

# Back on form but we're still the tie's underdogs

STAND-IN boss Steve Brown has warned play-off opponents Cheltenham that his side are back on form – but insists that the Blues are still the underdogs for the two-legged semi-final.

He has described tomorrow's Adams Park first leg clash and Thursday's second leg at Whaddon Road as the biggest matches Blues have faced since their 2001 FA Cup semi-final against Liverpool.

Brown said: "We know the prize at stake and the fear of failure is a massive driving force."

Brown will stay in charge for the games after Blues told grieving boss John Gorman to stay away.

He said: "We all want to win the play-offs and then dedicate it to John and to Mark Philo [The Blues midfielder who died in a car crash in January] but we have got to win these two matches first before we can even start thinking of that."

The Blues have never beaten Cheltenham in six league fixtures and they need to change that statistic to have any chance of meeting Grimsby or Lincoln in the final at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium on May 28.

Brown said: "Managers are always quoted as saying this is just another game but it's not. These next two matches are the biggest this club has played since that FA Cup semi-final."

"It is two games and then hopefully a third one and we are totally focussed on them."

Brown, who was in the team when Blues were relegated to the bottom tier of English football, is looking forward to having the chance to put that right two seasons later. But he admits his side face a tough task.

He said: "Cheltenham are the favourites. They finished above us in the league and have taken four points off us this season."

"But we don't mind being the underdogs – we prefer it."

Wanderers bounced back from a 1-0 home defeat against Darlington

## Wanderers by Dave Peters

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### LEAGUE TWO

| TEAM           | P  | W  | D  | L  | F  | A  | W  | D  | L  | F  | A  | Ps |
|----------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Carlisle       | 46 | 14 | 3  | 6  | 47 | 23 | 11 | 8  | 4  | 37 | 19 | 86 |
| Northampton    | 46 | 11 | 8  | 4  | 30 | 15 | 11 | 9  | 3  | 33 | 22 | 83 |
| Leyton Orient  | 46 | 11 | 6  | 6  | 29 | 21 | 11 | 9  | 3  | 38 | 30 | 81 |
| Grimsby        | 46 | 13 | 3  | 7  | 37 | 18 | 9  | 9  | 5  | 27 | 26 | 78 |
| Cheltenham     | 46 | 10 | 7  | 6  | 39 | 31 | 9  | 8  | 6  | 26 | 22 | 72 |
| Wycombe        | 46 | 9  | 9  | 5  | 41 | 29 | 9  | 8  | 6  | 31 | 27 | 71 |
| Lincoln City   | 46 | 9  | 11 | 3  | 37 | 21 | 6  | 10 | 7  | 28 | 32 | 66 |
| Darlington     | 46 | 10 | 7  | 6  | 32 | 26 | 6  | 8  | 9  | 26 | 26 | 63 |
| Peterborough   | 46 | 9  | 7  | 7  | 28 | 21 | 8  | 4  | 11 | 29 | 28 | 62 |
| Shrewsbury     | 46 | 10 | 9  | 4  | 33 | 20 | 6  | 4  | 13 | 22 | 35 | 61 |
| Boston Utd     | 46 | 11 | 7  | 5  | 34 | 28 | 4  | 9  | 10 | 16 | 32 | 61 |
| Bristol Rovers | 46 | 8  | 6  | 9  | 30 | 29 | 9  | 3  | 11 | 29 | 38 | 60 |
| Wrexham        | 46 | 12 | 6  | 5  | 36 | 19 | 3  | 8  | 12 | 25 | 35 | 59 |
| Rochdale       | 46 | 8  | 7  | 8  | 34 | 30 | 6  | 7  | 10 | 32 | 39 | 56 |
| Chester        | 46 | 7  | 6  | 10 | 30 | 29 | 7  | 6  | 10 | 23 | 30 | 54 |
| Mansfield      | 46 | 9  | 7  | 7  | 37 | 29 | 4  | 8  | 11 | 22 | 37 | 54 |
| Macclesfield   | 46 | 10 | 9  | 4  | 35 | 27 | 2  | 9  | 12 | 25 | 44 | 54 |
| Barnet         | 46 | 9  | 8  | 6  | 24 | 22 | 3  | 10 | 10 | 20 | 35 | 54 |
| Bury           | 46 | 6  | 9  | 8  | 22 | 25 | 6  | 8  | 9  | 23 | 32 | 53 |
| Torquay        | 46 | 7  | 9  | 7  | 33 | 31 | 6  | 4  | 13 | 20 | 35 | 52 |
| Notts County   | 46 | 7  | 11 | 5  | 30 | 26 | 5  | 5  | 13 | 18 | 37 | 52 |
| Stockport      | 46 | 7  | 11 | 5  | 34 | 29 | 4  | 8  | 11 | 23 | 49 | 52 |
| Oxford Utd     | 46 | 7  | 7  | 9  | 25 | 30 | 4  | 9  | 10 | 18 | 27 | 49 |
| Rushden        | 46 | 8  | 5  | 10 | 25 | 31 | 3  | 7  | 13 | 19 | 45 | 45 |

to beat Peterborough 2-0 at London Road on Saturday.

The victory was Blues' second in three games, and Brown is adamant the players have now recovered from the sequence of six straight defeats that cost them automatic promotion after they had led the division for most of the season.

Brown said: "We've won two out of the last three and it would have been three out of three except we hit the post four times against Darlington and were against a keeper having the game of his life."

"We are creating chances again but we need to improve our ratio of converting them."

But despite the return to form, Brown admits he's been kept awake by his new role as caretaker boss.

He said: "I've been waking up at four o'clock in the morning thinking about what team to play."

"Everybody is coming back to form and the confidence is



Decision time: Steve Brown has been kept awake picking his side

returning. There's competition for places and it will be difficult to leave people out."

Brown rested three at Peterborough with Tommy Mooney, Rob Lee and keeper Frank Talia all making way.

But their replacements stepped in with starring performances.

Jermaine Easter scored his third goal in a week, following his brace in the County Cup Final, Joe

Burnell was back to his busy best in midfield and glovesman Steve Williams was the Man of the Match by a country mile. A number of players are set for heartbreak ahead of Saturday's first game, as Brown prepares to name his side.

Brown said: "I've got some big decisions to make. Everyone's put themselves in the frame. We've got a good mix of big-game players and youngsters."