made 151 appearances, keeping 47 clean sheets.

Lewis Johnson - sponsored by *The Anglia Sign Casting Company*
Defender/midfielder. Debut on 18/02/2023. Up to the end of last season had made 97 appearances, scoring 5 goals.

Dion Frary - sponsored by *the CR Carpentry & Construction*
Defender. Debut on 05/08/2023. Up to the end of last season had made 89 appearances, scoring 1 goal.

Joe Jefford - sponsored by *Heart 2 Heart*
Defender. Debut on 05/08/2023. Up to the end of last season had made 84 appearances, scoring 7 goals.





Adam Tann - sponsored by *Constable Collective*
Defender. Debut on 02/01/2023. Up to the end of last season had made 101 appearances, scoring 9 goals.

Rossi Jarvis - sponsored by *Lauren Lou Storage Facilities*
Defender. Signed from Leiston in Summer 2025.

Harley Black - sponsored by *Lubbers Transport Great Yarmouth*
Midfielder. Debut on 10/08/2024. Up to the end of last season had made 50 appearances, scoring 4 goals.

Zach Dronfield - sponsored by *Opergy Group*
Midfielder. Debut on 03/08/2024. Up to the end of last season had made 46 appearances, scoring 3 goals.

Dominic Docherty - sponsored by *Green Army*
Midfielder. Debut on 05/02/2022. Up to the end of last season had made 99 appearances, scoring 2 goals.

Cameron Beazer - sponsored by *Kenny Philpott*
Midfielder. Debut on 17/02/2024. Up to the end of last season had made 47 appearances, scoring 3 goals.

Louis McIntosh - sponsored by *Admiral Tees, Lowestoft*
Midfielder. Signed from Lowestoft in Summer 2025.

Joe Marsden - sponsored by *Hayden, Richard and Graham Alsop*
Midfielder. Original debut on 29/01/2013. Up to the end of last season had made 25 appearances, scoring 6 goals.

Ryan Curtis - sponsored by *Gorleston Supporters Club*
Midfielder. Debut on 05/08/2023. Up to the end of last season had made 79 appearances, scoring 25 goals.

Kieran Higgs - sponsored by *Dave Hardy*
Midfielder. Debut on 26/12/2023. Up to the end of last season had made 67 appearances, scoring 1 goal.

Natty Stewart – sponsored by *The Snusfather*
Midfielder. Debut on 18/02/2023. Up to the end of last season had made 20 appearances, scoring 3 goals.

Alby Matthews - sponsored by *Premier Netting*
Forward. Debut on 05/08/2023. Up to the end of last season had made 76 appearances, scoring 18 goals.

Jake Reed - sponsored by *Gary James Bennett*
Forward. Debut on 21/12/2024. Up to the end of last season had made 17 appearances, scoring 8 goals.

Christy Finch - sponsored by *Norfolk Hire*
Forward. Debut on 13/08/2011. Up to the end of last season had made 197 appearances, scoring 136 goals.

Darren Cockrill – sponsored by *Albert Cadmore*
Manager. First game in charge on 11/10/2022. Former player who made 267 appearances for the Greens, scoring 42 goals.

Olly Willis – sponsored by *Ian Constable*
Assistant Manager. Part of the management team with Cockers since 11/10/2022. Up to the end of last season they have been in charge for 132 games, winning 61.

Gavin Coe – sponsored by *CIM Signs*
Director of Football and another former player.



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FIXTURES 2025/26

AUGUST

SAT 9	WALTHAM ABBEY	A	3PM	LEAGUE	L 1-0	ATT 302
TUE 12	WITHAM TOWN <i>Garcia, Mayhew</i>	H	7.45PM	LEAGUE	W 2-0	ATT 388
SAT 16	NEWMARKET <i>Garcia</i>	A	3PM	EMIRATES FA CUP PR	D 1-1	
TUE 19	NEWMARKET	H	7.45PM	EMIRATES FA CUP RR REPLAY	L 2-0	ATT 384
SAT 23	BOWERS & PITSEA	H	3PM	LEAGUE	D 0-0	ATT 340
MON 25	GORLESTON <i>Holland, Hitter, Gilchrist</i>	A	1PM	LEAGUE	W 3-1	ATT 121
SAT 30	GRAYS ATHLETIC <i>Mayhew, Hitter, Gilchrist</i>	A	3PM	LEAGUE	W 3-0	ATT 189

