

Adam VIRGO

BT SPORT PUNDIT GIVES HIS EXPERT OPINION

TOWN ARE THE TREND SETTERS

FYLDE, Ebbsfleet, Aldershot – getting in the play-offs one season doesn't mean it's going to happen again the next.

You always wonder how a club will perform the following campaign. Not that you'd expect Fylde to be struggling against relegation just a few months after reaching the promotion final, but it's not easy to follow it up with another push.

That's why Harrogate Town deserve huge credit. They had a bit of an inconsistent start. It was probably a hangover from a great first season in the National League where they finished sixth.

But Simon Weaver's side are right in the reckoning. When I first met him, he came across as a decent guy. You get a nice feel for most of the managers at this level and Simon is very open and

SIMON WEAVING HIS MAGIC

upfront with what they're trying to do.

Of course that has to be measured. Fylde have 2022 on their sleeves for when they want to reach the Football League. That's some statement.

Consistency

But Harrogate have really impressed. One key was keeping important players from last season – something that can be hard to do after a successful year.

Defender Callum Howe moved onto Solihull Moors but Simon kept the spine. James

Belshaw in goal, Josh Falkingham in the middle, Jack Muldoon, George Thomson, Mark Beck – good players and a big part of their success.

Sometimes they change it up with Ryan Fallowfield at full-back and Warren Burrell in midfield, and I like Jack Emmett in that midfield area. It's a good solid squad.

They always play the same, attacking football. In recent weeks they've put three past Eastleigh, the same against Yeovil and over Christmas they scored four against Hartlepool.

The one thing is their home and away consistency. Thinking with a player's hat on, does the pitch make a difference and having

to switch from 3G to grass? It's not something I've heard Simon use as an excuse.

But they have got one of the best home records in the league and when you compare it to their away form, that inconsistency has crept in.

Identity

Still, Simon is doing a great job. Working with his dad, who is the owner, can't be easy. It's like when players play for their old man – Lee Johnson under Gary at Yeovil

and Bristol City, as an example. It's not easy. Perhaps it's slightly different because he's a manager but, regardless, he is more than showing his worth at a real close-knit community club. The team has a real identity and they are building the momentum at the right time. They'll push Barrow all the way.

I think they will have really learnt from last season when they fell at the Eliminator stage in the play-offs to Fylde too.

I remember writing about Dave Challinor when Fylde did the same the season before. He went away, learnt the lessons and the next year they were in the final at Wembley.

What I like about Harrogate is they don't get above their stations. They are who they are, they're proud to be who they are, but they can certainly mix it with the big boys.

ALL SMILES: Harrogate pair Ryan Fallowfield, left, and George Thomson
PICTURE: Matt Kirkham



RAVENS NEED TO FIND THE FORMULA

HOW do you solve a problem like Bromley? At the moment we're seeing that up and down nature of their performances hurt them.

They're bottom of the form table and have slid out of the play-off places.

It can't be a coincidence that has coincided with Reeco Hackett-Fairchild moving to Portsmouth in January. His creativity was always going to be hard to replace.

But they've got the ability. My admiration for Michael Cheek is well known but he needs service. I don't think there is a harder working forward than Ben Williamson, even if he's not going to get you 15 goals a season.

They looked so strong at the start of the season and they've fallen away. It's not too late, of course. I like Neil Smith as a manager. He's built a real community within that football club and there is a really good pathway for youngsters.

How many times do they get a player in and move them on to good things? Louis Dennis and Hackett-Fairchild were both sold in recent seasons. That's the sign of a good manager. He takes a player who maybe needs an arm round them and tries to make them a better player.

As a group they need to find that consistency.

SPIREITES HAVE GOT THE SPIRIT

IF I was a Chesterfield fan I'd been feeling a lot better about the run-in now.

It's been a dreadful season overall but there seems to be a bit of light in their battle to beat relegation.

We covered them for BT Sport when they beat Notts County recently and I saw a belief back in them again.

Since John Pemberton has taken over he appears to have simplified what he wants.

Nathan Tyson has come in to give a bit of experience – then it's a bonus when he scores a hat-trick off the bench!

Along with players like Curtis Weston, Sam Wedgbury, Scott Boden they have the experience to keep climbing up the table.

I see a fighting spirit among their players that I don't see in every club down at the bottom.