

FOREST

OFFICIAL MATCHDAY PROGRAMME 2017/18



WALTHAM FOREST
V HACKNEY WICK

Essex Senior League

20.9.17



Waltham Forest Football Club

Match Day Centres, Wadham Lodge, Kitchener Road, Walthamstow, London, E17 4JP

Chairman: Turgut Esendagli

Vice Chairman: Steve Howe

Company Secretary: Vacant

Treasurer & Hospitality Manager: Vacant

Secretary: Andy Perkins

Communications Manager: Andrzej Perkins (andrzej@walthamforest-fc.co.uk)

Club Historian: David Chapman

Directors: Tony Brazier, June Brazier, Mustapha Cetinkaya, Turgut Esendagli, Kemal Soper

Life Members: A. Brazier M.B.E., J. Brazier, D. Chapman, D. Crabb, C.E. Gross, K.J. Harris, S. Howe, G. Larkbey, A McLean, A. P. Perkins, D. Salmon, C. Ward, D.E. Ward

Club Honours

Waltham Forest F.C. and Leyton Pennant F.C.

1995 – Present

Essex Senior Cup Winners: 2005/6

Essex Senior Trophy Winners: 1995/6

Eastern Frootlit Cup Winners: 1997/8, 1998/9

Essex & Herts Champion's Cup Winners: 1996/7

Essex & Herts Border Comb Cup Winners: 1996/7

London Intermediate Cup Runners-Up: 1996/7

London Challenge Cup Runners-Up: 1995/6, 1996/7

Suburban League Division Winners: 2005/6

Essex County FA Website of the Year: 2012

Youth Teams

EJA Under 18s Trophy Winners: 2003/4

EJA Under 15s Trophy Runners-Up: 2014/5

Conference Youth League: Winners: 2005/6

Pelly Cup Runners-Up: 2005/6

Pennant F.C. and Walthamstow Pennant F.C.

1965 – 1995

London Senior Cup Runners-Up: 1990/1

London Junior Cup Winners: 1974/5

SW League Junior Cup Winners: 1968/9

SW League Intermediate Cup Winners: 1969/70

SW League Senior Cup Winners: 1970/71

SW League Premier League Winners: 1972/3

London Metropolitan League Winners: 1974/5

London Metropolitan League Runners-Up: 1978/9,
1979/80, 1981/2

London Metropolitan League Intermediate Cup

Runners-Up: 1977/8, 1978/9

Spartan Reserve League Winners: 1980/1, 1990/1

Spartan Reserve League Runners-Up: 1987/8

Spartan Reserve League Cup Winners: 1980/1,
1988/9, 1990/1

THE EDITOR

ANDRZEJ PERKINS



PHOTO: @LANZASPORT

Good evening, and welcome to Wadham Lodge for tonight's game with Hackney Wick.

The club playing as Hackney Wick in the Senior League this season exist as a result of a merger between Hackney Wick - who were then playing in the Middlesex County League - and ESL side London Bari.

The new club kept Wick's name, but assumed Bari's place in the Senior League. At the time of writing, it appears that the management and committee of Bari are no longer with the club, though some players do remain.

I wasn't at the game on Saturday, but reading through David Ballheimer's match report (page 8), and Q's notes (page 5), it seems like we had more than enough chances to win the game. It goes to show, that this league is often really tight, and having a good goalscorer in your team can be the difference between being in the top six and the bottom six.

In today's programme, we've also got The Beer Hunter's Guide to our next few away days (page 6), David Chapman on a classic programme from Leyton v Eton Manor (page 7) and a gallery from Hackney Marshes, in homage to this evening's visitors.

There's also the amazing story of Sam Okonowo, who you may remember played for us around five years ago. What you may not know is that he also played for Barcelona 20-odd times. That's the real Barca, with Figo et al. That's on page 16. Thanks to Huw Richards for the heads-up on this one.

Finally, we've got Nick Miller on the weird and wonderful smells of football; page 20.

We're always on the lookout for new and unique content for the programme, so get in touch if you'd like to contribute.

Enjoy the game,
Andrzej

THE TREE SURGEON

CHARLIE WARD

Welcome Hackney Wick for their first ever season in the Essex Senior League, whilst I am sure they will be enjoying the experience, I dare say that they will find the opposition surprisingly tough, I know we were a little shocked when we first faced up to the level in our first season (yes I know that they officially merged with London Bari, but, as far as I am aware, the bulk of the club are from the Hackney Wick club of last season).

They are doing pretty well though, at present, sitting three places below us and one point behind, but, with a game in hand so could leap up above us with a win tonight which makes this encounter a little bit tasty.

The manager who was in charge at London Bari last season, Chris Davis, left by mutual consent a few weeks ago and is replaced by Tolga Dervis, who does have a tenuous link to our club, through the fact that he was in charge of the Under 23 team at Crawley, where of course we have forged a link through our Chairman, Turget Esendagli

Hackney Wick are the third club, so far, this season to see a change of manager, with both Enfield 1893 and also Woodford Town parting with our former manager, Tony Ilevli.

