



Meynell's Memories:



Tonight's visitors Barnet have been frequent visitors to The Shay over recent years. The first meeting of the two clubs took place at Underhill on 9 November 1991, with Barnet running out 3-1 winners but when the Bees arrived at The Shay for the return fixture on 21 March 1992, Halifax Town exacted revenge, running out 3-1 winners. When the two sides met at The Shay the following season, there was drama of sorts, with as much of it off-field as there was on it.

Synonymous with Barnet back then were larger-than-life manager Barry Fry and controversial chairman Stan 'The Flash' Flashman. It could have been said of the pair that they had a love-hate relationship. Over the years, Flashman sacked and reinstated Fry on no less than eight occasions, and with Barnet set to meet Halifax Town for their Third Division meeting on 5 December 1992, he was at it again. On the Tuesday of that week, Flashman had dismissed Fry, seemingly unhappy with his off-field deals. Earlier, Fry had called on Flashman to stand down because of his own recent conduct – Flashman had attacked two photographers, amongst other things – and the club's recent £50,000 fine for financial irregularities. Their club secretary Bryan Ayres confirmed Fry's sacking, adding, "I am shocked and devastated by the news."

The Barnet players clearly sided with Fry and threatened to go on strike, but after the now ex-manager had convinced them to

play the match at Halifax, they travelled to The Shay without him, with former assistant manager Edwin Stein put in charge of team affairs. But never one to miss out on a photo opportunity, Barry Fry travelled to the game himself to cheer on his former charges, and gained entry to the ground courtesy of a ticket bought for him by the Barnet fans! You couldn't make it up. There he was, on the terracing, beaming like a Cheshire cat, surrounded by the Barnet fans who'd managed to get him in. All the while, Flashman had retired to his bed, suffering from 'stress'.

What was all the more remarkable was that at the time of this match Barnet were sitting pretty in second place, hard on the heels of York City. Distractions like this could hardly have helped matters, particularly when their supporters spent almost the entire ninety minutes chanting anti-Flashman songs. One could hardly have been surprised had Halifax Town taken the lead, even given their recent run of poor form which had seen them without a League win in five and the recent FA Cup defeat by non-league Marine still fresh in the minds. But that's exactly what they did, even if it was somewhat against the run of play. Thirty-two minutes had elapsed when Town striker Nigel Greenwood chased down an attempted backpass by Mick Bodley that had necessitated keeper Gary Phillips to charge from his line, and when Greenwood just about won the race for the ball, his touch saw it spinning up into the unguarded net.

The lead did not last long – just five minutes, in fact. It was Geoff Cooper who was the provider for Brian Stein, and the Barnet marksman took one touch to make space for himself then fired the ball past Town keeper Lee Bracey. And it was the same player who scored the would-be winner six minutes into the second half, although there was a touch of controversy about it. When Bracey upended Gary Bull in the box, the home players were caught in a state of confusion when the linesman raised his flag for a penalty. Ultimately, they were guilty



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of not playing to the whistle and some were virtually static, for when referee Gurnam Singh ignored Bull's protestations, his team mate Jonathan Hunt latched onto the loose ball and whipped it across for Stein to stab home.

It was no more than Barnet had deserved but despite being the better side throughout they were still relieved at being let off the hook when, with just two minutes remaining, Town contrived to miss a penalty, awarded for David Howell's tug on Greenwood's shirt. Culprit was Town full-back Paul Wilson, who marred an otherwise excellent performance by blazing the spot kick over the bar. The visitors saw out the game to take the three points, then immediately headed in the direction of Barry Fry to celebrate.

Teams;

Halifax Town: Bracey, Megson, Wilson, Locketti, Thompstone, Bradley, Matthews (Edmonds 56 mins), Barr, Hildersley, Greenwood, Peake (German 40).

Barnet: Phillips, Huxford, Cooper, Bodley, Howell, Horton, Payne, Stein (Carter 79), Bull, Lowe (Showler 67), Hunt.

Referee: Gurnam Singh (Wolverhampton).

Attendance: 1,253.



There was an ironic post-script to this match. Beleaguered Halifax Town boss John McGrath had felt his time at the club had run its course and tendered his resignation two days later. Fry, on the other hand, was reinstated by Flashman in time for their next match with Rochdale the following Saturday. Come the season's close, the two clubs would be heading in opposite directions, Barnet promoted in third place behind Cardiff City and Wrexham, while Town, with physio Mick 'Basil' Rathbone at the helm, were relegated to the Conference following last day defeat by Hereford United. Any likelihood of Town being given a reprieve would rest with another club being expelled from the Football League for something like further financial misdemeanours. Barnet almost duly obliged. But only almost.

Photo 1. Nigel Greenwood celebrates with Russel Bradley after giving the Shaymen the lead. Photo 2. Barry Fry happily chats away on the terracing.

Johnny Meynell