

The Back Page

Craig's List

Who's in and out for next season?

PLUS: – Stones suffer a Ken Loach ending at Twerton Park
– The Steve Watt Column: a mixed season
– Saidou Khan poised to become Tunisian champion?!
– And finally we're "locked in" for next year

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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Meet The Team



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Six minutes into stoppage time an outstanding piece of improvisation by sub Mark Boruk earns Maidstone a 3-2 win. Boruk had already provided the assist for the Jamie Yila goal that got us back in the game when we were 2-0 down. His fellow academy player, Ashton Mitford, won the free-kick that indirectly led to the winner.

Report: pages 6-7.

Cheer up Kenny Loach, oh what can it mean ...

BATH CITY 2
Wilson 2, 43
MAIDSTONE UNITED 3
Yila 70, Fowler 85, Boruk 90+6
Attendance: 1,417.

By Fred Atkins

"We've always all liked a happy ending. That's why I hate Ken fucking Loach. Why can't you leave us, just once, with a smile, Ken?"
John Cooper Clarke.

"If you go and stand on the terrace you'll hear the wit and wisdom of the people of Bath," Ken Loach once said of Twerton Park. "It's warm and welcoming and friendly. Nobody cares who you are as long as you are a good supporter."

The ending to this game had a bit of Loach about it: the PA man began the afternoon with a spot of Leonard Cohen and ended it with "When Will I See You Again?" which was a suitably morose note to say farewell to a team who'd already been relegated and one who'd missed out on the play-offs.

The Sad FM soundtrack aside however, the fan base didn't seem too down. We witnessed a great game, watched a talent announce himself in spectacular fashion and at least we won't end up featuring in a three-hour *Bunch of Amateurs* play-off special, where they take a deep dive into the town's gene pool.

Bath is the sort of place you could easily consider moving to and the welcome Loach mentioned extended as far as the gate, where a man in a yellow gilet asked: "You're from Maidenstone are you?"

His accent reminded me of two things. (1) that *Hot Fuzz* was filmed half an hour away in Wells and that (2) there were more laughs in the first five minutes of *Hot Fuzz* than there were in Loach's entire back catalogue.

At kick-off our chances of making the play-offs were estimated by *The Back Page's* Tom Rogers at 35 percent. After 70 minutes of what for once was a literal "must-win" game, I thought they were closer to 0.35 percent.



2-2. Fowler brings us level five minutes from time.

It had been four years since we'd come from two goals behind to win a game (the 3-2 win over Hungerford in the title-winning season) and we just didn't look like scoring. At which point "the shit just got real" as no one ever said in a Loach film.

The start was chaotic, in the worst kind of way. A long throw was cleared as far as the edge of the box, and it bounced up to Scott Wilson, who volleyed it just inside the far post.

We struggled to cope with the pitch at times, but didn't play that badly. Riley Court had a volley

that was saved by the keeper at his near post and Jephthe Tanga went on one of his speciality runs, the type where you think he can't possibly keep possession yet somehow does. His effort was saved however, and after another near miss, Bath hit us on the break two minutes before half-time.

Lenny Holden saved the initial shot, but the ball broke to Wilson again and, from an almost identical position, he drove in Bath's second.

At half-time two of the four other games affecting us were going our way – at Woodside Road, where Gravesend were a goal



3-2. Boruk scores and all hell breaks out.

down and at Weston, where Dorking were winning 1-0.

It could have been even worse. During the first half Court went down with an injury that saw two physios enter the field and then a paramedic. At one point a stretcher was called for which had us all fearing the worst, but it turned out he'd dislocated a finger and that it had been popped back in – painful, but a long way from the kind of injuries that robbed us of Mo Faal at the business end of the season. (And that have robbed Mo of the second year of his deal with us...)

Court was in the wars for much of the afternoon, taking a blow to the face in the second half that forced him to wear Sam Corne-style nose plugs, but this has been a breakthrough season for the midfielder.

He always had potential, but the goal that sealed the 2-0 win over Bath in the home game was arguably the moment he turned into a match-winner in his own right.

"Nothing really happened until Mark Boruk came on like Nicholas Angel: 'Play time's over'..."

The fact he was out there allowed us some hope, although midway through the second half that was wearing thin. Weston equalised against Dorking within a minute of the restart, Torquay were 2-0 up at Tonbridge and we just didn't look like scoring.

Court dragged one effort wide but nothing really happened until Mark Boruk came on like Nicholas Angel: "Play time's over."

