

The **Back** Page

ONE OUT

**Paps heads
back to
Crawley**

ALEX FLISHER

**'He's far too
good for that
level ...'**

THE VAULT

**1980: Barry
Watling's
'Ice Boots'**

A BIG WEEK

**Slough and
Eastbourne
previews**



The Back Page is a new, independent news resource covering Maidstone United.

The team is a mixture of professional journalists, experienced amateurs and aspiring newcomers. We aim to offer previews, reports, features, rumours and more.

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The away end at the 2016 play-off final was almost a managers' convention. Future Maidstone boss Hakan Hayrettin had been working on the site that morning and he hung around so he could watch the game.

Mal Watkins, who was in charge for the final few months of the 2003-04 season, was also present, as was Steve Ward, who'd been Jay Saunders' assistant.

And when Didi Dumeka's equaliser went in, Barry Watling, in the blue coat and green jumper, third from the left here, was pictured celebrating by Steve Terrell, watching Maidstone against a rival he too had seen off, 36 years previously ...

The Vault, pages 10 and 11.

Angelic upstarts left cursing the woodwork

TONBRIDGE ANGELS 1
Korboa 67
MAIDSTONE UNITED 1
Moore 6
Attendance: 2,509 (700 away)

By Tom Rogers

Derby day ended disappointingly for the Stones, who were fortunate to escape Longmead with a point on Saturday afternoon.

After taking the lead early on through Deon Moore and controlling the opening exchanges, the hosts rallied, rattling the woodwork on numerous occasions and disrupting any rhythm we tried to get going. Though a point is not a satisfactory return, we deserved no more having been dominated for large parts of the second half.

George Elokobi fielded an unchanged side from the team that dismantled Ebbsfleet in midweek, sticking with a back three, whilst Alan Dunne made three changes to the side which lost 1-0 away to Chelmsford on Monday night.

Proceedings began positively when, six minutes in, a Riley Court free kick from just inside the Tonbridge half was nodded down by Foran and bundled goalward by Hamblin before eventually being forced over the line by Deon Moore's knee.

The scrappy nature of the goal set the tone for a game that was to be dominated by set pieces and mirrored the goal George Fowler had scored on our last visit to Tonbridge, early in last season's Boxing Day fixture.

Despite the early setback, the Angels settled into a clear pattern of play. Long balls into the area from set pieces and long passes that targeted Leo Hamblin at left centre-half proved to be a successful tactic.

Frankie Baker was sent clear by one of these balls, but a crucial interception inside the area from Jephthe Tanga hindered his progress enough to allow Harness to collect the ball.



Not entirely sure that's legal ...



... but Deon scores anyway



It was not long before we were scrambling defensively again, with former Stone Tom Leahy collecting the ball on the right-hand side and running at Hamblin, cutting in on his left foot and hitting the post. Harness was stranded and most likely unsighted by the bodies ahead of him, meaning there was nothing he could've done had the shot been curling on target.

Ricky Korboa, returning to the XI, stormed down the left as the half came toward its conclusion, putting a hopeful cross toward Tom Leahy who was coming in at the back post. The ball evaded Leahy and the Stones' defence alike, once more crashing off the woodwork as the ball looped over Harness. Tonbridge stuck to direct route one football and were incredibly unlucky not to go into the break level.

After the break Dunne introduced the veteran Scott Wagstaff, who managed the team towards the end of last season after Jay Saunders left for Folkestone, and top scorer Bunmi Babajide. The hosts started the half positively, with Ricky Korboa hitting the post yet again after cutting inside and striking towards goal.

By this stage the writing was on the wall: we were at panic stations and had lost all control over the game.

By this stage the writing was on the wall: we were at panic stations and had lost all control over the game. Tonbridge were set up well and had an effective game plan, while the introduction of Wagstaff provided some technical ability that had been lacking in the first half.

We were on the ropes and having been boxed in under an avalanche of attacks, the leveller eventually came on the 67th minute. Babajide picked the ball up in midfield and slotted through Wagstaff, who rounded Harness and dinked the ball to Korboa, giving him the simple job of tapping it into the empty net from a couple of yards out.

Mercifully, Wagstaff was injured just minutes later. In an incident which was like a poor man's version of what Sergio Ramos did to Mo Salah in the Champions League final a few years ago, Sam Corne collided with the midfielder, and they fell together with Corne seemingly injuring Wagstaff's shoulder in the process, forcing him off.

