

CARLISLE UNITED ASSOCIATION FOOTBALL CLUB (1921) LIMITED
STRATEGIC REPORT
FOOTBALL REVIEW
YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2021

First team review

After joining in November 2019 and being in charge for the final 18 League 2 matches of 2019/20, Chris Beech led us throughout the season and then again into 2021/22. He was awarded a new and improved, extended contract in December 2020.

Despite the Coronavirus Pandemic and new EFL wage capping rules replacing SCMP, our Player Cost budget was unchanged at the start of the year along with the spending on other football staff and football department expenses. The Club moved away from a squad model based on short-term one-year contracts for players and was more committed to players at the start.

After the upheaval of a manager change and major squad reconstruction starting January 2020, we had continuity in the coaching staff entering the season. We also had more continuity in the playing squad, but the churn of players was still high as Chris Beech changed players from the previous regime.

The 2020/21 season was played with a background of extraordinary circumstances off-the-pitch.

With the overall spending on Total Football Expenditure 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.

Skybet League 2

The season on-the-pitch saw the first half and second half being complete opposites.

In the first half, we significantly overperformed all realistic expectations right from the start of the campaign to be in the top 3 at the halfway mark. However, a run of one win in 13 games and 6pts from 39pts pushed us towards mid table. One win and 9pts in the last 8 games meant we had earned just 24pts in the second half of the season.

We finished in 10th place (2020/21: 18th) in League 2 with 66pts at 1.43 PPG (2019/20: 1.20 PPG). This was 7pts outside the playoffs but well above the points performance in the previous season achieved with a similar budget. The final record was:

2020/21	10 th	P46 W18 D12 L16 GF60 GA51 GD+9	66pts PPG 1.43... (xGF63 xGA46 xGD+17)
2019/20	18 th	P35 W10 D12 L15 GF39 GA56 GD-17	42pts PPG 1.20... (xGF43 xGA55 xGD -8)
2018/19	11 th	P46 W20 D8 L18 GF67 GA62 GD+5	68pts PPG 1.48 (xGF62 xGA66 xGD -4)
2017/18	10 th	P46 W17 D16 L13 GF62 GA54 GD+8	67pts PPG 1.46 (xGF67 xGA56 xGD+11)

On a per game basis, we won more points than the year before, achieved more wins, scored more and conceded less goals than 2019/20. Overall the season saw an improved campaign but it was very disappointing to fall away so badly.

Attack

In attack we scored 60 goals at 1.3 Goals For per 90 minutes (2019/20: 39 at 1.05 GF90), failing to score 11 times (2019/20: 14 times). We only scored 2 or more goals on 16 occasions (2019/20: 13), as our long-term weakness in being able to go 2 goals clear after taking the lead in games remained. Our scoring rate was slightly worse than expected given the quality of the chances we created as we again 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 winning only 9pts out of 14 games (2019/20: 1pts in 12 games). The very significant gap when playing against the division's best was present all season despite the excellent first half.

We accumulated 57pts when scoring first at 2.19 PPG (2019/20: 27pts at 1.93 PPG) which was only 16th (2019/20: 17th) best in League 2. We scored first in 26 games (2019/20: 14 games), ranking us 3rd (2019/20: 20th), which proved a crucial factor in gaining more points than in 2019/20. Scoring first and converting this into wins is the most crucial factor in League 2 success. The major improvement in the frequency of scoring first, plus the gain in the ability to get two goals up and all proved important.

We scored just 9 equalising goals in 17 games (2019/20: 9 in 18 games) when conceding first. In those 17 games we lost 13 and won only 1 game (2019/20: 2) after conceding first. Needing to equalise so often is a losing characteristic in League 2. In 2020/21 13 of our 16 defeats (2019/20: 12 of the 15 defeats), came after we conceded first.

Earning just 6pts in 17 games at 0.35 PPG after conceding first was the joint 4th worst in League 2 and the main factor in our failure to get into the playoffs. This is a long-term running theme that is essential to fix to achieve success.

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Defence

With 51 goals conceded (2019/20: 56 in 37 games), we improved defensively and recorded the 10th best (2019/20: 8th worst) defensive record in the division. Our goals conceded total was more than expected given the quality of the chances allowed. In the 16 games we lost, we scored just 9 goals, conceding 30 (GD-21).

Fifteen clean sheets were gained (2019/20: 8) making us joint 9th (2019/20: 20th). We conceded two or more goals 14 times (2019/20: 17 in 37 games). This was an improvement.

When conceding first, our record worsened to 4th worst in League 2 at coming back. We only achieved 6pts at a rate of 0.35 PPG (2019/20: 0.56 PPG) which was a decline from an already poor level, especially given the frequency we conceded the first goal. This underlines the importance scoring the first goal had on our 2020/21 season, and the risk going forward of any drop off in scoring first rate.