Within a minute of his introduction he'd set up Jamie Yila for a shot he squeezed inside the near post. If he'd been fit for the first half of the season we surely would have been a few places higher, but there's a line about Aunties with bollocks that applies here.

Five minutes from time it was 2-2. Bath didn't clear from a corner and George Fowler lashed in the equaliser with his left foot. We now had a genuine chance, but the minutes ticked away and the hope ebbed.

George Elokobi's final decision as



Fake news. Fans think Hornchurch have scored.

Maidstone manager was to throw on the academy player Ashton Mitford as a substitute, with two minutes of the minimum five added remaining.

With hardly any time to make an impact, Mitford ran at the Bath defence and won a free-kick that was cleared at the expense of the corner.

What happened next was bedlam. Court took the corner and TJ Bramble might have got a head to it, before it seemed to bounce off Yila's shin. Boruk improvised, backheeling it over the line, although there were so many bodies in the way no one in either the press area or the directors' box seemed to know who'd scored.

It also, frankly, looked like the kind of goal referees usually find a way to disallow. It took several seconds before I realised it was actually going to stand and then the classic

"false rumour" started to sweep the terrace.

Sat at the back of the Main Stand, looking at Flashscore, I couldn't see why everyone had erupted. According to the internet, Football Web Pages reported Hornchurch had scored against Maidenhead and the goal was disallowed, but this would also seem to be fake news: no such incident was shown on the Hornchurch highlights and it didn't feature in their match report.

So the ending was more Loach than Edgar Wright. Incidentally, in the same interview when he references the welcome at Twerton, he laments the tourists spoiling his home town.

If there's a happy ending for the Nuneaton-born director, it's that Plymouth Parkway won't bring many next season.



A peaceful transition.

What's next after the end of the Elokobi era?

By Alex Del-Valle

Saturday's result against Bath City FC saw not just the end to Maidstone's mixed-bag of a season, but also to the end of the George Elokobi era.

Three and a half years with George in charge has given Maidstone fans some of the best memories of their lives following this football club. In my opinion, we have a lot to thank him for.

With that said, I also want to use this article to also highlight the excitement of a new chapter – as former right-hand man to Elokobi, Craig Fagan, has been announced as the new Maidstone United manager.

We travelled to Bath City with a playoff spot still possible. Although we were also reliant on other teams around us dropping points to secure it.

"I don't think George could've asked for anything more out of his players in his final 45 minutes as Maidstone manager..."

All we had to do and all we could do that day was win. When we conceded in the first 10 minutes, and then again just before half time, you could forgive me and others for saying "well that's that, then".

And we would've been correct, had it not been for a classic Elokobi performance in the second half: goals from Jamie Yila, George Fowler and young Mark Boruk completed a sensational comeback victory.

Unfortunately, the results of other games meant that we still lost out on that last playoff spot, however. I don't think George could've asked for anything more out of his players in his final 45 minutes as Maidstone manager. They really showed up for him, and for the traveling supporters.

Certainly, for me, George Elokobi will always be remembered as one of the greatest managers this



August 2019: George Elokobi's Maidstone debut v Weymouth, which ended in a 2-1 defeat.

club has had in recent history.

Some might argue that the silverware was limited to only two Kent Senior Cups, but to those people I'd say, step back and see the bigger picture of what he achieved with this football club. Not only did he deliver the greatest FA Cup run in the club's history but also, he delivered multiple playoff

