

The Back Page

Takeover latest

Deadline for bids looms and the Stones' owners have four clear choices

Steve Watt

"There are some clubs where I wouldn't even bother applying for the manager's job ..."

PLUS: – Chippenham and Chelmsford reports
– Takeovers from hell
– Dorking and Enfield previews
– The Stones Quiz: We'll never play you again

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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We'll never play you again - part 1



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George Elokobi must have seen something out of the corner of his eye when he broke off his post-match conversation with Ruben Carvalho to point something out. Whatever it was, it looked serious ...
Tom Rogers' report, pages 10 and 11 ...

What next? The four options for the Stones

By Fred Atkins

Around ten years ago I did an interview with Terry Casey and Oliver Ash for *Stones TV* in which I asked them: Do you think you'll still be here in ten years time?

"Will we be dead, do you mean?" Casey replied, before I had a chance to reword the question slightly less cretinously, but everyone seemed to see the funny side (I think ...).

What I'd meant to ask, in a significantly less clumsy way, was whether they'd still be at the club. At the time we were coming off the back of two promotions in three years, the ground was under four years old and the landscape in National South looked very different.

We were also the best supported team in the division, with an average gate that was almost double that of our closest rivals, Dartford. (2,222 to 1,120).

This gave us a huge competitive advantage over every other club in the division, bar Ebbsfleet. We were also the only side to have reached the Football League and one of only seven to have played at the level above.



Empty seats at a play-off semi-final?
Alex Flisher scores at Truro's old ground to make it 2-0.

A decade later and much of that advantage has gone. Our average gate is pretty much the same at 2,117, but we're now the third best-supported side in the division, behind Torquay and Worthing.

The worst-supported side in the league are Hemel, whose 652 would have been the ninth-highest ten years ago.

While gates are up almost everywhere, player wages have rocketed out of all proportion, with private "investors" lured

by the chance of getting to the Football League. (Of the class of '16, so far only Sutton have made it into the 92.)

Supporter expectation has also soared. There are two other ex Football League teams (Torquay and Dagenham) in the South this year and 11 others have played at a higher level, meaning all have fans who want to get back to "where they belong". Our fan base is no exception and both Ash and Casey have borne the brunt of supporter disgruntlement. >

"It's no secret that both now want to sell up and we're told by very reliable sources that the deadline for bids is imminent ..."



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Terry Casey, Oliver Ash and Bill Williams in 2015, after promotion to National South had been sealed

< It's no secret that both now want to sell up and we're told by very reliable sources that the deadline for bids is imminent. As things stand, there are four options.

1) The club is sold outright to the preferred bidder. Ash and Casey would run the club till the end of the present season with a formal hand over taking place at some stage.

2) The club is sold, but Ash and Casey retain ownership of the stadium and the land, leasing the ground to the new owner or owners. This would reduce the price, potentially making it more attractive to buyers, while offering security to fans, although the owners are aware that similar models have had mixed results in the past.

3) If no overall deal can be done, a percentage could be sold.

4) The status quo. We're told this is only a short-term option. If no deal can be done, Ash and Casey will continue running the club until a buyer can be found.

There are several interested parties, including local businessmen. The owners will be "guided by the market" as to the price. Expect more news in a fortnight or so ...

Running a National South club hasn't got any easier in the last decade. Here's a look at how our rivals have fared since 2015-16.

Champions: Sutton United

Knocked Leeds out of the FA Cup the following year before losing to Arsenal in the fifth round. Won the National League in 2021-22 and had to rip up their 3G pitch. Relegated after three seasons in the EFL. Now back in the National League and battling relegation.

2: Ebbsfleet United. Then able to blow every other side out of the water, but paying a striker £2,200 a week no longer seems unusual at this level. Promoted in 2016-17 and lost a play-off semi-final to Tranmere the following year. Two relegations, one promotion and around £20 million later, they're currently fourth in the south.

3: Maidstone United. Mid-table in the south after two promotions, two

relegations and the FA Cup fifth round. You know this already of course ...

