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# THE FA YOUTH CUP COMES TO MADEJSKI STADIUM



**READING'S FA CUP HEROICS** have been well-documented over the last two years. But the Royals' success in the competition has unquestionably been a direct result of the success of our club's Academy system. Eamonn Dolan's under-18s side upset the odds themselves last month, coming from behind to beat Middlesbrough 2-1 at the Riverside Stadium in the Third Round of the FA Youth Cup thanks to two goals from Dominic Samuel.

"With any young footballer it is common that they can sometimes take one step forward, only to take two steps back – that's just a natural part of the game," Dolan explains. "But our win at Middlesbrough was one of those rare moments where players took a step forward – and it was a step that will never be reversed. It was so important for their development."

That superb win will see the FA Youth Cup come to Madejski Stadium on Wednesday 18th January, when Dolan's budding stars of the future will look to impress and progress against West Bromwich Albion here in a Fourth Round tie that kicks off at 7pm. Tickets are only £3 for adults and £1 for any supporter under 21 or over 65 and all tickets are on sale on the evening of the game itself, while parking at the Stadium is free – so just turn up to take a sneak peek at what talent we might have at our first team's disposal in the future.

And if you need any more persuading, take a look at the rest of our exclusive FA Youth Cup pull out in the next six pages of 'The Royal'...







## THE MANAGER

# EAMONN DOLAN

**THE FA YOUTH CUP IS ABOUT AS CLOSE** to first team football that a scholar can get without actually playing in a Football League game. The tie is a chance for our boys to show evidence to the manager, the Director of Football and the first team staff that they can perform at the level that matters. That was one of the great things about our game at Middlesbrough in the last round – Brian and Nick Hammond drove all the way up to watch the game; that doesn't happen at most football clubs.

The boys have done fabulously this year and out of this group we believe there will be some more first team players progressing into the main squad. That is the most important thing. We work for a fantastic club, and our job isn't just to talk – it's to provide results for the Chairman, the Chief Executive, the board, our first team and everyone else. They are good people and we don't want to let anyone down.

And on that note, I'm lucky to be able to have the likes of David Dodds and Martin Kuhl working with the Academy – the effect they have on the lads is

profound. They are part of a terrific set of Academy staff at Reading, I firmly believe we have the best people in the country passing on their knowledge to the lads.

It only takes a quick glance at some of our previous Youth Cup teams to see that we have produced some top talent in recent years. In 2007 we played Liverpool at Anfield, and ten of our starting XI that day went on to make a career in the professional game. We lost 1-0 on the night (although if it was a boxing match we would have won on points) and I remember vividly how disappointed some of our lads were. In particular Alex Pearce and Jem Karacan were very down – but as a staff we knew the reality. We could honestly say to them, 'it's no problem – you're going to do great because we know that in the long run you guys will do better than the guys in the dressing room opposite us'. A few years on and that has proved to be the case.

I have the same belief with our current group. We go forward as a really strong club, a good club and there's that real feeling here that the Academy is important. It's not just talk now.

# MATT PARTRIDGE



**THE FA YOUTH CUP IS,** and always has been, a big competition for the club and for the youth team as a whole. It's probably the biggest type of fixture we get to play in at this level; it has a huge reputation and we want to progress as far as we can.

Getting past Middlesbrough in the last round was a big achievement. I remember it being pretty cold on our arrival, but the stadium and the pitch were fantastic – and to win it after being 1-0 down showed good spirit. The visit of West Brom is a chance for us to go out there and do it again.

At times this season we've performed really well as a team. At one stage we went six games without conceding a goal, which was hugely satisfying as a defender. Recently we've let a few more slip past us but if we can get back to the way we were before then a clean sheet is always a help!

The first team have shown the importance of a solid defence recently and it goes without saying that there are loads of role models in the squad for us to look up to; that's great for all the boys in the youth team.

For me personally, as a centre back, I can look up to the likes of Alex Pearce – he's come through the Academy and to see that helps us all with our experiences in the current system. He's just won player of the month for the Championship too, not many defenders do that so it just goes to show what can be achieved.

I know as a team we're all looking forward to the occasion, walking out at the Mad Stad will be a buzz. Tickets are a pretty good price too so hopefully a few fans will come down, support us and we'll get the win for them! We look forward to seeing you there.

## THE CAPTAIN



ASSISTANT  
MANAGER

# THE BOYS WHO BEAT BORO ...

**THE ROYALS HAVE EARNED THE RIGHT TO PLAY AT MADEJSKI STADIUM** thanks to a stunning come-from-behind 2-1 win over Middlesbrough at the Riverside Stadium last month. Assistant Academy Manager David Dodds introduces the boys who beat Boro and some of the young lads who are likely to play a part against the Baggies in the Fourth Round.



