

On this day 39 years ago we made a first-ever trip to Worcester.. and one lucky goal helped win 2 saucy points

BY TIM PARKS



Saturday March 4 1978, Southern League Premier Division: Worcester City 1 Wealdstone 2

WEALDSTONE have had a reputation for getting themselves out of the s**t ever since I started supporting them, er, almost 50 years ago. It's happened twice since we got promoted to the National league and will probably happen again this season.

1977-78 was no exception. Though it was all the more extraordinary since the start of this campaign saw perhaps the most memorable couple of months in the terrific history of our club. It was the year we reached the Third Round of the FA Cup, only to lose at QPR, having chalked up our only (to this day) victories over Football League clubs on the way, with Hereford Utd and Reading both losing to Alan Fogarty's vibrant side.

But when 1978 dawned, and the glory from the cup run had long since ebbed away, Stones fans were deeply troubled. We were in 21st place in the league out of 22, and four teams would go down. Between the end of October and February 18 the Stones had played



Here it is: a magnificently grainy picture (and I've no idea who took it) shows George Duck (No.10) pouncing to rifle the Stones ahead in the first half at St George's Lane, in front of the travelling fans strung out behind the goal

12 league games and lost eight of them, seven in a row. The other four were draws.

The previous season had seen the Stones scramble out of trouble after a similar dire run had seen just two wins out of 18... but did this side have the quality or the spirit to emulate that?

As it turned out, yes it did. In the most fantastic way, I'm

not sure what boss Fogarty did to turn things around, as he had a first team squad of just 13 and the team barely changed in the meantime. But after a 2-0 defeat at Leamington on February 25 (which plunged us to one-off-the-

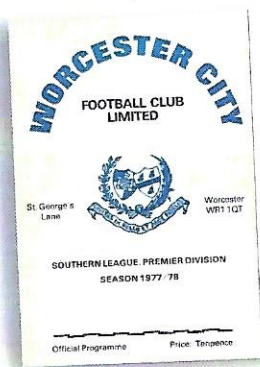
bottom of the table) we remained unbeaten in the league for the rest of the season - 11 wins and seven draws from 18 games.

They weren't spectacular wins. A lot of them were by the odd goal (mostly 1-0), grinding out the points on bumpy, sanded pitches and often against teams who were chasing honours at the right end of the table.

The trip to Worcester City was right at the beginning of this fine run - only a week after the spineless defeat at Leamington. In between the two, we'd faced third-placed Maidstone at Lower Mead on the Tuesday night and shocked them with the only goal of the game, a cracker from winger Steve Briscoe.

Come to think of it, although Briscoe arrived a month or so earlier from Redditch Utd (where he had previously played for Fogarty, and also at Nuneaton) it

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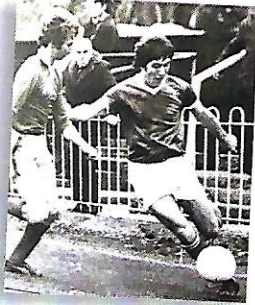
would be fair to say that he pepped up the side. Briscoe (pictured below) came in to replace the gangly winger Keith Furphy, who had left to join his dad Ken who was manager in the States at Detroit Express, and suffered by comparison to start with as Furphy had been a genuine star in the defeats of Hereford and Reading.

But he was a solid performer - as was young goalkeeper Ian Cranstone, who arrived at the same moment from Colchester United to replace the suddenly-inconsistent Chris Lightfoot.

So, on the back of the surprise win over Maidstone, we set off to Worcester for the very first time. City were newly-promoted from the First Division North and were flying along in fifth place and it was intriguing to visit one of the famous old Southern League clubs at their impressive St George's Road ground.

Worcester were just climbing back to the top of non-League football - and would actually win the Southern League the following season - but their whole set-up did not intimidate the Stones, backed by

around 200 fans who had made the 150-mile trek to the West Midlands. We did, admittedly have a huge slice of luck when taking the lead in the first half after a bit of a defensive stalemate... A home defender turned to run upfield but collided with the referee... the ball ran free to Steve Brinkman who quickly crossed to the unmarked



George Duck who snapped the ball home from close range.

A bit of luck was something that had eluded the Stones for months. And it happened again midway through the second half with us on the rack after conceding an equaliser. Worcester blasted a freekick from the edge of the box over the wall and past Cranstone, only for the referee to deem it an indirect offence... turning City puce with rage!

And of course, straight from the restart the yellow-shirted Stones stormed to the other end and Brinkman's delicious cross was nodded back into the danger area by sub Pat Ferry for the predatory Duck to blast the winner.

I remember being at journalism college in Harlow the previous day, wondering if my ancient Mini would be happily bump-started into action to make the long trip - especially after the misery of the previous few away trips. So I'm glad I made the effort!

Wealdstone: Cranstone, Alan Fursdon, Steve Hockham, Willie Watson, Dave Parratt, Seamus Horgan, Bobby Moss, Brinkman, Bobby Finch, Duck, Briscoe. Sub: Ferry.

That team barely changed for the rest of the unbeaten run, with Cranstone (who later proved to have far from safe hands) reliable behind the centre back pairing of spring-heeled Dave Parratt and the assassin Watson. Steve Hockham was a very decent young left back from Crystal Palace (whose No.3 shirt was remarkably filled by striker Pat Ferry when he was injured) while the midfield had guile and tenacity, and an old stager in Finch. Reserve team centre-back also Seamus Horgan did a good job in there while George Duck was just George Duck, aided by the endless ferreting of Bobby Moss.

A side much bigger than the sum of its parts - and the eighth place they finally claimed that season was hugely important in the Stones' successful bid to qualify for the new Alliance Premier League a year later.