Our own manager, Qayum Shakoore, has expressed his frustrations at our progress, or lack of it and certainly, last Saturday we saw the best and the worst of our team in a game that ended with 3-2 defeat with virtually the last kick of the game.

Having handed the opposition a two goal lead late in the first half, but, we stirred ourselves to pull one back before the break and certainly created many chances in a half we dominated.

Just when it looked as if we had salvaged

a precious point with a well taken goal by Christian Medina, we allowed Sporting Bengal to go home with full points with almost the last kick of the game.

Looking at the side that ended last season, there are just a few players that have returned this season, but, I believe that in many ways, we have better attacking options to pick from.

If you look at the goals scored in the final half a dozen games, most of them were scored by Nikki Dembele and without his goals, would we have been so successful in results.

Sadly, with the departure of both Nana Yiadom and Muhammadu Faal to Dulwich Hamlet, we have struggled to find a consistent goal scorer, despite Q trying countless combinations.

I think the main problem is a combination of lack of confidence and lack of game experience.

The players are trying their hardest, but, when confidence is low, players sometimes opt for the easy option and decision making suffers accordingly.

The background of some of our young shavers is junior football and they will need time to come to terms with the hurly burly of the ESL.

As I said in the previous programme notes, I do believe we have the best manager available and I know he acknowledges the team's weaknesses and is striving hard to correct them.

The players have the chance today, to learn the lessons of Saturday and put in a more consistent performance and hopefully gather the three points which will move us up the table, rather than our opponents.

The one feeling I have this season is one of frustration - we seem to be taking one step forward and one back - we have not managed to strings two wins together on the bounce, a drw after a win is the best we have managed, so far, that has to change, we need to get a head of steam up, if our season is not to fizzle out.

The only consistent thing about the side at the moment is the fact we lack consistency.

The last two games illustrate the point perfectly.

Against Woodford Town we put in a very good second half display and took advantage of their lack of numbers to complete see the game out with an impressive approach and, more importantly, we looked clinical in front of goal.

Our defence seemed to have become more solid and I was confident that as long as we could continue to score the goals, we would be on the way up.

What happened on Saturday? Well for a start there were a couple of players who's preparation were not ideal, but, we were undone in the first half by defensive blunders that gave us a 2-0 mountain climb, until we gave ourselves a lifeline with Abiola getting his first "league" goal for us, to send us in at the break, just 2-1 down.

In the second half, we dominated and should have got back on level terms, but, the old problems resurfaced, lack of good decision making in the final third which destroyed all of our good build up play and poor finishing when

we did create a clear chance.

Christian Medina equalized with a beautiful finish to seemingly, earn us a well deserved point.

However, we were undone by a bit of bad luck and some poor awareness by certain players in the team.

Having used all three substitutes, full back Boris did his hamstring and it was obvious that we couldn't let him continue in that position with the risk of getting a red card as he received a yellow card for fouling their winger, because he was unable to sprint, so we had to move him up front for nuisance value and try to fill in with another player in that position.

But, several of our players did not seemed to realise that Boris was injured and were very slow to take on board what we were trying to do.

Consequently, we conceded a winning goal with virtually the last kick of the game and so we ended the game empty handed when we should have come away with something.

Well meaning people keep saying to me, bad luck, we played well enough to get something, but, with all due respect, I am fed up with hearing that. We have conceded 22 goals in 9 games, and unless we stop conceding so cheaply we wont achieve anything this season.



THE BEER HUNTER

GRAHAM LARKBEY

A very warm welcome to tonight's first-time visitors, Hackney Wick, the result of a merger between London Bari FC and Hackney Wick FC. We wish them luck in their new incarnation - but not tonight!

After our recent Big Day Out to Framlingham, our next away fixture sees us making another trip to another attractive country town, this time Saffron Walden. This is an evening game, but if you have the time to spare it's well worth making an afternoon of it to have a wander round.

The town has an abundance of pubs, though according to CAMRA's ever-excellent Whatpub guide (www.whatpub.com) several of them are predominantly restaurants, including the Eight Bells (Bridge Street), the Saffron Hotel and the Cross Keys (both High Street). Also in High Street, the Duke of York is a more straightforward establishment (Fuller's London Pride, Sharp's Doom Bar and Woodforde's Wherry), while the Temeraire is a Wetherspoons with their usual offering of good beers and food at reasonable prices.

In Gold Street you'll find the Old English Gentleman, a welcoming 18th century inn with log fires, Adnams Bitter and Woodforde's Wherry, plus guest ales, an extensive bar food menu and displays of local artwork, but the jewel in the crown is evidently the King's Arms in Market Hill.

Voted CAMRA Town Pub of the Year by the local branch, this venerable wooden-beamed multi-roomed pub often has a dark or mild ale on tap once the weather turns colder - regular beers are Adnams Bitter, Woodforde's Wherry and Oakham JHB, plus guests. Looks like the one to head for first!

