

Second Division



CHAMPIONS: WYCOMBE (above)
ALSO PROMOTED: Carlisle
PLAY-OFFS: Blackpool, Brentford, Crewe, Hull
RELEGATED: Bournemouth, Walsall (below), Shrewsbury, Peterborough



Blackpool	finished 12th in Div 2	A club with great ambition whose plans for a new ground mean they will need to be successful to finance their dreams. Gill Bridge may be Blackpool's version of Karren Brady's, but she hasn't run off with any of the players yet.	Challenging for a play-off berth
Bournemouth	finished 19th in Div 2	The great escape artists of 1994/95 will be looking to build on their success in avoiding the drop. Former Manchester City star Mel Machin, now Bournemouth manager, will be looking to bring the good times back to Dean Court, but he may struggle.	Will be hoping to avoid the drop
Bradford	finished 14th in Div 2	Hectic transfer dealing with a club record £1.8million received from Wolves for Dean Richards and £80,000 from Peterborough for Lee Powers. In come the Leicester trio of Ian Ormondroyd, Gavin Ward and Nicky Mohan, with Swansea's £210,000 central defender John Ford among four other signings.	Improvement on last term
Brentford	finished second in Div 2	After the despair of play-off defeat, the hang-over may take some time to work its way out of the system. But they showed enough last year to suggest they could challenge for promotion again this time.	Play-offs will be their best bet
Brighton	finished 16th in Div 2	They had promised so much the season before, but last year was a write-off for Liam Brady and his men. With the fans revolting against a proposed ground share with rivals Portsmouth – hey, Pompey probably aren't too happy either, Brighton fans – there may be troubles ahead for the Seagulls.	May struggle to beat the drop
Bristol City	finished 23rd in Div 1	They were simply out of their depth in Division One last year and not even on-loan striker Robert Fleck could save them from the drop. If they were relying on him, no wonder they had problems.	Mid-table no-hopers
Bristol Rovers	finished fourth in Div 2	The shock team of last season may struggle to recapture the form that pushed them so close to promotion. Marcus Stewart's goals will be crucial if they are to reach the play-offs again.	Not as good a season as the last
Burnley	finished 22nd in Div 2	Last season was one step beyond for the side that jumped two divisions in two years. They may now find their feet in the Second Division, but may have to settle for a season of consolidation this time.	Mid-table security
Carlisle	Div 3 champs	Chairman Michael Knighton is not expecting miracles in their first season in Division Two. But his team might just surprise him by pushing the top clubs close. If hot-shot David Reeves finds his goalscoring touch, they should be the surprise packet of the season.	Good bet for a play offs and possibly better
Chesterfield	finished 3rd in Div 3 (promoted via play-offs)	Former Manchester City star Paul Moulden is expected to sign before the start of the season and John Duncan's team have been boosted by the return of goalkeeper Andy Beesley from injury.	Tough job to stay up
Crewe	finished third in Div 2	With Dario Gradi around, you can bet they will entertain and produce the stars of the future. But you can also lay money that they will be selling the cream of their talent. The need to sell may stop them going up.	Play-offs again
Hull City	finished 8th in Div 2	New signing Andy Mason will need to find his goalscoring touch if Terry Dolan's men are to make any impression this season. Last season's high finish should give confidence for the season ahead and they could provide a few more shocks this time.	Outsiders for a play-off place
Notts County	finished 24th in Div 2	They went through enough managers to last a decade last season and with the fans calling for everyone's head, from the chairman to the tea-lady, they may struggle again this year. If you start the season in turmoil, you can expect to finish even worse.	Another battle against the drop
Oxford United	finished 7th in Div 2	After losing reserve and youth team coach Steve McClaren to Derby, Oxford responded by signing Mark Harrison, Neville Southall's former goal-keeping coach, as replacement. Experienced Wayne Biggins has joined on a free from Stoke.	Mid-table
Peterborough	finished 15th in Div 2	After losing key striker Ken Charlerly to Birmingham, this season could prove be even more of a struggle than the last. If they stay up they will have done well.	Could be sucked into the relegation zone
Rotherham	finished 17th in Div 2	After a summer of spending by Archie Gemmill and John McGowan, Rotherham can look forward to much improved form this time. Paul Blades from Wolves is the summers' big signing and expectations for success are high. See, we can be nice about Rotherham.	Comfortably in the top half
Shrewsbury Town	finished 18th in Div 2	Mark Dempsey and Darren Rowbottom are the new faces at Gay Meadow, but they may not be enough to improve the team sufficiently from last season's inconsistencies. They have struggled to compete in this summer's over-inflated transfer market and now they may struggle to survive in Division Two.	A struggle to stay up
Sheff Wed	finished 11th in Div 2	Goalid again... Davey Downey leads the club and replacement Dave Jones is expected to lead the team. The new chairman is a former player, but...	Too right

