

CARLISLE UNITED ASSOCIATION FOOTBALL CLUB (1921) LIMITED
STRATEGIC REPORT
FOOTBALL REVIEW
YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2020

Football

The 2019/20 season was the most disappointing for some years. After the upheaval of a major squad reconstruction in the summer window, a poor start followed and the remainder of the season was focussed on stabilisation and recovery.

The Player Cost budget was unchanged at the start of the year along with the spending on other football staff and football department expenses, as Total Football Expenditure was expected to stay at 2018/19 levels. The Club moved to a squad model based on short term one-year contracts for players.

With the overall spending on Total Football Expenditure to be maintained, we again sought to use Premier League player loans and Academy development players to supplement the core squad, to maximise the effectiveness of our budget. We wanted to build on 18/19 when we finished 11th.

After joining on 16 January 2019, Steven Pressley was our manager going into 2019/20. He oversaw a full squad rebuild based on short term contracts and loans as he implemented a new possession based pattern of play. In November 2019 after 17 League 2 matches of the 19/20 season and just 10 months and 35 League 2 games in charge, his contract was terminated. At that point we had 18pts from 17 games at 1.06 PPG. Steven's overall League 2 record was P35 W11 D8 L16 GF40 GA56 GD-16 Pts41 PPG 0.91

Chris Beech was then appointed Head-Coach and was in charge for the final 18 League 2 matches before the season was curtailed by the Coronavirus. In the second part of the season under Chris Beech we accumulated 23pts from 18 games at 1.28PPG (17pts from his first 15 games) as we moved away from the bottom of League 2. His record was P18 W5 D7 L5 GF20 GA25 GD-5 Pts 23 PPG 1.28 (xGF21 xGA26.2 xGD -5).

Skybet League 2

We underperformed modest and realistic expectations right from the start of the campaign. A run of 1 win in 8 and 5pts from 24pts during October pushed us towards the bottom of League 2. A change of manager initially also led to only 1 win in the next 10 games with 8pts gained, before a welcome improvement in the final 10 games of the season earned 15pts with just 2 defeats.

After the recovery in the last 10 games, we finished in 18th place (2018/19: 11th) in League 2 with 42pts at 1.2PPG (2018/19: 68pts at 1.48PPG). This was a 16pts outside the playoffs and well below the points performance in the previous season achieved with a similar budget. We ended comfortably away from the bottom and final record was:

2019/20	18 th	P37 W10 D12 L15 GF39 GA56 GD-17 42pts PPG1.20... (xGF43 xGA55 xGD-8)
2018/19:	11 th	P46 W20 D8 L18 GF67 GA62 GD+5 68pts PPG1.48 (xGF62 xGA66 xGD-4)
2017/18	10 th	P46 W17 D16 L13 GF62 GA54 GD+8 67pts PPG1.46 (xGF67 xGA56 xGD+11)

On a per game basis, we won less points than the year before, achieved fewer wins, scored less and conceded more goals. All season, we only won two games in a row twice and seldom were we able to maintain consistency. Measured against all KPIs we showed a decline across all of the characteristics required for success. This was a very disappointing campaign. However, the end of the season was more encouraging until Coronavirus intervened.

Attack

In attack scored 39 at 1.1 Goals For per 90 (2018/19: 67 at 1.5 GF90), failing to score 14 times (2018/19: 13 times). We only scored 2 or more goals on 13 occasions (2018/19: 19), as our long term weakness in being able to go 2 goals clear after taking the lead in games again reduced. Our scoring rate was more than slightly worse than expected given the quality of the chances created as we often suffered from missing big chances.

Overall, when playing the best seven teams in League 2 (top 3 and 4 play-off teams), we struggled badly winning only 1 point out of 12 games (2018/19: 17pts in 14 games). The very significant gap when playing against the division's best was present all season.

We accumulated 27pts when scoring first (2018/19: 54pts at 1.93PPG (2018/19: 2.57 PPG) which was 17th (2018/19: 3rd) best in L2, as we conceded 9 equalising goals (2018/19: 10). However, we only scored first in 14 games (2018/19: 21 games) ranking us 20th (2018/19: 14th), which proved a crucial weakness. Scoring first and converting this into wins is the most crucial factor in League 2 success. The decline in the frequency of scoring first, plus the fall in ability to get two goals up and the increase in rate of equalisers conceded, all proved important in reducing the points won.