As a wise man once said, there's nothing worse in football than a snide, but whether this was accidental or slyly intentional, it turned the tide back in our favour. Tonbridge were forced to sit deeper and could only hit on the break, as they no longer had control of the midfield.



A home fan says something warm to Leo Hamblin.



The face you might get if you spill Taylor Foran's pint



Jamie Yila makes his debut in stoppage time

John Gilbert and Papadopoulos, who has since returned to Crawley, came on to bolster the attack, but a winner was not forthcoming. Kargbo, who caused havoc for Tonbridge in the home fixture, was not brought on at any stage, which was surprising as Mo Faal struggled to get involved.

His only real contribution was agitating the locals, falling easily under contact to win a few cheap fouls which earned him some insults from Tonbridge's finest youth at the end.

A draw wasn't a disaster as we could've easily lost, but it felt like more points had slipped away as we fell further outside the top seven.

The lack of control and how easily we gave up chances will be of great concern to George as we look ahead to Slough at home next weekend.



(Left) Neve Platt (Right) 1-0: The Stones celebrate Chi Madamombe's opening goal

Madamombe double sees
Stones coast into the semis

MAIDSTONE UNITED 5
Madamombe 1, 45+2
Kelsi Wilkinson 20,
Manktelow 56, Campbell 80
CHATHAM DEVELOPMENT 1
Molinari 39

By John Tully

On a gloomy, damp Sunday afternoon the Stones women showed how to take their chances, scoring five very good goals in a SECWEL League Cup quarter-final.

The game was barely a minute old when Chi Madamombe took a short pass in the box and turned the defender near the goal line before crossing into the Chatham goal with a neat finish.

Kelsi Wilkinson added the second on the 20th minute with a curling finish from just outside the box, but Chatham worked hard and got a goal back with a simple finish to a move that looked offside.

The Stones defence didn't play to the whistle and Aimee Molinari punished them by rolling the ball into an unguarded net.

Kelsi then hit the bar with a lob from distance before Chi restored their two goal lead on the stroke of half time, with a tap-in at the back post.



2-0. Kelsi Wilkinson's effort bamboozles the Chatham keeper.

Kylie added a fourth, 10 minutes into the second half, with a shot from 30 yards that the keeper will probably be disappointed to have let in by her near post.

Tori Campbell, a second half sub for Annie White, completed the scoring 10 minutes from the end with a blistering free kick from distance.

It was a fine win in front of a good crowd and it sees the Stones into the semi-finals.

Sunday (February 8th) sees Kings Hill visit for a league fixture, kick-off 3.15 pm. The Stones remain in second place, two points behind leaders Tonbridge Angels.



Kylie Manktelow embraces Wilkinson after the second



(Left) A civil disagreement after Chatham pull one back (Right) Campbell after scoring as a sub

The day Barry Watling put the boot into the Fleet

This is a story of a side from Stonebridge Road, Northfleet, making a journey to the County Town and getting beaten 3-0 because, frankly, they didn't fancy it. It's nothing new ...

MAIDSTONE UNITED 3
Woon 33, Daubney 61, 63
GRAVESEND & NORTHFLEET 0
Attendance: 1706

New Year's Day 1980, and as William Joel put it, "Ayatollah's in Iran, Russians in Afghanistan."

We Didn't Start The Fire only lasts for four minutes and 47 seconds, so Mr Joel didn't have time to expand on this, but if you're a fan of historical symmetry, yes, the Russians were getting their arses handed to them by supposedly weaker opponents.

And yes, there was a hostage crisis in Iran, which the UN Secretary General, Kurt Waldheim, was trying to mediate. Waldheim would later be outed as a suspected Nazi.

In the world of sport, Pakistan, captained by Kent's overseas star Asif Iqbal, were arguing with India but, (Gabriel Clarke voice over) the *real* story was unfolding at London Road, Maidstone, where a bitter Kent derby was about to take place in the newly-formed Alliance Premier League.

There are approximately 6,000 social media accounts dedicated to the "good old days" of football, when players made Sean Dyche look like Frank Spencer. These are almost all preferable to the revisionist bastards at Sky, but if there's one area where the game clearly *has* improved since the eighties, it's the playing surfaces.

Maidstone's old London Road ground had a terrible pitch that was frequently waterlogged and on New Year's Day 1980 a major argument broke out over whether the derby should go ahead.

Veteran *Kent Messenger* reporter Gordon Carpenter described the conditions as "Arctic" and wrote that Gravesend & Northfleet's manager



Barry Watling with the special "ice boots"

Tony Sitford had tried his hardest to get the game called off.

