

**WELCOME
TO THE
VERDANT
STADIUM**



**OFFICIAL MATCHDAY PROGRAMME
BIGGLESWADE UNITED FC**





CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

It only feels like yesterday that the curtain came down on our season, yet here we go again as we welcome Tring Athletic to the Verdant Stadium for our first Spartan South Midlands Football League match of a new campaign.

A campaign we go into full of optimism and positivity following the announcement that Kane Dougherty has taken over at the helm of our men's first team, following his move from Shefford Town and Campton where he was coach for the past three and a half seasons. During his time at the club he took them to the top of the table during the 2020-21 season before Covid intervened, winning promotion the following year via the play-offs as well as the Spartan South Midlands Div 1 League Cup and reaching the 3rd round proper of the FA Vase in their first ever inclusion.

The conversations I've had with Kane suggest we are very much on the same wavelength.

I'm excited about the prospect of working with him because it's clear that, much as I do, he sees football as something that extends much further than merely the result.

He has also shown in his time at Shefford Town and Campton that he is exactly the type of person we need to take our club forward to the next stage.

I am really encouraged that he sees the importance of establishing a close liaison with all the teams and coaches at the club, as well as with fans, volunteers, the board, in fact with everyone who is involved with the club."

He will be joined by Josh Bickerstaff, as assistant Manager, someone who played over 320 games for Hitchin Town, before joining their coaching team and James Taylor as First Team Coach. James follows Kane from Shefford Town & Campton, where he was his assistant for over 3 years.

Highly experienced as a player, turning out for local sides such as Hitchin, Stevenage and Bedford Town Josh will bring a great enthusiasm and energy to the group.

Joe Green, previously with Shefford Town & Campton and Eynesbury Rovers joins us as sports therapist and in addition to bringing a wealth of knowledge and support for our First Team squad, Joe will also be holding physio and rehab clinics every Thursday for all squads at the club to book onto.

Also staying on Kane's coaching team will be Josh Thomas, Del Digweed and Martin Russell.

But it isn't just on the pitch where changes have taken place.

Ryan Madden, best known at the club for his contributions on match day commentaries and interviews as well as for his Biggy Talks podcast, is the club's new head of Media Operations at Biggleswade United.

He takes over from Patri Gonzalez who will be stepping down because of an increase in work and studying commitments.

We are thrilled to welcome Ryan as Head of Media Operations and are convinced he will apply the same level of commitment and dedication that he has always done when banging the drum for the club as a match day commentator and popular podcaster.

The departure of Patri left us with big boots to fill, although I am sure that in Ryan we have found the perfect person to carry on the great efforts made by Patri in helping to promote this great club of ours.

Also in a radical re-structuring to the senior male section at the club, Dogan Ffrench is to become the club's new Technical Secretary.

He will be assisted in his role by former first team player and Under 23 coach, Nayasha Sagwete.

They will look to link up with both senior male teams, as well as with the Youth and women sections at the club. One of their primary roles would be to create Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes to assist coaches in instilling our way of playing and behaving, as well as being on hand to offer advice and help, as well as reporting back regularly to the chairman and the board.

I am personally so happy to see them both returning fully to the club. They are people that represent us wonderfully, have the right ideas, the ideal synergy and the same desires we all have to move our club forward.

The future looks bright; Onwards and upwards!

Guillem Balagué
biggleswadeunited@gmail.com

STORY OF OUR CLUB

Biggleswade United Football Club was re-formed on the 16th July 1959. However, local history records indicate that there was a Biggleswade United side playing at Second Meadow as early as 1929. Our first season (1959/60) saw us competing in Division Three of the North Herts. League (NHL). After 10 successful years in the NHL the club made the step up to South Midlands League (SML) football. But towards the end of a 15-year association with the SML the club began to struggle and after three years of finishing in the bottom three of Division One we sought fresh fields. The club joined the Herts. Senior but club continued to find the going tough. In 1986 we elected to return to local League football, joining the Bedford and District Football League and began to build again.