4: Truro City. Losing play-off semi-finalists for two years in a row, they were relegated to the Southern League in 2020 and forced to groundshare before moving in to a new ground in 2024. Won two promotions in three seasons but are eight points from safety in the National League.

5: Whitehawk. Defeated in the play-offs by Ebbsfleet, in June 2017 their co-owner Chris Gargan was jailed for racially abusing a pregnant 24-year-old in a pub. Without his backing they dropped into the Isthmian South East, although they are now back in the Ryman Premier and currently 10th.

6: Hemel Hempstead. Now seventh and remarkably consistent, with one play-off appearance and one relegation scare in the last ten years.

7: Maidenhead United. Defied expectations by staying in the National League for eight seasons, but almost all of them were spent battling

relegation and they finally succumbed last year.

8: Dartford. Freshly relegated in 2016, Dartford somehow failed in five play-off appearances before being relegated to the Isthmian Premier. Also lost last season's play-off final to Dover.

9: Gosport Borough. Probably punching above their weight, Gosport were relegated in successive seasons and have been in the Southern League Premier South ever since. Currently challenging for the play-offs.

10: Concord Rangers. Definitely punching above their weight, Concord are now mid-table in Isthmian North after suffering successive relegations a couple of years ago.

11: Bishop's Cleeve. As southern sides kept climbing the pyramid while northerners kept getting relegated, Stortford ended up in National North in 2023-24. Bowed by insane logistics, they finished rock bottom and are now 14th in Southern Premier Central.

12: Oxford City. Also geographically compromised and with only meagre support, City won the South play-offs in 2022-23 only to finish rock bottom of the National League. Now in danger of being relegated from National North.

13: Wealdstone. One of very few sides to be better off now than they were a decade ago, Wealdstone were top of the south when the pandemic arrived and duly promoted. They've had a couple of scrapes since, but are six points clear of trouble at present.

14: Bath City. Like Hemel, Bath have spent the entire decade at this level. They've made the play-offs three times but have also had a couple of near misses and are currently hovering a point above the drop zone.

15: Chelmsford City. Another side to have been ever-present in the South. They were leading the 2017 play-off final against Ebbsfleet but lost to ten men. Four play-off appearances since, but they've never reached a final and were lucky not to be relegated when they came 19th out of 21 in 2021-22.

16: Weston-super-Mare. Relegated to the Southern League in 2019, they bounced back after four seasons and gave us a scare in the race for the play-offs last year. Gates have doubled and they've clearly found some backing. Currently sixth in National South.

17: Eastbourne Borough. Struggled in the bottom half of the division for several seasons, but managed two play-off appearances in 2021-22 and last year. Now, frankly, a basket case. (See page 26).

18: St. Albans City. An 11-year spell in the south came to an end last season. Lost the 2023 play-off final to Oxford, now mid-table in the Isthmian Premier.

19: Margate. Another basket case, who spent huge sums to get into National South in a half-demolished ground. Twice relegated and now languishing in Isthmian South east, where they're unlikely to make the play-offs.

20: Havant & Waterlooville. Endured maybe the most volatile decade of any of the class of 2015-16. Relegated to the Southern League, they won back to back titles, only to get relegated again after a single season in the National League. Another side who probably regret handing a promotion budget to Steve King, they were relegated again in 2023-24 and are six points off the play-offs in Southern Premier South.

21: Hayes & Yeading United. Then groundsharing with Maidenhead and subsisting on an average gate of 169, they have at least got a new ground (used as the training ground in Ted Lasso) but are two levels lower in Isthmian South Central and eight points off the play-offs.

22: Basingstoke Town. Huge but never fulfilled potential. Evicted from their Camrose Ground in 2019 they had to groundshare with Winchester and are currently playing on a local FA pitch in Winklebury. Dropped two levels but now back in the Southern Premier South and currently 14th.

