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THE VOICE OF THE NATIONAL LEAGUE

TABLE, IT SEEMS, IS UPSIDE DOWN

...BUT WATCH OUT FOR THE BIG GUNS BELOW

THE NATIONAL League gets madder and madder every year. When you look at the league table today – particularly the top five – we've all clearly predicted the wrong things!

Let's be brutally honest – Halifax, Woking, Maidenhead and Stockport County – you could argue if they stayed up it would be a successful season.

Bromley we expect to be strong this year. Neil Smith is a really good manager – and a really nice person to speak to – but they can't play the 'Fifty points first and then we'll see how we go from there'.

When you can get quick points on the board you can build from that. At the other end of the scale there is Chesterfield who haven't been able to buy a win in the first nine games. Then Fylde have started slowly, Wrexham have, Harrogate have.

It's only early September. Woking had a good start a couple of years ago and ended up being relegated.

Tranmere Rovers had a slow start the same season. They ended up getting promoted but they were never going to be able to catch Macclesfield.

There are always one or two teams who start off quite fast. But to have FC Halifax Town and Woking first and second coming into the weekend, is just testament to them and their managers.

Pete Wild only really took over at Halifax just before the season kicked-off. He had a spell at Oldham where they beat Fulham in the FA Cup but it was a late appointment for the Shaymen after Jamie Fullarton decided to leave.

What an opening it has been for the young boss. They've just beaten Solihull and Chesterfield – there are some teams who start well and you wonder if this is going to be there one big chance of promotion.

Matty Kosylo's move to Fylde in the summer is a big loss and you wonder how they will cope. But so far they have done very well.

Liam McAlinden is on fire in front of goal in a team that are top scorers in the first nine games. I like Liam Nolan in midfield, he's a tidy player, and the experience of Nathan Clarke at the back. They've got a decent spine.

I know neither side will be getting

carried away, but when you put points on the board early, when they do have a bad run, they've got points in the bag and they can go for games a bit without worrying.

When I was at Brighton, we got promoted to the Championship and had the lowest budget. We went away to West Ham and won. Away to Sheffield United and won. We had that real togetherness and that's what Halifax and Woking have clearly got.

Those two teams can't turn up and expect one or two players to win it for them, like Danny Rowe can at Fylde. If they don't play well as a team then they will fall away.

Of course that doesn't mean they don't have key players. I wrote about Woking signing Dave Tarpey and how it's vitally important someone like him hits the ground running. He certainly has and they've got Jake Hyde doing well up front and scoring. You need goals early on and Woking have got the balance right.

Kane Ferdinand is a solid player at this level, Manny Parry and Ben Gerring are a solid defensive partnership and they've also got Moussa Diarra at the back.

I spoke to their manager Alan Dowson before their Watford FA Cup game last season. He is just so enthusiastic and that comes across on the players.

Both clubs have a great goal difference already and the runs they've both been on has seem them pick up points. Woking have beaten Fylde, they've won at Chesterfield. They've probably picked up extra points than they would have expected when they looked at the month of August before it started.

There are so many new sides and squads in the National League where it can take teams a while to get going. It's a huge opportunity to take points from them and get a good start.

You know Barnet will come good, I'd expect Harrogate to be better and Eastleigh's results haven't reflected how well they've played.

Wrexham have just gone to the polar opposite of last season – can't score and can't keep clean sheets.

Look, if it's the current top seven come the end of the season I'll eat my hat. But I'll enjoy seeing how it plays out.

LONG, HARD SLOG AHEAD: Chesterfield's Mike Fondop in action against Barrow



EXPECTANCY: Neil Smith

MIND THE GAP, SHERI!

FOR CHESTERFIELD to win the league title now would almost be a miracle.

I'm not saying they can't get promoted through the play-offs but already they are well off the pace and haven't even managed to win a game after nine attempts.

Manager John Sheridan won't need telling that it's not good enough and they need to turn it around quick.

Yes, there are draws in that opening sequence where they could have won and draws where they could

have lost. But it's a worrying start.

Like many, I really felt they had a good chance of taking hold of this title race by the scruff of the neck early on.

Ahead of the weekend they were 17 points behind FC Halifax Town and Woking. So that already means winning six games on top of them. I know they're only nine points off the play-offs but really it's a good enough squad to be competing for the championship. They're a long way back at this stage of the season.

People will say there's lots of games to go and there is. You can go on decent runs like they did last year – but in that time you're already hoping for other teams to drop points.

So I can't see them winning the league now. Play-offs, yes. But John will know they need to get results now. The goals they've conceded have been poor so we'll wait and see.

They brought in good players over the summer but, so far, they're just not performing.