## DEAN SANTANGELO

Did very well in the Youth Cup for us last year and has got that little bit of experience now. He's been out playing in non-league football and is a very sound goalkeeper. We are blessed in the goalkeeping department – we have four in the youth system at the moment, which hopefully will keep Sal Bibbo's stable strong in the future.



## NIALL KEOWN

Full back who came into football very late. His father, Martin, played for Arsenal and England, but Niall was more into athletics at school. He has come in and done exceptionally well though, and he was playing in the under-18s side as a schoolboy last year. A very, very good defender who takes things on board quickly – and he's a good character too which is important at our club.



## SHANE GRIFFIN

Came over from Ireland and spent six months training with us as a schoolboy, which really benefitted him. He's kicked on to another level this year – he's very comfortable on the ball, he's got a good left foot, he's well balanced and he has massively improved in 1vs1 situations.



**JAKE COOPER** Probably the most improved player this year. He went with us to the training camp at Brize Norton in pre-season and handled everything we threw at him. He's taken that on and now he's looking comfortable playing in the reserves. He's 6'4" and good in the air, with a good left foot to boot.



## MATTHEW PARTRIDGE

Has always had talent and now he is improving mentally. He's at it every day at training and his mentality is much better, which has helped to kick him into the reserve team. The captain of the team and a really good talent.



## AARON TSHIBOLA

Has great shape for a midfielder player and he's taken a lot on board about his defensive duties. He's always been very good going forward, but now he's a much more responsible defender. He has been training with Chris Cummins and the development squad a lot.



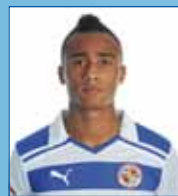
## JOSH WEBB

A very busy player in midfield – gets it, gives it. He's a catalyst for other players around him, and he's a quick player with a great left foot. Webby scores goals from outside the box too and he has progressed very well.



## CRAIG TANNER

A first year who is an outstanding football talent. We've been teaching him other parts to his game to go with his offensive capabilities, but against Middlesbrough he was the one putting the ball down the side of the centre half for the goal, and the one who played it round the corner into Uche for the shot which set up the second. He's capable of unlocking a defence with a little bit of brilliance.



## JORDAN OBITA

Started the season with the first team in pre-season. He's still learning the game as a player, but with help from Nigel and the gaffer, as well as Chris Cummins, he's improving and learning all the time. He's back to help us in the youth set-up right now, which has given the boys a boost knowing that a first team player has come back into the fold.



## JAMES MURPHY

Has been terribly unlucky with injury this season – the Middlesbrough game was literally his first back. He looked a little bit rusty on the night, but now he's had training and more games under his belt he is starting to look a lot sharper again. He had scored three or four goals in a row before he got injured earlier in the season.



## DOMINIC SAMUEL

Came in to the Academy late, but now mentally matured. He has scored lots of goals in the youth team and whenever he's been with the reserves he has looked capable of matching that standard. He's got a natural ability to do something special to create the angle to get his shot away. He finished with composure for his first against Middlesbrough, and his second showed difficult technique to keep it down – a lot of players would have panicked and blazed it over the bar. A very talented lad.



## UCHE IKPEAZU

A big lad, but still very young. He's been out playing in non-league football with men, and he's scored goals at that level. He has the ability to make a chance or score a goal from nowhere. He could be an Emile Heskey in the future – a good target player who scores goals.



## JONATHAN HENLY

Has been fantastic this season and it was a toss up between him and Dean for the first game. Dan Lincoln has been impressing away on loan as well.



## BISMARK AMOFAH

A young right-back who is a fantastic character. Reminds me a lot of a lad who I used to work with at Watford, Lloyd Doyley, who is now in his testimonial year. He has such desire to be a player and a fantastic attitude; he works hard every day and if you get success based on desire, he's got a great chance.



## SHEPHERD MUROMBEDZI

Out with an illness for four months which knocked him back a bit, but he's a great talent and one we have high hopes for. He runs with the ball very well and he can score a goal, which is a good quality to have.



## DAN CARR

Didn't start playing football until quite late, so the amount of improvement he has shown from the age of 14 to where he is now is huge. Sometimes he'll do something outrageously different on a football park, which is probably because he hasn't been coached into doing the usual things. Has scored some quite outstanding goals for the youth team this year – he can turn a game.