Parsons delivers the bitterest sermon

CHIPPENHAM TOWN 1
Parsons 90+6
MAIDSTONE UNITED 0
Attendance: 637
(unsegregated)

The first time we went to Chippenham, we won, 2-0 in the FA Cup, back in 2015. A home supporter told us he hoped we'd die in a coach crash on the way home.

We didn't but it always seems like the National South equivalent of Stoke, a place where it still feels properly non-league.

Our record there wasn't that bad going into Saturday: we'd drawn 0-0 there last year and had won on our other two league visits.

And yet ... who actually felt confident? Especially after Tuesday night's second-half capitulation at Eastbourne, which occurred at exactly the same time Chippenham were beating Torquay. One side went into this game full of belief and it wasn't us.

There's a school of thought that says this was lost by fine margins and there's some truth in that, but against a side in the relegation zone, just how fine should these margins be?

* They had an early attack thwarted by an offside flag before Gilbert flashed an effort across the goal. Yila then played in Faal, who forced a relatively comfortable save from the home keeper.

Foran blocked a shot at the other end and, before we knew it, it was time for the "keep pushing lads" half-time update, complete with the elbow emoji.

Midway through the second half it looked as though we'd gone in front with a goal almost identical to the one that gave us the lead against Slough a week earlier.

Corne miscued a shot outside the area and Gilbert steered it into the net, only for the offside flag to go up. And without getting too



Faal forces a first-half save.



Harness crunches Foran and Bramble as he gathers a cross.

"Farnborough admin" about it, if you freeze the highlights at exactly the right point (2:57) it does look as though Gilbert was probably level with the last defender and the body language suggests the keeper appealed in hope rather than optimism.

We weren't hopeless: Riley Court produced a nice weaving run only to see his shot blocked and Hamblin missed by inches with a drive from outside the box.

But with every minute that went by, a Chippenham winner looked more likely and the conclusion was like the slowly unfolding end to a horror movie.

Chukwu headed a Wanjau-Smith cross against the post when it looked easier to score and in stoppage time we conceded a long throw.

Bramble got to it first, but could only head it to Touray. He steered it straight back into the danger area and a split second was all Parsons needed to put it through Foran's legs and into the bottom corner.

* **George's post-match interview put me in mind of Graham Taylor saying: "They've done everything we told them not to do," during England's infamous defeat in Norway in 1993.**

George's post-match interview put me in mind of Graham Taylor saying: "They've done everything we told them not to do," during England's infamous defeat in Norway in 1993.

"We were talking about clearing our lines, and there were two moments we had, towards the end where the two players didn't do the basics," he said.

"It we're going to be clearing the ball, we want to keep it away from the central areas, because that's where they've got bodies, but we kept it in the central areas and then the ball went in behind.

"I think the call was to see it out, but we decided to clear it into an area where we know they've got a long throw. And then we've not managed to defend the first and the second phase and you pay the price when you don't do that and there's drop balls inside your 18 stroke six-yard box."

Asked if nerves were playing a part, he agreed. "I can give you the exact calculations: from the last 25 minutes of games, we've lost 14 points and you can make this 17 now," he said. "It's been five hundred and twenty something days since we've come from behind to win a football match."



Deon Moore, about to make a painful landing, in more than one sense.



Henry stops one right on the line.



Faal looks how we feel.

It's raining ... ridiculous CP company hats?

CHELMSFORD CITY 1
Taylor 59
MAIDSTONE UNITED 1
Carvalho 90+5
Attendance:
1,850 (unsegregated)

It isn't over until the Fat Lady sings, but the Weather Girls are warming up their vocal cords. A stoppage time Ruben Carvalho strike spared our blushes and rescued an undeserved point from the Melbourne Stadium on Monday night as our season survived by the skin of its teeth.

The evening started as it intended to go on when myself, my fellow commentator Sean and our social media admin Ben became embroiled in an intense negotiation with the sharp minds stewarding the game over whether Ben could set up his laptop in the away directors' box to update the club's Twitter feed.

