

Hardy B League Report 2013

For a third successive season, the same three clubs – Bulbury, Isle of Purbeck and Sherborne - occupied the top three places in the Hardy League **First Division**. In 2011, Sherborne finished as champions, they were succeeded by Bulbury and, in 2013, Isle of Purbeck won a record (since 1988) sixth title. Bulbury made a strong start in defence of their championship but suffered a setback when they were beaten at home 3-2 by Sherborne. This was the second of three successive defeats and it needed a win against Meyrick Park in the final match to maintain their First Division status.

Going into the final fixture, Sherborne went to Isle of Purbeck with nine points to face an Isle of Purbeck side with eight. Sherborne needed a draw to regain the title but it was going to be a difficult task as Isle of Purbeck had not been beaten at home since 2005 and had dropped only three points in 31 matches at home since then. Sherborne came within half a point of becoming champions, going down by the narrowest of margin (3-2).

The other two teams in Division One were not disgraced and played their part in a really competitive season. A win at Sherborne in their final fixture could have handed Canford Magna the championship but a 3-2 defeat saw them eventually relegated on points difference. Two draws and a narrow defeat by Isle of Purbeck in the four home matches proved costly for Meyrick Park but, apart from a 5-0 defeat at Bulbury, they acquitted themselves well away from home and picked up a good point with a draw at Canford Magna.

Such was the competitive nature of this division three teams lost three matches and the other two four.

Crane Valley made an immediate return to the top flight from **Division Two**. They made a good start to the season, picking up nine points from the first five matches and, despite adding only one point from the last three matches (all away) they had done enough to secure top spot. Going up with them for 2014 would be Bridport, who were promoted for a third successive season, having last been in Division One in 1991. Although they conceded a home point to both Parkstone and Weymouth, they finished a third season unbeaten at home.

Parkstone retained their second division status by winning their last three fixtures-all at home- to overtake Rushmore in the last fixture of the season. Rushmore, who finished one point adrift of Parkstone, were left to rue the fact that they failed to collect an away point for the first time since 2009 and, having looked comfortable, picked up only one point from the last four fixtures.

An unusual feature for Weymouth was that they finished in last place, and suffered a second successive relegation, despite having a positive points difference. They lost to both Bridport and Crane Valley at home but picked up away points with by drawing the return at Bridport and earning a draw at Parkstone.

Knighton Heath began their battle towards regaining the Division status that they had held for so long and lost in 2010 by winning **Division Three**. Six wins in the first seven matches virtually assured them of the top spot. The second defeat came at Christchurch who secured a second successive promotion with a late run that saw them win the last three matches –all at home- to overtake Yeovil. Although Yeovil won all four home matches for a second successive season, it was their away form that let them down and a defeat at Dudsbury in the last match cost them promotion. Yeovil have won only one away match in the league since 2008. It was another bad year for Wareham in the league and the club were relegated for a second second season after giving up an eleven year run in the top flight in 2011. Four away defeats and a 2-3 home reverse against Knighton Heath proved to be their downfall. Also relegated were Dudsbury, the 2007 Hardy League champions. Like Yeovil and Wareham they lost all four away matches but also suffered heavy defeats at home (1-4) at the hands of Christchurch and Knighton Heath.

Ferndown Forest won all four home matches for the third successive year and this earned a second promotion, this time from **Division Four**. In addition, Ferndown Forest won at Dorset

and Came Down, the latter denying Came Down a possible promotion, and earned a draw at Ashley Wood as they were unbeaten in their last seven matches. Highcliffe were promoted alongside them as they went up for a second successive year to return to Division Three after a seven year absence.

The final fixture between Ashley Wood and Dorset was not fulfilled as both were destined to be relegated. For Ashley Wood it was a second successive relegation and Dorset, who stretched their away record to twelve consecutive defeats, will start 2014 in Division Five having been a Division One side as recently as 2008.

Canford School had finished bottom of **Division Five** in 2012, without a single win, but bounced back to top the division in 2013. The top three teams in the division won all four home matches but Canford School added wins at Lyme Regis and Sturminster Marshall and victory at Moors Valley enabled Queens Park to go up with them and it was Folke who missed out.

The Knock Out Cup Final featured Wareham and Bullbury. Wareham had three cup wins to their credit, in 1999, 2001 and 2006 and had been runners-up in 1990 and 1993. Bullbury had been in two finals – in 1994 and 2010- and had won them both. The two teams had only ever met once before in this competition, Wareham winning a quarter final tie in 2001.