

How did the rest of the Coca Cola championship sides really do ?

(written May15th 2005)

Brighton

Finished 20th - Last season promoted

They stayed up thanks to last day draw at home to Ipswich. They only came up last season, have no ground, not many fans, players we never heard of, so all in all a terrific performance from Mark McGhee's men, and they took four points from Leeds.

Verdict = Very Good performance.

Burnley

Finished 13th - last season 19th.

They changed manager, Stan Ternet went to Gillingham, Sam Ellis went

to Leeds and Steve Cottrill came in. Sold their best player, Robbie Blake to Birmingham and brought in Ade Akinbyi from Stoke. They also sold Ian Moore to Leeds. Tightened up a leaky defence but did well to finish where they have. Burnley won at Elland Road and we won at Turf Moor. Verdict = decent performance but may struggle next season. (pic shows Clarke Carlisle dragging down Ian Moore of Burnley for a penalty and subsequent miss - Moore went on to play for Leeds)

Cardiff City

Finished 16th - Last season 13th.

Sammy Hamman's promises to turn them into a Premiership team of some force has failed miserably. They had to sell their two best players, Graham Kavenagh and Robert Earnshaw, and beating the drop was their only success. Leeds still took only two points from them all season, and they've just made Peter Ridsdale Chief Executive so life will not be dull. Verdict = Disappointing and next season they need fresh blood in

Coventry City

Finished 19th - Last season 12th.

They will play next season in the 32,500 all seater Ricoh arena, and gave Highfield Road a good send off defeating Derby County 6-2 in the last game there. With players such as Stern John, Staunton, Sherwood, Doyle and Hughes they would have expected better. Flirted with relegation big time at the end, and one of the few teams we succeeded in taking six points from. Verdict = Terrible season.

Crewe Alex

Finished 21st - Last season 18th

Dario Gradi refuses to compromise his principles of producing teams that can play football, and Leeds took just one point from them all season. When Dean Ashton was sold to Norwich for £3M their best goal scorer left the club. He scored against Leeds in both games. A victory on the final day of the season complimented with Gillingham's draw at Notts Forest in effect saved the Railwaymen from the drop. Verdict = Any team that constantly survives using its youth system has to be admired.



Derby County

Finished 4th - Last season 20th

George Burley has done a terrific job at Derby County, placing his faith in youth, in the shape of Tom Huddlestone and foreign buys such as Grzegorz Rasiak, Morten Bisgard and Inigo Idiakez. The polish striker, Rasiak has been brilliant especially toward the latter end of the season. The Rams were unfortunate that injuries to Rasiak and Idiakez ruled them out of the Play-Offs. At time of writing they had just lost 0-2 to Preston in the first Semi-Final. I have no doubt had they had Rasiak and Idiakez (who is talented on the ball), they would be in a better position before the second leg. Leeds defeated Derby 1-0 on the first day of the season but lost 0-2 the reverse match.

Verdict - On limited resources an excellent season irrespective of how they do in the Play Offs.

Ipswich Town

Finished 3rd - Last season 5th

Joe Royale's side had led the division for more than two months. In the end they finished two points behind 2nd placed Wigan Athletic. Football can be cruel. No team has played in the Play-Offs more times than Ipswich, and more often than not they have been unsuccessful. At time of writing they have gained a creditable 2-2 draw at West Ham in the Pla

y Offs 1st leg, but we'll see if they can go up this season.

Leeds drew 1-1 at home in April (a result which probably cost them automatic promotion) and lost 0-1 at Portman Road. Despite having a relatively small squad they remained a slick side throughout with regular goals coming from Finnish striker, Kuqi, Bent, Westlake and Miller.

Verdict = Excellent season that may or may not finish in joy. (pic shows Danny Pugh in action v Ipswich)

Leicester City

Finished 15th - Last season relegated

Like Leeds they were relegated last year, and completed the double over us, 2-0 on both occasions. Leicester showed only glimpses of form needed for promotion, drew too many games and struggled at home. The direct style favoured by Mickey Adams is gone and Craig Levein is gradually building a more attractive side. Dion Dublin plays at the back and David Connolly leads the line.

Verdict = Disappointing season but will improve next term

Millwall

Finished 10th - Last season 10th.

A first appearance in Europe (they finished runners up in the FA Cup) was a brief affair - lasting only two games, and their league form proved also to be a disappointment. A Play Off place never materialised as the turmoil off the field between Dennis Wise and the incoming chairman left only one winner. Wise left after the final game of the season, a 0-0 draw at home to Burnley. Millwall also drew twice



with Leeds, 1-1 on each occasion.

Verdict = Disappointing season (Pic shows late Jody Morris pen for Millwall v Leeds at Elland Road)

Nottingham Forest

Finished 23rd - Last season 14th.

A season that started badly for Forest ended in disaster - relegation

to League One. Joe Kinnear left in December after falling out with their best player, Andy Reid. They sold Reid and Michael Dawson. Gary Megson led a mini-revival, but the damage was done not helped by off the pitch antics. Seventeen players have already been released including Marlon King who was on loan at Leeds. Forest drew with Leeds twice during the season, 1-1 at Elland Road and 0-0 at the City Ground.