After that, we swop the country for the seaside with a trip down river to Southend Manor. Here, the Beer Hunter's favourite stop-off near the ground is Chester's (formerly the TEAC Club), a couple of minutes walk away on the seafront road. This small, cosy club welcomes visitors and usually has a choice of two real ales at a very reasonable price, which you can savour in quiet surroundings while watching the ever-changing skyscape over the estuary. Just along the road is the Falcon, a lively family-run pub offering Greene King and Morlands.

If you're looking for a good pint in central Southend, a reliable bet is the Last Post in Weston Road near the station, a huge Wetherspoons housed in a former Victorian post office building. The extensive beer range often includes local brews such as Wibblers and George's. Not far away, the Railway in Clifftown Road has a National Inventory-listed interior and offers Adnams, Woodforde's and Crouch Vale beers. At the other extreme sizewise, the Cornucopia in Marine Parade usually has a Farmer's Ales beer from Maldon on tap and is reputedly the smallest bar in Essex.

CLASSIC PROGRAMMES

DAVID CHAPMAN

Tonight's opponents are not exactly new-boys as we have met before when they were known as London Bari.

Bari recently merged with Hackney Wick taking the latter's name and remaining part of the Essex Senior League.

Any mention of Hackney Wick takes me back to those halcyon days of the Eton Manor Boys Club.

I wish I had a pound for every time I have run round 'The Triangle' or in Vicky Park. Sadly, the headquarters were closed down and a new road created linking Blackwall Tunnel with the A11.

It tore the heart out of the old club, but we still have our memories. So I thought of showing a programme versus Eton Manor from 1950 in a replay of an FA Amateur Cup game.

Leyton lost by the single goal having played out a score draw seven days earlier on The Wilderness. The Leyton side had only three players who would twelve months later reach the final held at Wembley, defeating Eton Manor on the way.

Playing for Leyton was inside forward Kenneth Facey. After leaving Leyton in 1952 Ken

captained Leyton Orient and played in over 300 games (actually 301) for the Third Division South side.

What is probably less well-known is that over the next few years one member of the Manor coaching staff was Alf Ramsey.



MATCH REPORT



WALTHAM FOREST 2

Tanimowo 42, C Medina 79



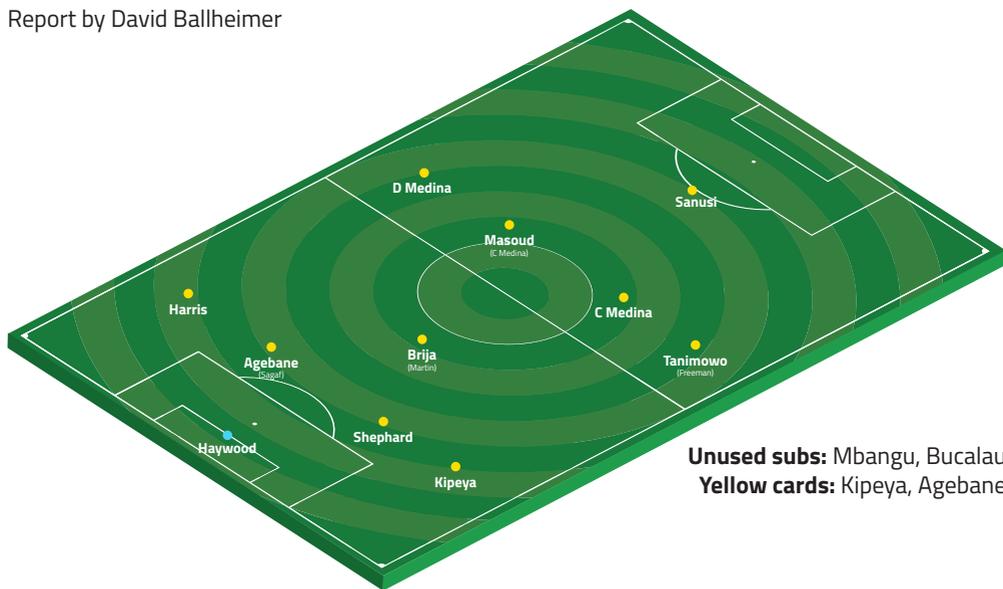
SPORTING BENGAL 3

Carvell 34 90+5, Mendes 41

ESSEX SENIOR LEAGUE

WADHAM LODGE | SATURDAY 16TH SEPTEMBER 2017

Report by David Ballheimer



Sporting Bengal United continued their excellent start to the season by snatching victory from Waltham Forest at Wadham Lodge on Saturday. The first thing to say that it was a superb contest, one that neither deserved to lose.

In the opening nine minutes Sporting could and probably should have been three goals to the good. Shibli Miah curled a 25-yard shot off the underside of the crossbar after three minutes; Oscar Mendes, arriving late at the far post,

couldn't make good connection on a right-wing Codey Cameron cross; and a Freddy Tandon header from a corner thudded off the middle of the bar from a right-side corner.

Gradually Forest began to assert themselves once they had achieved a degree of defensive stability, they showed they could be dangerous going forward. Abiola Tanimowo proved particularly tricky and he struck a post with a 20-yard curling shot.

The breakthrough came in the 34th minute. A simple pass from Mendes released Steven Carvell and he composed himself as he ran at Sam Hayward, before rolling the ball into the net.