Despite the fact he was wearing a club jacket, obviously had a laptop and there was no space in the microscopic press box, securing a seat in there was akin to getting into the Pentagon.

It took three stewards, all staring blankly at one another and debating this seemingly massive decision before Ben was finally granted permission to sit in a directors' box we were never going to fill. I'd assume it was their first day on Earth, let alone their first day at a Stadium by the way they handled things, which was a sign of things to come.

Then, in a moment straight out of Little Britain, one of Chelmsford's media assistants rushed up to the press box to warn of a call from the police that there would be 'yoof' coming to cause trouble as it was half-term and that they should post a reminder of the stadium behaviour code to prevent any trouble.

Chelmsford has since announced all remaining games will be segregated off the back



1-0. Taylor stabs in the opener.

of trouble in the second half, so the code clearly did not have the desired effect.

Unfortunately, the game started and we were forced to watch a team devoid of confidence, in an unfamiliar system, scramble around for ninety minutes. Faal has struggled since his return, partially due to lack of fitness, however playing our only proven goalscorer off the left-hand side and forcing him to drop back to defend was peculiar.

Gilbert played more centrally next to Kargbo and, perhaps unsurprisingly, our midfield never got going as the coalition of Bramble and Court struggled to get any control.

Chelmsford had the better of the proceedings, making the best of the heavy pitch. The first flash point came after half an hour, when Lyle Taylor was booked for a flailing arm on Leo Hamblin at a corner.



The cast of Police Interceptors arrive to deal with some asbos. "Monday" as it's known in Essex.

Chances rained down on the Maidstone goal, with Jett Murphy heading wide from a cross in by Sonnie Davis. Jason Adigun, who was busy throughout, then fired over after a sighter from the edge of the box. Taylor was involved again, playing the ball over to Barbrook, who should have scored but was denied by Harness.

The deadlock was finally broken just before the hour. Adigun weaved his way through the Maidstone penalty area before sliding it across to Taylor, leaving the ex-Charlton man with the simple job of poking it home. The only surprise was it took so long to come.

"None of them truly want a fight, none of them really want to watch the game. They just need a reason to justify leaving the house in fake Stone Island jackets ..."

The second half was marred by the overzealous Essex 'yoof' looking to have some handbags with our 'yoof' behind the goal we attacked. The trouble looked to have been gotten under control when an impromptu segregation was formed by the security.

GCSE students looking toward non-league as an excuse to cosplay Pete Dunham is part and parcel of many games now.

None of them truly want a fight, none of them really want to watch the game, they just need a reason to justify leaving the house in fake Stone Island jackets, Burberry scarves and those ridiculous C.P Company hats with the plastic eye cut outs.

The equalizer came deep into stoppage time. Faal found space close to the byline inside the Claret's box, and his resulting ball broke kindly for Carvalho, who stabbed home. We had knocked gently on the door in the latter stages, but a point was flattering.

This game felt more like Chelmsford throwing away their season than us saving ours, because they should have put us away long before Carvalho found himself poking home the leveller.



Faal gets round the back ...



Carvalho steers in the equaliser ...



... and everyone celebrates!

Upcoming Commentaries

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

Weston Super Mare (H) Tue 3 March 2026 @ 1945 – Darren Styles & Nigel Seager

Maidenhead United (A) Sat 7 March 2026 @ 1500 – Chris Bechervaise & Darren Styles

Dagenham & Redbridge (H) Tue 10 March 2026 @ 1945 – Fred Atkins & Nigel Seager

Farnborough (H) Sat 14 March 2026 @ 1500 – Fred Atkins & Sean Scurr

Chesham United (A) Sat 21 March 2026 @ 1500 – Chris Bechervaise & Adrian Sharpe

AFC Totton (H) Sat 28 March 2026 @ 1500 – Alan Thatcher & Alex del Valle

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

This week **STEVE WATT** talks about late goals, momentum, how he'd deal with Dorking and Takeover talk ...



Watt's Occurring?

It's never great to let one in on 96 minutes ...

