

**CARLISLE UNITED ASSOCIATION FOOTBALL CLUB (1921) LIMITED**  
**STRATEGIC REPORT**  
**FOOTBALL REVIEW**  
**YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2019**

**First team review**

At the end of the 2017/18 season, Keith Curle left the Club after over 200 games spanning three and a half years, along with his football staff. He was replaced by John Sheridan in June 2018. John was in charge for just six months before he left the Club. Very shortly after he joined Chesterfield. He was replaced on 16 January 2019 by Steven Pressley who was manager going into 2019/20, before he left the Club after the year end in November 2019, when his contract was terminated.

The 2018/19 season finally ended in disappointment after a period of progress tailed off. There was significant rebuilding and change in the football department and our results were mixed, apart from a golden period of 8 wins in 9 games in mid-season.

The Player budget was reduced along with the spending on other football staff and football department expenses as Total Football Expenditure fell nearly 15% to the lowest level since 2014/15. This was necessary to address the unaffordable financial losses being suffered by the Club. It was accompanied by a total rebuilding of the squad which saw nine permanently contracted players leave and six join plus loan players. The Club also changed its approach to player contracts terms, duration and bonus incentives as we sought to reduce both fixed and variable football costs.

With the overall spending on Total Football Expenditure planned to fall, we sought to use player loans and Academy development players to supplement the core squad reduced in size, to maximise the effectiveness of our budget.

We wanted to achieve improved home results and better results against the best teams. We needed to see more consistency to achieve back to back wins and create momentum.

**Skybet League 2**

Overall, we had an improved season. We probably surpassed most initial expectations from the start of the campaign given the senior players leaving, churn of players and football staff, the new manager starting late in pre-season and the change of approach to football spending, followed by a second change of manager after just six months.

A run of 8 wins in 9 games and 10 wins in 14 games, including 6 wins out of 7 at home, in the middle third fixtures, transformed our whole season. In that period we showed promotion form scoring 32 goals, conceded only 15 and winning 31pts at 2.21 Points Per Game (PPG). In the remaining 32 games (the other two thirds of the season) either side of this period, we scored just 35 goals and conceded more than treble at 47, with GD -12 and won only 37pts (PPG 1.16) showing bottom six form.

Following a mediocre and inconsistent start (16<sup>th</sup> after 17 games), at the half-way point, just before John Sheridan's departure, we were in 10<sup>th</sup> place (2017/18: 13<sup>th</sup> place) with 33pts (2017/18: 31 pts), averaging 1.43PPG and established above mid-table. At that time, we were still only 3pts behind 7<sup>th</sup> place (2017/18: 4pts), with hope for improvement and a play-off challenge in the second half of the season. This was all encouraging and better than the previous season despite all the changes that had occurred.

We increased the Player Cost budget in January 2019 to help capitalise on this opportunity. Crucially three key starter loan players, who each had played over 85% of the available league minutes, returned to their home Clubs. The new players made far less contribution (due to injury and non-selection) and less of an impact than those they replaced.

For the whole of the second half of the season we were P4-P9 and were well placed to mount a final play-off push, being 7th with 10 games left. But we fell away at the end, earning just 12 pts in those important last 10 games, as only 3pts were won in the last 8 away games.

We finished in 11<sup>th</sup> place in L2 (2017/18: 10<sup>th</sup>) with 68pts (2017/18:67pts (2016/17: 71pts). This was a +1pt more than 2017/18, just 3pts outside the playoffs. Our final record was:

2018/19:	11 <sup>th</sup>	P46 W20 D8 L18 GF67 GA62 GD+5 68pts PPG1.48 (xGF62 xGA66 xGD-4)
2017/18	10 <sup>th</sup>	P46 W17 D16 L13 GF62 GA54 GD+8 67pts PPG1.46 (xGF67 xGA56 xGD+11)

We won more points than the year before, achieved more wins and scored more goals. We showed a much improved ability to compete with best teams but we still came up short and missed the opportunity. Having moved into a position to succeed, this outcome was even more disappointing, but offered encouragement given the major changes in the closed season.

