

HARDY B LEAGUE REPORT 2010

THE KNOCK OUT CUP

Bridport and **Bulbury** contested the nineteenth Hardy B League Cup Final.

For **Bridport**, it was their first appearance in the Final. The Fourth Division side did it the hard way, beating teams from a higher division in each round. They began by taking their biggest scalp when they overcame First Division Sherborne by the odd match in five at Bridport but this was the last time that they would be on home soil until the two-legged final. In rounds two and three, they won at Canford School and Yeovil and reached the final with an emphatic win against Crane Valley, who boasted a 100% record in their league matches to that point, at Bulbury Woods in the semi final.

Second Division, **Bulbury** received a bye in the first round and took advantage of home draws to reach the semi final with wins over Queens Park and Rushmore. In the semi final, played at Crane Valley, they defeated fellow second division side Meyrick Park to reach their second final. In their only previous appearance in 1994, Bulbury had beaten Lyme Regis to take the trophy.

In the final, **Bridport** hosted the first leg and took a 3.5-1.5 advantage to Bulbury for the deciding fixture. **Bulbury** pulled back the two match deficit in the second leg and, then, went on to win the trophy at the first extra hole to win their second Hardy B League cup..

THE LEAGUE

Division One

The First Division brought together five well matched teams and promotion and relegation went down to the final week of the season.

Only **Knighton Heath** went into their last match with no chance of winning the title or avoiding relegation. A big win against Weymouth (4.5-0.5) in the final match was not enough to preserve their first Division status and 2011 will be only their second outside the top flight since the beginning of the century. Four away defeats and a narrow defeat against Sherborne at home sealed their fate.

The final match between **Weymouth** and **Wareham** was crucial to both teams. Wareham had eight points and Weymouth six and on the same day **Sherborne** were hosting **Isle of Purbeck** and both had eight points.

Weymouth's defeat at Knighton Heath in the previous match had severely dented their chances of survival in the top division and a home draw against Wareham in the final match sealed their fate after just one season in Division One. Although they won 3-2 at Sherborne in their opening match of the season, Weymouth gave back the points when Sherborne won by the same score in the return.

Wareham ensured that they would be in the First Division for an eleventh successive season in 2011, having finished with an identical record to that of the previous season – an unblemished home record and one point from the three away matches.

The league title rested on the final match at **Sherborne**. If either side won, the title would be theirs and a draw would give **Isle of Purbeck** the championship for a second successive season and a record sixth time. **Sherborne**, back in Division One after a six year absence had won the title in 1991 and 1993.

In 2010, **Isle of Purbeck** had won all four home matches for the third time in four seasons (they had lost only two of their thirty two home matches since 2002) but in 2010 had not picked up a point on the road.

Despite their loss against Weymouth, **Sherborne** also boasted a strong recent home record. They had won all of their home matches in 2006, 2007 and 2009 and had been beaten once in 2005 and 2008.

In a match where every game went to the final green, Sherborne made home advantage count to run out winners by 3.5-1.5 and become 2010 Hardy League Champions.

Division Two

Meyrick Park, who had lost their Division One status in 2009, regained it at the first attempt by topping the Second Division. Once again it was their strong home form that laid the foundation for the title and they completed four wins –three of which were by the odd match in five- on their home course. Meyrick Park have been beaten only once in twenty four home league fixtures since 2003 – winning nineteen and drawing four. Although they were well beaten by Dudsbury (0-5) and Bulbury (1-4) on their travels, a win and at Moors Valley and a draw at Yeovil gave them a one point advantage over runners-up Bulbury in the final table.

Bulbury, who had the consolation of reaching the cup final, completed back-to back promotions. They also have proved difficult to beat at home and won all four of their matches on home soil. This was the fourth time in the last five seasons that they had finished the league season with a 100% home record. A win at Yeovil was enough to take them into Division One.

Dudsbury, who dropped out of Division One in 2009 – for the first time since the turn of the century – failed to win an away match for only the second time since 2000. They dropped a home point to Moors Valley but a draw at Yeovil prevented a second successive relegation.

After two seasons in which they boasted a 100% home record, **Moors Valley** were beaten by Meyrick Park in their first home fixture of 2010. This proved crucial in their bid to stay in Division Two as, despite winning their other three home fixtures, the creditable draw at Dudsbury proved to be the only point picked up on their travels and they slipped back into Division Three after one season in the second division.

It was a disastrous season for **Yeovil** who have been in the top Division in seven of the eleven years since 2000. Just one win and two draws at home and four defeats away from home for the second successive season saw them suffer relegation for a second year running.

Division Three

Looking back through the records, from 1998 at least, no team has gone through the season with a 100% record. In 2010, two teams were in with a chance of doing it this season. **Crane Valley**, runaway winners of Division Three had won all seven of their games, remarkably all by a 3-2 margin, when they went to Parkstone for their final match but were beaten 3-2! Nevertheless, it was a great effort and represented their best away record since 2000 and their first 100% record of home wins since 2005.