Maidstone were equally desperate to play, knowing they had a secret weapon: a set of boots custom built for quagmires, with multiple micro-studs on the soles.

It's possible the referee, Brian Daniels from Brentwood, was swayed by Jim Thompson's notorious powers of persuasion, but the match went ahead in front of London Road's biggest crowd of the season to date.

As Carpenter fittingly described it,



John Daubney, looking like a fourth musketeer

"Maidstone took a firm grip on the game from the start". The Fleet's star striker Phil Stonebridge, who once held the record for the number of goals scored by a Maidstone player in a single season, was described as "all at sea" and although Maidstone's Andy Woon missed two early chances it was a mere stay of execution.

On 33 minutes John Daubney broke down the right and with two Fleet defenders tangling with each other, Woon steered his cross into the far corner.



Join our facebook group

STONES:

Dickie Guy, Chris Kinnear, Kenny Hill, Graham Knight, Billy Edwards, Norman Fusco, Dave Wiltshire, Glenn Aitken, Frank Ovard, Andy Woon, John Daubney, (Sub Alan Budden).

It was 1-0 at half-time and, although Frank Ovard missed a sitter early in the second half, he set up two goals in two minutes just after the hour mark, leaving John Kennedy floundering on the left before crossing for Daubney to tap in.

Barely a minute later he broke down the right and, with multiple players struggling to find their feet, Daubney slammed in his second.

Maidstone probably should have had more. Daubney missed an easy chance for a hat-trick when he turned a Norman Fusco cross over the bar and Ovard might have had a penalty when he was brought down in the area by Fleet keeper Lee Smelt, although knowing Ovard's reputation this may have been less clear cut than the report implies.

Sitford continued to protest after the game but his opposite number, Barry Watling, had little sympathy, pointing out that Daubney, the game's star player, had been wearing ordinary boots.

Watling threw one final dagger. 'The game is all about commitment. We wanted to play and win. Gravesend just didn't want to know.'

"He was slipping and sliding about just as much as the Gravesend players," Watling told Carpenter. "And Chris Kinnear, who I thought had an outstanding game, wore a half-inch stud.

"The boots most of the lads were wearing were those we bought last season. They cost about £15 a pair and we purchased a dozen pairs. We used them just once, when we beat Harlow 3-0 in the FA Trophy and they had no complaints.

"The boots are not in general use, but the players know that if conditions become difficult they are available. We always take what we call the ice boots with us when the grounds start to get hard.

"I just feel that in any professional set-up, such as ours, you have to have the kit for all conditions. You wouldn't find a League club without



The Kent Messenger's report, with the brilliant Frank Ovard in full flow on the left wing

the right boots to wear on frozen grounds. They are nothing special – just part of our normal equipment."

Watling threw Carpenter one final dagger: "The game is all about commitment. We wanted to play and win. Gravesend just didn't want to know."

35 years later I interviewed Watling for Stones TV and later that season caught up with him again after the



Andy Woon, who scored Maidstone's opener, had also played for Gravesend

play-off final at Stonebridge Road. He hadn't watched Maidstone for a long time, but had been brought back into the fold by John Baxter of Britelite, the club's first shirt sponsors, after the club came home in 2012.

In one of Steve Terrell's pictures from that afternoon (see pages 4 and 5) you can see Watling celebrating Dumebi Dumeke's equaliser as enthusiastically as if he were still manager and after the game he gave me an expert analysis of what had just happened, highlighting the contribution made by James Rogers.

"We had some battles here," he reflected, standing in front of a main stand that hadn't apparently been altered in any way since his time as manager.

What else remains unchanged? The Russians are still getting their arses handed to them by supposedly weaker opponents, and a suspected Nazi is claiming he can solve the Iranian crisis.

The Pakistan and Indian cricket teams are still arguing and Maidstone are still beating Gravesend sides who struggle with our pitch.

As one final aside, on New Year's Day 1980, Pink Floyd were at number one with *Another Brick In The Wall*. A group called Fiddler's Dram were at three with *Day Trip To Bangor*. You don't get shit like that on Radio 1 any more, so in this area, at least, we've made progress.