The appointment of Brian Swords as first team manager in 87/88 proved to be the turning point in the club's fortunes. During the next ten years the club achieved a tremendous amount of success on and off the football pitch. Our record of League and Cup honours speak for themselves but aligned to this a great deal of work went on behind the scenes to match the on-field success. The club now boasts one of the best clubhouse and ground facilities in the Mid-Bedfordshire area. The success of the club also attracted many new players as well as commanding a great deal of loyalty from those players who helped the club progress from Division Three of the Bedford and District League to County Senior Club status in just 15 years.

The 1995/96 season was the most successful in the club's history - winning five major honours; the Beds Intermediate County Cup, Bedford and District League Championship, League Cup Championship and as the League's representatives the club won the Beds. FA Centenary Cup. Having won every major Bedford League honour the club felt it was time to move on and made the decision to make the step up once again and returned to Division One of the

SML. In an exceptionally successful first season we celebrated a Division One "double" by winning the Championship and the Division One Cup. We also retained the Beds. FA Intermediate County Cup, only the second club in the competition's history to achieve this feat. To crown our success the club were awarded the SML Special Achievement Trophy in July 1997.

In the season 1997/98 we finally achieved Senior status. This was achieved not only through the endeavours of the players on the field but ultimately as a result of an extremely hard working committee. With the help of the Biggleswade Town Council a new stand was erected and perimeter fencing installed. And two seasons later the club erected floodlights and on the evening of 26th October 1999 we played our first-ever floodlit game at Second Meadow, Ryman League side Leighton Town were the visitors in the Bedfordshire Premier Cup.

The next eleven years saw the first team led by Steve "Snowy" Wright and under his management the club continued to enjoy a very high level of League and Cup success ultimately achieving promotion to the Molten Spartan South Midlands League Premier Division and with it the opportunity to compete in the FA Cup. And under Snowy the club made three Beds FA Senior Challenge Cup final appearances, winning two of the three with victories over Stotfold (4-1) and Leighton Town (1-0) but missed out in 2006/07 going down 2-0 to Dunstable Town. Snowy's other cup successes came in the form of the Hunts Premeir Cup, North Beds Charity Cup, Hinchingsbrooke Cup, the SML Division One Cup and the SML Special Achievement Award once again. The end of the 2006 2007 saw Snowy step down as manager with his assistant, Nick Burton taking over the first team reins. January 5th 2009 saw the club embark on further ambitious ground improvements. With financial backing from Biggleswade Town Council, Mid Beds District

Council and the Football Foundation we installed a 260-seater stand, fully enclosed the ground with a double turnstile entrance and players' secure walkway which raised the ground to Grade E status. After several years of stability in terms of first team managers the next six years saw a regular turnover of first team and reserve team managers with Nick Burton, Dave Elkin and Phil Childs all taking over the first team reins for a time.

At the start of the 2013 2014 season we appointed Mick Reardon and Mark Royal as first team managers both of whom had enjoyed success as coaches at the higher levels of football. Their disciplined approach was quickly adhered to and responded to by the players and under their stewardship we achieved the highest Premier Division position in nine years and first silverware in seven years winning the North Beds Charity Cup for the first time in the club's history.

In November 2014 the club took a further positive step to realise our ambitions with the appointment of Sky Sports Presenter and renowned author, Guillem Balague as Biggleswade United's Director of Football. Following Mick and Mark's decision to step down at the end 2014 2015, Guillem was quick to act and recruited a new Head Coach in Cristian Colas Beccera. Cristian was assisted by former professional player, Stuart Bimson, and under their guidance the team finished in eighth spot in the Premier Division in 2017 2018 - the highest position in the club's history. Having built a strong reputation for their outstanding coaching ability and playing philosophy Cristian and Stuart moved up to Step 3 level club, Staines Town, for the start of the 2018 2019 season. Guillem was again in search for a high quality coach and Jimmy Martin came highly recommended by his predecessor, Colas, who worked with Jimmy at Stevenage FC Academy. Jimmy was appointed Manager in May 2018 but he tendered his resignation in October 2018 having been offered a "hard to refuse" opportunity to take up a coaching role at Premier Division club Watford. Despite the setback the first team went on to record their highest ever League placing - a fourth spot in the Premier Division.

