

Gray is named boss at club where it all began

By DOMINIC BLISS

Potters Bar Town 0
Corinthian-Casuals 1
Isthmian League Premier Division
Saturday, April 2

IT was a big week for Corinthian-Casuals, who announced former England international Andy Gray as their manager for next season, then went on to win 1-0 away at Potters Bar Town to keep their faint hopes of survival alive at the bottom of the Isthmian Premier Division.

Gray, 59, will take charge of the team from the beginning of next season, and can point to a playing career that took him right to the very top of the English game.

That journey began with Corinthian-Casuals, where he played a starring role the last time the club reached the first round proper of the FA Cup, in 1983. He was a teenage prospect at the time, but his performances in non-league earned him a move Crystal Palace, before he went on to represent Aston Villa, QPR, Tottenham and Millwall, among others.

Gray's crowning moment arrived in 1990 when he scored in Palace's shock FA Cup semi-final victory over Liverpool, earning him his Wembley moment. A year later, he was selected to play for England against Poland in a qualifier for Euro 92, and he remains the last Corinthian-Casuals player to have represented the Three Lions.

Gray now returns as manager at the club that helped to launch his career.

"This is the only kind of management job I would have considered," he said on accepting the role. "I know what it means to play for Corinthian-Casuals



Former England international Andy Gray is the new manager of Corinthian-Casuals

and I will turn every stone for this club.

"Come and support us because we are going for it. We're going to get hungry players who want to play for this club.

"Corinthian-Casuals is a big name. Look at the people connected to the club, like Micky and Alec Stewart - these are blue-chip figures in sport. So if there's a

talent looking to get into, or back into, the pro game, they couldn't come anywhere better: I've been there, this is where it all started for me and now I'm coming back... and I'm happy, I'm very happy!"

Brian Adamson remains in charge as interim manager until the end of the season and has now recorded two straight

wins since taking the reins.

Finlay Lovatt's solo effort earned Casuals three more points at Potters Bar on Saturday to keep alive hope that one of the great escapes might still be on for a team that currently sit second-from-bottom, ten points from safety, with four games remaining.

Esher stay in drop fight with vital victory

Esher 31 Bishop's Stortford 13
National League 1
Saturday, April 1

VICTORY over Bishop's Stortford kept alive Esher's hopes of staying off relegation - but they still have much work to avoid the drop.

Es stand two points above the relegation zone with two matches left but third-from-bottom Taunton have the easier run-in.

A Connor Lloyd penalty on eight minutes rewarded Bishop's Stortford for starting more convincingly, Esher get-

By RICHARD SPILLER

ting into their stride after that and hitting back when a prolonged push down the right opened up space elsewhere, the ball being fed across field for wing Harri Lang to touch down.

A gusting cross wind made kicking hazardous all day and Sam Morley failed to land a tricky conversion but he overcame it to take his tally to 245 points for the season, 23 ahead of his nearest rival.

Two penalties from long range extended Esher's advantage but their habit of

conceding tries with half time approaching was to strike again - twice.

First, a catch-and-drive move sent over Alex Rayment, then Ben Atkins was turned over near the halfway line and the Essex side galloped through for Chris Smith to score. Neither effort could be converted, Lloyd not possessing the same composure as Morley, which meant the hosts trailed only by two points at the break.

Morley put Esher back in front straight after the break by landing a third penalty, both sides aiming to move the ball around the pitch in the second half

and Esher clearly more at home with that tactic than the kicking game which cost them so dearly against Chinnor last month.

Having entered late in the first half in place of concussed full-back Owen Waters, Chris Davies made a vital incision with a magnificent break that sent over Atkins on 49, Morley converting and soon adding his fourth penalty.

Es then produced some of their most convincing rugby and thoroughly deserved their third try three minutes from time. Jack Owlett's extra left up front was underlined by him going over, Mor-

Adults get a kick but it's all friendly fare



The adult team

WALLINGTON Little League made the most of there being no scheduled children's matches this Sunday and arranged a couple of adult friendlies, with all clubs represented by parents, relatives, management and supporters.