Upcoming Commentaries

Slough Town (H) Sat 7 February 2026 @ 1500 – Fred Atkins & Alex del Valle

Eastbourne Borough (A) Tue 10 February 2026 @ 1945 – Chris Bechervaise & Darren Styles

Chippenham Town (A) Sat 14 February 2026 @ 1500 – Darren Styles & Sean Scurr

Chelmsford (A) Mon 16 February 2026 @ 1945 – Sean Scurr & Tom Rogers

Dorking Wanderers (H) Sat 21 February 2026 @ 1500 – Alan Thatcher & Nigel Seager

Enfield Town (H) Tue 24 February 2026 @ 1945 – Chris Bechervaise & Fred Atkins

Salisbury (A) Sat 28 February 2026 @ 1500 – Chris Bechervaise & Fred Atkins

Stones Live! has been providing radio commentaries of Maidstone United matches since the 2008 -09 season, way back when the club was a fraction of the size it is now, playing to crowds of 200 in Sittingbourne. Founded by Stones fan Chris Bechervaise, its audiences grew steadily at first and then rapidly when the club returned home after the end of its 24-year exile in 2012. The Back Page editor, Fred Atkins, is a regular commentator, as are a number of this publication's contributors.

It's run by volunteer supporters who have a background in professional broadcast radio and funded independently from the football club by volunteer donations or through sponsorship and advertising. Stones Live! is a not-for-profit service and any monies raised are put back into the radio station to pay for various broadcast licences and to renew worn or broken equipment.



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The Back Page

With **STEVE WATT** slightly under the weather this week, an alternative legend has stepped in to fill the void ... please welcome our guest columnist **ALEX FLISHER** to The Back Page

Gone Flishing!

The goal that emptied the Racecourse Ground: Alex puts Maidstone 3-1 ahead against Wrexham in 2017.



'I'd back myself to score 20 a season ...'

First of all, what are you up to and how are you enjoying retirement?

Well I obviously miss playing but I've sort of got over it by coaching. My son Louie is in the under-9s team at Maidstone and I've been coaching them for three seasons. I've also started coaching an elite development side with Jim Bodle. I played with both him and his twin brother, Ant, when they were at Maidstone and Tom Parkinson's eldest is in the same side as my youngest, Oliver, so it is a bit like a mini-reunion when we get together on Saturdays.

You always gave the impression of being a tight-knit squad, are you still in touch with everyone?

I spoke to Steve (Watt) today when I heard he was unwell, and I talk to Frannie quite a lot. My wife and I have been on holiday with him and his wife quite a few times. Alex Brown's also in regular contact and there are quite a few who live near us. Now we have kids, so we quite often see each other and reminisce.

You were in an almost unique position in that, alongside Tom Mills, you were with the club when it was really just another non-league side with 200 fans. Then it turned into this juggernaut. Do you ever reflect on how quickly it happened?

Yeah, I saw Ben Austen, who does the club's socials, while coaching and we ended up having a 45-minute chat about the old times. Then I saw

Oliver (Ash) on Tuesday night at the Ebbsfleet game and I was telling him that my kids have seen YouTube videos of what the ground used to be like when it first opened. They were asking: "where's the big stand?" And obviously the main stand wasn't as long as it is now.

Funnily enough Louie's under-9 team were playing Bredhurst on Saturday and their ground was behind the pitch at Sittingbourne where we used to play. It looks like an absolute dive at the moment. I think someone's playing on our old pitch but I'm not sure, although I played for Sittingbourne for six months towards the end of my career. They're at Woodstock Park now, which isn't a bad little set up.

To go to the other end of the scale, have you seen Welcome to Wrexham?

The first season, yes.

The reason I ask is because I can remember you scoring there twice: the first was in the FA Cup, but the second one was when we won 3-1 in the league and when you scored the third the ground just started to empty. Were you aware of how demoralised you'd made them?

I think we were more caught up in the euphoria of the moment. I'd started that season really well and had scored quite a few goals, but I got injured away at Torquay and from that point onwards I didn't score until that game.

We'd also been on a really bad run, I think we went nearly 20 games without a win, but we signed players like Stuart Lewis and Joe Pigott and after beating Sutton we went on a run and ended up beating a lot of teams.

I'd had a few niggles and hadn't scored since October. Before the Wrexham game Jay told me he wanted me to play in centre midfield.

He told me he knew I could do it, but that it would be slightly different to when I'd played there before in the Ryman Premier and National South. I just thought I'd take it as it comes and even if I ran around like a headless chicken for 90 minutes, I'd try my best.