Third Division



The Team	Last season	The Lowdown	The Verdict
Barnet	11th	Manager Ray Clemence and youth team coach Terry Gibson will need to nurture the boys well if they lose Dougie Freedman. Brian Kilcline will also know a thing or two about knocking them into shape, but mid-table respectability will be impressive.	No play-offs this time round
Bury	4th	Beat Preston in play-off semis, but lost to Chesterfield in the final. They've kept the nucleus of the side and have made three new signings, including David Johnstone from Manchester United. Probable champs.	Champions
Cambridge	21st in Div 2	In any other season the Varsity men would have escaped the drop, but with Division Three football looming there has been an exodus of players like Mick Heathcote and Carlo Corraiz. Simply surviving the season will be impressive.	Bottom half, but should avoid the drop

Fierce competition for places in the fast lane

Local derbies are back on the fixture list in Bristol, and City fans will be viewing the prospect with mixed emotions. They face Rovers – who are still lodging at nearby Bath – as a consequence of being relegated in May but, despite possessing a better ground, more money and a superior pedigree, the odds favour the exiles.

Rovers nearly passed City this summer, having missed out of promotion only in the play-off finals. While City have lost Wayne Allison to Swindon for £475,000, Rovers have retained the talented Marcus Stewart.

The last time both clubs were in this division, four seasons ago, Rovers were champions and City were promoted behind them. That may be the best City can hope for – together with a first derby win at Twerton Park.

The Second Division threatens to become a series of M4 duels. Brentford, narrowly beaten to promotion by Birmingham last year, are among the favourites together with relegated Swindon.

Brentford are optimistic, especially as the 51-goal partnership of Nick Forster-Robert Taylor is intact, despite Crystal Palace apparently having designs on Forster.

Morale is somewhat lower at

SECOND DIVISION

Swindon after consecutive relegations. Steve McMahon, whose exhortations proved no more successful than John Gorman's coaxing, has made several signings in the hope of halting the freefall. Among them is Mark Seagraves, a Coca-Cola

PREDICTIONS

PROMOTED

Brentford, Carlisle

PLAY-OFFS

Wycombe, Bristol Rovers,
Bradford City, Swindon

RELEGATED

Stockport, Chesterfield,
Shrewsbury, Peterborough

Cup finalist with Bolton in April, and the mercurial Allison, who could form a potent combination with Peter Thorne.

Wycombe Wanderers, now managed by Alan Smith, the former Crystal Palace manager, and Crewe are also among the contenders but the latter, though long on quality, are short on depth.

Carlisle, who romped the Third Division last year, may prove more durable. Their confidence will be as high as their chairman Michael Knighton's ambition. Warren Aspinall and

Glyn Snodin are among their signings.

There will be plenty of invention at Notts County, especially in the programme notes – Colin Murphy, the bard of the non-sequitur, is manager. Steve Thompson, who impressed at Southend last season, is his team manager and the combination may produce a team to match revamped Meadow Lane.

Blackpool's search for a new ground reaches a new step next month with a planning application. In the meantime they have invested a well-judged £200,000 on Crystal Palace's Andy Preece. Spending too at Rotherham, including Paul Blades (Wolves) and Mike Jeffrey (Newcastle) for six-figure fees, and Bradford. Lennie Lawrence has bought several players, including Ian Ormondroyd and Nicky Mohan from Leicester and Swansea's Jon Ford, out of the £1.85m received for Dean Richards.

Few clubs have the depth to cope with a run of injuries which means anyone could struggle. Promoted Chesterfield, impecunious Shrewsbury and heavily indebted Brighton – who are searching for a new ground – could fare worse than most. Wrexham will miss Gary Bennett's goals and Stockport the inspiration of Danny Bergara.