Sporting's second goal, in the 41st minute, came from the route of one of the earlier chances. Carvell started it with a clever pass to Cameron out on the right flank. Cameron got into a crossing position and his low ball into the danger area was despatched powerfully by the unmarked Mendes eight yards out.

The two-goal lead lasted barely sixty seconds. Forest produced the perfect response as Tanimowo worked the opening and his precise bending shot went beyond Ataaib Khan's dive on its way into the far corner.

The second half ebbed and flowed with both teams failing to take good opportunities. In the 54th minute, Ashan Siddiq was denied by a sprawling save from Haywood. Forest substitute Mohammed Sagaf did well to create an opening for Azhad Masood, but he could not convert the chance.

Sporting then thought they should have been awarded a penalty when one of their replacements, Suli Udi-Ba was sent tumbling in the penalty but the referee waved away the claims. At the other end, Tandon produced a

Juelmo Agebame.

But Forest's best chance fell to Hafeez Sanusi in the 75th minute, when given a clear run at goal. After rounding Khan, however, he was hurried and harried off the ball by Tanden when all it needed was a sidefoot to level the game. It allowed, instead for an equaliser of the very highest order. In the 80th minute, Sporting got themselves in a defensive muddle and the backpass to Khan forced him to clear from outside his penalty area wide on the right side. The kick did not go far enough and Chris Medina had time to control the ball before drilling a 45-yard shot into the net.

The game ebbed and flowed with both teams creating half-chances and better, but the final touch wasn't there. Shahiful Choudhury fired wastefully over the bar from a good position before Mendes was unlucky when he saw his effort bounce off the top of the crossbar one minute into added time.

But the drama wasn't over. In the fifth minute of stoppage time – there had been more than enough stoppages to justify the additional minutes – Forest failed to clear their lines and when the ball came to Carvell, he controlled and struck a shot which found its way past Hayward's dive on its way into the bottom corner. Cue joy for the visitors and utter misery for the home team.



Free app available from Apple App Store and Google Play



HACKNEY MARSHES

THE ESSEX SENIOR LEAGUE MAY SEEM A PRETTY LOWLY PLACE TO PLAY FOOTBALL SOMETIMES. BUT THE REAL HOME OF FOOTBALL IN EAST LONDON IS HACKNEY MARSHES





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ESSEX SENIOR LEAGUE

Latest Essex Senior League Table (18-9-17)

		P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
1	Takeley	6	6	0	0	15	18
2	Basildon United	7	6	0	1	8	18
3	Great Wakering Rovers	8	5	1	2	10	16
4	West Essex	7	5	1	1	7	16
5	Sporting Bengal United	9	5	1	3	5	16
6	Tower Hamlets	7	4	2	1	9	14
7	FC Romania	6	4	1	1	11	13
8	Redbridge	7	4	1	2	1	13
9	Ilford	8	4	0	4	5	12
10	Barkingside	7	4	0	3	2	12
11	Woodford Town (2017)	8	3	2	3	-3	11
12	Clapton	6	2	3	1	2	9
13	Hullbridge Sports	8	2	3	3	-4	9
14	Waltham Forest	9	2	2	5	-8	8
15	Sawbridgeworth Town	8	2	1	5	-4	7
16	Stansted	8	2	1	5	-6	7
17	Hackney Wick	8	2	1	5	-7	7
18	Enfield 1893	7	2	0	5	-8	6
19	Southend Manor	5	1	1	3	-3	4
20	Burnham Ramblers	9	1	1	7	-16	4
21	Wadham Lodge	8	1	0	7	-16	3

LEAGUE TOP SCORERS

	Player	Club	Apps	Goals
1	Oscar Mendes	Sporting Bengal United FC	9	6
=	James Peagram	Ilford FC	7	6
=	Stuart Anthony Zanone	Takeley FC	6	6
4	Michael Mignot	West Essex FC	7	5
=	LIVIU FLORIN POP	FC Romania	6	5
=	Jack Sykes	Stansted FC	8	5