The winner at Chippenham came from a classic long throw. I've won a lot of games as both a player and a manager because of long throws and it's always been part of my set up.

I scored a lot of goals direct from them and how you defend them depends on the distance the thrower gets.

If you had someone who could throw it a silly distance, like Alex Flisher, you could score from the first phase of the attack because the ball could arrive untouched in the six-yard box, but that's still unusual.

"If you lose the second and third phases, nine times out of ten the ball will end up in the back of the net..."

What's more common is you'll get a long thrower who lands the ball near the front post. You've obviously still got to be set-up correctly for the first phase, but it's the second phase where you have to be spot on.

Maidstone won the first phase at Chippenham, but you can see they just got caught up with it after that.

Conceding in stoppage time is some way from ideal ...



If you lose the second and third phases, nine times out of ten the ball will end up in the back of the net.

I think confidence could have been a problem. You're going to concede goals over the course of a season, but when you concede them is important and this might seem like an obvious thing to say, but the 96th minute isn't a great time to let one in.

If you concede just before half-time

it can take the wind out of your sails and if the opposition score when you've been on top that can deflate a team. >



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... but a late equaliser can transform a team

< The flipside is what you saw on Monday night. When you score a late goal and get a point, it feels like three. I'd like to think they'll have new confidence because that's the kind of result that can transform a season.

It could also be crucial because the players who most needed confidence all contributed. David Agbontohoma played the ball down the wing to TJ Bramble. Jamie Yila weighted the next pass perfectly for Mo Faal and Ruben Carvalho finished it off.

There's nothing you want more than for your attacking players to be firing; you want them to be confident. An attacker with confidence is a completely different player.

As a defender, I could be lacking in confidence but I can still do the basics; win my headers, win my tackles and defend the box. Attackers need to create and score and when you score a goal of that importance it's worth a lot more than, for example, a goal you score when you're 2-0 down and it's just a consolation.

It could be just what you need going into the next game, and the next game is Dorking, who are a side that like to play. They want to get the ball down and play expansive, attractive football, so you'll have to set out how you want to press them and whether you want to use a high press, a mid block or a low block. I'd look at the patterns they use frequently and try to set traps within those patterns.

One of the things you have to look at, particularly with a side like that who pass the ball and move it well, is possession. You have to understand you probably aren't going to have as much of the ball as they are and I would have no problem accepting that.

My game plan would be built on how we win the ball back, where we are when we do so and how quickly we can hurt them on the turnover, because they'll be so open.

The last thing you want to do when you play a team like Dorking is win the ball back and let them get back into a good shape, so I'd be working with the players on setting them a few traps to fall into and taking full advantage.



... yet barely two days later and the world seems a better place.

Players have to stay focused during takeover talk

As a player you probably wouldn't be unsettled by the current takeover talk. Every player is different and it's possible some might be a little bit worried about job security, but it would never enter my head. All I try to do is win a game on a Saturday or a Tuesday.

Owners might come in and have a different way of doing things and a different vision, but as a player you can't worry about that. Your job is to give your all and win the match and if you worry about external factors it could affect your game.

"There are some clubs where I wouldn't even bother applying for the manager's job..."

As a manager it could be different, because every owner wants their own man. If you're already doing a job well, you've got nothing to worry about.

You probably would want to have discussions with the people coming in about their plans and I can see some managers being worried about that, but I don't think someone like George would be.

He seems like a strong character who's confident in what he does.

I can see how it would affect some managers, however.

If the guys who've backed you for several years have gone, you may not get as much time under the new regime and that probably will be in the back of your mind.

The grass isn't always greener. There are some clubs where I wouldn't even bother applying for the manager's job and there have been others where I've gone into meetings and at a certain point in the conversation I've realised 'this is not for me'.

This town might not have had a football club without Terry and Oliver, or they might have had one, but perhaps it wouldn't have been as successful. I was having a conversation with someone the other day about how we went flying through the leagues at great speed and maybe it was too soon for the club.