We scored just 9 equalising goals in 18 games (2018/19: 13) when conceding first. In those games we lost 12 out of 18 and won only 2 games (2018/19: 3) after conceding first. This was mainly due to us conceding 24 goals giving the lead to the opponents in 37 games. Needing to equalise so often is a losing characteristic in League 2. In 2019/20, 12 of our 15 defeats (2018/19: 12 of the 18 defeats), came after we conceded first.

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Defence

With 56 goals conceded in 37 games (2018/19: 62), we worsened defensively and recorded the 8th worst (2017/18: 9th 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).

Just 8 clean sheets gained (2018/19: 11 versus 15 in 2017/18) making us joint 20th best in League 2 (2018/19: 19th). We conceded two or more goals 17 times in 37 games (2018/19: 21 of 46 games). Only Morecambe and Scunthorpe were worse). In many games we needed to score 2 goals to gain a draw, this is unsustainable.

When conceding first, our record also worsened to 12th best in League 2 (2018/19: 9th and 2017/18: 11th) at coming back. We only achieved 10pts (2018/19: 13pts and 2017/18: 11pts) in 24 games at a rate of 0.56PPG (2018/19: 0.54PPG and 2017/18: 0.55PPG) which was no change, especially given the frequency we conceded first. This underlines the importance of scoring the first goal.

Home form

Our home form worsened and played a big part in our League 2 performance. After winning 3 of our first 9 at home under Steven Pressley, our form remained poor with only one win in the next 9 at home before we won the last home game of the season. We only ranked 19th (2018/19: 9th) in League 2 for home points won. We beat only 1 top half team at home and gained only 7pts from 33 in 11 games before the season stopped. Our overall home record was:

2019/20	19 th	P19 W5 D5 L7 GF17 GA26 GD-9 Pts 22 PPG 1.16
2018/19	9 th	P23 W12 D3 L8 GF42 GA31 GD+11 Pts 39 PPG 1.70
2017/18	11 th	P23 W7 D10 L6 GF31 GA23 GD+8 Pts 31 PPG 1.72

Away form

Our away form which has been the foundation stone of our points totals in recent years worsened. We fell back and ranked 15th (2018/19: 10th) in League 2 for away points won achieving 20pts in 18 games at 1.11PPG (2018/19: 29pts at 1.57PPG). Although it is noteworthy that we suffered only 2 defeats in 9 (including losing at Champions Crewe) under Chris Beech as we became tough to beat on our travels after initially struggling with only 7pts and six defeats in the first 9 away games.. Our overall away record was:

2019/20	15 th	P18 W5 D5 L8 GF22 GA30 GD-8 Pts 20 PPG 1.11
2018/19	10 th	P23 W8 D5 L10 GF25 GA31 GD-6 Pts 29 PPG 1.26
2017/18	4 th	P23 W10 D6 L7 GF31 GA31 GD0 Pts 36 PPG 1.57

Cup competitions

Again, disappointingly and frustratingly, in the Cup competitions we failed to make any meaningful impact. After beating Championship Barnsley 0-3 (A) in R1, we then lost 2-1 to League 1 Rochdale (A) in the EFL Carabao Cup.

After beating non-league Dulwich Hamlet 1-4 (A) on live TV and overcoming fellow League 2 team Forest Green, we lost 3-4 (H) to Championship Cardiff City again after a replay, in R3 of the FA cup.

In EFL Leasing.com Trophy we won just one group game of three and were eliminated after a poor 3-1 defeat at Morecambe (A) in what was Steven Pressley's final game. We also lost comprehensively to Wolves U21 2-4 (H). The third successive season we had failed to beat an Academy side. This meant potentially lucrative cup runs were not secured. Net Football Fortune from cups was £274,000 (2018/19: £120,000) reflecting the TV money and replay.

Players

We had 31 different contracted players (2018/19: 30) during 2019/20 including 8 loans (2018/19: 10).