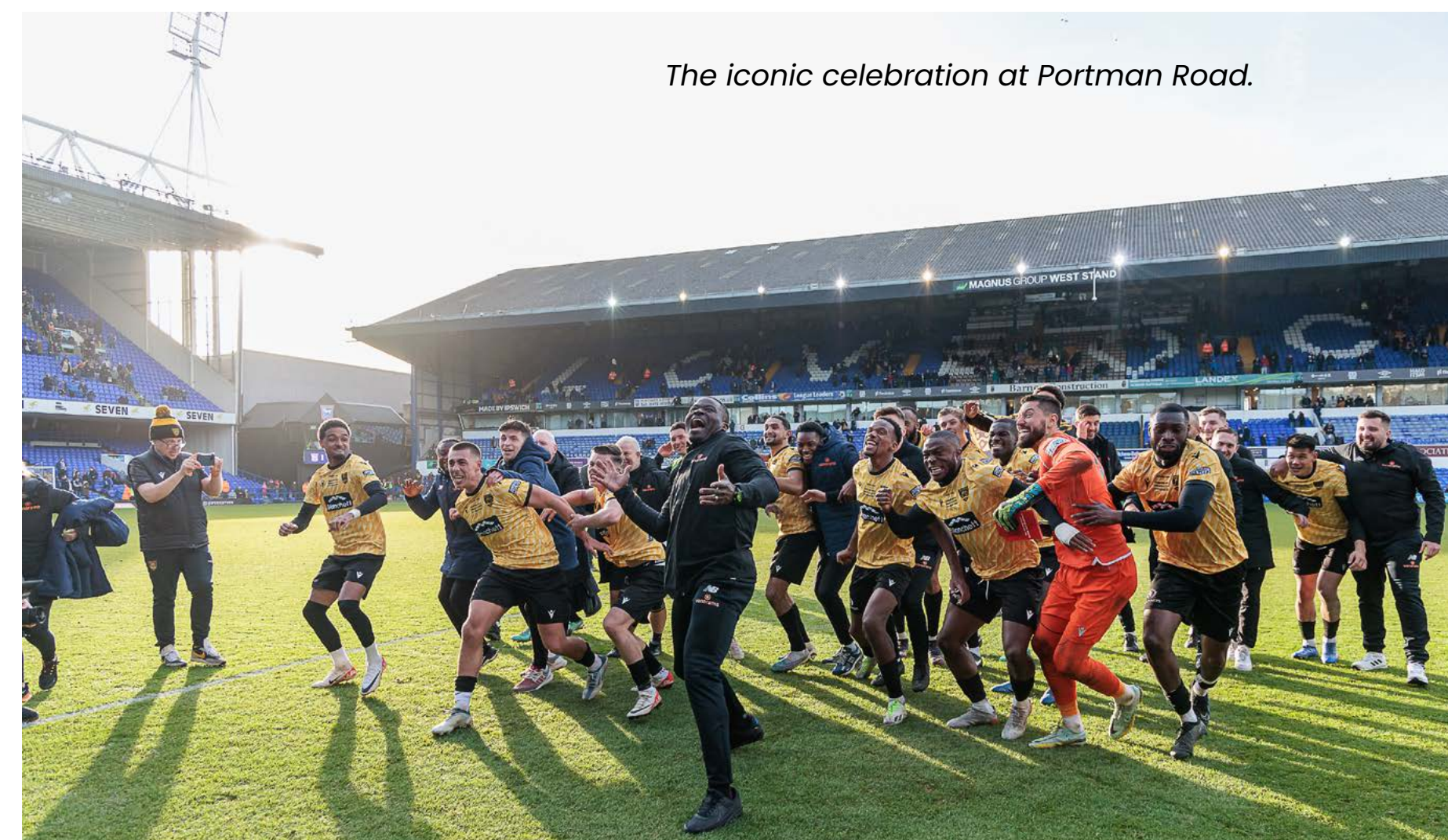
pushes in seasons where he had to completely rebuild teams. That, there, is a proper football manager.

So, what now? Well, Craig Fagan has rightfully been given the role.

I think that was a logical choice and I would've scratched my head had we given it to anyone else to be honest!



August 2022: his farewell as a player, in front of the Elvis End after winning the National South title.



The iconic celebration at Portman Road.

He's already getting down to business, with the club announcing that Foran, Court and Hamblin will be Maidstone players next season.

And with a number of players offered contracts, it's a good starting point to build from.

Given the current ownership situation, it will be interesting to see what the playing budget looks like.

Certainly, in the FY25 financial results announced in March, it was hinted that further cost-cutting measures had been implemented. That said, I also wouldn't write of Craig Fagan's ability to work some magic with the squad.

Having been on the sidelines with Elokobi for over three years and as a former Premier League footballer, he probably knows his stuff.

As for ambitions next year? Well, in my view, these should be focused more off the pitch than on it.

I believe the club currently lacks a clear vision. No one really knows what our ambitions are. Don't tell me it's playoffs and then we don't have the playing budget to match it, or the panic about what happens if we do actually go up.

We need to be very realistic with ourselves and understand that there's a few things to fix at this club before we are ready to go up. One of those being the ownership situation that needs to stabilise – I think people underestimate the uncertainty that filters down even to the dressing room when the club is

actively up for sale.

The sale needs to complete, and a vision and plan need to be set by the new owners, not least to give the fans something to look forward to again.

Linked to the above, we need a far better player retention rate. In the last three years we've only retained at most 4 or 5 players from the previous squad.

We've had one of the highest player-attrition rates in the league and that needs to change, fast. Based on recent events, it looks as if Craig has already started that journey.

