

## Programme Notes v Exeter

Good afternoon and welcome to today's match against high flying Exeter City and a special welcome to the fans of "The Grecians" who have made the 600 mile round trip for today's game.

Exeter are one of only 3 fan owned clubs operating in the EFL with AFC Wimbledon and Newport being the others. Until recently Wycombe were also fan owned before agreeing to selling a majority stake to American entrepreneur Rob Couhig. There are around a further 40 fan owned clubs operating in non-league with the biggest and most well known being Wrexham.

It is a model that works for some club's and not others and generally is a result of a solution born from adversity. This was certainly the case with Exeter when in 1994 the club had to appoint administrators to manage their affairs. St James Park was sold to Beazer Homes for £650,000, which was obviously a major worry for supporters, but fortunately the council bought back the ground and leased it to the football club as a way of maintaining a football league club in the city. Problems continued however and in 2003 the Police raided the club and took the chairman and vice chairman away for questioning. With debts mounting the majority shareholder asked the Supporters Trust to take over the day to day running of the club. In the same season the club were relegated to the Conference. The Supporters Trust subsequently became the majority shareholder with the objective of stabilising the finances and undergoing a CVA (company voluntary agreement) which basically enabled the debts to be paid over a period of time.

A key turning point for the club ironically involved ourselves when in 2004/5 we were drawn away to Exeter in the second round of the FA Cup. I remember this game well because the club decided to travel

down by plane with supporters filling up the spaces to help cover the costs. I was one of those supporters and it was the journey from hell with many of the players nervous flyers which was made worse by a delay due to “technical problems”. As a result, the preparation for the game was all wrong and Exeter deservedly went on to win the game 1-0 and eagerly awaited the 3<sup>rd</sup> round draw which when it came out as Manchester United away it was to transform the fortunes of the club. They achieved a fantastic 0-0 draw at Old Trafford and despite losing the replay 2-0 the receipts and TV income from both games wiped out the club’s debts. Similar to ourselves, it took a while to get back to the Football League, but this was finally secured in 2007/8 under the management of Paul Tisdale and this momentum continued the following season with promotion to League 1. Although dropping back into League 2 in 2012 the club are established as one of the best teams in league 2, they were unlucky to miss out on promotion last season and it is no surprise that they are up there again this season. A key to the club’s success has been the investment in their academy which has earned the club in excess of £5m in transfers over the last 4 years and again this is model we are certainly to trying to aspire to with six recent academy graduates in the match day squad. Again similar to us, with tight budgets and remote location they have had no choice but to develop their own players and this has reaped it’s rewards financially and the Exeter Academy has gained a reputation as being one of the best in the lower leagues.

Fifteen years on from moving to fan ownership Exeter are now recognised as one of the best run club’s in the EFL and quite rightly have run awards for things like best community club and best way fan experience. As we look to continually improve our own fan engagement rating we are looking at the best practice at other club’s and Exeter are always one of the those we can learn from.

It is certainly exciting times for the ourselves at the moment and it is great to see a buzz around the club and the town once again. When everyone comes together the potential for this club is huge, long may it continue.

Enjoy the match, we know it will be a very difficult so as usual let's get right behind the lads and keep the run going.

UTMM

Mariners Trust Board.