We were in the playoff places for 81 days (30%) across the entire season (2017/18: only 7 days) and in the top half for 85% (2017/18: 43%) of the season. We only won 3 games in a row twice (never under Pressley) and seldom were we able to create or maintain consistency outside the 14 game middle third of the season.

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**Attack**

Our attack improved as we scored 67 (2017/18: 62), despite failing to score 13 times (2017/18: 9 times). We improved and scored 2 or more goals on 19 occasions (2017/18: 14), as our long term weakness in going 2 goals clear after taking the lead in games reduced, again helping us close out games. Our scoring was more than expected given the quality of the chances.

Overall, when playing the best seven teams in League 2 (top 3 and 4 play-off teams), we improved earning 17pts in 14 games (2017/18: 7pts). The very significant gap when playing against the division's best, narrowed in 2018/19. When scoring first, we again accumulated 54pts (2017/18: 54pts) at 2.57 PPG (2017/18: 2.25PPG and 2016/17: 1.96PPG) which improved us to a creditable 3<sup>rd</sup> best in L2, as we conceded only 10 equalising goals (2017/18: 16), to maintain these excellent characteristics. These all remained key factors for us gaining points.

However, we only scored first in 21 games (2017/18: 24) ranking us 14<sup>th</sup> (2017/18: 13<sup>th</sup>), which proved a crucial weakness. Scoring first and converting this into wins is the most crucial factor in L2 success. We went ahead in 26 games (2017/18: 29 games) and won 20. This was despite only going 2 goals up 9 times (2017/18: 5 times).

Although we scored 13 equalising goals (2017/18: 8), the 5<sup>th</sup> best (2017/18: the third worst) in L2, which was a major improvement, returning us back this being a strength and demonstrating some resilience, we still lost 17 out of 24 and won only 3 games (2017/18: 2) after conceding first. This was mainly due to us conceding 30 goals giving the lead to the opponents. Needing to equalise so often is a losing characteristic in L2. In 12 of the 18 defeats (5 of 8 defeats at home and 7 of 10 away), we conceded first and fell to defeat after then failing to score, with weaknesses in defence exposed as we sought equalisers but conceded 23 goals at nearly two goals per game.

**Defence**

With 62 goals conceded (2017/18: 54), we worsened defensively and recorded the 8<sup>th</sup> worst (2017/18: 9<sup>th</sup> best) defensive record in the division. Our goals conceded was more than expected given the quality of the chances allowed. Again, this was disappointing. In the 18 games we lost, we scored just 7 goals, conceding 37 (GD-30).

Fewer clean sheets were recorded (11 versus 15 in 2017/18) making us 19<sup>th</sup> best in L2 (2017/18: 5<sup>th</sup> best). In 21 of 46 games we conceded two or more goals. Only relegated Notts County were worse. In too many games we needed to score 2 goals to gain a draw. Only one team scored two goals more often than we did but this is unsustainable.

When conceding first, we improved a little to 9<sup>th</sup> best in L2 (2017/18: 11<sup>th</sup>) at coming back, but still only achieved 13pts (2017/18: 11pts) in 24 games at a reduced rate of 0.54PPG (2017/18: 0.55PPG) which was a step back, especially given the frequency we conceded first. This underlines the importance of scoring the first goal.

Our strong record when we did score first, combined with our inability to convert equalising goals into points and come backs, plus a higher frequency of failing to score, meant 34 of 45 games were won by the team scoring first and we had just 8 draws (2017/18: 16).

No team had more games settled by one goal either way and no team won more games by one goal than us. This highlights the fine margins behind the games we won, even when we scored first.