The final thing I'd like to see back, and it's probably a function of all the above factors, is the matchday experience. The Gallagher is a ghost town 20 minutes before kick-off.

Fans don't have any reason to go there outside of 90 minutes of football, and some fans have even given up on that – with attendances dropping this year, on average.

We need change, and with that a clear vision. Without it, I see our future in the National League South continuing for a while. It'll be an interesting summer regardless. Enjoy it!



The end at Twerton Park.

Upcoming Commentary

See you next season!

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.

We'll see you all again next season!



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The Back Page

Falling short, Riley's progress and the ever increasing demands on non-league clubs ... it's **STEVE WATT'S** final column of the season



Watt's Occurring?

The play-offs were the minimum requirement

FALLING SHORT

I think you'd have to say Maidstone have had a mixed season overall. Having reached the play-off final with Boreham Wood last year, you'd have to say that getting back into the play-offs this year would have been the minimum requirement.

They finished with 77 points and that would normally be enough to get you into the top seven (although last year it wouldn't have been).

They weren't the only team to get 77 points and miss out: Ebbsfleet suffered the same fate and you don't often see three teams finishing with the same number of points in that situation.

In that sense you could say they were a tad unlucky and I'm sure they'll have sat in that dressing room afterwards and pointed to results here or there where things could have gone differently. There are always games where you think "if we don't make it at the end of the season this'll be one where we kicked ourselves in the teeth".

You can also say it's a bit unlucky to miss out on goal difference, but at the end of a season I always say you finish where you deserve to finish. That's why there are 46 games and you can't be lucky or

unlucky over all of them. I'm pretty sure that, although they went out on a high on Saturday, they will be disappointed with where they've finished.

RILEY'S PROGRESS

Riley Court's emergence is one of the major positives of the campaign. I watched him a little bit last year and you could see the kid had talent, but the big question was whether or not he was going to be able to harness it. I thought we'd find out how good he could be in the next year or so, and he's gone on to be a massive player for Maidstone.

George and Craig have got the best out of him this season. You quite often see talented young players like Riley, but you need to see if they can make the right decisions: he's a player who's easy on the eye, but it's not just a question of doing something that looks good. You have to be effective as well. In that sense he reminded me a bit of Jack Paxman.

Players like that are always going to be judged on how many goals and assists they've contributed: this year he scored eight times and set up his team mates nine times. It's been the breakout season for him and it'll be interesting to see how he kicks on next year. He needs to keep pushing and pushing, demand more of himself, mentally attack it and try to go to the next level.

"At the end of a season you finish where you deserve to finish. That's why there are 46 games. You can't be lucky or unlucky over all of them ..."



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Going for a header at VCD's ground in Crayford in August 2014

HE'S MAKING A LIST

Whenever I see a retained list, I always wait to see who a club are bringing in before making any judgements. Jamie Yila was the name that leapt out on Maidstone's. I've not seen enough of him this year to really comment either way but I do know that on his day he can be a real handful, so it'll be interesting to see who they've got lined up to replace him.

11 players have been released and that seems like a lot, but you don't know what's going on behind closed doors. They may have had other offers or they may just have wanted to leave anyway. You'll get a better idea when pre-season starts.

Honesty is the best way to approach releasing a player who doesn't want to go.

There were too many times in my career when I wasn't given the news straight and I always said that if I ever found myself in a manager's shoes I would never be that type.

I give players honest assessments of

why I'm letting them go. I understand you might not agree with it, but these are my reasons.

I think every player appreciates this, because it is easier to take and you never know when you might need a player or when they might need a club. So part on good terms and stay honest: honesty solves everything.

THREE BRIDGES TOO FAR

Faversham also missed out on the play-offs on the final day, although in slightly less dramatic circumstances.

We needed Sittingbourne to lose to VCD and they won fairly comfortably, although we were mainly focused on winning our game and putting on a performance for our fans, so we could end the season on a high.

A 2-2 draw against the champions, Three Bridges, wasn't a bad way to finish. We've got the foundation to challenge next season, given the opportunity.

The players have been brilliant and like every off season, there would need to be a few comings and goings, but not too many.

TOO SOON?

I said it years ago, I came to non-league far too early. The wages of part-time players now are incredible. People working two jobs might not see what a player gets in a week, but that's just how the game's gone.

I thought after COVID there might be a drop off, but it's gone the other way, which is really surprising. It'll be interesting to see how long it lasts because in the past clubs who had money would all of a sudden end up bankrupt.