SEPTEMBER

SAT 6	HERTFORD TOWN <i>Ford (3)</i>	A	3PM	ISUZU FA TROPHY 1QR	W 3-1	ATT 377
SAT 13	NEWMARKET TOWN <i>Ford, Garcia</i>	H	3PM	LEAGUE	W 2-0	ATT 502
TUE 16	BRANTHAM ATHLETIC <i>Hitter, Brown, Holland, Gilchrist</i>	A	7.45PM	LEAGUE	W 4-0	ATT 185
SAT 20	GRAYS ATHLETIC	A	3PM	ISUZU FA TROPHY 2QR	L 2-0	ATT 194
SAT 27	TILBURY <i>Mayhew (P)</i>	A	3PM	LEAGUE	W 1-0	ATT 295

OCTOBER

SAT 4	HEYBRIDGE SWIFTS	H	3PM	LEAGUE	D 0-0	ATT 420
TUE 7	AFC SUDBURY <i>Lay, Warren, Gilchrist</i>	A	7.45PM	SUFFOLK PREMIER CUP	W 3-2	ATT 114
SAT 11	CAMBRIDGE CITY <i>Warren, Stevenson</i>	A	3PM	LEAGUE	W 2-0	ATT 563
SAT 18	MALDON & TIPTREE <i>Mayhew, Brown</i>	H	3PM	LEAGUE	W 2-1	ATT 1017
WED 22	BRANTHAM ATHLETIC <i>Ford</i>	H	7.45PM	LEAGUE	W 1-0	ATT 401

NOVEMBER

SAT 1	TAKELEY <i>Ford (2), Hitter, Lay</i>	H	3PM	LEAGUE	W 4-0	ATT 390
TUE 4	BRIGHTLINGSEA REGENT <i>Ford (2), Brown</i>	H	7.45PM	LEAGUE	W 3-0	ATT 251
SAT 8	WALTHAMSTOW <i>Warren, Ford</i>	A	3PM	LEAGUE	W 2-1	ATT 323
TUE 11	CORNARD UNITED <i>Santa De La Paz, Lay, Holland</i>	A	7.45PM	SUFFOLK PREMIER CUP QF	W 3-1	
SAT 15	CONCORD RANGERS <i>Garcia, Warren, Santa De La Paz</i>	H	3.03PM	LEAGUE	W 3-1	ATT 541

SAT 22	MILDENHALL TOWN	A	3PM	LEAGUE	MATCH ABANDONED	
TUE 24	STANWAY ROVERS Ford (2)	A	7.45PM	LEAGUE	D 2-2	ATT 181
SAT 29	WALTHAM ABBEY Ford, Santa De La Paz	H	3PM	LEAGUE	L 7-2	ATT 397

DECEMBER

SAT 6	REDBRIDGE Hitter, Santa De La Paz	A	3PM	LEAGUE	W 2-1	ATT 96
TUE 9	WITHAM TOWN Santa De La Paz	A	7.45PM	LEAGUE	L 2-1	ATT 191
SAT 13	WROXHAM Ford, Garcia	H	3PM	LEAGUE	W 2-0	ATT 403
TUE 16	MILDENHALL TOWN	A	7.45PM	LEAGUE	P-P	
SAT 20	GRAYS ATHLETIC Mayhew, Garcia, Santa De La Paz (2), Aitkens	H	3PM	LEAGUE	W 5-1	ATT 342
SAT 27	LOWESTOFT TOWN Stevenson, Santa De La Paz (2), Hitter	A	3PM	LEAGUE	W 4-1	ATT 600

JANUARY

SAT 3	GORLESTON	H	1PM	LEAGUE		
SAT 10	DOWNHAM TOWN	A	3PM	LEAGUE		
SAT 17	BRIGHTLINGSEA REGENT	A	3PM	LEAGUE		
SAT 24	CAMBRIDGE CITY	H	3PM	LEAGUE		
SAT 31	HEYBRIDGE SWIFTS	A	3PM	LEAGUE		

FEBRUARY

SAT 7	TILBURY	H	3PM	LEAGUE		
SAT 14	MALDON & TIPTREE	A	3PM	LEAGUE		
FRI 20	STANWAY ROVERS	H	7.45PM	LEAGUE		
SAT 28	TAKELEY	A	3PM	LEAGUE		