As it turned out I set up Joe Pigott's goal, when I blocked a clearance, chased it down and squared it to him. I think I played a one-two with Jamar Loza for the second and then I scored the header, although I'm pretty sure that was my last goal for Maidstone.

It feels like Wrexham are on a different planet now.

If you laid out all the money that Wrexham have spent getting where they are on a table it would show what a massive, massive gulf there is between the National League and the South.

I see the stick Terry and Oliver get on Twitter and I think it's quite unjustified. There's a limit to how much anyone can put in, and they've got to a point where they want someone to pick up the baton. But if you look at some of the teams we played 10 years ago, even then there was a massive contrast. Ben reminded me I'd scored at Tranmere and weren't they in the Championship?



One of the great, late winners at JWW - a stoppage time strike against Gosport in 2016

They were in the League Cup final in the year 2000.

Right. And if you go back to that era Maidstone were still at Sittingbourne, playing on the dog track. People forget how far Maidstone came. And without that massive, massive input of money, it's hard to push on further.

It feels like the impact of the money is filtering even further down now.

I was at the Dover game because Louie was nagging me to take him and the boys from his team go quite often. Being honest, that was quite a dull game, and I had to tell them it was usually a bit more exciting, but I go to watch my brother (Sam) at Bearsted and Frannie's still at Faversham so I know there are people, even in the SCEFL league, who are earning more than I was when I was at Maidstone.

"Would the best part-time players in the area beat your average National South side? I think they'd demolish them ..."

If someone at that level is getting £400 a week, they'll want £800 to £1000 to play for Maidstone now. Apart from Ebbsfleet, I don't think anyone in the South was paying anything like that when I was at that level. When Watty and I were at Hythe, he wouldn't necessarily object to paying money for someone who was worth it, but players were saying they wanted X per week and they weren't worth that.

Is it diluting the standard?

The conversation I always have with Steve is, would the best part-time players in the area beat your average National South side? And I think they'd demolish them. Players are dropping levels because they have kids to look after and mortgages to pay and so I do think the standard in the South has dropped.

I spoke to Tom Parkinson, who was at Tonbridge with Jay and is now with him at Folkestone, and he thinks it's nowhere near the standard it was before. I'm not being a dinosaur and saying our Maidstone team would have beaten this one, because there are pluses and minuses to everything, but I played with Charlie Sheringham at Dartford and he's now playing for Snodland. He's far too good for that level, but everyone in non-league knows he's earning a lot of money.

If you were in your prime, how would you do at this level now?

I'd back myself to score 20 goals a season. You look at Deon Moore's goal against Ebbsfleet: it was just one punt upfield and he slotted it through against the goalie. I don't ever remember, when I was playing in National South, it being that easy to score a goal, especially against Ebbsfleet. The derby games were a lot harder and as I was saying to Oliver, it baffles me that this Ebbsfleet side are in the play-offs.

One last question. Steve calls, says he's got another job and wants to put the band back together. What do you say?

Yes, without a doubt. I was sceptical when he asked me to join Hythe because I didn't watch a game for a year after I stopped playing. I was enjoying my Saturdays off and I didn't want to miss playing again, but then he signed my brother and when I went to watch he asked if I'd be his assistant. He just kept asking and my wife, George, in the end said "why not try it? Because you're bound to learn something."

At that point I decided to give it a go and I would say to anyone that tactically he is one of the best managers and coaches I've ever stood next to. He sees things at the click of a finger, so without a doubt, I'd go straight back with him.

We didn't start the fire, but then neither did he

By Tom Rogers

A busy February could make or break our promotion hopes. A total of twenty-one points is on offer across the month, with a game every Saturday and Tuesday for the next five weeks, continuing with the visit of Slough this Saturday and a trip to Eastbourne on the following Tuesday evening.

To call them 'must win' is a tad dramatic, but it's hard to see anything other than two wins as acceptable.

Both Slough and Eastbourne are struggling and have already been dispatched comfortably this season, although the side which boasts the biggest trading estate in Europe have picked up recently, battering a beleaguered Chelmsford 5-0 at the weekend.

Eastbourne, by contrast, are six without a win and looked near certainties for the drop now.

The Rebels, led by player-manager Scott Davies, sit 17th and six points clear of the drop. Avoiding the drop comfortably is no doubt the objective and they look set to succeed in that, with a recent run of five wins in their last seven pulling them away from danger.

Our last game against Slough was a comfortable win, with John Gilbert scored twice against his former club. We ran away 4-1 winners in one of our best showings of the campaign.

