

PETER
ROGERS



PROMOTION-WINNING CANARIES

THE MEMORIES, PLAYERS,
FACTS AND FIGURES BEHIND
ALL TEN NORWICH CITY
POST-WAR PROMOTIONS

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Season Reviews

1959/60 DIVISION THREE RUNNERS-UP

Speedy winger Bill Punton's debut season at Carrow Road saw the Canaries build on their FA Cup heroics of the previous campaign by winning promotion from the Third Division in 1959/60.

The 1959/60 campaign proved to be a landmark season for both Norwich City and Southampton as both clubs won promotion from the old Third Division and remained within the top-two tiers of the English league set-up for almost half a century, until they were both relegated to the third tier in 2009.

Recollections of the Canaries' success in 1959/60 were thrust back into the spotlight in the spring of 2019 as City's class of 2018/19 closed in on promotion to the Premier League. Despite Norwich City winning promotion on eight occasions between 1960 and 2019, it was only Archie Macaulay's men and Daniel Farke's side that actually secured promotion on home soil at Carrow Road.

If the promotion of Farke's Norwich team in 2018/19 came as something of a surprise, then the achievements of Macaulay's men in 1959/60 were perhaps the polar opposite.

A no-nonsense, straight-talking Scot, Macaulay replaced Tom Parker as Norwich boss in April 1957. He began building Norwich City from ground zero – there was nowhere else to start. The team had just finished their 1956/57 campaign rooted to the foot of the Third Division (South) table following a financial crisis which had almost brought the club to the very brink of extinction, and they were now faced with applying for re-election to the Football League.

A smart operator, Macaulay soon plotted the way forward and in his first full season in charge, in 1957/58, he guided the

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club to an eighth-place finish in Division Three (South). Under Macaulay's watch, City had increased their points haul from 31 to 53 and their league standing by 16 places. All in all, an impressive season's work by all concerned at Carrow Road.

The progress made in Macaulay's first season was built upon again in 1958/59. The Canaries' league progress was of course totally overshadowed that season as Norwich City shocked the football world with a gallant run to the semi-finals of the FA Cup – a phenomenal achievement for a then Third Division team. The heroics of the club's famed '59ers, who recorded never-to-be-forgotten victories over Manchester United, Cardiff City, Tottenham Hotspur and Sheffield United before bowing out in a semi-final replay to Luton Town, saw them widely recognised as the men who put Norwich on the map in footballing terms.

While the cup run grabbed all the attention, headlines and focus, the side once again crept their way up the Third Division table. They ended the 1958/59 season in fourth place, just four points shy of second-place Hull City, who won promotion with champions Plymouth Argyle. City's cup exploits resulted in the Canaries facing a major fixture backlog, so much so that they had to play 11 games in 26 days in April 1959 to complete their fixture programme.

Everyone associated with Norwich City cherished the unforgettable excitement of the FA Cup run, particularly all the national attention it brought to the city, but one has to wonder if it also hampered what could have been a promotion-winning campaign.

Following all the drama of 1958/59, Macaulay had his men ready to go again come August 1959, and he possessed a group of players fully focused on winning promotion to the Second Division.

One of that group of players, geared for a promotion push, was new signing Bill Punton, who had joined the Canary ranks in July 1959. A pacey Scottish winger, 25-year-old Punton had been signed from Southend United and was delighted to be reunited with his former Roots Hall team-mate Errol Crossan, who had made the identical move some ten months earlier.

‘Errol and I both played for Southend in a game against Norwich right at the start of the 58/59 season – it was just after I’d joined Southend. We beat Norwich and it was then that Archie Macaulay wanted to sign both of us,’ recalled Punton, who turned 85 in May 2019. ‘Southend would only sell one of us and it was Errol who got the move and I had to wait until the end of the season.’

Macaulay’s interest in Punton certainly never waned despite the delay in getting his man. Come the summer of 1959 and the City boss made Punton his number-one target. ‘He came up to Scotland to see me and talked me into making the move. I’ll always remember that; he certainly went out of his way to make sure I signed for Norwich City.