In the season 2019 2020 the club were sitting in a highly commendable third position in the Premier Division and under the management of Chris Dev-ane and Trishnan Patel were hoping for a promotion play off opportunity. However, in March 2020 the season was decalred Null and Void by the FA after the devastating outbreak of the Coronavirus. The club were also to learn that Chris and Tishnan had accepted the offer to work at Step 4 and departed the club at short notice. Fortunately the club were

able to call upon the services of former Head Coach Cristian Colas Cristian took the club to its highest ever position in the club's history at the curtailment of the 20/21 season leaving us second in the table on PPG. The club applied for promotion to Step 4 but were unsuccessful. A double whammy came when the club were subjected to a lateral move to the UHlsport United Counties League. The FA's actions had a devastating effect on the club and we spent most of the 2021 2022 season at the foot of the table. But we rallied and secured Step 5 football on the final day of the season. The club have now been re-instated in to the SML and with a strong squad will be looking to put that season's nightmare in to a distant memory and push on to return as a top of the table club.

With the nightmare season confined to the history books we kicked on and finished a very creditible 8th in the Premier Division but the highlight of the season was achieving the best ever run in the FA Vase. Starting at the qualifying round stages we came through five rounds reaching the fourth round proper but fell to Coventry Sphinx. At the end of a great season Cristian Colas made the difficult decision to step down after 7 (-2) seasons as head coach. Two United players came forward with the right experience, credentials and knowledge of the football world at this level and the next and the decision was felt to be the right one. Gareth Hunt, who had captained the side and had been instrumental in helping us through the difficult season, will be partnered with Jordan Wright who captained the FA Vase winning Newport Pagnell Town team. Highly respected by their peers we are confident that Gaz and Jordan will see us enjoy further success in the years to come.

The club has certainly come a long way in relatively few years but we could not have done it without the help of a very supportive Town and District Council who clearly understand the benefits of having a community based club in Biggleswade. Our success is also very much down to a very hard working committee who throughout the year - not just the football season - continue to volunteer their time and commitment to the club, to help it continue to thrive and be a source of enjoyment for our supporters and the Biggleswade community.

TEAMSHEETS

**BIGGLESWADE
UNITED FC**



**TRING
ATHLETIC**



**JOSH MOLLISON
JOE DEFRIES
FREDDIE LARAMAN
CAM WATSON
VINNIE BAKER
KANE O'NEILL
AARON DADA
JAIDEN IRISH
KEY ANDREWS
FRANKIE WEBSTER
SAM DAY
KEVIN OWUSU
KINGSLEY BATES
SCOTT METCALFE
KIT BROWN
LIAM SMYTH**

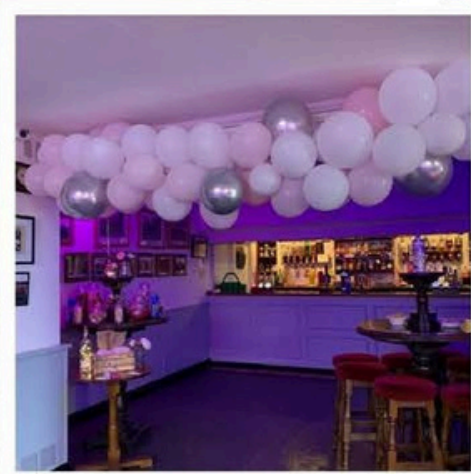
**MANAGER: KANE DOUGHERTY
COACHES: JOSH BICKERSTAFF,
JAMES TAYLOR, DEL DIGWEED,
JOSH THOMAS, MARTIN RUSSELL
PHYSIO: JOE GREEN**

**LEE STOBBS
HARRISON CORNICK
DAVE O'CONNOR
FRANKIE HERCULES
MAX HERCULES
HARRY JONES
GREG DEER
JACK HARVEY
DAN GOULD
ADAM SAWYER
BAILEY OSBOURNE
GEORGE CARBERY
GREG DEER
BENJI KAKEMBO
HARRY BEAUMONT
DYLAN FITZPATRICK
RYAN SHARKEY**