Verdict - Disaster for the team crowned Champions of Europe 26 years ago. (Pic shows Julian Joachim in action v Notts Forest at Elland Road)

Plymouth Argyle

Finished 17th - Last season promoted

After two promotions in three seasons, Plymouth found life in the Championship a tougher affair. They got off to a flier, but their poor away form which saw them taste defeat in 15 out of 23 games ensured a season of struggle. That said, relegation never looked likely, and Bobby Williamson hopes to strengthen the squad in the summer. Leeds will be happy to see them. We defeated them twice.

Verdict = Did okay

Preston NE

Finished 5th - Last season 15th

When Billy Davies took over in August, few fans could have expected them to take a side expected to struggle and turn them into Play-Off contenders. But that's exactly what happened, and (at time of writing) they sit with a two goal advantage after the first leg against Derby County. Davies has moulded Preston into one of the form teams of the division, losing just 3 of their last 23 games, and making some shrewd signings. Star player, David Healy left for Leeds, but his replacement, David Nugent (pic'd above right) who was signed from Bury has been a sensation. Cresswell, Nugent, American Eddie Lewis and Alexander have all been their best performers and they fear no one in the Play Offs. Leeds still defeated them home and away last season.

Verdict = Terrific season irrespective if they go up or not.

QPR

Finished 11th - Last season promoted

Most QPR fans would have bitten your hand off at the start of the season if they were offered 11th place. I know my father in law would anyway. So it's probably a testament to Ian Holloway's men that they were in with a shout of the Play-Offs right up until April. A run of seven consecutive wins propelled Rangers into the top six earlier in the campaign, but injuries took their toll and they faded away. Their manager is a head the ball, attends anger management sessions, but he is talented and gets them motivated. Leeds defeated them 6-1 at



home and they have the honour of seeing the first Seth Johnson goal in nearly three years in the 1-1 draw at Loftus Road.

Verdict = Exceeded all expectations and can be happy with their season.

Reading

Finished 7th - Last season 9th

They finished two places above their position last season but a season that promised so much was a genuine frustration in the end. Virtually ever presents

in the top six until it mattered most, Steve Coppell's side did the double over champions, Sunderland but fell short at the death. A run of 11 games without a win after Christmas

ultimately proved more vital a statistic than the 19 goals scored by striker, Dave Kitson, injured for much of that run. Rob Hulse inspired Leeds to a 3-1 home win over Reading, and we drew 1-1 at the Madjeski.

Verdict = One place outside the Play-Offs is always frustrating but plenty to build on. Good season all in all. (Pic shows Sean Gregan in action v Reading at Elland Road)

Rotherham

Finished 24th - Last season 17th

Rotherham seem destined for the drop for much of the season. Ronnie Moore departed company after January, following 8 successful seasons at Milmoor. They chose shrewdly in appointing Mick Hartford as his successor. Two successful promotions at the turn of the Millennium have finally caught up on the club and four years of struggling at Championship level have finally ended. Still, they defeated Leeds 1-0 at Milmoor and held Leeds to a scoreless draw at Elland Road making us the only side in the division not to have scored at least once against them.

Verdict = Punched above their weight for a long time but time to steady the ship and mount a promotion challenge in the future.

Sheffield United

Finished 8th - Last season 8th.

Another season of so close yet so far for the Blades. Their preoccupation with cup competitions definitely costs them league places. They defeated Aston Villa and West Ham in the FA Cup before the run came to an end in a penalty shoot out against Arsenal, following a 1-1 draw at Highbury and a 0-0 draw at Bramall lane.

Their stuttering league form was not helped by their poor home form and lack of firepower up front. That said, Andy Gray had a good season, and they inflicted two convincing wins over Leeds, 4-0 at Elland Road and 2-0 at Bramall Lane

Verdict = No improvement means not good enough

Stoke City

Finished 12th - Last season 11th

For a while Stoke looked like Play-Off candidates but lack of fire power cost them dear.

Early on they were the kings of the 1-0 wins. Ade Akinbyi (pic'd right vs Clarke Carlisle of Leeds) fell out w



ith the club management, and eventually departed to Burnley, while of the rest only Gilfton-Noel Williams managed more than three goals. Leeds gave them Duberry and Ricketts on loan. We won 1-0 at the Britannia and drew 0-0 at home. News that the owners are looking to sell may suggest an uncertain season ahead.

Verdict = Average season with a little improvement shown.

Sunderland

Finished 1st - Last season 3rd

After just missing out in 2004, Mick McCarthy scoured the lower divisions for talent and with a mixture of youth and experience justifiably won the division. Since his arrival at the Stadium of Light, he has let over 45 players go (including youths) and tightened up his squad.

