

CARLISLE UNITED ASSOCIATION FOOTBALL CLUB (1921) LIMITED
STRATEGIC REPORT
FOOTBALL REVIEW
YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2022

Football

Skybet League 2

2021/22 saw a welcome return to a normal football season. After the upheaval of a manager change in November 2019 and major squad reconstruction starting January 2020, plus disruption of Coronavirus in 2020/21, we began the 21/22 season with stability of football coaching staff entering the season. We also had more continuity in the playing squad, with lower churn of players. Our Player Cost budget was increased by 20% at the start of the year to be the highest since 2018/19 along with more planned spending on other football staff and football department expenses too, as we sought to build on the first half of 2020/21 and back Chris Beech in his third campaign and second full season.

However, despite all this, the concerning trend from the second half of 2020/21 was not reversed and the start of 21/22 season was very poor.

With 14 League 2 games played, we were third bottom P22, with just 12 points at 0.86PPG, with a dismal 3pts earned in the most recent 8 games, with no wins and a paltry two goals. In the last 23 games to that point, we had achieved just 24pts at 1PPG (full season equivalent 48pts). Over the last 38 games to that point, we had earned just 36pts at less than 1PPG. On all key measures, for nearly the equivalent of a full season, we accumulated points in line with relegation. The most recent results were declining as the trends worsened.

After being in charge for 78 League 2 games in total including 14 of the 21/22 season, Chris Beech left the club. His overall League 2 record was P78 W25 D26 L27 GF88 GA100 GD -12 Pts 101 at PPG 1.29 with a win 32%. Since being awarded a new and improved, extended contract in December 2020 we won just 9 League 2 games out of 41 played, earning 43 points.

We appointed Keith Millen as replacement in late October 2022 with seven games before the transfer window opened and two thirds of the 2021/22 season remaining. Further financial support made available and we made 4 permanent transfers and 4 loan signings in the January 2022 window. This did not bring the improvement required. As the transfer window closed performances and results worsened alarmingly. Keith left in late February 2022 after just 17 games. Like Chris Beech, his last 8 games brought just 3 points. His overall record was P17 W4 D4 L9 GF12 GA 24 GD-12 Pts 16 PPG 0.94. At that point we were second bottom P23 with just 15 games remaining and the transfer window closed.

David Holdsworth left at the same time after 3.5 years in his role as Director of Football after joining in mid-2018. In his tenure he managed down our Total Football Expenditure from £2.6m in 2017/18 to a decade low of £1.9m in 2021/22 before rising to £2.25m in 2021/22. We appointed four managers and signed 96 players (50 permanent and 26 loans, 20 Academy) over eight transfer windows. Of these players, we received transfer income for only three players who we had recruited (Hope, Hayden and Tanner) and just 12 permanent and 7 Academy remained on contract as we entered the 2022/23 season. The churn of players was very high. Three Academy players who were already on the books in 2018 were also sold in this period (Branthwaite, McCarron and Galloway).

Paul Simpson was appointed immediately on 23 February 2022 on a short-term contract to the end of the season. The team responded straight away with six wins out of the next seven games in a remarkable turnaround. The final 15 games saw a total transformation in results as we achieved P15 W8 D1 L6 GF16 GA17 GD-1 Pts25 PPG1.67.

Overall, the season on-the-pitch saw the first two thirds and final third being complete opposites.

In the first 31 games we were strong relegation candidates. We significantly underperformed all realistic expectations right from the start of the campaign as we were firmly fixed right at the bottom of the division with just 28 pts from 31 games. With just 23 GF and 45 GA and failing to score in half the games meant the fundamentals required to win games were not there. Two managers, a higher budget and the benefit of a January transfer window with more cash made available brought no consistent improvement.

The final 15 games proved sufficient to save our EFL status, but that needed an extraordinary improvement which appeared unlikely in mid-February 2022.

We finished in 20th place (2020/21: 10th) in League 2 with 53pts at 1.15PPG (2020/21: 1.43 PPG). This was 8pts outside the relegation positions. The final record was:

2021/22	20 th	P46 W14 D11 L21 GF39 GA62 GD-23	53pts PPG 1.15... (xGF52 xGA66 xGD-14)
2020/21	10 th	P46 W18 D12 L16 GF60 GA51 GD+9	66pts PPG 1.43... (xGF63 xGA46 xGD+17)
2019/20	18 th	P35 W10 D12 L15 GF39 GA56 GD-17	42pts PPG 1.20... (xGF43 xGA55 xGD -8)
2018/19	11 th	P46 W20 D8 L18 GF67 GA62 GD+5	68pts PPG 1.48 (xGF62 xGA66 xGD -4)
2017/18	10 th	P46 W17 D16 L13 GF62 GA54 GD+8	67pts PPG 1.46 (xGF67 xGA56 xGD+11)

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Attack

In attack we scored just 39 goals at 0.85 Goals For per 90 minutes (2020/21: 60 goals at 1.3 GF90). This was an all-time record low. Our scoring rate was worse than expected given the quality of the chances we created as we again often suffered from missing big chances. Our 19 Goals scored at home was the lowest in League 2 except for relegated Scunthorpe and 20% below the next worst. It was an all-time record low. We didn't score three goals in a League 2 game all season.