**MANAGER: RYAN STURGES
ASST MANAGER: LEE GROVES, IAN
RICHARDSON
COACH: MICK VIPOND
PHYSIO: HANNAH CHILDS**



VERDANT
FINANCIAL PLANNING



HIRE OUR CLUBHOUSE



WRITE TO KAREN AT
CLUBHOUSE@BIGGLESWADEUTD.COM

OUR OPPONENTS

Tring Athletic Youth FC was formed in March 1958 by a group of local men who contributed towards the purchase of 3.4 acres at Miswell Lane. The cost of providing changing rooms, fencing, equipment and ownership of the ground was approximately 2,000, a lot of money in those days. Committee members, players and friends carried out most of the work, including the building of the changing rooms and during the early days the team had to play on another pitch in Tring. Originally the Club was formed to provide football for youngsters aged under 21 and despite playing against adult teams we won many trophies in the West Herts Saturday League during the early 1960's including the Division 1 title 3 times in 5 years.

We then went through a lean spell and in 1971 decided to scrap the upper age limit and drop youth from our name. Over the years many fine players appeared in our shirts and many went on to play for professional/senior clubs.

In the mid-seventies the Miswell Lane ground was sold to the Council and we had a bad time and but for the efforts of a few loyal members would have certainly folded. The Reserves were disbanded and the First Team dropped down to Division 3. We decided to turn to youth again and gradually forced our way back up through the league and by 1986 we were competing in the Premier Division and running a Reserve side again.

In 1988 we joined the South Midlands and as a result gained senior status with the Herts FA. In 1989 we entered into a 3 year ground sharing arrangement with Isthmian League side Tring Town moving back to Miswell Lane in 1992 where the Reserves had continued to play. In 1997/98 we just missed out on the Senior Division title by the narrowest of margins to New Bradwell St Peter - a goal difference of just 2! We finished the season in fine style, suffering just 1 defeat in our last 21 league games which included a terrific run of 14 straight wins for which we won a special award from the League. The Reserves went one better by winning their league by a clear 10 points and in doing so achieved 100% success in their league games at home. In 1998/99 we picked up our first major South Midlands trophy when we won the Senior Division Cup. We also won the St Marys Cup for the 2nd time in 3 years. In the league a terrific run of just 1 defeat in our last 28 games saw us finish in 3rd place, 4 points behind champions Holmer Green. During this magnificent run we went 15 hours without conceding a goal. The Reserves also did well finishing 5th in their first season in the top division.

The 1999/2000 season proved to be one to remember. During the summer we spent over £50k on building new changing rooms and extending the social and bar area. That meant a total of over 90k had been spent on improving the facilities at Miswell Lane since 1993. To mark the opening of the new changing rooms we played a Watford XI in front of a huge crowd of about 1,000 people. The game was Refereed by Graham Poll and Graham Barber.

The season turned out to be the most successful in the Club's history. In addition to winning the Senior Division title by 11 points we also reached 5 finals. We won the Herts Charity Shield, Herts Senior Centenary Trophy and the Cherry Red Books Trophy in its inaugural year. Our achievements were recognised by the South Midlands who awarded us the Houghton Regis Cup for achievements in outside competitions and Mick Eldridge, Ray Brimson and Richard Vincent were voted Managers of the Season. In 60 games in all competitions we lost on only 6 occasions, a remarkable achievement.

After finishing the old millennium in style we continued our success into the new one by retaining the Herts Senior Centenary Trophy and the Cherry Red Books Trophy. The Reserves won the League title and a newly formed B Team claimed the runners-up spot. The following season we won the Herts Charity Shield for the 2nd time beating Letchworth 4-1.

More success followed as we capture the Herts Senior Centenary Trophy for the 3rd time, to become the first club to do so. We finished 3rd in the table and won the League Cup for the 2nd time, to make 12 major trophies in 7 years. We were also finalists in the Cherry Red Books Trophy. For the 3rd year running Darrel Bodimeade won an award for the best playing surface, which is just reward for the tremendous job he does for the club.