MARCH

SAT 7	WALTHAMSTOW	H	3PM	LEAGUE		
SAT 14	WROXHAM	A	3PM	LEAGUE		
SAT 21	REDBRIDGE	H	3PM	LEAGUE		
SAT 28	DOWNHAM TOWN	H	3PM	LEAGUE		

APRIL

SAT 4	BOWERS & PITSEA	A	3PM	LEAGUE		
MON 6	LOWESTOFT TOWN	H	3PM	LEAGUE		
SAT 11	NEWMARKET TOWN	A	3PM	LEAGUE		
SAT 18	CONCORD RANGERS	A	3PM	LEAGUE		
SAT 25	MILDENHALL TOWN	H	3PM	LEAGUE		

CHANGING DESTINY

BY MARTYN GREEN, THE UNTOLD GAME

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When Pelé broke out at the 1958 World Cup, a raw, exceptionally talented 17 year old who scored two goals in the final against Sweden, he changed the course of Brazilian football forever. But the nation was already obsessive about the sport, and desperate to win the ultimate competition. When they lost the final in 1950 - on home soil - there were reported suicides. When the goalkeeper from that day, Moacir Barbosa, was gifted the Maracana goalposts upon his retirement, he burned them in his back garden because the pain of that defeat was too deep. But 1958 saw a tactical change that would repair the past, and at the heart of that change was not Pelé, but Didi.

Didi was born in 1928 to the north of Rio de Janeiro, and nearly couldn't become a footballer at all when infection threatened to require his leg to be amputated. But he made his recovery, moved to the city, and started his career. First with Madureira, and then Fluminense, where people began to notice. He joined the side - already a powerhouse of Brazilian football - in 1949, scored the very first goal at the Maracana when it opened before the 1950 World Cup, and played 298 consecutive games without missing one, scoring 91 goals in the process. A tricky outside right, he became notable for his trademark free kicks, which swerved and dipped and bamboozled goalkeeper after goalkeeper. He was too young to be included in the squad

for the home World Cup, which probably spared him from the trauma of defeat (and in Brazil, that was trauma). But by 1954, he was ready.

He travelled to Switzerland with the nation in high hopes, but they came undone like so many in the mid-1950s, against a Hungary side that was all-but unstoppable. Hungary lost just one match between 1952 and 1956, the World Cup final, but other than that they were largely unassailable. Brazil were no pushovers themselves, however, and when they met, in the quarter finals, it was such a physical encounter that it's gone down in history as the Battle of Berne. After goals against Mexico and Yugoslavia, Didi was involved in a brawl against Hungary as the Brazilians lost.

In 1957, Didi moved to Botafogo and after winning the league fulfilled his promise upon signing that he would walk from the Maracana to his home in the city, a journey on which he was joined by 5000 Botafogo fans. But at international level, Brazil were changing, and had adopted the 4-2-4 that still defines them.

As a winger, he linked up well with Garrincha and scored the goal against Peru that sent his nation to Sweden. But a new competitor was emerging, and when Pelé was selected for the squad, Didi's place was in doubt. Eventually, selectors were persuaded to play him in the middle, and it was a masterstroke.

The '2' in the 4-2-4 were absolutely vital to

the system. To allow Garrincha and Pelé, and Vava and Mario Zagallo, the freedom to play, they had to be strong, creative midfield presences. Zito was a natural choice here, but Didi was playing out of position. As it turned out, to a player like him, that didn't much matter. He had shown his mettle in Berne, and now it was being deployed tactically.

Didi played every minute and was voted player of the tournament, especially for his creativity. When the final was goalless and needed inspiration, it wasn't the teenage Pelé who found it; he credited his midfield teammate for laying on the pass that set up his first goal. Arguably the greatest player to have ever played the game, Pelé was effusive in his praise for Didi, calling him a mentor.

Brazil's success saw Didi move to Europe in 1959, becoming the first Brazilian ever signed by Real Madrid. He joined a team of Ferenc Puskas, Raymond Kopa, and Alfredo di Stefano, but this turned out to be a problem. Not liking

the competition, and unquestionably the star of the side, di Stefano had Didi frozen out for most of the season. Real lost the European Cup that, to that point, only they had won, and the season was an unqualified failure. After just one year, Didi moved back to Botafogo. By 1962, he was in the twilight of his career, but still effective enough to join his teammates for the World Cup in Chile. Garrincha was the star this time, but Didi picked up his second medal.