You also have to have sympathy for VCD. I remember playing against them when I was with Maidstone and you never want to see clubs fold. They have a fan base, they've got a history and there are people who give blood, sweat and tears to run that club for nothing.

Then someone comes and takes it away from you. I don't know what's going on behind the scenes but I'd like to think they're in discussions to maybe groundshare or something because you never want to see a club fall.



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"You do have some days when you just can't be arsed..."

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Apart from absolutely everyone who read Rob Key's book ...



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Who's on Craig's List?

By Tom Rogers

After the false flag late on at Bath that teased a playoff spot which never came, Craig Fagan's first act as Maidstone United manager is to build a squad which will be aiming to improve on this year's disappointing campaign.

In recent years we've been unable to retain the nucleus of our sides in the post-season. Since Hakan Hayrettin's title winning team broke up, a constant turnover has been the norm.

On the opening day at Hemel Hempstead this season, only two players in the starting XI were in the squad at Boreham Wood in the playoff final just two and a half months earlier.

We're caught in the unenviable position of easily losing our better players to more lucrative contracts. We can shed deadwood which hasn't performed, but this causes the first eight or so games of the following season to be a chore where we desperately try to work out what our best XI looks like.

"Some fans were unhappy Mo Faal was released, but he was our highest earner ..."

This year could be different though. We've kept hold of three players who have been exceptional performers in the second half of the season, and made competitive offers to eight more senior players.

I'd argue that most of this team hasn't shone brightly enough to attract much interest from elsewhere. Players like TJ Bramble and Jephthe Tanga finished the season strongly, but I doubt they'll garner the attention the likes of Ben Brookes, Temi Eweka and Aaron Blair did twelve months ago.

In theory this makes it easier to keep hold of those who were starting to form the core of a decent side in the run-in.

Jamie Yila, David Sesay and Lexus Beeden were the three most debatable names of those released. Yila's injury issues kept him out for most of the season but he made a positive impact when he got fit.

Beeden and Sesay are evidently good enough for this level, but struggled to stay in the side at times



Mo Faal, seconds after scoring against Weston and moments before his Stones career was sickeningly cut short.

and Beeden's performances against Bath and Tonbridge to see out the season may not have helped his case.

Mo Faal's contract being broken a third of the way into a deal which was meant to keep him for next season surprised some, presumably because the club announced him as being on an eighteen-month deal and nobody knew we had the opportunity to release the injured striker.

Faal was understandably unhappy, taking to Twitter after Craig gave him the news, but he won't play until 2027 and even then, his exact return is unclear.

Some fans were unhappy he was released, but he was our highest earner and, if we'd kept him, a different set of fans would have complained spending a chunk of the budget on a man who would be

lucky to feature in half of our games next season.

Assuming we stick with some variation of the 4-4-2 deployed in the last two games of the season, we should be in the market for a centre-half, a striker and some wide players with the ability to play centrally if needed, similar to how Christie Pattison and Yila were used as a front two at times during the run in.

This of course assumes we can agree terms with the players contracts have been offered to but will doubtlessly have agents agitating for higher paying contracts elsewhere.

Craig should be able to retain the spine of his side, maintain some continuity and hit the ground running in a way we never did under George; that always left us playing catchup once we'd settled the side down around October.



Saidou Khan after his verified thunderbastard in the FA Cup at Blackpool back in 2019

The path of Khan

By Tom Rogers

If I say the name 'Saidou Khan' to you, what springs to mind? You'll likely remember his screamer away at Blackpool a few months before COVID and that he disappeared during the ensuing disruption which brought the 19-20 season to a premature close and left the 20-21 season as a half-baked shamble.

If I polled Maidstone fans as to where they thought he was now, I'd expect answers including the likes of Aldershot, Eastleigh, Crawley, Chesterfield, but instead, Khan stands on the cusp of winning the Tunisian Ligue Professionnelle 1 with Club Africain.

He arrived at Maidstone in 2019 on the recommendation of Ryan Gordon, who knew him from when they crossed paths at the University of East London and he was one of the shining lights in a bizarre and disappointing season led by John Still.

He started every game he was fit for and would have been named player of the season had the campaign been concluded.

Khan played a few more times for us in the proceeding season, despite battling injury and scored in his final game for the club, a 5-4

loss at Hornchurch in the FA Trophy.

A loan to Dagenham followed as their season continued in lockdown after ours was curtailed, before he ventured North to Chesterfield. From there drifted around the league until this Summer, when the one-cap Gambia international penned a two-year deal with Tunis based outfit Club Africain.