Alan Smith believes his new club Wycombe — on the brink of first division status just three seasons after playing Conference football — have been guilty of under-achieving.

The new Adams Park manager hopes his Premiership pedigree will rub off on the Buckinghamshire club as they launch an assault on the second division title.

Smith, who led Crystal Palace to the Endsleigh League title 15 months ago, believes Wycombe's players, for all their glorious achievements in Martin O'Neill's five years at the helm, lack proper coaching and organisation.

O'Neill, who moved on in June to manage Norwich, inspired previously unknown Wycombe to the Conference title and promotion from the third division via three Wembley successes in four years.

Now Smith, recognised as one of the top coaches in the game, reckons he can teach his new players to achieve higher standards and, consequently, one of the three promotion places.

He said: "I do not want to start bringing new faces in too early as I think these players have a lot more to show."

"They have not had a lot of training and have not been very well organised but I have not been here very long. It's not a criticism of anyone — it's just my style of management is different."

Wycombe, sixth last season, missed the play-offs by one place and are joint third favourites for the title at 10-1. Play-off runners-up Crewe (14-1), Bristol Rovers (10-1) and Brentford (9-1), along with the four relegated first division clubs, are also in the running.

But the bookies are predicting third division champions Carlisle (8-1) will repeat their title success despite Mick Wadsworth barely changing his squad. Chairman Michael Knighton said: "That's a ridiculous price — we're looking for a season of consolidation."

The 25,000 Cumbrians who travelled down for Carlisle's Wembley debut in the Auto Windscreens Shield 1-0 defeat by Birmingham in April reckon differently and the addition of former Leeds full back Glyn Snodin provides experience.

Meanwhile, Smith is concentrating solely on Wycombe's capabilities. He said: "It's not what the others do but what we do that counts for me this season."

"I adopted that philosophy at Palace in the Endsleigh League although it was different last year as you really must concentrate on the opposition in the top bracket."

"I think the experience of leading Palace to a championship the season before last will help and if you look



● Steve McGavin

Smith in a hurry to make mark

DIVISION 2 by PETER LANSLEY

before that, I won a non-League championship with Dulwich, three titles when youth team manager at Palace and then had success there as assistant manager.

"I do not want to bide my time here — I'm in a bit of a hurry to get on with things. I enjoyed the Premiership — going to Old Trafford and Anfield was special — and now this is an exciting challenge."

Wycombe have won four and drawn one of their pre-season friendlies so far, including a 2-1 win over Southampton. Smith has barely changed O'Neill's squad yet, merely bringing in Bristol Rovers' Paul Hardyman and releasing former captain Glyn Creaser and winger Simon Hutchinson.

Strikers Juan De Souza and Steve McGavin should be a lethal combination once fully fit and in harness for the first time.

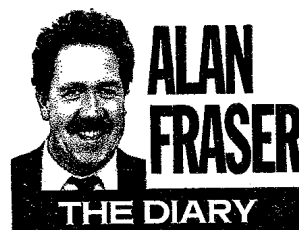
And star man Dave Carroll said: "Our main aim is to continue the momentum and get into the first division."

"We had a pretty good season last year but we've come so far in such a short time. If I was a betting man I'd back the sides coming down, Brentford, Crewe and us."

"It's very open this year. For instance, Bournemouth enjoyed the best run of form in the division to stay up and if they continue that they've a chance."

Relegated Burnley are 10-1 as they seek to repeat the promotion they achieved 15 months ago while Steve McMahon's Swindon are sure to be a tough nut to crack as they seek to stop the rot of two successive demotions.

Bristol City (14-1) and Notts County (16-1) may be satisfied with consolidation. Shrewsbury (40-1), Peterborough, Wrexham and Brighton (all 33-1) are favourites to fill the four relegation spots.



ALAN SMITH, bless him, has never been an orthodox football manager. The public slugging of his employer at Crystal Palace was just one manifestation of his strong independent streak.

You would, therefore, expect Smith to tackle the problem of living in Purley

and working in High Wycombe in his own way. The difficulty — as anyone living in the London area will appreciate — is getting from one to the other during the rush hour.

His solution is to leave home at 6.45am and arrive at Bisham Abbey, which Wanderers have hired for training, at 7.45.

Smith then plays two hours of tennis with some of Britain's brightest young prospects at the National Training School. Davis Cup captain David Lloyd is monitoring the situation.