**Glamorgan men’s 1st football DPS**

Following the end of another season for the Glamorgan men’s 1st team, *GlamSport* reporter Dan Lewis looks back at a campaign that has provided many highs and lows, and gets manager Steve Savage’s thoughts on what he made of the season – including that dramatic final day survival battle against Swansea, and the cup battering at the hands of Northumbria.

The season began in the worst possible way for Steve Savage’s men, with an opening day defeat at the hands of Chichester being followed up with losses at Bath in a seven goal thriller, and a morale-crushing 2-0 home loss to Severnside rivals University of the West of England (UWE).

Things did start to turn in early November however, with what would turn out to be a huge victory at South Wales rivals Swansea, before a narrow victory at Glamorgan Sport Park against Brighton led to Glam climbing away from the relegation zone.

Savage – who balances his time between managing the Glamorgan 1st team and the Welsh university side – puts the bad start to the season down to the fact that so many new players had come into the squad, with just a matter of days to go before the season kicked-off.

In his honest and frank interview, Savage began by saying: “Coming into the season we were purely trying to stay in the Premier League, which is the top division in the country. There are only six teams in it and two of those sides get relegated, so it is always going to be tough.”

“It obviously wasn’t the best of starts, but it was always going to be difficult with the turnaround we had from the trials and selection of our first squad to our first game which was only 10 days apart.”

“It is always difficult when you don’t know who is coming into the side in terms of replacing players in certain areas.”

“We lost eight of our starting 11 from the previous season, so from the outset we knew it would be a challenge and that we would have to give time to allow the side to gel and for us to get our message across to them.”

“When the group did click together then we started putting some results together.”

Following a positive run of form through November with those victories against Swansea and Brighton, the men’s 1st team failed to build any real momentum, crashing to Chichester and Bath in successive weeks by the same 2-1 scoreline.

The Chichester game in particular was a bitter pill to swallow for the Blue and Yellows who fell to a late Sam Goodge winner. It was a contest which saw Glamorgan fail to capitalise on their opportunities – something which Savage believes could have cost them dear at the end of the season.

“Stats show that we have dominated a lot of games this season, but have failed to win. I was left thinking that if we had taken our chances in more games this season then we would have gained some extra points along the way.”

As for points gained, the away trip to Hartpury at the three-quarter-stage of the season that Glam faced whilst low on confidence, turned out to be a personal highlight for manager Savage, who saw his side come back across the Severn Bridge with a hard fought point.

Despite this unexpected draw, the well regarded manager believes his side could have come away with more, saying: “In terms of team performance that was a personal highlight against a very good Hartpury side who go out and recruit ex-professionals or budding future football stars.”

“To pull off a draw was a huge achievement. We took the lead and could have - and probably should have - won the game - not many sides have taken points off Hartpury so that was great.”

Glamorgan would have two months over the Christmas and New Year period to reflect on the season to date, but any hopes of avoiding a final day relegation fight were quashed by a Brighton side vying for revenge.

Glam would fall to a 2-1 defeat at the Falmer Campus, meaning that with just one match remaining they were staring relegation right in the face.

Swansea on the other hand had two matches – home to champions-elect Hartpury and away at lowly Bath - to leave Glamorgan in real trouble and confine them to their worst fears of dropping out of the league, but the Swans failed to pick up any points in both matches, meaning we would have a final day relegation battle on our hands.

“In terms of the South Wales derby it was a big game for us – an all or nothing clash where the winner would stay up,” Savage said.

“Swansea only needed a point, but we put a huge emphasis onto the players to deliver and we managed to take that into the game and take our chances when they come.”

“You can’t afford to lose too many games on the bounce and you certainly need to win a minimum of three or four games – so to stay in this division was our main aim and we achieved that with a victory here.”

The match itself was built up as being a close-fought and fiery affair, but in truth Glamorgan eased any nerves early on thanks to striker Sam Bailey’s goal after just four minutes, before three goals inside the opening 10 minutes of the second half sealed Glam’s place in the division for another season.

“I mentioned that from a performance point of view the Hartpury away game was a highlight, but the overall highlight has to be this 5-0 victory because it was down to the players to decide where they wanted to play next season - League 1 or the Prem - and they went and delivered.”

Though in what many ways can encapsulate the entire season, Glamorgan failed to build any real momentum from their final day survival, crashing out of the cup the following week at the first hurdle.

Visitors Northumbria ran out 6-0 winners in a one-sided contest that ended the season on a low note for the Prem survivors. Despite this, Savage believes his players can be extremely proud of themselves following a big team effort, which culminated in some of those who haven’t had so much game time this season featuring in the cup defeat to the Northumbria.

He said: “The Northumbria game was a tough one for us. We took the decision to play our some squad players, taking four players that would normally start out of the side. This included our holding midfielder and goalkeeper as well as some other midfielders.”

“Because our squad wasn’t always the strongest, these players were always going to be challenging, and this competition was a chance for those who have been loyal to us and trained every week to get their chance.”

“We always said the league was our main priority, so this competition gave some of the other players a chance of playing.”

During his interview with *The Phoenix, ‘*Sav’, as he is affectionately referred to by his players, also pointed to the importance of the links the university has in place with Cardiff City, or more specifically, the Championship sides academy, which is based at Glamorgan’s Treforest home.

Referring to the state-of-the-art facilities, Savage said: “We have a good partnership in place so we do try to pick up those players who have been released by the academy. If they have been through the Cardiff City academy at the ages of 16-18 then they are technically good players, it is then a case of getting them to step up to men’s football at the older age level.

“Mama [Mamadou Diallo] and Luke Jones were good academy players for us to pick up and they have added to our squad – that goes to show the benefit of having these strong links in place.”

Despite these football connections, Savage still laid bare the challenges facing his Glamorgan side, who don’t receive the same funding as some of the larger sporting universities, such as South Division Prem champs Hartpury.

“The reality is, without the top players – and we don’t recruit football players, we rely on students coming through the doors from all over – we will always struggle. But overall it was a good season and a huge tribute to the university to survive.

"I was realistic in the sense that I felt with this squad of players we would struggle, so to get that win against Swansea on the final day and cross the finish line was crucial – relief more than joy because it has been a tough season.

When pressed, Savage also picked out his personal player of the season, Chris Miethke, though he stressed the importance of the entire squad, who gave their all throughout.

“My personal player of the season would be Chris Miethke, who scored three against Bath when we lost 4-3. He started all of our games, and in terms of consistency he was always a threat and also worked hard to track back with his defensive duties.

“I felt he was one of the outstanding players for us, but all of the lads did a good job and it was a real team effort, rather than an individual effort. That is probably why we struggled in some games because we didn’t have enough individual stand-out performances.

Finally, attention turned to next season, where Sav and his players embark on another season in the Prem South following their dramatic survival – hoping to now challenge some of the bigger sides.

“We are hoping to push on next season. We’ve had a few years in the Prem so it will still be tough to survive, but we will look to target footballers now with the links that we have with Welsh football clubs and the Cardiff City academy, and try to target specific players to come in and have a real go at it.

“The league is too easy for Hartpury in my opinion - they have it their own way every year, so I would like to have a real go at them next year.

“We picked up a point away at Hartpury this season, so we are not a million miles away - it is just a case of one or two very good footballers coming through the Glamorgan doors.

And with that Glamorgan end what has been a challenging, but overall successful, season. Savage, David Gough and the rest of the 1st team back-room staff will now prepare to do it all again in October.

**To view match reports from all of Glamorgan’s home games this season, visit: http://sport.glam.ac.uk/sportscentre/matchreports/**