First up were Management vs Grange Hurricanes. The match up couldn't have been closer, the midfield was equal stride for stride until George Whitfield won a header in the middle of the

By PATRICK HUTCHISON

park, which fell to Michael Walton, who in turn fed it through to the on running Stephen Robertson. Stephen slotted it neatly past the on-rushing goalkeeper Stephanie to make it 1-0. Great goal but the celebration was questionable.

Grange Hurricanes reorganised and took control of periods of the match. An attack down the left-hand side by Nick Hignell

caused confusion in defence. Although the ball was initially cleared, it fell to the one player they wouldn't have wanted, Alan Parry, who on the half volley couldn't have struck the ball any sweeter - pick that out the net. 1-1 and anyone's game.

Scorelines were level at the break, but it didn't take long for Management to find themselves ahead after a precise attempt by Michael Walton had enough pace on to escape the grasp of the goal-

keeper.

Grange Hurricanes didn't give up and caused problems to Management but with the defensive capabilities of Jerry Brook were able to halt any promising attacks. Greg Orlu led the line well but often found himself man-marked by Rezart Bushataj.

On another day, you could see another result but this time Management took the win. It was a tightly contested match played with great spirit.

Hercules just miss podium

By GEORGE MALLETT



Hercules Wimbledon Athletic Club were left with mixed emotions as a joint-best performance in recent history saw them just miss out on the South of England 12 Stage Relays podium on Sunday.

Hercules' Senior

Men matched last year's fourth-place finish, a club best since 1974 as Aldershot, Farnham and District, Highgate and Tonbridge took the team medals in a high-quality race held in the shadows of the Olympic stadium in Stratford.

The event sees teams of 12 alternate between legs of 7.2km and 4.8km in an afternoon which sees positions change throughout.

First off for Hercules was George Mallett, who brought the team home in 16th in 22:12 for the 7.2km leg. He handed over to GB International Stu McCallum, making his debut for Hercules, whose 14:59 on the short leg was good enough to lift the team up to 11th.

With a lot of clubs front-loading their teams, it was always expected that Hercules would move through the field but few would have predicted quite the progress Jonathan Cornish would make over the following long leg.

The England international set out running alongside British Indoor 3,000m champion James West, with many expecting the latter to set one of the fastest times of the day. Not only did Cornish keep pace with the Tonbridge athlete but he slowly moved away over the final of three laps, moving the team up to fourth.

The race was fast developing into a battle for bronze between Hercules and Tonbridge, with Ed Mallett maintaining the small gap thanks to a 14:43 run.

Cross-country captain Fred Slemeeck faced the daunting task of holding off Alex Howard, an athlete who just three weeks before earned 15th place in the Inter-Counties XC, deemed by some to be the most competitive race in the UK.

Whilst Howard would close the gap over the first lap, Slemeeck showed off his continued outstanding form to edge away over the final lap, in the process running 22:10 for Hercules's second fastest long leg of the day.

Madrid match now key

By TIM HARRISON

AS Chelsea's domestic season implodes, the importance of next week's journey to face Real Madrid in the away leg of the Champions League quarter-final intensifies.

Bruno Sator, in interim charge after Graham Potter's sacking, is at least steeped in Spanish football, though he was part of Potter's entourage that arrived from Brighton.

Potter's position became untenable after the 2-0 defeat to Aston Villa; with home fans joining the Villa jeers of: "You're getting sacked in the morning." There's never a 'right' time to announce a manager's dismissal, but the club's decision to release the news in the middle of the women's away game on Sunday evening was inept.

That Chelsea Women defeated Villa 3-0 days after their gruelling penalty win over Lyon showed the gulf of difference between the men's and women's sides. It may be too early this time, but a motivator and tactician of Emma Hayes' calibre will surely soon be given a chance to prove herself in the men's game.

Graham Potter struggled to give underperformers the hairdryer treatment. He was too nice, too considerate. With a minute of stoppage time remaining of his last Chelsea match, he glanced down with a look of despair. He knew the game was up.