

The myth of the curse of the Manager of the Month by Stuart Fuller

Ask any manager at any club around the world and they will tell you they don't care for plaudits of being the manager of the month until the season has ended. Despite being top of the Bostik League South Division for two-thirds of last season, our very own Darren Freeman didn't win a single monthly award, something that also happened when he was in charge of the very successful Whitehawk side that gained three promotions in just a few years.

But against his wishes the gaffer won the award for September in the Bostik League Premier Division, which is a fantastic achievement for him, Ross and Codge, after just a few games back at this level. In September we took seven points from a possible nine, the best record in the division. It wasn't just the results though, it was who they were against. Wins at Margate and Wingate & Finchley plus a draw against second place Enfield Town. Whilst they didn't count towards the award, we could also add in five unbeaten FA Cup ties, including the 8-1 thrashing of Molesey. Few could argue it wasn't a deserved reward for a fantastic month.

Yet ringing Darren and telling him the news was a job that Barry and I had to flip a coin for. His immediate reaction was to say he'd refuse to accept it and wouldn't attend the presentation ceremony. When I told him that as a representative of the Isthmian League board I would fine him he grudgingly accepted but, wary of the superstition of the "Curse of the Manager of the Month", he immediately banned any further talk of the award.

Results in the first half of October seemed to bear out his suspicions. Consecutive defeats to Worthing, Bath City and Potters Bar Town represented the worse run of form The Rooks had had for over eighteen months. But is there really a curse? Statistics suggest that it is all in the manager's mind.

Last season the Manager of the Month in the Bostik League Premier Division won an average of 1.8 points per game in the month after they won the award. Whilst this was a slight drop from just over 2 points per game for the month in which they won it, it is still a very impressive return, almost Play-off form. The situation in the Bostik League North and South Divisions wasn't too different, with a return of 1.6 and 1.5 points respectively. But certainly not the level of poor form that most managers think.

The numbers don't tell the whole story. For all the money and hype around Billericay Town, their joint managers, Glenn Tamplin and Harry Wheeler, won the Manager of the Month award five times thanks to some excellent performances. Excluding April's award, their subsequent month performance ranged from 3 points per game in September to just 1 point per game in January. Likewise, Dulwich Hamlet's Gavin Rose only gained an average of 1 point per game in November after winning October's award, whilst Greenwich Borough's Paul Barnes could only gain 0.8 points per game in April after scooping March's award.

So next time you hear a manager talk about the curse of the award, take a careful look at their next set of results. No manager, well apart from a certain Portuguese one in North-

West England, wants to really big up their abilities, and that's why they created the curse. If you don't believe me, then you can ring Darren and give him the good news next time!