They weren't ready for it. Since then Maidstone have yo-yoed a bit. Other clubs have caught up in terms of wages and to get to the next level there might need to be a bit more risk.

If they feel like it's time to change, maybe it is time to step aside, but what a 16 years it's been.



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."

To register your interest visit our [website](#).



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A 'shit Jack Grealish' is now the golden boot

By Tom Rogers

There's no escaping how important these two games are. We sit 13th, seven points adrift of the top seven and without the luxury of games in hand. It's win or bust.

We have dug ourselves a monumental hole to climb out of after recent disastrous results. The current gap is surmountable, but something will have to click with this team that has eluded us for large parts of the season so far.

We welcome the man in the hat on Saturday. Marc White brings his unstoppable Dorking side to the Gallagher searching for a seventh straight league victory.

"Letting Casey go without giving him a real chance is arguably our biggest blunder of the season ..."

They are fresh off the back of beating Hornchurch in a crunch clash for the title on Tuesday night and now sit five points clear at the top of the division.

Our record against Dorking reeks. We've recorded just one win against them in eleven games; none have come in the league.

They beat us soundly at Meadowbank by 3-1 earlier in the season. We sit dead last in the form table with two points in five games, they top it with a one hundred percent record in recent weeks. All signs point toward a disaster.

Fortunately, that isn't how non-league football goes and whilst we have done little to suggest we should win here, football works in mysterious ways.

Charlie Carter, the man once known as 'A shit Jack Grealish' when we faced him for Eastleigh a few years ago, is their top scorer in the league, but the creative midfielder is among several key players missing for the visitors.



Patrick Casey, now at Dorking, wiped out for a penalty at Totton, during his very brief loan spell with us.

Patrick Casey, who has been their main outlet in the second half of the season, is also out. Casey has netted seven goals in eleven games since joining on loan from Charlton. His tally matches that of our top scorer in Gilbert.

Letting him go without giving him a real chance is arguably our biggest blunder of the season, in a campaign where we've never found any attacking fluidity.

Our only ever win against Dorking came during the lockdown season, way back in January 2021.

We beat them 2-1 in the fourth round of FA Trophy. Saidou Khan gave us the lead on seven minutes. James McShane equalised on 20, minutes before Joan Luque (known as "The Fucker" to Marc White) scored the winner nine minutes later.



Saidou Khan's opening goal in our only ever win against Dorking, during the pandemic season of 2020-21.



Lamar Reynolds netted the winner for Enfield at Donkey Lane on a bitter night back in November.

Remember to mark Lamar

By Tom Rogers

After Dorking, Enfield are next on the horizon. They notched their first win since they beat us in late November on Tuesday night, overcoming Horsham 2-1. This, irritatingly, gives them reason for hope and optimism coming into their visit to the Gallagher.

They visit Farnborough on Saturday in a relegation six pointer which will have a huge impact on their seasons. Veteran Sam Youngs and Stones cult hero Lamar Reynolds are their main threats.

Reynolds tally of eight is again greater than our top scorers. Both found the net as we threw away a 1-0 lead at Donkey Lane earlier in the season and we can only hope for a repeat of last years game against Enfield, when a Shaq Coulthirst hattrick spurred us on to a 4-0 win.

No more ground can be given up. I feel like I've uttered those words in desperation for the last month now, but if we lose to Dorking on

Saturday and the gap stretches to double figures, then that will be curtains.

There are positives in this team you'd salvage for next season: defensively we look strong and despite criticism of Nathan Harness in recent weeks we boast the second-best defensive record in the league.

The inability to find a system which compliments this has held us back. We have struggled to find a balance and there are far too many players that are 'good enough' whilst very few stand out frequently enough to drag us towards the top end of the table.

This time next week it may be all over and we could be consigned to a season of mediocrity. No doubt planning for next season will begin but there is no certainty over ownership, management and playing squad for next year, making looking too far into the future challenging.

In more positive news, the Kent

Senior Cup Final has been set for the 22nd of April at Priestfield, where we will meet one of Tonbridge, Chatham or Gillingham.