STATTO

	Starts	Goals	Sub on	Sub off	Yel	Red
Juelmo Agebane	11	0	0	0	4	0
Mohammed Ahmed	3	0	0	0	0	0
Terry Anim	1	0	0	1	0	0
Callum Bailey	0	0	2	0	0	0
Vicente Belho	4	1	0	0	0	0
Jetmir Brijia	2	0	1	1	0	0
Wilson Chaby	0	0	2	0	0	0
Isaac Charles	1	0	0	0	0	0
Jake Connaris	1	0	1	1	0	0
James Curran	2	0	0	0	0	0
Cruz Danilo	0	0	3	0	0	0
Germaine Dua	4	1	0	0	0	0
Muhammadu Faal	1	0	0	1	0	0
Marco Faria	2	0	1	0	0	0
Terry Foxe	2	0	0	0	0	0
Enoch Freeman	1	0	2	1	1	0
Bradley Harris	11	1	0	0	0	0
Sam Hayward	3	0	0	0	1	0
Billy Hendy	1	0	0	0	0	0
Mahdi Khan	1	0	0	1	0	0
Boris Kipeya	8	0	0	0	2	0
Mohamed Koita	1	1	1	0	0	0
Arjanit Krasniqi	4	0	3	3	0	0
Olumide Lapite	2	0	1	2	0	0
Ohimai Long	8	1	0	2	0	0
Pelummy Martin	0	0	1	0	0	0
Azhad Masoud	4	1	4	3	0	1
Ben Masuku	2	0	0	1	0	0
Chris Medina	4	1	3	4	0	0
Daniel Medina	4	1	0	3	0	0
David Myers	4	0	0	0	0	0
Nathan Okoye	6	1	0	1	1	0
Mohammed Sagaf	5	2	1	0	1	0
Hafeez Sanusi	2	1	2	0	0	0
Dominic Shephard	5	0	0	0	0	0
Zaid Sorr	1	0	1	1	0	0
Abiola Tanimowo	8	2	1	2	0	0
Glen Toonga	3	0	0	1	0	0
Harrison Tweddell	3	0	2	1	0	0
Joshua Wandera	3	1	0	0	0	0
Nathan Warren	2	0	0	0	0	0
Nana Yiadom	1	1	0	0	0	0
Kevin Zola	0	0	1	0	0	0

FIXTURES, RESULTS & STATS

Jul	Sat	29	A	Hullbridge Sports	2-2	ESL	Warren	Agebane	Harris	Curran	Kipeya	Sagaf 1
Aug	Tue	1	A	Takeley	1-4	ESL	Warren	Agebane	Harris	Longe *	Curran	Foxe
	Sat	5	A	FC Romania	2-2	FAC	Ahmed	Harris	Agebane	Okoye	Kipeya	Toonga *
	Sat	12	H	West Essex	0-2	ESL	Myers	Masuku	Freeman *	Longe *	Okoye	Foxe
	Tue	15	H	FC Romania	1-2	FAC	Ahmed	Masuku *	Harris	Longe *	Okoye	Agebane
	Sat	26	H	Wadham Lodge	3-1	ESL	Ahmed	Kipeya	Harris	Agebane *	Okoye 1	Charles
	Tue	29	A	Clapton	2-2	ESL	Myers	Masoud	Harris	Hendy *	Kipeya	Agebane
Sep	Sat	2	A	Sawbridgeworth Town	0-2	ESL	Hayward	Kipeya	Harris	Lapite *	Okoye *	Shephard
	Sat	9	A	Framlingham Town	0-2	FAV	Myers	Kipeya	Harris	Belho	Shephard	Agebane
	Tue	12	A	Woodford Town 2017	4-1	ESL	Hayward	Kipeya	Harris	Agebane	Shephard	Brija
	Sat	16	H	Sporting Bengal United	2-3	ESL	Hayward	Kipeya	Harris	Brija *	Shephard	Agebane
	Wed	20	H	Hackney Wick		ESL						
	Sat	30	A	Southend Manor		ESL						
Oct	Wed	4	H	Burnham Ramblers		ESL						
	Sat	7	H	Great Wakering Rovers		ESL						
	Tue	10	A	Woodford Town 2017		ESL						
	Sat	14	A	Stansted		ESL						
	Mon	16	A	Enfield 1893		ESL						
	Sat	21	H	Basildon United		ESL						
Nov	Sat	4	A	Ilford		ESL						
	Sat	11	H	Woodford Town 2017		ESL						
	Sat	18	A	Barkingside		ESL						
	Wed	22	H	Hullbridge Sports		ESL						
	Sat	25	H	Takeley		ESL						
Dec	Sat	2	H	Tower Hamlets		ESL						
	Wed	6	H	Barkingside		ESL						
	Sat	9	H	Sawbridgeworth Town		ESL						
	Sat	16	H	Southend Manor		ESL						
	Sat	23	A	Hackney Wick		ESL						
Jan	Sat	1	H	Clapton		ESL						
	Sat	13	A	FC Romania		ESL						
	Sat	20	A	Sporting Bengal United		ESL						
	Sat	27	H	Redbridge		ESL						
Feb	Sat	3	A	Burnham Ramblers		ESL						
	Sat	10	H	FC Romania		ESL						
	Sat	24	H	Enfield 1893		ESL						
Mar	Sat	3	A	Basildon United		ESL						
	Sat	3	A	Wadham Lodge		ESL						
	Sat	10	A	Great Wakering Rovers		ESL						
	Sat	24	A	West Essex		ESL						
Apr	Sat	7	A	Redbridge		ESL						
	Sat	21	H	Stansted		ESL						
	Sat	28	H	Ilford		ESL						

FROM BARCELONA TO WALTHAM FOREST

JASON PETTIGROVE TELLS THE REMARKABLE STORY OF SAM OKUNOWO (OR "BARCELONA SAM", AS HIS FOREST TEAM MATES CALLED HIM) WHO WENT FROM THE CAMP NOU TO CRICKLEFIELDS.

He could once count Xavi, Luís Figo, Rivaldo and Luis Enrique amongst his teammates but Gbenga Samuel Okunowo was never quite in their league at Barcelona.

