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FORMER NON-LEAGUE DEFENDER



DUKU

AND THE SPORTS CIRCLE FOUNDER

THE
SPORTS
CIRCLE

STAYING IN SHAPE IS KEY NOW

IT'S fair to say that the way players look after themselves in the close season has changed a lot since my playing days.

In my time, players couldn't wait to get off on holiday at the end of the season and didn't really worry about playing football again until two or three weeks before we started back.

You'd have 'a good summer', for want of a better phrase, and then it would be a case of running, and more running, at the start of pre-season. There would be sessions where we'd be told - 'just bring your running shoes, don't worry about balls and boots!'

Horrible

Nowadays they will do the running with the ball and get it in that way. We would have to go to big parks and climb the hills. And everyone would have to go again if someone didn't get within the group time allowed.

I'm not the smallest guy so miles and miles of runs - and bleep tests - were horrible. What made it worse when you were doing those runs was the heat - it always seemed to be in the hottest weeks of the year. And you could count on it being hot in the first few games of the season as well.

It was a time no-one ever liked, but you knew it was necessary. I must admit I got a bit wiser as I got older and started preparing for

the season a bit earlier. Things have moved on since I packed up a little over a decade ago. Nowadays it seems to be two weeks off and then start thinking about football again. People are training in groups, not just as individuals, and there's a lot more focus now on the strength and conditioning side of it. People are also on better diets.

We have so much more knowledge and there are lots of options to help you perform to your best or come back to perform at your best.

The science is so much better now and, although there are no guarantees, you can reduce the likelihood of getting injured.

Something that I'm hoping will be of interest to clubs and players seeking to give themselves the best chance of performing well in the coming season is through my membership and rewards platform, The Sports Circle.

We have designed a comprehensive gold standard medical infrastructure which can support all Non-League clubs. We have a lead medical partner in FIFA Medical Centre of Excellence, Isokinetic, whose UK base is in London's Harley Street, a chief medical adviser in Dr Matthew Stride, who has Premier League, EFL, Commonwealth and Olympic Games experience, and a network that provides membership access to the likes of ex-Arsenal and

England physios Gary and Colin Lewin.

As part of this, we are rolling out a programme across Non-League which will help players with their conditioning and fitness in pre-season and right throughout the campaign. We are also creating a medical passport for players which will have their medical data.

When a player moves from one club to another, the player will have access to their medical and sports science records so they can build on any work they have done so far and share these records with their new club as they need to, while clubs can keep their data in one place and have access to it.

Elite

We are working with elite people and people with experience in the field. The idea is to have a Football League standard medical system operating in Non-League for players and clubs.

We have got membership benefits in place for those who have joined The Sports Circle to make it even better value. We will be contacting clubs this month with an early bird offer and it's set to go live on July 1.

At a time when people often talk about the small margins in football, it's something that we hope could make the difference for clubs and players.

And it certainly beats running up hills!



HEYDAY: Bradley Pritchard, left, in action for Charlton against Cardiff

PICTURE: Alamy

I'M BACKING BRAD IN HIS ROOKS ROLE

ONE of my old clubs, Lewes, recently appointed Bradley Pritchard as their new manager - and I would love to see him do well.

I've known Bradley a long time and he had a career path that many Non-League players hope for. After learning his trade in Non-League, he went on to have a successful time in

the Football League with Charlton and Leyton Orient before coming back into Non-League.

Stepping into management is something different but he has a couple of major strengths that should stand him in good stead. Firstly, he's got really good football knowledge and, secondly, he knows how to

deal with people. Man-management is really big these days. It's not about shouting at someone, you have to bring them with you.

I know other managers who have done well previously at the Rooks and hopefully Bradley, who is a really switched on guy, can do the same with them in the Isthmian Premier.

Take a bow, Louis

THERE will no doubt be a few defenders breathing a sigh of relief now that Jefferson Louis has hung up his boots at the age of 46.

I definitely played against him and I think it was in one of his spells with Thame United.

Whichever club it was, he was always a pain to play against. He was big, physical and knew the game - he wasn't just brute strength.

He got in good positions, could run in behind and scored plenty of goals. He's looked

after himself well and that's why he's managed to keep his career going as long as he has.

I thought I'd done well stopping at 34, 35 but he's done over a decade more! You've got to have respect for the career he's had.