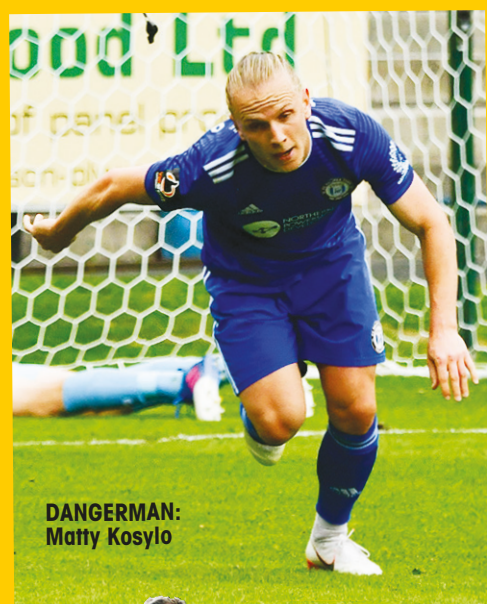


2019-20 SEASON PREVIEW PULLOUT

Adam VIRGO

BT SPORT PUNDIT GIVES HIS EXPERT OPINION



DANGERMAN:
Matty Kosylo



HEADS UP!
Paul McCallum



HONEST:
Mitch Brundle



GOALS:
Dave Tarpey



WORKHORSE:
Gus Mafuta

WHO MAKES MY SUMMER FAB 5?

MATTY KOSYLO**FC Halifax – AFC Fylde**

This is a big season for Kosylo. It's one thing doing it for FC Halifax and another to do it on a weekly basis when the spotlight is on you. Fylde are expected to win near enough every game. On his day, he's excellent. At 26, he's at that age where it's a real chance to prove himself.

PAUL MCCALLUM**Eastleigh – Solihull Moors**

Arguably the best striker in the air in the National League. McCallum's goals with his head were massive in getting Eastleigh into the play-offs. It's important he continues that on. If you look through his career, he hasn't scored goals season after season. He's got to show it again.

MITCH BRUNDLE**Dover Athletic – Dag & Red**

Underrated. He's an honest player and would get in most National League teams with his performance and personality. Ask him to play centre midfield, he does well. A centre-half, he does well. He's just

a very good footballer at this level. He's been superb for Braintree, Gateshead and Dover. Most importantly, he's reliable and it's a great signing for Dagenham.

DAVE TARPEY**Barnet – Woking**

Loved him at Maidenhead. He reminds me of Dan Holman, who scored loads at this level. Tarpey got his move to Barnet and had a bad ACL injury, which is obviously a tough one to recover from. But Woking can have belief they've got a genuine goalscorer to keep them in the league.

GUS MAFUTA**Salford City – Hartlepool Utd**

When Salford had their good run that put them back into the promotion hunt, he was important for them in midfield alongside Lois Maynard and Devonte Redmond. He's exactly what Hartlepool need in the middle of the park. Maybe he can add goals but he's a very good player at this level. He's a workhorse, but has that quality Pools need.

A LUTON? A Tranmere? There's no one this season I look at and immediately say: Finish above them and you've won the league.

It's a really open division and as hard to call as ever. Don't me wrong, there are good teams in this National League. But there's no one I look at on the first day of the season and think, 'They're the team to beat'.

Can Chesterfield take inspiration from Leyton Orient? It's a similar situation where they had a difficult first season but finished strong.

There was something about the Spireites under John Sheridan towards the back end of the last campaign. It was like they'd accepted where they were. The change of manager from Martin Allen to Sheridan was the right call.

He's found a formula and got results. You saw people were there to be part of the club. I like the experience at the back they've brought in with Anthony Gerrard during a much steadier summer than they had last year.

They should have done better in their first season at the level but Sheridan has gone out and signed some decent players. They've lost Charlie Carter, but overall he's kept the players he would have wanted and added more quality and class.

For me they start as favourites in an open field. I expect Fylde to be up there again. They seem to be going in the right direction every season. Year 1 in the National League: play-offs. Year 2: reach the final – plus they won the FA Trophy. If they finish outside the top two, then that will be a disappointing season. They've certainly got the quality to finish in the

SHERIDAN CAN IN-SPIRE AGAIN

top two and even be champions.

When you do well in the National League, it always raises one issue. You lose some of your best players. They've lost three out of their back five. Zaine Francis-Angol has moved to Accrington Stanley – he's been one of the best left-backs in the division. Then centre back Jordan Tunnicliffe has joined Crawley Town and Jay Lynch, one of the best keepers in Non-League, has moved on.

Predictable

But what Dave Challinor did was make early signings. They didn't muck around. Matty Kosylo from FC Halifax, Mark Yeates from Eastleigh, Jordan Williams – he's gone for width.

Replacing Lynch is always going to be difficult but the signing of England C keeper James Montgomery is a very good one.

Then they've still got a ridiculous goalscorer in their team. Whatever people say about Danny Rowe, he's a genuine threat and you feel he will be pushing to be top scorer in the division again.

Solihull Moors can't play the underdog card again this season. If you analyse their squad – they had more promotions than anyone else – their play-off finish maybe shouldn't have been a huge surprise. But, having said that, Tim Flowers did a wonderful job last season. He's a fantastic manager and coach – he was my assistant and Coventry and I know his quality. I'm his biggest fan.

Will they have a Plan B this year? Towards the end of last season they got a little bit predictable. The play-off semi-final against Fylde was evidence of that. When Fylde worked them out, they didn't quite know what to do even when Flowers tried to bring on some more creativity.

Alex Gudger and Liam Daly are two brilliant centre halves at this level. They've signed Mitch Hancox too – adding National League quality could prove important. Play-offs, no doubt.

I've actually got them down to finish fourth. Third? Barnet. Darren Currie was a team-mate of mine. Injuries played a massive part in an under-

whelming league position last season. Keeper Scott Loach has come in from Hartlepool, Callum Reynolds is as solid as they come, Elliott Johnson is a veteran at this level, even though he's only 24, Andre Boucaud will be important if they keep him fit and Charlee Adams, I like. I'm amazed they've been able to keep Jack Taylor and then they've got Shaq Coulthirst and Sim Akinola up top. It's a squad of players who must be pushing for play-offs, in my opinion.

Cursed

Wrexham should be in the play-offs with them. They're always solid but the question before each season is how many goals are they going to score compared to the rest?

They've signed JJ Hooper, who had a good end to the season in front of goal at Bromley. He probably played the best I've seen him. Sometimes it feels as though anyone who wears the number nine there is cursed. They've tried lots of different options up front but it hasn't quite happened. Hooper could prove to

be a good signing but I don't sit here and think: jigsaw complete. I just genuinely don't know how it will go but there's a squad of players good enough to get in the top five.

Harrogate should be strong again. They remind me of Fylde. Excellent first season, now they're looking to build on it and signing Jon Stead could work out well. He brings that know-how. And imagine defending against him and Mark Beck if they need a goal in the last ten minutes.

The last spot, as always, is up for grabs. You just don't know what you'll get from Notts County with all their summer problems. They've still got good players so they could go well but you look at the clubs coming up like Torquay and Stockport County with that momentum.

Then Bromley have signed very, very well. The manager Neil Smith just gets it. Michael Cheek and Adrian Clifton are good additions, Chris Bush is a solid defender. They could be a dark horse for seventh. Enjoy the season!