Following our failure to secure floodlights at Miswell Lane we entered into an historic alliance with Tring Town to play our first and reserve team football in season 2004/05 at Pendley where lights are already in place. The main focus was to be to raise the funds needed to build a new Clubhouse, the previous building burnt down in March 2003. This new arrangement with Tring Town secured senior level football in the town.

Winners of Herts Charity Shield 2007/8. This was the first trophy for the new management team of Manager, Phil Casserley, Assistant, Terry Nightingale and Coach Julian Robinson followed by treble Winners in 2008/9 - SSMFL Challenge Trophy Winners, SSMFL Premier Division Cup Winners and St Marys Cup Winners.

The First team finished in the highest position in 2010/11, runners up to Chalfont St Peter in the SSMFL Premier Division, in their history so far. They also won the St. Mary's Cup for the fifth time.

The First Team were Runners Up in 2018/19 SSMFL Premier Division. The Reserves were Suburban Football League Central Division Champions and the "A" Team were Herts Junior Cup Winners and West Herts Senior Cup Finalists.

BUFC PODCAST

BIGGY TALKS



Ryan Madden
Host of Podcast

Nick Witcombe
Host of Podcast

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PLAY YOUR PART

**EVERYONE AT YOUR CLUB HAS
A ROLE IN KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE**



PLAY SAFE

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enjoy the beautiful game.

Find out more at [TheFA.com/PlaySafe](https://www.thefa.com/PlaySafe)



FOR ALL



In partnership with

NSPCC

Supported by



WE ARE BACKING PLAY SAFE

Biggleswade United is lending its full support to Play Safe – a national FA-led campaign to raise awareness of the importance of safeguarding in football.

Play Safe is being run in partnership with the NSPCC and has the full backing of the Premier League, EFL, Barclays FA Women’s Super League and the FA Women’s Championship. It’s also supported and being run across every other level of the game.

The main element of Play Safe is a series of short films which emphasise the importance of clubs such as ours having safeguarding as an everyday reality. The films also explain to parents/carers and children themselves know what to do if they feel unsafe or worried, because nothing matters more than making sure football is safe for everyone, especially children and young people. You can see these films on our club website and we’ve also broadcast them on our social media channels.

“As a youth team coach, I will be working with my club to ensure we support the Play Safe messaging,” says FA Chief Executive Mark Bullingham. “I am also pleased that the campaign has the support of the former footballers with lived experience of abuse in football, who are on our Survivor Support and Safeguarding Advisory Group. The Group has collectively said:

“Learning from the past is crucial, so that we can prevent the horrific experiences that happened to us and so many others in football, from happening again.

“As a group of survivors, we fully support the ethos and important messages that Play Safe conveys – whether to club officials, parents/carers and or vitally, children and young people themselves. Equally important is that Play Safe is not a one-off campaign – it will be used at key points in the football calendar to remind everyone in football, that children’s welfare and keeping them safe, should be at the heart of all that we do.”

As the Survivor Group points out, you’ll see Play Safe appearing at various points throughout the season to keep safeguarding front of mind in football. Together, we want to do everything we can so everyone – particularly children and young people – has a consistently positive experience of our great game.

Biggleswade United have appointed Tracey James as the club’s Child Welfare Officer. Tracey’s contact details are tracey.james58@btinternet.com or telephone 07714 661827.

CLUB NEWS

For club secretaries and grounds team (and all of the other jobs in between) the month of June heralds the time for a well earned break after a long, long season. And this year Heather and I managed to get five weeks in France touring around the beautiful French countryside in Martha Reeves our new caravan. You are wondering why Martha Reeves? Well, she's Martha and we are the VanDwellers.

It was a month that we hoped saw rainfall everyday in England having just witnessed the sowing of the grass seed on the pitch as part of the annual renovation. If rain did not materialise we had left requests to our volunteer team to water, water, water and cut the grass every three days. And wow!! On our return and our first visit to the ground it was big WOW - the pitch was resplendent and we are very, very grateful to Del, Darren, Adrian, Steve and Geoff for all their hard work. Their efforts can be witnessed this afternoon as the pitch is looking superb.