Arca, McCartney, Marcus Stewart, Breen, Caldwell and Elliott are just a few of the players who excelled for him. This all followed from a disappointing start of one win in their first six matches. Their run of eight straight wins late on in the season took them top and their win at West Ham sealed the title for them. Leeds were beaten at home by Sunderland 0-1 but defeated the Makems 3-2 away. (Pic shows Sunderland goal at Elland Road) Verdict = It doesn't get any better. Looking forward to Roy Keane playing at the Stadium of Light.

Watford

Finished 18th - Last season 16th

A season of unexpected highs ended with the Hornets

scrambling to avoid relegation at the death. Watford punched well above their weight in making the Carling Cup Semi Finals but fading form in the league led to the departure of Ray Lewington in March. He was replaced by Ade Boothroyd of Leeds. Goals from star striker, Heidar Helguson in two crucial 1-0 wins secured Watford's survival with one game left.

Leeds defeated them 2-1 away and were held 2-2 at Elland Road.

Verdict = Did well to escape relegation at the end but with Danny Webber and Helguson expected to leave, there is plenty of rebuilding to be done.

(Pic above shows Watford goal at Elland Road)

West Ham

Finished 6th - last season 4th

Very little progress made and if they don't go up via th

e Play-Offs, Pardew will find himself out of a job. A final day victory at Watford pushed them into the Play-Offs but a 2-2 draw at home to Ipswich leaves



The Coca-Cola Football League Championship Table

	P	GD	PTS
1 Sunderland	46	35	94
2 Wigan	46	44	87
3 Ipswich	46	29	85
4 Derby	46	11	76
5 Preston	46	9	75
6 West Ham	46	10	73
7 Reading	46	7	70
8 Sheff Utd	46	1	67
9 Wolverhampton	46	13	66
10 Millwall	46	6	66
11 QPR	46	-4	62
12 Stoke	46	-2	61
13 Burnley	46	-1	60
14 Leeds	46	-3	60
15 Leicester	46	3	57
16 Cardiff	46	-3	54
17 Plymouth	46	-12	53
18 Watford	46	-7	52
19 Coventry	46	-12	52
20 Brighton	46	-25	51
21 Crewe	46	-20	50
22 Gillingham	46	-21	50
23 Nottm Forest	46	-24	44
24 Rotherham	46	-34	29

them with it all to do at Portman Road. The manager spent the season wheeling and dealing but he never got near the top three, let alone automatic promotion. Teddy Sheringham's 20 league goals were vital and Matthew Ettrington continued to be one of the better players at this level, but Tomas Repka will be a disaster at any level. Verdict = If they win the Play-Offs all will be forgotten and it will be a hell of a season, but that seems unlikely. (Pic shows row over last minute Leeds penalty at Upton Park)

Wigan Athletic

Finished 2nd - Last season 7th

David Whelan's (of JJB fame) 10 year plan to get Wigan into the Premiership delivered and the team who averaged less than 10,000 fans will soon be rubbing shoulders with Man United, Chelsea, Liverpool and Arsenal. Jewell had an abundance of money at his disposal and rumours are that he will have £40m next season to spend. Ellington and Roberts were an explosive duo up front with hard working players in behind doing their all for the cause, none more so than Jimmy Bullard. Purchasing Graham Kavenagh from cash strapped Cardiff City was a clever move as they fought with Ipswich for the 2nd spot, and beating Reading on the last day delivered this. I was at both games v Wigan 0-2 at home and 0-3 at the JJB. They were by far head and shoulders above our team on

both occasions. Verdict = Dream achieved of reaching the Premiership. Now they have to stay there. (Pic shows Matthew Kilgallon in action v Wigan's Nath Ellington)

Wolves

Finished 9th - Last season relegated

Wolves finished the season really well and probably wish the season didn't end until July. After losing his first game in charge in December, manager Glenn Hoddle has tasted defeat just once in 25 games. Had he turned some of his 15 draws into wins a late Play-Off push

could have been possible. We drew

twice with Wolves, 0-0 at Molineux and 1-1 at Elland Road.

Verdict = No

PFA Coca-Cola Championship team of the year:

Kevin Davis (Ipswich), Graham Alexander (Preston), Tom Huddlestone (Derby), Gary Breen (Sunderland), George McCartney (Sunderland), Jimmy Bullard (Wigan), Steve Sidwell (Reading), Julio Arca (Sunderland), Inigo Idiakez (Derby), Nathan Ellington (Wigan), Jason Roberts (Wigan).

quick return to the Premiership but could be dangerous next year.

Who is coming down ?

C Palace lasted just one season, and if they can hold on to Andy Johnson which I doubt, they may be strong. Norwich City however, will be stronger. They ran away with this division two seasons ago, will lose no players and in Ashton, Huckerby and McKenzie will certainly score goals. They are certainly capable of bouncing straight back up and I would consider them favourites for the division. Southampton may find things tough. Financially they will surely have to sell some of their better players. Will Crouch, Camara and Phillips hang around ? I doubt it.

16 Portsmouth	38	-16	39
17 West Brom	38	-25	34
18 Crystal Palace	38	-21	33
19 Norwich	38	-35	33
20 Southampton	38	-21	32