## UNDER-18S APPEARANCES AND GOALS IN 2011/12:

	APPS	GOALS
Bismark Amofah	8	0
Dan Carr	14	3
Jake Cooper	11	2
Tariqe Fosu-Henry	0(+2)	0
Shane Griffin	15	0
Jonathan Henly	14	0
Dominic Hyam	1(+1)	0
Uche Ikpeazu	1(+9)	1
Ben Jefford	3(+1)	0
Andrew Jenkinson	0(+1)	0
Niall Keown	10	0
Shepherd Murombedzi	7(+3)	1
James Murphy	10	2
Jordan Obita	2	0
Karl Oliyide	4(+3)	0
Matt Partridge	10	1
Dominic Samuel	14	13
Dean Santangelo	1	0
Josh Shama	1(+1)	0
Craig Tanner	9(+1)	2
Aaron Tshibola	15	4
Josh Webb	15	1



# OUR HISTORY IN THE FA YOUTH CUP

**THE ROYALS HAVE HAD SOME GOOD FA YOUTH CUP TIES IN THE LAST FEW YEARS,** playing some top sides and losing to the eventual winners twice in the last five seasons. But most importantly, the competition has given excellent experience to a crop of young players:

## 2005/6: READING 3-2 EVERTON

It's not often that Gylfi Sigurdsson is left on the bench, but in his very early years at Madejski Stadium he was just one part of one of the best crop of youngsters this club has ever seen. Our current players Alex Pearce, Jem Karacan, Simon Church and Nicholas Bignall all started, with Gylfi an unused sub. And of our team that night Ben Hamer, Julian Kelly and Scott Davies are also playing professionally in the Football League, which is quite some achievement from a youth side. Interestingly, only Victor Anichebe has made it through the Everton ranks to make their first team from their side that started that night.

Our striker Pierre Joseph-Dubois – now playing on the non-League scene – opened the scoring, but the Toffees soon levelled, only for Church to make it 2-1. A late penalty took the game to extra time, but Davies leathered home a 116th minute spot kick to send us through. And we were desperately close to another scalp in the next round – our ten men lost away at Nottm Forest in a sudden death penalty shoot out.



## 2006/7: READING 5-1 COVENTRY CITY READING 5-1 BLACKBURN ROVERS LIVERPOOL 1-0 READING

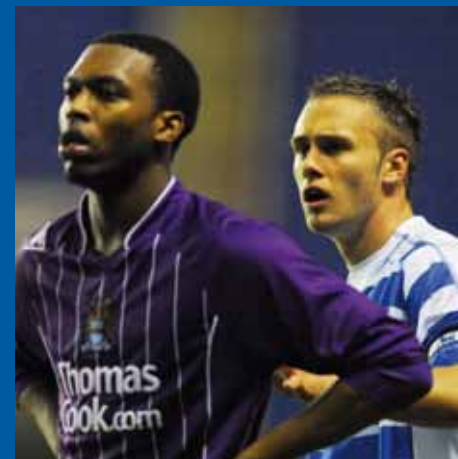
After beating Coventry 5-1 in the first round, a home tie with Premier League Blackburn may have been a daunting task – but another 5-1 win was a quite incredible scoreline. As the picture shows, Alex Pearce was already learning his goal celebrations in the Academy!

And so Anfield was next for Eamonn Dolan's young side, but the holders just about managed to hold on for a 1-0 home win thanks to a Jimmy Ryan screamer that gave Alex McCarthy no chance. An incredible nine of our starting XI are professional footballers, five of them here at Reading, while Reds skipper Jay Spearing is their only player to be an Anfield regular. Gylfi Sigurdsson started and would gain Anfield revenge three years later....



## 2007/8: READING 1-3 MANCHESTER CITY

Daniel Sturridge had already made his City Premier League debut when the two teams met in youth action at Madejski Stadium, and he showed his class on the night. The future England international was outshone by our youngster Josh Webb early on when he gave us the lead, but the striker's hat-trick sent City through and they went on to win the competition.



## 2008/9: READING 0-1 PRESTON NORTH END

A rare blip for our side, and it proved to be only the second time in six years we went out to opposition from outside the Premier League. Jake Taylor was inches away from a goal, but Ryan McGreevy's strike was the difference.



## 2009/10: READING 1-3 NEWCASTLE

After beating Cheltenham in the third round, there was another tough Premier League draw for Dolan's boys, and despite a Jacob Walcott penalty we were knocked out on the same night Gylfi Sigurdsson was scoring at Anfield to help us beat Liverpool – his Youth Cup experience truly bearing fruit. Jordan Obita and Lawson D'Ath were starting to make their way into the youth setup, and would both be involved in our first team within six months.



## 2010/11: BLACKBURN 3-2 READING

Having beaten Manchester United and Everton on their way to the semi-finals the year before, going to Ewood Park to face Blackburn was a big ask for our lads. But they came so close. Jordan Obita opened the scoring and it was soon 1-1, only for Charlie Losasso to score a wonderful second for us. But Rovers fought back and snatched it in extra time. The likes of Dean Santangelo, Matt Partridge and Dominic Samuel all gained their first Youth Cup experience – so that could yet bear fruit this season as they all played in this season's win at Middlesbrough.