But that was certainly not the end of the story. On entering the clubhouse the transformation of the drab, tired looking interior was amazing!!. Freshly decorated and repairs made to the water damaged walls was fantastic but it didn't end there. The bar furniture, tables and chairs had been replaced by new brighter furniture and the whole club had taken on a new and modern look. It was so heartwarming that our brilliant volunteers had worked so hard but kept it all under wraps for our return. I am sure the whole thing was orchestrated by the Bosses, Karen Digweed and Petula Hunt who I am certain pushed the lads all the way to get it finished in time for our return. And to say we were astounded is an understatement. So a big, big thank you to one and all. It's what belonging to the Biggleswade United Family is all about.

Tracey James, Secretary and Club Welfare Officer

COACH CHAT

Good afternoon and welcome everyone to the Verdant Stadium!

On a personal note, and on behalf of the rest of my management team and many new players, I just wanted to say thank you to everyone involved in this great club that have made us all feel so welcome and their efforts in getting everything ready for this season.

The last 2 months has been some journey, but we have worked really hard to rebuild our squad and we are pleased with the group of lads we have assembled for the start of the new campaign. Of course, as is often the case with management changes, the turnover of players has been significant and it has been a real challenge to even get to this point.

The players have worked extremely hard over the last couple of months, and I also just wanted to acknowledge their attitude and application... They have taken on what we have asked of them, and been patient as we filtered through a number of potential players that we have had to take a look at.

Josh Bickerstaff (our Assistant Head Coach) has played a huge role in our preparations, supported by JT and Josh Thomas, and we are extremely lucky to have him on board. Our new Lead Sports Therapist, Joe Green, has also used his expertise to support both our squad and other squads within the Football Club.

Onto today! I'm not sure we could have been handed a much tougher start than facing a strong Tring Athletic side this afternoon... Ryan is a great manager and has kept the core of his team in place, whilst adding real quality to the group. Pre-season games aren't always the best indicator, but you only need to look at their results over the last few weeks against sides from step 4 to know they will be visiting us with plenty of confidence.

We come off the back of a morale boosting win ourselves, and I'm sure the lads will leave everything out their today to try and take something from the game.

We hope to provide our supporters with an exciting brand of football, but also winning football, as this club deserves to be fighting at the top end of the table.

Thank you all for your support an I hope you enjoy the game.

Kane Dougherty, Men's First Team Head Coach

COACH CHAT

The start of pre season seems a long time ago now!

Focus has very much been in assisting the all new coaching team of Kane Dougherty and his staff with whatever they need to make their job easier, as well as getting to know the players and their families. Many new faces have been added to the experienced squad members that remained. The group look a fine balance of fitness and guile.

We welcomed back a lot of familiar faces in our reserves. Cam and Darren have started the hard work early so to capitalise on last seasons positive progress. The foundations are in, now time to build on them!

But to be honest it is all made easier with the wonderful group of support behind the scenes at this club by so many people season upon season.

I hope to get round and see all the good work with the ladies and youth section very soon. Dan and Dean are rallying around their respective groups readying for the 2024/25 season.

See you all at the club soon!

Dogan Ffrech, Men's Technical Secretary

LEAGUE HISTORY

The League is relatively young compared to other's being formed in 1922 as the Bedfordshire County League. With new clubs keen to join from outside the County it was decided in 1929 to change the name to the South Midlands League. The League continued to consolidate and strengthen over the ensuing 70 years or so providing quality football for many teams over a large area of the South Midlands. In 1997 it became apparent that the London Spartan League, which was very much to the South of the League's geographical footprint, was struggling administratively and, with the full support of the Football Association, the decision was taken to merge the two competitions with the new League being known as the Spartan South Midlands League. The League now covers a wide area from North London in the South to Milton Keynes in the North and from Ware in the East to Aylesbury in the West.

The League is part of the FA's National League System (NLS) and comprises of three Divisions; Premier at Step 5 of the NLS, Division One at Step 6 and Division Two at Step 7.

The League has a proud record of promoting clubs to Step 4 of the NLS and has also provided 4 FA Vase Finalists including two winners in Arlesey Town and Hoddesdon Town FC.





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