‘He explained that he wanted me to take over from Bobby Brennan. He felt time was starting to catch up with Bobby and he was losing a bit of his pace and they needed someone really quick on the wing.

‘The conversation we had centred around my role in the team and his plan to win promotion. Errol was a really quick player and he wanted to use our pace to help the team get up.’

Once Punton arrived in Norfolk and began training with his new team-mates, he soon got the impression that this was a group of players with unfinished business. After falling at the semi-final hurdle in the cup, the team were really looking to make their move up to the Second Division.

‘It was a good side, as they had shown the year before in the cup. I was certainly joining a good team, there was no doubting that,’ confirmed Punton. ‘They all wanted promotion and certainly didn’t lack any belief. As a group of players they never thought they were beat; going behind wasn’t a problem.’

Norwich’s 1959/60 league campaign started away to Southampton on Saturday, 22 August 1959 with Terry Bly and Jimmy Hill on target for City in a 2-2 draw at The Dell. A hard-fought meeting with the Saints certainly set the tone for what would unfold throughout the season as both clubs slogged it out at the top of the table for the majority of the campaign.

The Canaries followed up their point on the south coast with home wins over Tranmere Rovers and Reading. A swift return

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meeting with Tranmere saw Punton make his Canary debut in place of Brennan as the teams drew 0-0 at Prenton Park on Monday, 31 August 1959. However, the new man had to wait until mid-October before cementing himself a regular place in the team.

‘At first I couldn’t get in the side because Brennan was a very, very good player and a big crowd favourite. Plus the crowd didn’t really take to me to start with because Brennan was such a favourite and I had been bought to take his place.

‘In those days they used to play a pre-season practice match at Carrow Road between the first team and reserves which used to pull in thousands of people. I played for the reserves, and we lost 3-2, but I scored both the goals so that helped!’

With 20 games played, Norwich had won 11, drawn four and lost five. It meant their tussle at the top with Southampton was well and truly under way.

‘We had a real battle with Southampton – they had a cracking side. Every side in those days had two fast wingers. We had Crossan and myself, Southampton had Terry Paine and John Sydenham.’

Crossan and Punton could both run 100 yards in 10.2 seconds wearing spikes, and the manager often put the two speed merchants through their paces around the Carrow Road perimeter track. Eventually it was the tactical awareness of Macaulay, coupled with Punton’s natural pace, that added another dimension to the player’s game.

‘Archie Macaulay was the best manager I ever played under. He was such a shrewd tactician – he’d look at a defender and say, “Don’t try to beat him on the outside – he can’t tackle on his left foot, come inside him.” I’d do that and just walk past the fellow, but I’d never have noticed it myself.’

Punton netted his first goal for City in a surprise 4-1 defeat at home to Coventry City on 21 November 1959 and he was on target again in the big match with Southampton on 19 December. Sadly, the free-scoring Saints ran out victors in this top-of-the-table clash at Carrow Road, winning what was certainly Division Three’s ‘Match of the Day’ 2-1.

After suffering back-to-back home defeats, City then turned on the style to get their promotion push back on track when

Mansfield Town provided the opposition at Carrow Road on 28 December.

‘I remember the Mansfield game. We played really well – they weren’t a bad side, they had beaten us at their place on Boxing Day but we absolutely hammered them that day.’

That victory over the Stags saw a rare goal for defender Barry Butler, a player whom Punton had the greatest respect for.

‘Barry Butler, he was the best centre-half I ever played with. Great footballer, really strong and boy he could play; very comfortable on the ball but just so brave and so strong. I played four years at Newcastle, before I went to Southend, and they had some really good players at centre-half – but none as good as he was.’

Another player on the score sheet in that morale-boosting victory over Mansfield was Jimmy Hill. The Irishman ended the season as joint top scorer with 16 league goals and his skills were nothing new to Punton.

‘I played with Jimmy Hill at Newcastle. He then came down to Norwich around the same time that I went to Southend. I’d liken him to Wes Hoolahan in terms of some of the recent players. Jimmy was really clever on the ball and could always make things happen for us.’