Davies scored a trademark free-kick, but at no stage did we look likely to drop any points.

Reiss Greenidge is on the books at Slough but is surprisingly finding minutes hard to come by. The Guyana international is out of favour, having spent the last three league games on the bench without featuring at all.

When fit, Greenidge was a key part of our backline for two and a half seasons, making his recent downturn in form a real surprise.

Their two danger men are Wiktor Makowski, who's scored



Reiss Greenidge, now with Slough, during the second-half rearguard action at Portman Road

thirteen times this season, and Ruben Shakpoke, who's made a positive impact since joining from Welling earlier this season.

Shakpoke played a few games for us at the backend of last season, though his spell was forgettable. He is likely to miss this game though, having sat out the Chelmsford game after being injured against Tonbridge the week before.

*

Eastbourne are clearly in need of a motivational speaker. Somebody who can rally the troops as they are surprisingly slumped down the bottom of the table.

I strongly suggest they shell out and bring back Sanyika 'The Firestarter' Street, whose powerful words helped the Sports in their 2-1 play-off semi final defeat last season..

The 'ALL-IN CEO' (he has a lot of self-



Ruben Shakpoke, now with Slough, during the 1-0 defeat at Priory Lane last season

given nicknames) has an Instagram [bio](#) that reads: "Teach high performance married men that a strong man is a safe man".

For any readers struggling with your spouses, I'd fully recommend a visit to [Sanyika's Instagram](#), where truth bombs such as 'You're not keeping the peace, you're training her to disrespect you' and 'You didn't get unappreciated, you trained her that way'.

This will no doubt give you a fresh perspective on your ailing relationship, and definitely won't make her think you've gone the full Andrew Tate.

This aside, Eastbourne's failings this season are a surprise. They've splashed the cash, released a documentary about last season and persistently stated their aim of promotion.

"This advice definitely won't make your spouse think you've gone the full Andrew Tate ..."

Yet they sit second bottom and we swept them aside 3-0 earlier in the season.

Former Stones Tayt Trusty, Harry Phipps and Gold Omatayo all play their Football in Eastbourne now, but I will be impressed beyond belief if anybody else recalls Phipps' goal at Forest Green in 2017, or Omatayo's tap in against Barnet in the dismal Wheeler days.

David Sesay was plucked from the south coast during the summer and, despite not being a regular toward the end of the season for Borough, he has been a solid addition for us in defence.

In terms of team news, the forgotten man Jamie Yila is fit, whilst Carvalho was sprinting on the pitch before Tonbridge so cannot be far from a return to action.

Antony Papadopoulos has posted pictures back in training at Crawley and has apparently gone for good, whilst Golding and Lexus continue their extended period on the sidelines.

We sit four points off Hemel after their draw with Ebbsfleet on Tuesday. Winning both these games is of huge importance.



Maidstone-boy Harry Phipps, scoring the equaliser in a 2-2 draw at Forest Green in 2017



Tayt Trusty, also at Eastbourne last year



Gold striking gold at Barnet in 2018



THE SPITFIRE



Launching in March 2026

A new media outlet dedicated to independent coverage of Kent Cricket is coming in 2026.

The Spitfire will be run by Fred Atkins, who has followed Kent since the early 90s and has covered them for the ECB and Wisden since 2021.

Expect expert storytelling, colourful matchday writing, insightful analysis and in-depth interviews, as The Spitfire takes coverage of the club to new heights.

Everyone who signs up to the site's mailing list prior to launch will get a special discount on membership.

The site, which offers a modern reader experience and a commitment to zero intrusive advertising, will be up and running in March.

The Spitfire is the eighth county cricket outlet to be

confirmed on CounterPress ahead of the 2026 season, as part of a wide-reaching project designed to revitalise written digital coverage of our domestic summer sport.

Other outlets announced so far include The Hawk (Hampshire), The Rey (Surrey), Lanky Lanky (Lancashire), Up The Middle (Middlesex), From The Sea End (Sussex), Cider Press (Somerset) and The Chester (Durham). Further sites are still to be released.

CounterPress co-founder Sam Morshead said: "The Spitfire promises to be the go-to place for proper cricket writing on events at Canterbury and Beckenham."

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Walking Football – Stay Active, Stay Healthy!

Walking football is a fast-growing sport designed for people in later life. It's a fun, social way to keep fit while enjoying the beautiful game at a gentler pace. Regular participation can help reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and stroke, improve blood pressure and resting heart rate, and lower cholesterol – all key indicators of good health..