Overall, we earned just 19pts from 24 games (0.79 PPG) against teams in the top half of the division. However, against teams in the bottom half we earned 34pts from 22 games (1.54 PPG) as we were more competitive against them. We were beaten by only one team out the bottom half at home and beat all the bottom four away. Our form against fellow struggling teams proved important in our survival.

We accumulated 42pts when scoring first at 2.63 PPG (2020/21: 57 at 2.19 PPG) which was the 3rd best conversion rate in League 2 (2020/21: 16th), as we proved very strong and resilient after getting ahead. Our record of 13 wins and 3 draws from 16 was promotion standard. We only scored first in 16 times (2020/21: 26 games), ranking us 4th worst in League 2. This proved a crucial factor in our 21 losses. We simply didn't score enough goals and didn't score first often enough. We failed to score 20 times (2020/21: 11), with only relegated Scunthorpe worse.

Scoring first and converting this into wins is the most crucial factor in League 2 success. When we did score first, plus the gain in the ability to get two goals up and all proved important.

We scored just 11 equalising goals in 32 games where we fell behind at 0.34 GF90 (2020/21: 9 in 17 games at 0.53 GF90) when conceding first. This was the 4th worst in League 2. For most of the season we showed little ability to come back and recover to score and gain points from losing positions.

Earning just 6pts in 25 games at 0.24 PPG after conceding first was the 3rd worst record in League 2. It is telling that 4pts of the 6pts were earned in 8 games under Paul Simpson compared with 2pts in 17 games before that.

In 2021/22 all our defeats came after we conceded first. We conceded first in 24 of 46 games, losing 21. We came back to win only 1 game (2020/21: 1) after conceding first. This win came under Paul Simpson. Needing to equalise so often is a serious failure. Conceding first in 2 of every 3 games, combined with failing to score in over 40% of games and then scoring only one equalising goal every three games, was recipe for poor results.

However, as noted in prior years, an inability to win points after conceding first was a failing all through Chris Beech's tenure, where we won just one and drew seven out of 32 games after conceding first. This continued under Keith Millen where we then lost 9 out of 10 after conceding first and only earned a solitary 1pt. This underlines the importance of scoring and not conceding the first goal had on our 2021/22 season, this major risk was highlighted in the 20/21 season review. This is essential to fix to make improve our points haul and avoid a repeat of 2021/22.

Defence

With 62 goals conceded (2020/21: 51), we worsened defensively and recorded the 7th worst (2020/21: 10th best) defensive record in the division. Our goals conceded total was slightly less than expected given the quality of the chances allowed. In the 21 games we lost, we scored just 6 goals, conceding 46 (GD-40) as we regularly fell away to heavy defeats. In all 21 we conceded first.

Thirteen clean sheets were gained (20/21: 15) ranking us joint 13th best (2020/21: 9th). We conceded two or more goals 21 times (2020/21: 14). Only four teams suffered as many heavy defeats and three finished below us in League 2.

When conceding first, our record worsened to 3rd worst (after being 4th worst in 2020/21) in League 2 at coming back. This was a decline from an already very poor level, especially given the frequency in which we conceded the first goal.

The pattern of conceding first, failing to equalise and then falling to heavy defeat was a regular feature, especially away. Nearly half our games ended in defeat by 2 or more goals, while 11 of our 14 wins came by the odd goal. Close wins after going ahead and comfortable defeats after conceding was a consistent pattern. This was only reversed after Paul Simpson's arrival, when defeats became narrower and we gained points more from behind, as we scored first more often, failed to score less often and increased our scoring rate, equaliser rate and reduced the conceding rate.