Home form

Our home form improved and played a big part in our League 2 performance. After winning 9 of our first 11 at home our form totally reversed, to lose 5 of the next 6. Overall, we ranked 5th (2019/20: 19th) in League 2 for home points won. We beat only 2 top seven teams at home and gained only 7pts from 7 games at home against the top 7, highlighting the gap to the best teams. Our overall home record was:

2020/21	5 th	P23 W12 D5 L6 GF38 GA25 GD+13 Pts 41 PPG 1.78
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 fell back again and we ranked 17th (2019/20: 15th) in League 2 for away points won achieving 25pts at 1.09 PPG (2019/20: 20pts at 1.11 PPG). We gained only 3pts in 9 games against the top 9 away. Our overall away record was:

2020/21	17 th	P23 W6 D7 L10 GF22 GA26 GD-4 Pts 25	PPG 1.09
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 GD 0 Pts 36	PPG1.57

Cup competitions

Again, disappointingly and frustratingly, in all three cup competitions we failed to make any impact. We lost 3-0 (A) in Round 1 of the EFL League Cup against League 2 Oldham.

In miraculous turnaround, we beat non-league Hayes & Yeading (A) on penalties in round 1 of the FA Cup, following a 0-0 draw in normal time. This was after being 2-0 down with just two minutes to go in extra time. We then lost 1-2 against League 1 Doncaster (H) in round 2.

In the EFL Trophy we won just one group game of three. Our only win coming against Aston Villa U21 3-1 (H) after we had already been eliminated. For the fourth successive season we failed to get out past the group stage. This meant potentially lucrative cup runs were not secured. Net Football Fortune from all cups was just £85,000 (2020/21: £274,000) the lowest since 2011/12.

Players

We again suffered high player churn as a consequence of manager change. We had 29 different contracted players (2019/20: 31) during 2020/21 including 5 loans (2019/20: 8) and supplemented by five more new Academy U21 players).

Just ten (2019/20: six) players remained from the prior season's final squad. 16 new players (2019/20: 15) joined in the Summer window (including one who joined and left within the window) including 5 loans. The January 2020 transfer window saw a further 3 players join (2019/20: eight), and three loans return with one contracted player leaving.

At the end of the season just 14 (2019/20: 8) of the 22 players in the final squad returned for 2021/22 training before two were sold in the window leaving 12 existing players. None of the five Academy U21 players were retained.

The average age of the players used on the pitch was 25.5 (2020/21: 26.0) 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.

Injured players missed the equivalent of 168 games (2020/21: 90 games) as the number of injuries suffered increased. The equivalent of five games (2020/21: five) were lost due to suspension.

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Total Football Expenditure² £1.957m (2019/20: £2.026m, 2018/19: £2.215m and 2017/18: £2.606m)

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 £69,000 (2019/20: £189,000) reflects lower performance bonuses and lower football operating costs (travel, hotels, medical) during the Coronavirus affected season.

Within Total Football Expenditure, Player Costs were £1.298m (2019/20: £1.408m and 2018/19: £1.568m), a reduction of £110,000. Again, driven by performance and Coronavirus rather than from planned reductions.

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 52% (2019/20: 51%) of our £1.298m Player Costs in productive minutes on the pitch. 24% (2019/20: 24% and 2018/19: 26%) of our spending was unavailable “not in the 18” due to injuries, payoffs or being left out. Injuries cost us 14% (2019/20:14% and 2018/19: 16%) of Player Costs the same as the year before.

The EFL Salary Cost Management Protocols (SCMP Player Wage Capping) rules were withdrawn for 2020/21. According to EFL independent benchmark data from March 2021, our spending was again in the bottom quartile of League 2 ranking while we finished 10th place in League 2.

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 minutes on the pitch in our First Team. Players do not emerge at a predictable or consistent 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. This was a priority area for cultural change within the Club from 2018/19 alongside the realignment of spending on Player Costs.

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

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

Minutes from Academy players in League matches fell to a very low 242 minutes (2019/20: 836), and just represented just 0.5% (2019/20: 2%) of on pitch time. While the age and contribution on the pitch from younger players is improving, it remains from recruited players rather than Club Developed Players. We earned £18,000 (2019/20: £16,000) through the EFL Football Futures scheme. Also with none of the 2020/21 Academy U21 players retained for 2021/22 we have some way to go to achieve our main objective (1).

In terms of objective (2), while not contributing minutes on-the-pitch, in the two years ended 30 June 2021, transfers of three Club Developed Players have earned income of circa £1.325m.

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)