Our walking football programme is **open to all regardless of footballing ability**. Our programme is focussed on **using sport inclusively** to help **improve physical and mental wellbeing**. For the more competitive we have teams for +50's, +60's and +65s playing in the Kent league. If that floats your boat then dust off your boots and come along.



Scan the QR code opposite to register and then pop along to a session at the YMCA.

Fridays 18:45 - 20:30

Venue: YMCA Centre Melrose Close, Cripple Street, Maidstone ME15 6BD

stonesinthecommunity.org




CONFERENCE SOUTH TO LEAGUE TWO = PROGRESS

TRIPLE-A TO TOKYO = MADNESS

PACIFIC SWINGS

パシフィック・スイングス | 퍼시픽 스윙스

WATCH EPISODES



BASEBALL STORIES THAT CROSS OCEANS, CULTURES, AND SANITY CHECKS

MAIDSTONE UNITED
2025/26 SQUAD

M



George
ELOKOBİ
Manager

1



Nathan
HARNES
Goalkeeper

13



Lenny
HOLDEN
Goalkeeper

2



David
SESAY
Defender

3



Leo
HAMBLIN
Defender

4



Lexus
BEEDEN
Defender

5



George
FOWLER
Defender

6



Thomas-James
BRAMBLE
Midfielder

7



Jephthe
TANGA
Midfielder

8



Sam
CORNE
Midfielder

9



Deon
MOORE
Forward

10



John
GILBERT
Midfielder

11



Jamie
YILA
Midfielder

12



Dajon
GOLDING
Forward

15



David
AGBONTOHOMA
Defender

17



Riley
COURT
Midfielder

19



Ruben
CARVALHO
Midfielder

20



Antony
PAPADOPOULOS
Midfielder

21



Malachi
MBOGBA
Midfielder

22



Muhammadu
FAAL
Forward

23



Hamzad
KARGBO
Forward

24



Taylor
FORAN
Defender

30



Christopher
SWIFT
Goalkeeper

Designed by MAIDSTONE UNITED SUPPORTERS CLUB IN VIETNAM

Seeing red: Part 2

The second half of our two-part special on the red mist concerns players who've been sent off while playing **against** us ...



1) Name the two Charlton players sent off for fighting each other when we drew 1-1 at The Valley in the FA Cup in 1979.

2) He was a prolific striker for Sutton, so we signed him. He wasn't a prolific striker for us, so he went back to Sutton. And on Boxing Day 1986 he was sent off while playing for Sutton at London Road. Who is he?

3) Our first ever game at "Pitch One" Sittingbourne was at the end of the 2000-01 season. Mal Watkins was headbutted but the referee missed the incident, so he asked his attacker: "Is that all you've got?" He was butted again and this time the ref saw it – who were the opponents?

4) Which player, who later became a successful non-league manager in Kent, got sent off three times in four games against us for Lydd Town during the 2000-01 season?

5) Which central defender was shown a straight red for bringing down Alex Tiesse when we beat Dover 4-2 at "The" Crabble in 2007?



6) Which Football League team had two players sent off against us in an FA Cup tie at JWW in 2015, but still won 1-0?

7) Which manager walked right across the middle of the pitch at JWW after being sent off against us in the 2015-16 season?

8) Which side had goalkeeper Manny Smith sent off against us in August 2017, only for sub Christian Dibble to come on and immediately save Joe Pigott's penalty?

9) Which side had two players sent off against us after we came from 2-0 down to win 3-2 against them at JWW in 2021-22? One before and one after the final whistle.

10) Which Bath City keeper had his red card overturned on appeal after he was sent off for DOGSO in an incident with Deon Moore earlier this season.



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Answers to Edition 24: Seeing red part 1

1) Three players, Jason Lillis, Dave Madden and Nicky Johns, were sent off for Maidstone away to which Division 4 side in 1991?
Northampton Town.

2) Karl Elsey saw red for what TVS described as an "injudicious" challenge in the League Cup in 1990. Which London side were we playing?
Leyton Orient.

3) Which striker was shown red in an Inter-Regional Challenge Cup game with AFC Lewisham in 2000-01, starting a mass brawl in the process?
Richard Monks.

4) Which Northern Irish midfielder was shown two yellow cards in the space of two minutes on his home debut for Maidstone at Bourne Park, against AFC Wimbledon in 2007-08?
Conor Hagan.