Boosted by their resounding victory over Mansfield Town, City began the calendar year of 1960 with two excellent wins away from home. A Terry Bly brace sealed a 2-0 win away to Reading before Errol Crossan’s first-half goal secured both points from a trip to Halifax Town on 9 January.

The big difference now from 12 months earlier was that City were not distracted by the FA Cup – there was to be no repeat of the previous season’s incredible adventure as City bowed out of the competition to Reading. After a first-round tie ended 1-1 at Carrow Road, the Royals triumphed in the Elm Park replay.

Superb form throughout February and March saw Norwich and Southampton break further away from the chasing pack. Macaulay strengthened the City squad with the signings of Bunny Larkin and Brian Whitehouse, who were bought just before the transfer deadline in March 1960, and their arrival helped City’s drive towards the finish line.

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April saw Carrow Road victories over York City and Halifax Town and, after a point was secured from a goalless draw away to Queens Park Rangers, City went into their penultimate game of the season with promotion in their grasp.

It was Punton's former club, Southend United, who stood between City and a place in the Second Division. The Canaries had slipped to a narrow 1-0 defeat in Essex when the two sides had met back in October 1959, so Norwich now had both revenge and promotion in their sights.

In front of a bumper Carrow Road crowd of 34,905 on Wednesday, 27 April 1960, promotion was finally clinched following a thrilling 4-3 victory. This memorable midweek promotion clincher certainly saw ex-Shrimpers Punton and Crossan use a little inside knowledge to see off their former employers. Both men were fired up and in top form, with Crossan netting twice, Punton once, and Whitehouse also on target.

'It was probably one of the best games I ever had,' says Punton. 'I made two goals and scored one, the crowd really got behind me and I never looked back from there.'

'The funny thing is that because Errol Crossan and I had both played for Southend we knew that their goalkeeper, Harry Threadgold, was as blind as a bat under floodlights so we just kept putting high balls in and he kept missing them!

'There was a tremendous atmosphere, the whole place was really tingling. We knew we had to get a result from that game and the crowd – they went bananas when we won!'

'On the Ball, City' was sung throughout the game, and at the final whistle thousands of fans ran across the pitch to celebrate City's return to Division Two just three years after having to apply for re-election in the summer of 1957.

Southampton finished the season with 61 points to pip the Canaries to the title by two points, but both sides finished comfortably clear of third-placed Shrewsbury, who managed a 52-point return.

Incredibly, Southampton's 46-match league programme featured no fewer than 181 goals – 106 for, and 75 against, with Derek Reeves netting 39 league goals. The Canaries were no goalscoring slouches either, their 82 strikes including notable

contributions from Terry Allcock (16), Jimmy Hill (16), and Errol Crossan (13).

Ron Ashman, Barry Butler, Roy McCrohan and Bryan Thurlow played in every game that season, and Matt Crowe, Sandy Kennon, Terry Allcock, Errol Crossan and Jimmy Hill missed only a handful of matches between them. Many of them were, of course, already Canary legends following their great FA Cup heroics the previous season, but now they had a promotion on their CV and Second Division football to look forward to. They were a great group of players – some of whom were a little underrated, according to team-mate Punton.

‘Matt Crowe, he was certainly one of our best players. A great left-half, he would say, “Get on your bike, Punty” and he would hit balls over full-backs’ heads and leave the full-back thinking that the ball’s going to run into touch, but he would have put back-spin on the ball and I’d keep going and run to it and be in from there.

‘Terry Allcock used to score a lot of goals, mostly in and around the six-yard box. He was like Martin Peters – he’d drift in last minute and people never saw him. He was certainly an intelligent striker.’

Mention the name of ever-present Bryan Thurlow and a big grin appears on Punton’s face:

‘Bryan, he was tough you know. We’d often play first team against reserves in training and whenever I came up against Bryan in attack v defence he kicked the shit out of me! Archie Macaulay would say, “What are you doing Bryan?” and he’d reply, “It’s the only way I can play!”’

This promotion-winning team were a close-knit group who certainly enjoyed one another’s company both on and off the pitch. Unsurprisingly, Punton has fond memories of the celebrations that followed:

‘We all went to the University Arms pub after the match for a supper and some drinks. We all had our wives up there too – it was really nice.’