Home form

Our home form deteriorated. Overall, we ranked 18th (2020/21: 5th) in League 2 for home points won. Under Chris Beech and Keith Millen we earned just 16pts in 16 games with only 3 wins before winning 5 of 7 games under Paul Simpson earning 15pts. We beat only 4 of the top half teams at home with 3 of the wins coming under Paul Simpson. Our overall home record was:

2021/22	18 th	P23 W8 D7 L8 GF19 GA 23 GD-4 Pts 31 PPG 1.35
2020/21	5 th	P23 W12 D5 L6 GF38 GA25 GD+13 Pts 41 PPG 1.78
2019/20	19 th	P19 W5 D5 L7 GF17 GA26 GD-9 Pts 22 PPG 1.16
2018/19	9 th	P23 W12 D3 L8 GF42 GA31 GD+11 Pts 39 PPG 1.70

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We scored first just 9 times of 23 at home but won 8 (drawing the other after scoring first) which was almost perfect. However, in the 10 games at home where we conceded first, we never came back to win, losing 8. We drew the other two, both with last minute equalisers. Only Scunthorpe was worse than us at home after conceding first.

Away form

Our away form fell back just a little from an already poor level, but we still ranked 17th (2020/21: 17th) in League 2 for away points won achieving 22pts at 0.96PPG (2020/21: 25pts at 1.09 PPG). We gained only 5pts in 10 games against the top 10 away, failing to score in 6 games. We earned just 10pts from 19 away games (0.53PPG) against the 19 teams above us. We scored just GF13 with GA37 and GD-24 in those 19 games. We lost 13 of 15 away when conceding the first goal with a record of P15 W1 D1 L13 GF8 GA33 GD-25 Pts 4 PPG 0.27. We beat all 4 teams away who finished below us, but overall, when playing away against almost everyone else, it was a case of concede first and lose, half the time without scoring. Our overall away record was:

2021/22	17 th	P23 W6 D4 L13 GF20 GA39 GD-19 Pts 22	PPG 0.96
2020/21	17 th	P23 W6 D7 L10 GF22 GA26 GD-4 Pts 25	PPG 1.09
2019/20	15 th	P18 W5 D5 L8 GF22 GA30 GD-8 Pts 20	PPG 1.11
2018/19	10 th	P23 W8 D5 L10 GF25 GA31 GD-6 Pts 29	PPG 1.26

Cup competitions

Again, disappointingly and frustratingly, in all three cup competitions we failed to make any impact. We lost 1-0 (A) in Round 1 of the EFL League Cup against Championship Sheffield United.

We then lost 1-2 against League 1 Shrewsbury (H) in round 2 of FA Cup after beating non-league Horsham (H) 2-0.

In the EFL Trophy we won two group games of three to progress to the knock-out rounds for the first time in a number of years. We then beat L1 Lincoln (H) on penalties after a 1-1 before a 1-0 (A) defeat at League 2 Harrogate.

Players

We suffered an even higher player churn in the year as a result of addressing recruitment failures in the Summer 2022 window and manager changes mid-season. We had 33 (2020/21: 29) different contracted players during 2021/22 including 7 loans (2020/21: 5) plus supplemented by a further 7 Academy U21 players).

A recent high of 14 (2020/21: 10) contracted players remained from the 20/21 season's final squad bringing initial continuity and stability. Two were sold before the Summer 2022 window closed and 7 new players (2020/21: 11) joined on contracts plus 3 loans (2020/21: 5 loans). The January 2022 transfer window saw emergency recruitment with 5 players (2020/21: 3) joining on contracts and all 3 loans returning (2020/21: 3) with 4 new loans in. Only Gibson of the five attacking players recruited in the Summer made an impact and the other 4 all had been exited within just five months. Overall, 19 new players came in. This level of player turnover is high risk and not tenable in the long term.

At the end of the season just 13 (2021/22: 14) of the 23 contracted players in the final squad returned for 2022/23 training meaning another period of player churn in the summer 2022 window lay ahead. Only two of the 7 contracted players recruited in Summer 2022 returned for 2022/23. These were supplemented by 7 Academy U21 players) for 2022/23 season. The core squad for 2022/23 comprises players recruited before August 2021 or from January 2022.

Injured players missed the equivalent of 158 games (2020/21: 168 and 2019/20: 110) as the number of injuries suffered reduced. The equivalent of 5 (2020/21: 5) games were lost due to suspension.

Excluding loan goalkeepers, outpitch loan players made 39 starts (2020/21: 34) from 120 available (2020/21: 84) league games at 33% starting compared with 40% in 2020/21 as we saw outpitch loan players less used. Our total spending on loan players doubled to £116,000 (2020/21: £58,000) but they were less used, the effectiveness of our loan recruitment reduced markedly. Only Simeu of the 9 loan players in the season, made a meaningful contribution. This poor use of the loan market was a drag on performance and ineffective use of the budget.

In terms of effectiveness of our Player Cost spending, £728,000 (2020/21: £652,000), representing 52% (2020/21: 53%) was spend on minutes on-the-pitch. £379,000 (2020/21: £327,000) representing 27% (2020/21:27%) was spent on players unused on the bench. This meant 79% (2020/21: 80%) of Player Cost spending was selected in the '18' on the team-sheet. However, 21% (2020/21: 20%) was non-productive "in the stand", comprising 5% (2020/21:5%) available but not selected in the '18' and 16% (2020/21: 14%%) unavailable due to injury.