He returned to Brazil a hero, and retired in 1966. He then embarked on a varied managerial career across three continents. He guided Peru to the World Cup finals in 1970, where they were put out by his old teammates; a Brazil side led by Mario Zagallo, and inspired by a veteran Pelé. His international career had come full circle.

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PITCHING IN ISTHMIAN LEAGUE NORTH ROUND UP

BY IAN TOWNSEND, TAKEN FROM WWW.ISTHMIAN.CO.UK

Lowestoft Town got the first goal of our three o'clock kick offs as they hosted the leaders, **Felixstowe and Walton United** - Aaron Bullent scoring for the fourteenth time this season, but the Seasiders were level twelve minutes before half time, Toby Stevenson with the equaliser - and soon ahead, courtesy of Jose Santa De La Paz. De La Paz scored again just after half time to make it three-one, and on sixty seven minutes Josh Hitter made it four-one. The scoring stopped there, and Felixstowe remain one point clear at the top.

Maldon and Tiptree, breathing down the necks of the leaders, were very much the favourites as local rivals **Heybridge Swifts** came to call. Swifts have been struggling, but they held on to parity for sixty eight minutes, only for Cameron James to finally make the breakthrough for the Jammers. As it turned out, that was the only goal, and it keeps the hosts hot on the tail of Felixstowe at the top, one point behind with two games in hand.

Waltham Abbey have been in superb form in recent weeks, and the Abbotts were favourites as they welcomed **Walthamstow**, but they were made to wait for sixty seven minutes for an opening goal. When it finally arrived it went to Ibitayo Oyebola, and as it turned out it was the only goal. The Abbotts are third, and nine unbeaten - eight of which were wins.

Play off chasing **Wroxham** and **Gorleston** met in Great Yarmouth, both sides hoping to return



to winning ways after taking only one point from their previous two fixtures. After a goalless first half, we had a goalless second half - three without a win for both sides.

Newmarket Town were at home to **Redbridge**, and it was the Motormen who made the breakthrough early in the second half - and once they had one, they quickly got another. Malachi Napa got the opener, and only two minutes afterwards Darren Esuka made it two. The Jockeys made a match of it ten minutes before the end, Finlay Whiteley hitting back, but the equaliser didn't arrive, and the Motormen are up to eighth.

Bowers and Pitsea played host to **Concord Rangers**, and they were rather generous hosts

in the first half. A spot kick on twenty minutes was converted by Sherquan Toussaint, his seventh goal of the campaign, and only five minutes later the Beachboys had another, Fred Buiers making it two. The hosts roused themselves and got back into the game only two minutes later, a Luca Albon spot kick halving the deficit, and five minutes into the second half it was two-two, Ross Wall delivering the equaliser. The hosts were now at full speed, and they took the lead twenty minutes from time, John Elongo making it three-two, and four minutes later Wall wrapped up the points, adding a fourth. Bowers go seventh.

Cambridge City have been climbing the table rather relentlessly, and hoped for more of that as they welcomed **Takeley**. They went ahead ten minutes before the break, Jayden Randell with the opener, but the visitors drew level with seventeen minutes left, Jack Mitchell with the equaliser. They weren't level for long, Sam Coombes quickly restoring City's lead, and three minutes from time they made quite sure with a third, Quevin Castro scoring from the spot.

Stanway Rovers and **Witham Town** were both in decent form. Rovers made the breakthrough twelve minutes into the second half, Nat Mardell with the opening goal, and fifteen minutes from time they made the points safe, Jamie Bennett

adding a second. Rovers climb into the top five as a result.

Brantham Athletic's latest attempt to pick up a victory came as they hosted **Brightlingsea Regent**, but the visitors went ahead in first half added time, Jake Clowsley scoring from the spot. Clowsley made it two on fifty five minutes, and a red card for Athletic's Tom Lawson made things worse. Charlie Durling got Regent's third nineteen minutes from time, and Athletic are now twenty two points from safety.

Grays Athletic 'hosted' **Tilbury** in the latest instalment of their local derby, and the opening goal arrived just after the hour, Joe Elliott putting the Dockers ahead. That was that- Grays four points and one place above the drop zone, Tilbury up to thirteenth.