This affable Nigerian, who also played for Benfica and at international level, even now, could walk just about anywhere in the world and no one would give him a second glance.

He arrived into this world on 1 March 1979 in Ibadan, Nigeria and was born to play football, taking his first tentative steps in the sport whilst still at nursery school. When others were interested in a dizzying array of other activities, Okunowo would seek solace and comfort with a ball.

Its power was magnetic and more often than not, the youngster would take the ball to bed with him. They were inseparable. Even after he had completed his primary school education, no one could come between him and his prized possession. The parents at African Grammar School in Oyo State would laugh amongst themselves but Gbenga's parents were more than happy that their son had somewhere to channel all of that youthful energy.

Their encouragement in the very earliest stages of his life and his formative years would play a huge part later on, but a professional career was far from the minds of everyone at that stage, least of all Gbenga himself.

He was quite good, mind. He knew it and so did all of the local kids. Makeshift pitches were formed whenever and wherever the mood took everyone, and as Gbenga got older and stronger, it was clear that all those hours of practice hadn't gone to waste.



Spotted playing for his school, he was approached by Liberty Boys Club, a team who had something of a reputation for playing good football. It was the first real chance for everyone to understand how good the player was. And boy he was good. A strong, quick right-back, it was a rarity for him to be beaten down his flank. With pace to burn, he often would take the game to his opponent, helping out in attack whenever possible.

Exide Sparkers, amongst many others, had been made aware of his talent, and being in a higher division, their interest meant that what had been an enjoyable hobby was beginning to turn into something a little more serious. By now 15 years of age, Okunowo's schooling was of paramount importance to a family of little means, but the tones in which their son was discussed by knowledgeable local football men, led his parents to believe that they should give him the best possible chance at sporting success.

A dip in his schoolwork was to be expected but unlike so many others before him, a dip in his form on the pitch never came. Just before the World Youth Championships in Ecuador in 1995, he had come to national attention, and his rise could not have been better timed as he was picked to join the under-17s in what was an ultimately unsuccessful tournament, but

one in which a lot of positives were taken away. Not least for Gbenga himself.

Shooting Stars Sports Club of the Nigerian Professional Football League were only interested in the very best, and at 16, he now fitted into that bracket. His consistently high level of performance had turned him into something of a prodigy, and a local hero to boot.

Now people were turning up to games to watch him – to see what all of the fuss was about. It was blindingly obvious to anyone with half a football brain that the boy had talent, for he stood, metaphorically and physically, head and shoulders above the rest. Always in peak physical condition, the youngster had never lost a game to injury. Though it would author his later career, he was flying in his late teens and was called up at 18 by the Nigerian under-20 selectors – the most pivotal decision in his career.

The 1997 UEFA-CAF Meridian Cup was played in Portugal and Okunowo would have a starring role. Africa was well represented in the tournament with Ghana, Ivory Coast and Guinea in the eight-team competition alongside Greece, France and Spain as well as hosts Portugal.





Though the young Super Eagles would only qualify second from their group, ceding top spot in Group B to an excellent Greek side, a 2-0 victory over Portugal saw them into the final against a Spain team which included Xavi within its ranks. A five-goal thriller was edged by Nigeria 3-2, with Okunowo one of the best players on the pitch.

Barcelona's staff, at the tournament ostensibly to keep tabs on young Xavi, had seen enough. Like so many before them, the Nigerian right-back had them in his thrall. Less than an hour after the final had concluded, Barcelona made their move, introducing themselves and inviting Okunowo for a week's trial.

With a still-supportive family right behind him, it was an easy decision to make and Gbenga made his way to Catalonia and a short tenure at La Masia, then located right next door to the Camp Nou.

A period of adaptation was expected and with that in mind, a second week's trial was given. Before it was up the decision had been made: Gbenga Samuel Okunowo had made the big time, Barça paying Shooting Stars £14,000 for his services. Not long afterwards, Xavi would graciously introduce himself as one of the members of the Spanish side that Nigeria had beaten weeks before. It was the first sign of the sportsmanship and conduct that Barça expect of their players.

Signed to the B team, it would only take the Nigerian a season to force his way into first-team reckoning, Louis van Gaal handing him a squad number for the 1997/98 campaign.

He would make debut at the start of the following season, in August 1998, against Racing Santander, lasting 76 minutes of a tough 0-0 draw before being replaced by Roger García. If playing just behind Phillip Cocu and Luís Figo down the right side fazed him, Okunowo certainly didn't show it. It was a great start.

With Van Gaal tinkering tactically and with personnel, replacing Figo on 82 minutes against Extremadura was a feather in Gbenga's cap on his second, shorter outing. His first El Clásico at the Bernabéu saw another sub appearance, this time on the hour for Bolo Zenden, and, more importantly, it was also his third game without defeat.

In fact, he wouldn't be on the losing side until his ninth match, but then lost four on the spin. With 21 appearances to his name including six as a sub, there was one, clear, standout moment. Marking Dwight Yorke and Andy Cole in a Champions League match against Manchester United which ended 3-3 was by far the biggest game of his career.