**Home form**

Our home form improved and played a bigger part in our L2 performance. This was welcome in an area we needed to see improve. However, we still only ranked 9<sup>th</sup> (2017/18: 16<sup>th</sup> and 2016/17: 9<sup>th</sup>) in L2 for home points won and lost more home games. Our home record was:

2018/19	9 <sup>th</sup>	P23 W12 D3 L8 GF42 GA31 GD+11 Pts 39
2017/18	11 <sup>th</sup>	P23 W7 D10 L6 GF31 GA23 GD+8 Pts 31

We suffered a disastrous early season period at home losing 5 of 6, scoring only one goal. This was followed by five home wins in a row as we finished the season with just 2 defeats in the last 13 home games winning 29pts at 2.23PPG

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**Away form**

We fell back and ranked 10th (2017/18: 4th after 2016/17: 7th) in L2 for away points won achieving 29pts (2017/18: 36pts). Our away form which has been the foundation stone of our points totals in recent years, fell away badly in the crucial final of the season with only 3pts won in the last eight away games and two goals scored including a failure to score in six games. This ultimately proved decisive as we missed out on a playoff position by 3pts. Our record was:

2018/19	10 <sup>th</sup>	P23 W8 D5 L10 GF25 GA31 GD-6 Pts 29.
2017/18	4 <sup>th</sup>	P23 W10 D6 L7 GF31 GA31 GD0 Pts 36

**Cup competitions**

Again, disappointingly and frustratingly, in the Cup competitions we failed to make any meaningful impact. We lost heavily 1-5 to Championship team Blackburn (H) in round one of the Carabao Cup. After beating L2 Crewe(A) 0-1 in round one of the FA Cup, we lost 0-2 to L2 Champions Lincoln (A). In the Checkatrade Trophy we won just one group game and were eliminated after a 1-1 draw versus Stoke U21 (H). This meant potentially lucrative cup runs were not secured and contributed to a decline in Football Fortune from £522,000 in 2017/18 to £262,000.

**Players**

We had 30 different contracted players (2017/18: 28 and 2016/17: 34) during 2018/19 including 10 loans.

Just ten players remained from the 2017/18 squad. Thirteen players (2017/18: 8) joined in the Summer window including six loans. The January 2019 transfer window saw a further seven join (including four loans) but 5 exits including 4 loans as the squad churn continued. These seven new players played 63% (2017/18: 36%) of game minutes.

Overall the 20 new joiners (2017/18: 15) played 55% (2017/18: 56%) of available minutes, which was less than the 10 existing players (2017/18: 13) who played 64% (2017/18: 60%).

11 out of 30 (37%) (2017/18: 11 of 28) of the contracted players made 10 starts or less, as fewer players made low contributions compared with the high number of 2016/17. The 11 most used players played 69% (2017/18: 72% and 2016/17: 68%) of their available minutes, as the use of the key group of starters remained very stable.

We earned £13,000 (2017/18: £10,900) through the EFL Football Futures scheme through 41 starts from three loan players and 3 starts from one Academy player. We had 34 starts in 17/18 all from three loan players. This reflects a change in our approach towards younger players.

The average age of the players used on the pitch was 27.8 (2017/18: 28.3) as the squad grew younger from the release of experienced players with a larger contribution from players aged under 30 and younger loan players. This made us the 6<sup>th</sup> oldest in L2 (2017/18: 4<sup>th</sup>). We had 3 contracted players aged under 25 (2017/18: 4), excluding loans.

Injured players missed the equivalent of 182 games (2017/18: 150 and 2016/17: 92) as a number of injuries were suffered including to loan players. The equivalent of 7 games (2017/18: 13 and 2016/17: 12) were lost due to suspension. All three available substitutes were used in 28 of 46 (2017/18; 43) as the managers made less changes. 11% (2017/18: 9%) of substitutions were made in the last 5 minutes. Substitutes played 5.3% (2017/18: 6.5%) of game time. In only 3 games (2017/18: 12) a substitution was made at half time.

Richie Bennett was acquired for £50,000 in August 2017, then released on loan in January 2019 and not resigned as his contract expired. He made 37 starts spread over 74 games in L2 and played 61% of available league minutes over two seasons and scored 10 L2 goals.

In the final analysis, we fell one place in L2 position compared with 2017/18 as Total Football Expenditure reduced by 15% being £383,000 lower. Our final league position is in marked contrast to our 18<sup>th</sup> placed ranking for Football Expenditure on the EFL benchmark data. We also achieved 10<sup>th</sup> place in L2 in 2016/17 season despite spending £282,000 more. It remains the Club's position, that up to a point, on-the-field success is influenced by expenditure on Football activities, especially spending on Player Costs.