Just six (2018/19: 10) players remained from the prior season's squad. Fifteen new players (2018/19: 13) joined in the Summer window including five loans, supplemented by two Academy players. The January 2019 transfer window saw a further eight join (2018/19: seven) including three more loans. Six exits followed as two players sold, three loan exits and pay-off (2018/19: 5 exits including 4 loans) as the very heavy squad churn continued.

At the end of the season 8 (2018/19: 6) of the 31 players contracted in 2019/21 returned for 2020/21. This means we face another window of recruiting circa 14-18 new players in Summer 2020, which is a major risk. We earned £16,000 (2018/19: £13,000) through the EFL Football Futures scheme.

The average age of the players used on the pitch was 26.0 (2018/19: 27.8 and 2017/18: 28.3) as the squad continued to grow younger from the release of experienced players with a larger contribution from players aged under 30 and younger loan players. This made us the 5th youngest (2018/19: 6th oldest in L2).

Injured players missed the equivalent of 90 games (2018/19: 182 games and 2017/18: 150) as the number of injuries suffered reduced. The equivalent of 5 (2018/19: 7 games and 2017/18: 13) were lost due to suspension. All three

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available substitutes were used in 27 of 37 games (2018/19: 28 of 46) as the managers made more changes. 20% of substitutions (2018/19: 11%) were made in the last 5 minutes.

Total Football Expenditure² £2.026m (2018/19: £2.215m and 2017/18: £2.606m and 2016/17: £2.706m)

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.

The fall in Total Football Expenditure of £189,000 (-8.5%) reflects lower performance bonuses and lower football operating costs (travel, hotels, medical) from seven fewer fixtures. This means our Total Football Expenditure in 19/20 was £679,000 (25%) lower than the peak spending of £2.7m 2016/17.

Within Total Football Expenditure, Player Costs were £1.408m (2018/19: £1.568m and 2017/18: £1.893m), a reduction of £160,000 (10% reduction on top of 17% lower in 18/19 after a 7% reduction in 17/18). Again, due to lower performance bonuses and fewer games rather than from planned cut-backs. This means our Player Costs were 29% lower than the peak of £1.99m in 2016/17.

While Total Football Expenditure is not a guarantee of success, it is also unsustainable to continually reduce spending. Achieving improvement with shrinking football spending does not indicate the policy can continue indefinitely.

To maximise the effectiveness of our Player Cost spending, we need to balance “contingency” spending on non-contributing players and focus our spending on players playing minutes on the pitch, while maintaining squad depth for unpredictable circumstances. We utilised 51% of our £1.408m Player Costs (2018/19: 54% and 2017/18: 52%) in productive minutes on the pitch. Less of our spending was productive in the 90 minutes than last year due to key players being omitted more often. 24% of our spending was unavailable “not in the 18” (2018/19: 26%) due to injuries, payoffs or being left out. Injuries cost us 14% of Player Costs (2018/19: 16%) as we suffered less than the year before.

The Club complied with EFL Salary Cost Management Protocols (SCMP Player Wage Capping) rules for the 2019/20. Pre Coronavirus, our planned spending was 84% (2018/19: 97%) of the EFL allowance. According to EFL independent benchmark data from November 2019, our spending was 19th of League 2 and we finished 18th in League 2 (2018/19: 18th when we finished in 11th place in League 2). It is unknown how the Coronavirus and new EFL Salary Cap rules will affect spending by League 2 clubs in 20/21 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. One good year does not act as a reliable predictor for the future. The board remains committed to Club Developed Players coming through, but this needs opportunities to be given wherever possible and a commitment from everyone to doing all we can to support and develop our young players.

Academy 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 2018/19 and the new football management team of John Sheridan and then Steven Pressley both embraced this. We are pleased to see this commitment continue under Chris Beech.

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 the 2015/16 season, a new academy player received a real opportunity to be in our First Team squad and start in League 2 games. It was a small but notable change, as minutes from Academy players, still just represented just 2% (2018/19: 1%) of L2 minutes after nil% in both 2016/17 and 2017/18. This was a welcome development and led to the sale of Jarrad Branthwaite to Premier League Everton.

² **Total Football Expenditure** comprises all Player Costs plus Other Football Costs

Player Costs comprise all player & development players related employment costs (salaries, bonuses, benefits, employment taxes)
Other Football Costs comprise all coaching costs (director of football, 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)