A reasonable end to his first season promised much but Van Gaal evidently had time to reflect over the summer, and given the Dutch bias



in the Barça team at that time, it was clear that the coach preferred Michael Reizeger in the right-back slot. With nowhere to go professionally at the club, Gbenga had no option but to accede to a loan move to Benfica.

With less than 10 appearances to his name in Portugal, it's fair to say that things didn't work out the way anyone would've wanted so Van Gaal recalled the player after he had represented Nigeria at the Sydney Olympics in 2000. Determined to fight for his place, Gbenga suffered a cruel blow, injuring his knee so badly that it required surgery. It took so long to heal that he was again loaned out, this time to Spanish second tier outfit, Badajoz.

Unable to prove his fitness, he didn't play a single game and Barcelona eventually decided to cut their losses and sold the player to Greek side Ionikos. It was about this point when Gbenga began to realise the harsh realities of life as a professional footballer. With knees that were shot to pieces, he could never get fit enough again to make a real impression.

Over the course of the next six years, he would try his luck in as far flung places as the Maldives (VB Sports Club), Albania (KF Tirana) and Ukraine (Stal and Metalurh Donetsk), not to mention Dinamo Bucharest, Vilanova del Camí from the Spanish amateur league, Odra Wodzisław from Poland, and both Northwich Victoria and Waltham Forest, some eight steps below the Premier League.

From the time he joined Ionikos to the time he had left Waltham Forest, he'd played less than 20 games in eight years. It's a miracle that Sunshine Stars would then take a risk on a 33-year-old with the knees of someone twice his age, but he was still a big draw in the locale. A boy made good.

Thirty times he managed to drag his sorry frame around the pitch before it all became too much and he retired from the sport at 34.

Just as his football career was petering out in 2012, his house in Ibadan burned down and Gbenga lost everything. There was nothing left of his property once the fire had taken hold, all of his trophies, memories, medals and papers detailing his career were lost, not to mention his passport, clothing and other valuables.

Fortunately, Barcelona were on hand to help out their old player after an online appeal alerted the Catalans to Gbenga's plight. In his hour of need, his prayers were answered.

Now his situation has turned full circle. As a scout of some renown, he has a keen eye for talent and a moral compass that is focussed on bringing through the right type of Nigerian superstar. He hasn't hit the jackpot just yet but his spirit, desire and will to succeed should ensure that Gbenga Samuel Okunowo is a name we'll hear more about in the future.

CELEBRATING FOOTBALL'S WEIRD AND WONDERFUL SMELLS



MOST PEOPLE CAN RECALL THEIR FAVOURITE FOOTBALLING SIGHT OR SOUND, BUT SMELLS ARE WHAT REALLY STIR THE FOOTBALLING SOUL. WE'RE TALKING PIES, CIGARETTE SMOKE, BOVRIL AND URINAL CAKES. NICK MILLER PREFERS HORSE ST TO BACON...**

In *High Fidelity*, the Stephen Frears adaptation of Nick Hornby's novel and one of those rare things, a film that's better than the book, there's a scene in which John Cusack's character Rob explains what he misses about his ex-girlfriend, Laura. "I miss...her smell," he says, almost apologetically. "And the way she tastes. It's a mystery of human chemistry and I don't understand it, but some people, as far as the senses are concerned, just feel like home."

And, as ever, as with relationships, also football. The business of going to football games is obviously a largely sensual (in the non ruddy sense of the word...although we're not here to judge...) business. Sights, sounds, touch, and as with Rob and Laura, smells.

Football is, quite obviously, a largely visual experience. The little things we can see at grounds that make up part of the experience, beyond the mere game are clear and oft-discussed; the vast greenness of the pitch, standing out in the middle of a sometimes built-up, usually urban and almost always largely concrete area; the colours worn by both teams and fans; the flags and banners and, if you're in Europe or at a particularly creative English game, that trickiest of things to get right, the tifo; the simple pleasure of watching a



SPECT HEATING

well-timed, crunching tackle. We could go on.

The sounds, too. Songs from the stands, which are sometimes even to a tune other than 'Sloop John B'; loud and aggressive swearing from people who wouldn't usually let an eff or cee pass their lips, let alone loudly or aggressively; the simple pleasure of hearing a well-timed, crunching tackle.

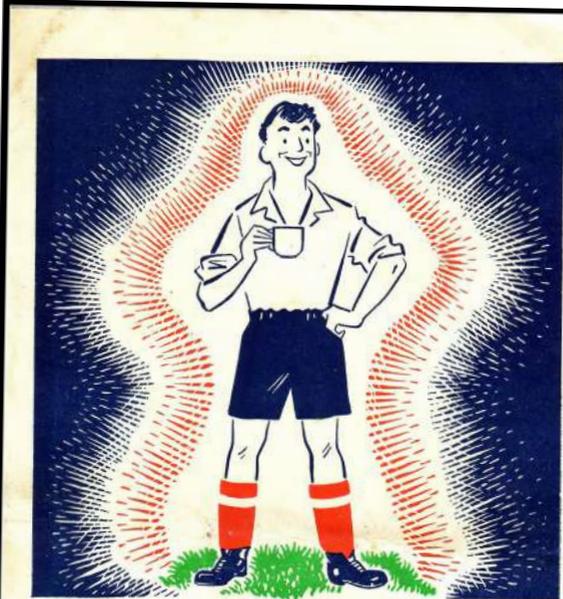
But also the smells. The smells aren't quite so immediately obvious, and aren't quite so frequently discussed, but are often just as big a part of what is so often called the 'experience' of going to games.