They will be joined in Division Two in 2011 by **Dorset** who having slipped from Division One to Division Three between 2008 and 2010 are now looking to battle back to the top division which they graced between 2002 and 2006. They were beaten by Crane Valley at home but the 4-1 win at Canford Magna was, surprisingly, sufficient to secure promotion.

Parkstone's win against the champions in the final fixture was just enough to save them from relegation. Remarkably, one more win could have earned a promotion but, having also beaten the other promoted side, Dorset, 5-0 at home they dropped points to the two relegated sides on their own course, losing 3-2 to Queens Park and being held to a draw by Canford School.

Having slid from Division One to Division Four in three seasons, **Queens Park's** must have been hoping that last season's promotion offered a way back but two home defeats for the first time in five years meant that they would drop back into Division Four for 2011.

Canford School, who had been promoted in 2007 and 2008, found themselves relegated for the second successive season. Home defeats at the hands of the two promoted sides and just one away point sealed their fate.

Division Four

Although **Canford Magna** lost 2-3 at home to Rushmore, they won their other three matches and picked up away points from wins at Bridport and Came Down as well as earning a draw at Rushmore to carry off the Division Four title and earn promotion at the first attempt.

They will be joined in the higher division by **Rushmore**, who were relegated alongside them in 2010. The draw with Canford Magna was the only home point dropped and continued the successful home run that has seen Rushmore beaten only once at home in five seasons. It has been the away form that has let Rushmore down in the past and, since joining the league, they have never won more than one away match and, before this season had a record of three wins and twenty five defeats on the road. This season proved no exception, with one win (at Canford Magna!) and three defeats but it was just enough to see them up.

Bridport's success in 2010 came through their Knock Out Cup run but they only retained their Division Four status by the skin of their teeth. They have always been a difficult side to beat at home, and their 2-3 defeat by Canford Magna was only their third loss at Bridport since 2003 but the draw at Folke, which was their first away point since 2006, was just enough to keep them up on points difference.

After two successful promotion seasons, **Folke** failed by the narrowest of margins to maintain their Division Four status. Despite remaining unbeaten at home for a third successive season, the draw with Bridport sealed their fate. Away from home, they lost all four matches –albeit that three were by three matches to two- and this was the first time since their introduction to the league in 2007 that they had failed to win, at least, one away match.

Came Down will also look back at their poor away form for their relegation. For the fourth successive season they failed to win an away match and, in the sixteen matches, have managed just one point. In 2010, they were beaten in all four matches and the home defeat at the hands of Canford Magna was to prove very costly.

Division Five

This division was to provide two unique situations. **Christchurch** went through the season unbeaten at home for the third successive year and won all of their home matches for the second year running. In 2010, they also managed to win all three of their away matches and, having scrutinised League records going back to 1998, I have not found any other occasion where a club has finished the season with a 100% record. Congratulations !.

The second unique event was that the next two teams – **Ashley Wood and Highcliffe** – finished the season with identical records and points difference. This is certainly the first time that it has happened where either promotion or relegation have been at stake. Both teams finished with seven points from their six matches. **Ashley Wood** won all of their home matches (for only the second time in ten years) and forced a play off with the crucial draw at Highcliffe.

The draw with Ashley Wood meant that **Highcliffe** finished the season unbeaten at home for the third time in four years. However, it was their win at Ferndown Forest, which gave them their only away success of 2010 - their first away win since 2007 – that put them in contention for a place in the higher division.

Unfortunately it has not been possible to schedule the play off matches to take place before the AGM. The first leg will be at Ashley Wood on 6th November with the return two weeks late

Lyme Regis loss to the runaway leaders Christchurch (1-4) at home cost them promotion as they finished just one point adrift of Ashley Wood and Highcliffe. It put something of a dampener on the win at Cheddington Court that brought the first away point since 2005.

Cheddington Court failed to pick up an away point and, since 2005, have now managed just two draws from seventeen on the road. At home, the story has been much better with Lyme Regis becoming the first team to lower Cheddington's colours since 2006.

Defeat at home by Christchurch, wrecked **Sturminster Marshall's** bid to go through the season unbeaten at home for the first time since 2002. The two home wins against Ferndown Forest and Highcliffe were just enough to keep them off the bottom of the table as they lost all of their away matches for the sixth successive season – a run of twenty two matches.

It was a disappointing season for **Ferndown Forest** who had battled their way into Division Four in 2009, only to be relegated after just one year. The only points came from a 3.5-1.5 win at home against Ashley Wood but it proved a difficult season for them as their three home matches were to be against the teams that occupied the top three places at the end of the season. They also lost all three away matches and it was only the second time since 2002 that they had not managed, at least, one win on their travels.