CA, as they are known in their homeland, are the second biggest outfit in Tunisia and the mortal enemies of Esperance Tunis, who played Chelsea in last summer's Club World Cup.

They boast 13 domestic titles and an African Champions League won in 1991. CA play in a state of the art 60,000-seater stadium that is regularly filled to capacity by flag waving and flare throwing ultras during big games.

Khan is under the guidance of veteran manager Faouzi Benzarti, who is a remarkable figure on his fifth spell with the club, having held forty-three different managerial posts in a coaching career which began in 1979.

He has won ten Tunisian titles with all three major clubs in the country, as well as running for the Tunisian

Parliament in 2011. He makes John Still and Bill Williams' careers look tame in comparison.

In recent weeks Khan has won over Benzarti, playing every minute of the last three games as a good run has seen them overtake their stuttering city-rival in Esperance.

With four games remaining of the domestic season, they hold a two-point advantage over Esperance, who have won eight of the last nine titles. The crown is set to be decided by the outcome of the Tunis derby on the penultimate weekend when the sides meet at their shared home in Rades (a coastal neighbourhood in the capital).

Saidou will likely play in front of a crowd of well over the capacity of 60,000, with thousands more finding their way into the stadium as is customary in big games in North Africa: flares are launched in "ultras" displays, creating a hazy smog that makes it impossible to see the other end of the pitch.

The game will bring a country to a standstill - it is a world away from the Hornchurch Stadium, where he last wore Black and Amber in front of a crowd consisting of myself and about twenty others during the peak of Lockdown.

MAIDSTONE UNITED
2025/26 SQUAD

M



George
ELOKOBI
Manager

1



Nathan
HARNESS
Goalkeeper

13



Lenny
HOLDEN
Goalkeeper

2



David
SESAY
Defender

3



Leo
HAMBLIN
Defender

4



Lexus
BEEDEEN
Defender

5



George
FOWLER
Defender

6



Thomas-James
BRAMBLE
Midfielder

7



Jephthe
TANGA
Midfielder

8



Sam
CORNE
Midfielder

10



John
GILBERT
Midfielder

11



Jamie
YILA
Midfielder

12



Dajon
GOLDING
Forward

14



Mark
BORUK
Forward

15



David
AGBONTOHOMA
Defender

17



Riley
COURT
Midfielder

19



Ruben
CARVALHO
Midfielder

20



Christie
PATTISON
Midfielder

21



Malachi
MBOGBA
Midfielder

22



Muhammadu
FAAL
Forward

23



Hamzad
KARGBO
Forward

24



Taylor
FORAN
Defender

26



Jacob
BERKELEY-AGYEPONG
Midfielder

30



Christopher
SWIFT
Goalkeeper

Designed by MAIDSTONE UNITED SUPPORTERS CLUB IN VIETNAM

Counterfeit Stones

Like it or not, we're not the only Stones and we're not the only black and amber army.
We're not even the only black and amber Stones. This week's quiz is set by Jurgen Dahmer ...



Absolute scenes in 2013, as Paul Booth scores the winner in a play-off semi-final with the answer to Question 1.

- 1) Jay Saunders seems to like black and amber Stones having now achieved promotions with us and his current side.
- 2) Another recently promoted side, they really should be named Perth FC, who will be gracing the SPL once more next season.
- 3) A brief rivalry with this lot in the 2010s, who perhaps should rename themselves Ruislip FC. Famed for their sense of humour and never taking themselves too seriously.
- 4) A bit more obscure, and much further afield. Imaginatively deviating from calling

- themselves, this Tasmanian based side call themselves 'The Stones'. Sadly, they have seemingly done nothing of note nor have any notable former players to assist with the clue.
- 5) Former Everton centre back, aiming to reach a century of England caps.
- 6) Home of Brighton & Hove Albion for 95 years, up until their 91st place finish in the football league, prior to things getting even worse for them when having to go to Gillingham every other week.

7) Little known Northern counties side who made national headlines recently when prolific football league striker Jordan Rhodes was appointed as Club Ambassador. If you find the answer amusing, grow up!