The one that instantly springs to mind, and tends to send those of us who recall that bleak hinterland before Sky invented football in 1992 into inexplicable glassy-eyed reverie, is Bovril. Now, as a drink, Bovril is revolting. It's meat extract in a paper cup, for heck's sake. You would smother your Sunday beef and potatoes in gravy, but you wouldn't sip it in the concourse of Anfield or the City Ground or Gigg Lane. But like penicillin or those battery-powered back massager contraptions, Bovril is one of those things whose primary purpose is not the one it was originally intended to be. The smell of the stuff is not necessarily pleasant, but it just smells like football, so thus becomes

glorious. If you've ever caught a whiff of it in a scenario other than at a match, as unlikely as that might be, you'll instantly go in your mind to football, through that curious sensory recall of ours that connects events to intangibles.

In a similar manner, there's onions and cheap burgers, frying merrily away outside the ground as some gruff bald bruiser or a hardened woman with scraped back hair and an expression that says 'Do not f**k with me', shovels questionable meat your way in exchange for a fiver. Again, that smell isn't inherently especially pleasant, but it's part of being at a game.

Then there's smoke. As a lifelong non-smoker who rather enjoys the experience of waking the morning after a night out and not brushing down jeans coated in eau-de-Silk Cut, it's odd that the absence of cigarette smoke might even be noticed, never mind missed. But since the smoking ban included football grounds, the soft waft drifting from a thousand nervous cigarettes from various parts of the stand has been notably absent. That's the smell of tension, of



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BOVRIL puts beef into you

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swathes of fans trying to calm themselves down via any lung-rotting means necessary. At some grounds you can still catch a whiff, and erstwhile F365 Italian expert Sheridan Bird reports that you used to be able to smell a slightly more 'specialist' brand of smoke at Napoli games. Makes you wonder why they don't seem more relaxed, really.

Others are even more strange. Walking down Green Street after West Ham v Newcastle on Monday night, I caught that most individual of scents, horse dung. For someone who has lived in cities for 14 years, the only place you can smell that is either during brief and ill-advised trips to the country, or at football games. The combination of equine excretions and nearby hotdog stands is not an aroma you're likely to find in Calvin Klein's next range of perfumes, but it's still enough to inspire a warm, fuzzy and quite curious feeling.

Others on Twitter suggested the smell of freshly-printed programmes, urinal cakes (weird place, the internet), fog, which has that cold, wet smell that's tricky to describe but is

certainly there on chilly evenings as the mist rolls in from the Trent/Thames/Tees, while Steve Welsh, a fine illustrator you should all check out, commented: "I remember a Boro article that described games over the festive period as a mix of cheap aftershave and new leather gloves." Marvellous. And, of course, there's pies, whether that's the semi-enticing scent of warm pastry, or the mixture of non-specific meat and regret that emerges once you've taken a bite or removed the top.

Ask some people to describe their favourite smells, and they'd say things like freshly cut grass, or bacon, or flowers, or their partner's favoured fragrance. However, ask a football fan and you'll probably get one or a combination of the things we've mentioned, because of what it reminds us of. Few of these things are what you would necessarily call 'nice' or 'pleasant', but they're part of the game, and can represent all sorts of other things. It's a mystery of human chemistry and I don't understand it, but some things, as far as the senses are concerned, just feel like home.

TODAY'S TEAMS



	NUMBER		
Juelmo Agebane	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Samy Abdelaziz
Vicente Belho	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Allan Bastel
Jetmir Brija	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Berkcan Belindir
Andrei Bucalau	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ibrahim Camara
Bradley Harris	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Saico Djop
Sam Hayward	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Robert Gaweda
Boris Kipeya	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Marian Histrov
Pelummy Martin	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Jeffrey Idemudia
Azhad Masoud	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Robert Kasanga
Elie Mbangou	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Joel Malundama
Daniel Medina	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Simpson Mpalampa
Chris Medina	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Jermaine Nicholson
Mohammed Sagaf	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sergo Sidibe
Hafeez Sanusi	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Davide Trindade
Dominic Shephard	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mark Ugochukwu
Abiola Tanimowo	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

RECENT FORM

Forest

D-L-L-W-L

Hackney Wick

L-L-L-W-L

MIDWEEK FIXTURES

Tuesday

Clapton v West Essex

Redbridge v Ilford

Woodford Town (2017) v

Tower Hamlets

Wednesday

Sporting Bengal United v

Wadham Lodge

Waltham Forest v Hackney
Wick

TODAY'S OFFICIALS

Andy Simmonds

Alan Steward

Abu Taher