With broadly 79% of total Player Costs being available for use on-the-pitch, to potentially contribute to winning games and only circa 52% actually used on-the-pitch over the season, it is highly misleading and simplistic to focus on headline Player Cost spending (however its labelled) as the route to success. High spending does not necessarily lead to more success on-the-pitch.

Maximising the spending on-the-pitch, minimising the spend on unused players "in the stand" while maintaining cover and squad depth is a key factor in maximising the effectiveness of our Player Cost spending. Similarly, minimising injuries leading to players being unavailable is also a factor, where spending can be more effective.

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Total Football Expenditure² £2.25m (2020/21: £1.87m, 2019/20: £2.03m, 2018/19: £2.21m)

A key priority is to direct as many resources to football activities as possible, whilst operating within our available funding facilities and then to maximise the effectiveness of what we spend.

The increase in Total Football Expenditure of £379,000 (2020/21: £155,000 reduction) reflects increased spending but lower performance bonuses in 2021/22 and lower football operating costs (travel, hotels, medical) during the Coronavirus affected season 20/21. The exceptional costs of football staff changes were £87,000 in contractual settlements.

Within Total Football Expenditure, Player Costs were £1.419m (2020/21: £1.298m and 2019/20: £1.408m and 2018/19: £1.568m), an increase of £121,000 (10%). The budget for player costs was initially increased as planned, by circa 20% to support Chris Beech and then again further in the January 2022 window to support Keith Millen. The actual spend reflected these budget increases, but offset by lower than expected bonuses (due to results) and some unspent budget. The exceptional costs of football staff changes to address the football underperformance was £87,000. To maximise the effectiveness of our Player Cost spending, we need to balance “contingency” spending on non-contributing players who are not in the ‘18’ with our spending on players playing minutes on-the-pitch, while maintaining squad depth for unpredictable circumstances. We utilised just 53% (2020/21: 52%) of our £1.4m spending on Player Costs in productive minutes on-the-pitch.

According to EFL independent benchmark data from March 2022, despite our increased Player Costs, our spending was again in the bottom quartile of League 2 ranking while we finished 20th place in League 2.

Academy review

It is a long-term process to see players developing and breaking through to make their mark in our first team squad, then being named in the first team ‘18’ and finally to play minutes on-the-pitch in our first team. Players do not emerge at a predictable or consistent rate; many factors must come together to bring success. One good year does not act as a reliable predictor for the future. The board remains committed to ‘Club Developed Players’ coming through, but this needs opportunities to be given wherever possible and a commitment from everyone to doing all we can to support and develop our young players. In recent years we have invested more in awarding post-Academy contracts.

The four core objectives of the Academy are unchanged and are set out in the Club’s Academy Plan which is a key component of the Premier League and EFL’s Elite Player Performance Plan (“EPPP”). These remain to develop:

1. elite professional footballers to play in our first team (in League 2 now and be capable of playing higher in the league pyramid). This is the Academy’s top priority
2. players who add significant value to the first team squad for future sale and reinvestment
3. players who have playing careers in the professional game
4. individuals capable of forging successful careers after they leave us

Minutes from Academy players in League 2 games increased to 550 (2020/21: 242 minutes and 2019/20: 836), and just represented 1.2% (2020/21: 0.5%) of on pitch time. While the age and contribution on-the-pitch from younger players is slowly and slightly improving, it remains primarily from recruited players rather than ‘Club Developed Players’. We earned £13,000 (2020/21: £18,000) through the EFL Football Futures scheme (which ended in 2021/22 when funding was withdrawn). Despite awarding many more contracts to Academy players we have some way to go to achieve our main target (objective 1).

While not contributing minutes on-the-pitch as we would like, transfers of three Academy ‘Club Developed Players’ in the last three years has earned income of circa £1.475m to date (objective 2).

A disappointing number of Academy players have made no impact after scholarship and quickly fallen down the pyramid and not secured professional careers (objective 3). Our rankings in terms of Academy productivity KPIs are slowly improving.

In 2022/23 we intend to invest more in player care as part of the EPPP (objective 4)

² **Total Football Expenditure** comprises all Player Costs plus Other Football Costs

Player Costs comprise all player & development players related employment costs (salaries, bonuses, benefits, employment taxes)

Other Football Costs comprise all coaching costs (director of football, manager, coaches, payroll and benefits) and indirect football costs (agents, scouting, recruitment, travel, food, IT, sports science and medical, analytics, insurance and non-coaching football staff costs)