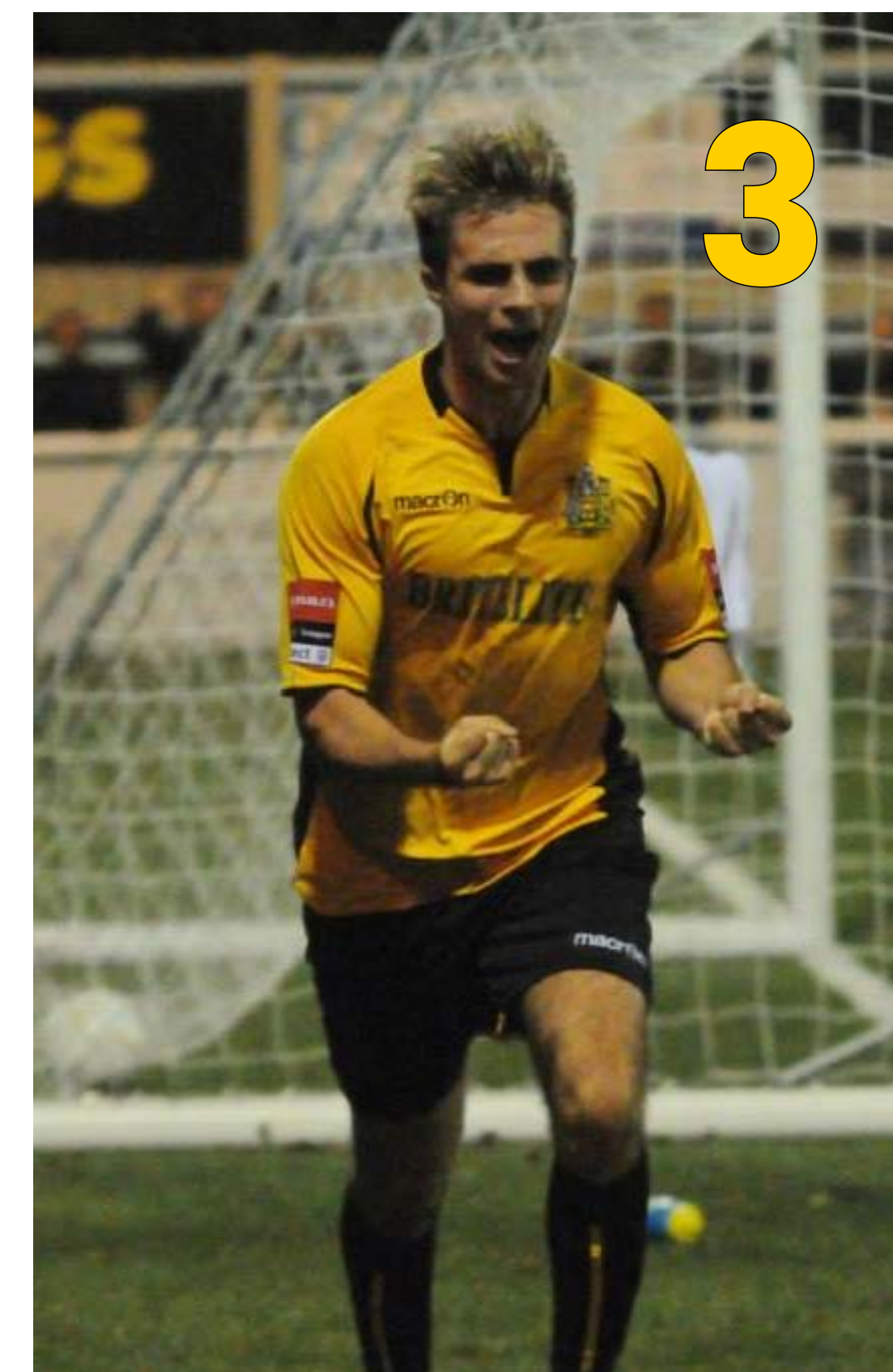
8) North Bucks league side but the area is slightly more famously known for taking F1 away from Brands Hatch.

9) United Counties Premier League Division South promotion hopefuls whose former players include Jeff Astle and Malcolm Shotton.

10) Early predecessor of Dagenham & Redbridge, with this incarnation ceasing to exist in 1979, having won the Isthmian League nine times.

BONUS QUESTION: *Komm schon du Stein.* No, not Uncle Albert, but the actual translation for this UN and FIFA recognised country, who – despite having it's own FA – has no league system, with clubs instead competing in neighbouring Switzerland.

Zac Attwood scoring a last-minute winner in the FA Trophy against the answer to question 3, in 2013-14. >



Answers to Edition 35: This is the end ...

