

in BRIEF

Shields digs in as Eagles suffer



SPEEDWAY: Adam Shields, left, showed signs of an upturn in form for Eastbourne last night but his battling display was one of the few bright spots of a 53-39 defeat at

Poole Pirates in the Elite League.

Polish pair Dawid Stachyra and Maciej Janowski starred for Poole to make up for two falls by No.1 Darcy Ward.

Guests Dakota North and Kevin Doolan did a good job in the place of unwell Lukas Dryml and Denis Gizatullin. The reserves enjoyed a 5-1 in heat two and Doolan had Eagles' only two heat wins.

Eagles boss Trevor Geer said: "It was good to see Adam getting stuck in and fighting for every point. He looked like he was up for it which is just what he needed."

Poole: Janowski 14 (5), Stachyra 12 (4), Holder 11+1 (5), Tungate 7+2 (5), Ward 4+2 (4), Andersson 4 (4), Howarth 1 (3).

Eagles: Pedersen 10+1 (5), Doolan 8 (4), Woodward 7+1 (5), North 5+3 (4), Shields 4+2 (4), Gustafsson 4 (4), Lahti 1+1(4).

Farewell Audley

BOXING: Audley Harrison has announced his retirement from professional boxing. He said: "There are only so many times you can fall before it becomes foolhardy to continue."

Perry retires

RUGBY UNION: Worcester's former England scrum-half Shaun Perry has been forced to retire because of a knee injury. The Warriors announced that 34-year-old Perry has not recovered from an injury he suffered earlier this season.

President Bates

FOOTBALL: Outgoing Leeds chairman Ken Bates will take up a three-year presidency at Elland Road from July 1. He will take up his new role a day after his chairmanship ends but will have no say in the running of the club.

Decision time



FROM BACK PAGE under it. We offered him a good deal and if we had hung on then maybe something might have happened but we need to move on.

"It's the same with Muzzy and Josh. We

want to know where we stand so we can plan for next season so I'm expecting answers from them in the next 48 hours."

Sparrow, above, made 21 appearances for Reds after being released by the Seagulls in January and had stated he wanted to stay at Broadfield Stadium if the terms were right.

The 31-year-old has also said he would like to play abroad and has looked into the possibility of joining a club in America.

Barker added: "It is a shame but we consider ourselves fortunate to have had Matt for the amount of time we did."

In part two of our exclusive interview with Paul Barber, Albion's chief executive discusses with chief sports reporter Andy Naylor training ground sponsorship, his relationship with supporters and clubs bending the Financial Fair Play rules.

MANCHESTER United recently became the first club to announce a training ground naming rights sponsorship deal. Do Albion have any plans to follow suit in Lancing?

"We haven't lined up anyone. We have talked about it. Man United are a unique case because they are probably the most commercially desirable football club in the world.

"The thing with training grounds is they tend to be quite private places, so the visibility for a sponsor is quite low. It's not like passing by on the A27 and seeing The Amex name above the door.

"I tried to sell training ground sponsorship at Tottenham, so I know what it's like, and it's actually quite difficult. So yes, it is on the agenda, no we haven't lined up anyone. Are we going to talk to one or two people? Definitely."

WHAT has the first ten months in the job been like for you?

"We have achieved pretty much everything we set out to from a commercial point of view. We wanted to complete the ground expansion and Martin (Perry, managing director) has done a fantastic job getting that done on time and budget.

"We wanted to get the new shirt sponsorship done. We wanted to bring in a couple of other smaller sponsors which we have done but haven't announced yet.

"We wanted to get the new kit manufacturing process done. That's now in its final phase and we are down to the final two candidates.

"We wanted to get the training ground planning permission and get started. We've done that. We wanted to make sure we filled the new capacity as often as we could, taking the 20-21,000 average from last year to 25-26,000 this year and that's worked very well.

"And we wanted to try to maintain that sense of community and relationship with the fans which kept this club alive. We've worked pretty hard to get out and about and discuss with fans their genuine fears as we grew that we would lose that connectivity, that contact.

"Probably more than any other football club we cannot afford to lose that contact, one because of the history and two because this club is such an important component of the city".

DO YOU think the message has got across now, because at first you were getting quite a bit of abuse?

"If you provide some context to change people tend to understand. It doesn't mean they like it or agree with it but they understand what you are trying to achieve.

"One of the most important bits of communication we did this year was in the Derby County programme to set out what Financial Fair Play meant and as part of that reality we are going to have to do this, change that, charge more there, we're probably going to have to put season ticket prices up.

"All of these things are not because we want to get richer or fatter – we are losing £8 million a year – these are things we need to do to bridge the gap from where we are to where we need

Paul Barber is pleased with Albion's progress



Go to Hove Lawns and see kids wearing Albion shirts. That is when you know the football club is a key part of community

to be to comply with the rules.

"And, by the way, if we don't comply with the rules, these are the pun-

ishments. Do you really want to see a transfer embargo or pay a fine that then gets shared out equally among

the clubs that meet the rules and support their promotion push? Of course, you don't.

"So once you start to put things into a context then I think people start to understand and the devil incarnate doesn't necessarily become the messiah overnight but at least he's not the devil incarnate any more.

"My job is not about being popular, it's about trying to make the right decisions for the long-term health of the football club."

DO YOU think the club went crazy in its spending in the first season at The Amex and was that something you had to look at?

"It's almost impossible to try to forecast what it takes to move from Withdean to The Amex, so I don't think there is any criticism due to anyone.

"But our cost base was high and so what we've had to do is look at ways we could become more efficient and, where we have had our cost base in the wrong place or too high, to see where we can find some economies.

"The third phase of that will now be, having had two seasons here, to fully review at the end of this campaign exactly where we are. What do we now need to do to get our cost base down to a level which is what I would call more normal relative to the size of club we are, the size of stadium, the crowds we get, the non-matchday events we generate? At the same time we have got to increase revenue."

DOES it concern you there are some clubs who might not be as committed to Financial Fair Play as Albion are and will therefore get an advantage?

"Our job is to be as smart as the smartest, preferably smarter. As the rules unfold and as the way they work unfolds it's like any game, you learn to adapt and to live and play within the rules but also to understand how they are meant to work.

"I suspect in the first year or two some will steal a march in one or two areas, people will look for ways to use the full extent of the rules. That is not to say people are going to abuse them or step beyond them but inevitably sometimes rules are black or white and sometimes shades of grey. These rules aren't tested properly yet, they are new, they are only just starting to bite.

"So am I concerned? No. Am I concerned that we need to be as smart as the smartest and preferably smarter? Yes. From that point of view we have got our wits about us and I think we are pretty much on top of the rules. We talk about them at every Board meeting, we pick up intelligence from other clubs, because although we are competitors we have all got similar challenges."

WHAT about the future for Albion in the Championship or Premier League?

"The most important thing is we maintain momentum into next season on and off the pitch, whether at this level or the next level. We just have to keep growing.

"If, back in my banking days, I heard people talking about current accounts and saving accounts the way they do about Albion I'd have been delighted. I only have to walk down the street in Hove and I can regularly hear people talking about this football club just as part of their everyday chatter.

"Go down to Hove Lawns and see the kids wearing Albion shirts. That is when you know the football club is a really key part of the community. It matters to people.

"With that comes a huge amount of responsibility, to stay connected and listen to that community."