With any luck Gillingham will make it through and we can end the season with a visit to our old enemy for the first time in a generation, which may be the only thing we can salvage from a disappointing season.

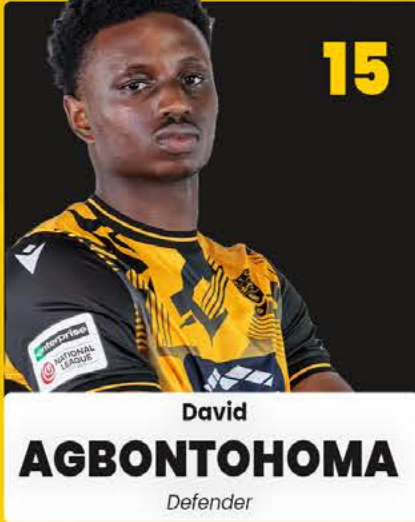
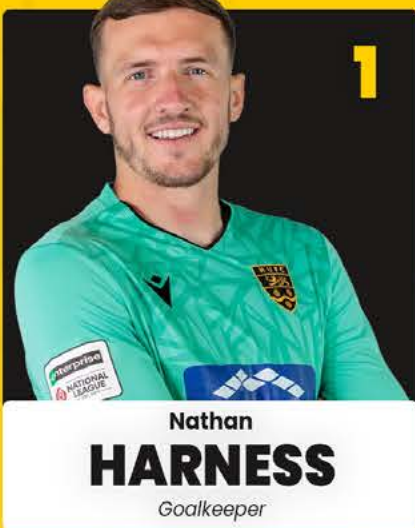
* MUFC Women's Kent Plate quarter-final with Faversham Strike Force, due to take place on Sunday, was postponed due to the weather.

The tie will now take place this Sunday, February 22nd, at Abbey School, kick-off 2pm.



Join our facebook group

MAIDSTONE UNITED
2025/26 SQUAD



Designed by MAIDSTONE UNITED SUPPORTERS CLUB IN VIETNAM

We'll never play you again ... part one

Football is a volatile industry and a huge number of teams we once played regularly have either fallen so far from grace that we'll never play them again, had to rebuild as Phoenix clubs or simply disappeared completely ... Part one of this two part quiz concerns clubs the old Maidstone United met before 1992 ...

1) Which side beat us in the 1900 Kent Senior Cup final at Chatham but merged with their neighbours after World War 2?



2) Which works team from the coalfields of East Kent knocked us out of the FA Cup at the first hurdle in 1956?



3) They pipped us to the Southern League Division One South title by a single point in 1971-72, but effectively disappeared when they merged with their neighbours in 1998. Next year they plan to reform under the expert guidance of Harvey Bradbury: who are they?

4) Another side who merged with their neighbours, only for both clubs to go bust in 2011; who were our first ever opponents in the FA Trophy, in 1972?



5) Who beat us in the Kent Senior Cup final in 1978, changed their name two years later and folded in 1990?

6) Playing at The Pilot Field, which coastal team folded in 1985?

7) Which Welsh side finished ninth in the inaugural Alliance Premier League, but were in Cymru North when they collapsed in November 2021?

8) Which team challenged us for the Alliance Premier League title in 1984, folded in 2008 and folded again midway through the 2023-24 season?



9) Who won the FA Trophy in 1984, played us in the notorious "pies and pints" match in 1986, lost two grounds in the 2010s and subsequently splintered along Judean lines?

10) Which team, managed by Neil Warnock, was the first to win automatic promotion to the Football League in 1986-87, but went under 20 years later?



Answers to Edition 26: Name on the shirt

1) Our first sponsors in 1981-82 also sponsored us during the Sittingbourne years and had their names on the shirts when we came home in 2012. Who are they?
Britelite.

2) The next sponsors, from 1984 to 1986, were from which local garage?
Rootes.