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**Total Football Expenditure<sup>2</sup> £2.198m (2017/18: £2.581m)**

A key priority is to direct as much resources to Football activities as possible, whilst operating within our available funding facilities and then to maximise the effectiveness of what we spend, especially on Player Costs leading to time on the pitch.

Despite the reduction in turnover and Football Fortune, Total Football Expenditure was £2.198m (2017/18: £2.581m and 2016/17: £2.72m). The £383,000 reduction was necessary and unavoidable to address the unsustainable losses being incurred by the Club.

Within Total Football Expenditure, Player Costs were £1.526m (2017/18: £1.847m), a reduction of £321,000 (17% lower after a 7% reduction in 17/18). The spend was split 86% (2017/18: 94%) on contracted players and 14% (2017/18: 6%) on loan players, as we relied more on the loan market.

In order to maximise the effectiveness of Player Cost spending, we need to minimise expenditure on non-contributing players and focus our spending on players playing minutes on the pitch, balanced with maintaining squad depth for unpredictable circumstances. We utilised 55% of our expenditure on the pitch (2017/18: 53%) and 21% unused on the bench (2017/18: 26%). We suffered injuries which meant 16% (2017/18: 17%) of the spend was on unavailable players. The spending on non-contributing players<sup>3</sup> rose from 5% to 8%.

The Club complied with EFL Salary Cost Management Protocols (SCMP Player Wage Capping) rules for the 2018/19 season. Our spending was 97% (18/19: 99%) of the EFL allowance as our eligible spending reduced by £335,000. According to EFL independent benchmark data, our spending was 18<sup>th</sup> of League 2 in 2018/19 in gaining 11<sup>th</sup> place in L2. We expect this position to broadly continue in the 19/20 season.

### **Academy review**

It is a long process to see players developing and breaking through to make their mark in our first team squad, then being named in the first team '18' and finally to play in our First Team. Players do not emerge at a predictable rate, many factors must come together to bring success. The board remains committed to Club Developed Players coming through, but this needs opportunities to be given wherever possible and a commitment to doing all we can to support and develop our young players.

We have said in prior years that success requires the Academy and Football departments to work together with a shared vision and common purpose and proactive desire to provide opportunities and succeed together. This was a priority area for cultural change within the Club in 18/19 and the new football management team of John Sheridan and then Steven Pressley both embraced this. We are pleased to see this commitment start to bring actual results.

The four core objectives of the Academy are set out in the Club's Academy Performance Plan which is a key component of the Premier League and EFL's Elite Player Performance Plan ("EPPP"). These remain to develop:

- elite professional footballers to play in our First Team (in League 2 and be capable of playing higher in the league pyramid). This is the Academy's top priority
- players who add significant value to the first team squad for future sale and reinvestment
- players who have playing careers in the professional game
- individuals capable of forging successful careers after they leave us

For the first time since 2015/16 season, a new academy player received a real opportunity to be in our First Team squad and start in L2 games (before injury). It was a small but notable change, as minutes from Academy players, still just represented 1% of L2 minutes (nil% in both 2016/17 and 2017/18). This was a welcome development but significant and led to a player sale after the year end.

We expect to see more minutes from Academy players in 2019/20 and further progress in our top two academy objectives.

After a difficult period of EFL compliance audits, we were delighted to receive accreditation for the Academy.

In May 2019 Academy Manager Darren Edmondson left the Club and was replaced by Eric Kinder who rejoined us.

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<sup>2</sup> **Total Football Expenditure** comprises all Player Costs plus Other Football Costs

**Player Costs** comprise all player related employment costs (salaries, bonuses, benefits, employment taxes)  
**Other Football Costs** comprise all coaching costs (manager, coaches payroll and benefits) and indirect football costs (agents, scouting, recruitment, travel, food, IT, sports science and medical, analytics, insurance and non-coaching football staff costs)

<sup>3</sup> **Non-contributing players** those players excluded from the team-sheet of 18, suspended, unavailable or paid-off