5) Which elbowtastic Maidstone player was sent off for giving his opponent a suspected broken nose when we played Burgess Hill at Worthing in 2006-07?
Nick Barnes.

6) Which Maidstone player was shown a second yellow for taking a quick free-kick at Hornchurch in March 2014, prompting Jay Saunders to call the decision "a disgrace".
Michael Phillips.

7) Which of his team mates had already been sent off in the same fixture?
Alex Flisher.

8) Against which Suffolk side was Steve Watt shown a red card for a one-footed two-footed tackle in 2015?
Leiston.

9) Which Stones midfielder was sent off, twice, at Hungerford in 2021-22, prompting Hakan Hayrettin to say: "What else can we do with these people? Let them fine me. Absolutely disgraceful."
Regan Booty.

10) Charlie Seaman was sent off in the play-off semi-final at Eastbourne in 2025, but which player was dismissed in the league fixture at Priory Lane last season, due to the performative outrage of their players and staff?
Raphe Brown.



The independent source for Maidstone United news: Edition 25 (February 6th 2026)

We all saw that coming

Insta messages, non-league books and faking it like a pro

By Fred Atkins

PAPS YER LOT

It wasn't a surprise when Antony Papadopoulos resurfaced at Crawley this week. It was rumoured he was offered a deal that would have made him one of our highest-paid players before Christmas, but radio silence followed and the budget went on the Mo Faal deal instead.

The contrast with Taylor Foran, who seemed delighted to convert his loan deal into a "permanent" one was clear and the writing was on the wall by the time of the Ebbsfleet game in the league last week, when he was left on the bench while Tanga played right midfield and David Sesay played on the left.

Earlier this week his availability was being circulated by Crawley. He may not have buttered as many parsnips as he did in his first spell with us, but we'll miss him. That said, I personally won't miss the bi-weekly Insta messages asking me to sign up to his baller diet and trying to flog me Creatine. Mate, I'm 52.

WHEN DEALS GO BAD

In fairness to Paps, he was never a badge-kisser. We wish him well when he's not playing against us and he will undoubtedly get an offer somewhere else, although whether it's as good as the one we made him remains to be seen.

One of the more insightful books on non-league football in the past few years was *Journeyman* by Ben Smith, who played for Hereford, Yeovil and Crawley among others. His brutal honesty could make him unpopular with team mates, some of whom felt he was too ready to offer advice when it wasn't always wanted, but it does make for a decent read.

He doesn't flinch when talking about Steve Evans' managerial style, or about the mistakes he made when negotiating his contracts. Thinking he'd do better elsewhere, he rejected more than one offer, only to return, cap in hand, to find the



Papadopoulos's final act in a Maidstone shirt? No surprise he's off. No surprise we found out on Instagram.

deal he'd rejected was no longer on the table, forcing him to take a pay cut. For Paps' sake, let's hope he had something lined up. *Kali Tuxi, Adonis.*

CARCINOGENIC TITLE

Equally insightful about the non-league game was an anonymous book with the even less flinching title: *I Hope You Die of Cancer*, co-written with Marvin Close and published in 2022. The reviewer from Philosophy Football said it was a "really bad choice for a title," before adding that this shouldn't obscure its brilliance.

I wouldn't have gone quite that far, but it was fun trying to work out who the author was and very revealing about the absurd distances some players commute at this level, Yorkshire to Bishop's Stortford being one example.

As for the title, a former Southern League player once told me this was pretty much what a former Maidstone manager had said to him, after treading on his head during a midweek game around a quarter of a century ago. We'll leave you to guess who that was.

THE KENT FOOTBALL FAMILY

Lastly for this week, remember Alan Green? Back in 2006 "Greenie" was triggered when Andy Murray, then just 18 years of age, joked that he would be supporting: "anyone but England" in the World Cup, leaving the hyperbolic Ulsterman stunned that a Scotsman wouldn't want England to win at football.

At a rough guess, the number of Scots who'd want Harry Kane to lift the trophy in New York next summer is probably outnumbered 100 to one by those who'd gladly see him shot in the face by a morbidly obese ICE agent in combat trousers.

In the less febrile local media, there's still a perception that we should all like to see the Kent "family" do well. Yet only two of the National South's scheduled fixtures survived the weather on Tuesday night and both Dover and Gravesend & Northfleet blew 2-0 leads.

The Whites ended up losing 3-2 to Torquay and the Fleet shipped an equaliser deep into stoppage time to Hemel. This was (*engages badge-kisser mode*) a terrible shame.