3) 1986-87 was like asking JFK to wear a Lee Harvey Oswald t-shirt. Why?
Because our sponsors were MFI, who moved into London Road after we sold it. (Ok, so that's a reach ...)

4) Who sponsored us during the 1988-89 title-winning season and the first season in Division 4?
Wiseoak Homes.

5) Why did it feel like our 1991-92 sponsors (modelled by Robbie Painter) were taking the piss?
They were called Prosperity and we were going bust.

6) Riley Court's father Ian is pictured during our first season in the Kent League, 2001-02. Which company is on the front?
MI Pankhurst.

7) Who took over from the answer to question 6 in 2002-03 and subsequently went bust?
Joebec.com.

8) Leaping from frying pan to the towering inferno, which pyramid scheme became our next sponsor?
The KF Concept.

9) Which local IT company sponsored us during our 2009-10 season in Ashford?
Icom.

10) Which company, whose owner nearly bought us in 2023, still sponsors our shirts and our main stand?
Manchett.



The independent source for Maidstone United news: Edition 27 (February 20th 2026)

Takeovers from hell

A false rumour, a pipe dream and a nightmare

RUMOUR CONTROL

One of the first rules of journalism is you should always check things and a general rule is that the less you want something to be true, the more likely it will be.

Last week someone suggested Paul Scally was about to buy Maidstone. This was bollocks of course, although it was amusing to think he might spend the money he'd earned from selling Gillingham on dethroning them as Kent's number one side.

It did, however, remind me what life could be like under a new owner. I was at the KM when the entire organisation was banned from Priestfield.

At the time I regarded this as a perk of the job, but colleagues who were unlucky enough to actually have to cover their matches were forced to go incognito and sit in the stands. One was even ejected from the seat he'd paid for after he was grassed up by a ~~scab~~ fellow media worker.

THE MISSING THOUSAND

Attendances in non-league football have rocketed over the last 20 years. When we first played at Chelmsford's "new" ground in 2006-07, shocking them 2-1 in the FA Trophy, the crowd was 859 and that felt like a big game. A year later, when they humped us 7-0 in the Ryman Premier, there were 1,140 present.

At the end of that season Chelmsford beat AFC Wimbledon to the title, winning automatic promotion to what was then Conference South but they've been there ever since and despite their new owners mission to get them to the Premier League, it looks like they're stuck here for at least another season.

On Monday night, Chelmsford announced they were letting in Ipswich fans for £1 if they showed a season ticket at the gate. It seems likely this was a well-meaning initiative devised by someone unaware of the flashbacks the mere



A week after this theatrical gesture from Tommy Widdrington, he was sacked.

mention of our name causes in Suffolk.

The gate was initially announced as 846, which seemed low. This was later corrected: someone had missed a 1 off the front. I did ask how many Ipswich fans had taken them up on the offer, but didn't get a reply.

STORYPRENEUR?

This isn't the first time we've been the subject of this kind of offer. Eastbourne Borough offered a special rate to anyone who produced a valid EPL season ticket in the final game before Lockdown.

If that seemed a morally dubious decision by their then-owners, Eastbourne are now demonstrating just how badly things can go when a club changes hands.

Bought by Simon Leslie in 2023, they're now looking for their third manager of the season, having sacked Tommy Widdrington following Tuesday night's defeat at Chesham. That was exactly a week after they'd beaten us, in front of a crowd that

was around 2,500 lower than the play-off semi-final. By Leslie's own admission, he spent £2 million last year and was planning to spend a similar amount this.

Wednesday's statement announcing Widdrington's departure also said they are planning for all scenarios, including a return to part-time football. Leslie describes himself as a "storypreneur, with a bucketful of fails and a handful of big wins". I think we all know which one this is.

HAPPY FAN GROUP

This week Dagenham were taken over by "The Happy Fan Group". They are: "committed to creating an environment which breeds success both on and off the pitch, underpinned by a core philosophy of collaboration, innovation, and tireless dedication."

In the past someone would have been paid to write this shit, but this may well have been churned out by a bot, so that's at least one area where they can make a saving.