- 1) Which team did we beat 6-0 to win the Alliance Premier League in 1984? **Telford United.**
- 2) Our final game at the old London Road ground in 1988 was against Stafford Rangers, but who was our final away game against that season the following week? **Wealdstone. We won 3-1.**
- 3) Who were our last opponents in the GM Vauxhall Conference in May 1989? **Runcorn away, where we won 1-0.**
- 4) And who were our final opponents in Division Four, three years later? **Doncaster Rovers, where we lost 3-0.**
- 5) Our first game at Sittingbourne was at the end of the 2000-01 season. We were nominally the away team against which South London side, who were reduced to eight men at the end? **Stansfeld O&B.**
- 6) Who did we beat 3-1 to secure the Kent League title on the final day of the 2001-02 season? **Deal Town.**
- 7) And who did we fail to beat on the final day a year later, handing the title to Cray Wanderers? **Ramsgate, where we could only draw 0-0.**
- 8) Which side came from 2-0 down to beat us 3-2 in our last game at Bourne Park in 2012? **Bognor Regis.**
- 9) In 2017 a bus load of fans wore Jay Saunders masks? Where were they going? **Forest Green Rovers, for a 2-2 draw.**
- 10) Have we ever been relegated on the final day of a season? **Yes, but only once, at Hornchurch in 2011 to Ryman South.**



The independent source for Maidstone United news: Edition 36 (April 30th 2026)

We'll be back next year

By Fred Atkins

Retained lists usually contain a few surprises and this year's had an unwelcome one. When Mo Faal re-signed for us in January it was described as an "18-month deal".

What the story didn't say was that there must have been a break-clause, one Maidstone have chosen to activate. The decision might make financial sense for the club, but it's harsh on a player who was just starting to look sharp again when his ACL went.

To add to the confusion, two players were announced, again. Riley Court and Taylor Foran are going to be with us next year, but then we knew that already. Or at least we thought we did. Given what happened to Faal perhaps we shouldn't have taken it for granted.

Eight players have been offered new deals. We can be confident there'll be a higher uptake this year, if only because it couldn't be a lot lower. Of the four who stayed, George Fowler and Sam Corne seem to like it here, and Lenny Holden looks set to be promoted to the number one role, while the aforementioned Riley Court has gone from being an unproven talent into the team's star player.

Of the 11 players who are leaving, Jamie Yila was possibly the biggest surprise, although he may well have had other offers and his time was marred by the injury that kept him out for four months.

Fitness is clearly a factor: when the club gave Joan Luque a two-year deal, he was ruled out for the final month of the 2021-22 season and all of the following year. This explains why Faal was subject to a break clause and why Ruben Carvalho, Lexus Beeden, Dajon Golding and David Agbontohoma have gone.

All four of them had their moments, but they through no fault of their own spent too long on the sidelines. Golding was particularly unlucky, after being taken out during the Kent Senior Cup tie with Gravesend.



The front and back pages of our first ever edition.

As for us, *Operation Restore Sanity* didn't quite succeed, but trying to bring about world peace through the medium of non-league football reportage was always a bit of an ask.

We will be back next year, in a slightly different format. A number of readers have asked if we'd consider binging out a printed edition, but the deadlines mean a weekly isn't really viable. We are, however, considering bringing out a monthly edition for subscribers, with features, quizzes and non-time-sensitive articles. News reports and previews will feature on an improved website.

If you'd like to become involved in any capacity, please let us know – we're especially keen to bring an advertising manager on board. Please email info@back-page-media.co.uk if you're interested, or contact us via the socials.

It just remains to thank absolutely everyone who's helped us during this first season.

Without the photos provided by **Helen Cooper** and **Steve Terrell**, The Back Page wouldn't exist. Thanks

also to **Nhan Thien Nguyen** who used their work to design our covers; to **Tom Rogers** and **Alex Del-Valle** who gave us invaluable insights and **Darren Styles** went above and beyond to write a report after getting back from Weston at 3am. **Alan Thatcher** provided a non-league round up and introduced us to, **John Tully**, who's kept us up to date with MUFC women.

We'll (hopefully) have a report on the website about their final game at Hollands & Blair on Sunday, when they may secure the title.

Sean Scurr and **Nigel Seager** fed us information and Sean, **Richard Fryer** and **Jurgen Dahmer** all spotted sometimes glaring errors in the drafts. **Steve Watt** has been the rock that he once was at the heart of our defence and **Alex Flisher** filled in seamlessly when he was away.

Oliver Ash was also very supportive and our above all thanks to **Paul Furst** for keeping us online and to **Ian Hewett** of **Momentum Mortgages** for his sponsorship.

Have a great summer and see you at the friendlies. #Believe