Downham Town and **Mildenhall Town** seemed to be heading for a goalless draw, but ten minutes from time Krisztian Gagyí decided that he had other ideas, putting the hosts ahead. Hall still had time to hit back, and hit back they did, Jordan Nicholson seemingly earning them a point - but they turned one point into three, Luke Brown delivering an added time winner. Mildenhall are fifteenth, Downham seven points from safety.

TODAY'S FIXTURES



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03.01.2026

Brightlingsea Regent v Stanway Rovers
Concord Rangers v Brantham Athletic
Felixstowe & Walton United v Gorleston
Heybridge Swifts v Bowers & Pitsea
Mildenhall Town v Newmarket Town
Redbridge v Waltham Abbey
Takeley v Downham Town
Tilbury v Maldon & Tiptree
Walthamstow v Cambridge City
Witham Town v Grays Athletic
Wroxham v Lowestoft Town

CLUB CONTACTS

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Chairman	Tony Barnes		chairman@felixstowefootball.co.uk
Vice Chairman	Andrew Clarke		springcroftcdr@outlook.com
Director of Operations	Chris Daynes	07415886803	clubhouse@felixstowefootball.co.uk
Club Secretary	Ruth Ward	07745 062337	secretary@felixstowefootball.co.uk
Treasurer	Gary Hammond	07803 244721	treasurer@felixstowefootball.co.uk
Chairman of Youth Football	Scott Dunne	07790 820396	sjd_sw@yahoo.co.uk
Head of Media/Press Officer	Stuart Daynes	07717 577497	media@felixstowefootball.co.uk

GENERAL COMMITTEE

Safeguarding/Welfare	Ruth Ward		secretary@felixstowefootball.co.uk
Youth Safeguarding/Welfare	Kathryn Maclean	07809 673414	
Fixtures Secretary	Les Soall	07825 058857	lgsfxt@aol.com
Health & Safety Officer	Paul Secker	07539 455089	paul.secker1@hotmail.com
Hospitality	Winnifred Soall	07900 591367	winnifred.mcclean@aol.com

PRESIDENTS CLUB

President	Dave Ashford	07850 618940	dave@dhashford.co.uk
Life Vice Presidents:	Andy Wilding, Tony Barnes, Mick Gosling, Chris Ryan, Jayne Ryan, Phil Griffiths, Jim Seymour		

OTHER CONTACTS

Facilities Manager	Chris Daynes		clubhouse@felixstowefootball.co.uk
Commercial Manager	Chris Daynes		commercial@felixstowefootball.co.uk
Programme Designer	Becky Wybrow		beckywybrow.design@gmail.com
Photography	Stefan Peck		



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FOOTBALL
LEAGUE**



PARTNERS WITH
ISTHMIAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE



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MATCHDAY SQUADS

Isthmian League North
Saturday 3rd January 2026
Kick-off 1pm



Felixstowe & Walton Utd FC

Managers: Jack Ainsley and
Stuart Ainsley

Jack **Ainsley**
Stuart **Ainsley**
Hugo **Akhuseyin**
Noel **Aitkens**
Callum **Bennett**
Zak **Brown**
Ollie **Caley-Brown**
Hugh **Cullum**
Sam **Ford**
Ethan **Garcia**
Dan **Gilchrist**
Josh **Hitter**
Billy **Holland (C)**
Will **Jones**
Jacob **Lay**
Olly **Martin**
Josh **Mayhew**
Jose **Santa De La Paz**
Toby **Stevenson**
Thomas **Warren**
Joe **Whight**
Jack **Wilkinson**
Harry **Wright (GK)**

Gorleston FC

Manager: Darren Cockrill
Assistant Manager: Olly Willis

Antoni **Bort (GK)**
Jake **Jessup (GK)**
Lewis **Johnson**
Dion **Frary**
Joe **Jefford**
Adam **Tann**
Rossi **Jarvis**
Harley **Black**
Alby **Matthews**
Zachary **Dronfield**
Ryan **Curtis**
Joe **Marsden**
Louis **McIntosh**
Cameron **Beazer**
Dominic **Docherty**
Kieran **Higgs**
Spencer **Keller**
Billy **Walsh**

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MATCH OFFICIALS:
Referee: Mr Paul Stratton **Assistant Referees:** Mr Daniel Squibb and Mr Royan Campbell