

Ryman League new boys by Stuart Fuller

At the start of the season the Ryman League announced that three teams from the North and South divisions would be relegated at the end of the season, meaning that we would see six new teams join us for this season. Unfortunately, the structure of the pyramid falls down at step 5 and below of the Non-Leagues due to the nature of the feeder leagues. The ideal scenario would be six leagues would all provide one team for promotion at the end of the season. Unfortunately, the Ryman League technically only has five feeder leagues, namely:-

- Southern Counties East Football League – (the former Kent Premier League)
- Essex Senior League
- Sussex County League – (now known as the Southern Combination League)
- Combined Counties League
- Eastern Counties League

What has happened in previous years is that the winners have all been given a promotion place plus the best second place team, In addition, some clubs may not want to be promoted, or even be able to due to ground grading issues. That is underlined by this season's new teams who will be joining the Ryman League.

Southern Counties East Football League Champions – Phoenix Sports FC

Crayford-based Phoenix Sports stormed the SCEFL last season, losing only one game on their way to the title and finishing 8 points above 2nd place Ashford United. Their ground is a stone's throw from VCD Athletic's Oakwood and has gone through a rapid redevelopment to facilitate their promotion. The club only were only promoted to the SCEFL in 2013 after a meteoric rise through the Kent leagues. Last season they also reached the Fifth Round of the FA Vase. Expect their momentum to continue this season.

Essex Senior League – Haringay Borough FC

Haringay Borough won the Essex Senior League at a canter last season, finishing 11 points clear of Bowers & Pitsea. Their ground, Coles Park, is in White Hart Lane, Tottenham but not that White Hart Lane Tottenham. The 1,500 ground which they share with Greenhouse London, is a modest affair with one smallish grandstand but more than adequate for their Ryman North needs. This is the highest they have played at in their history and such an auspicious occasion calls for the big guns, so the club have signed ex-Rook Leroy Griffiths for the new season.

Sussex County League – Dorking Wanderers FC

Last season's champions Littlehampton Town declined promotion meaning that second place Dorking Wanderers will take their place in the Ryman South this season. The Wanderers have had a meteoric rise up the Non-Leagues since formation in 1999. Their 2,000 capacity Westhumble Playing Fields ground was opened in 2007 and is located a little way outside of Dorking in a nice leafy setting not far from Box Hill & Westhumble railway station. The club have signed former Conference South leading scorer Phil Page for their first ever Ryman League campaign.

Combined Counties League Champions – Molesey FC

Molesey won the Combined Counties League last season by five points from Camberley Town. They are old hands at this Isthmian League game, having played in the various leagues from 1977 until 2008. Cyrille Regis started his illustrious career at Walton Road Stadium, whilst the film Bend it Like Beckham was filmed at the ground. They are located almost half-way between Metropolitan Police FC and Hampton & Richmond Borough's The Beveree. Be warned, when in the UK, West Moseley is the home of Piers Morgan.

The Eastern Counties League did not put forward anyone for promotion this year. Champions Norwich United won the league by 25 points from Granchester Rovers, with Stanway Rovers in third place. All three clubs had indicated that they did not intend to take promotion should they win the league. It will be interesting to see if Norwich United especially decide to take up the challenge this year although having another side in the north of Norfolk isn't ideal for the Ryman League's logistics.

Consequently, Barkingside and Redbridge from the Ryman North and East Grinstead Town in the South gained reprieves from relegation whilst Ware have been moved to the Southern Premier League. Meanwhile Cray Wanderers have been moved from the North to the South which hasn't made them happy with Chatham Town moving the other way, which they are on the contrary very happy about.

How will they succeed? In the past few years many teams have struggled in their first few seasons. Redhill were relegated from the Ryman South last season after just two seasons in the league, whilst East Grinstead Town were reprieved. In the North Burnham Ramblers two season Ryman adventure came to a spectacular end last season, conceding 138 goals in the process. On the flip side we've seen Whitehawk storm through the leagues in recent years, as too did Peacehaven & Telscombe before their reverse last season. Ryman North champions last season Needham Market only entered the league four seasons ago and are now competing in the Premier League.