

The College Cup: Nouse's definitive guide

With less than a week remaining to the start of the College Cup, [David Ambrozejczyk](#) previews everyone's favourite college competition

Thursday 6 May 2010



Photo: Arran Bowen-la Grange

It's back, finally. Did you miss it?

The pinnacle of the College Football season comes together in seven weeks of ultimate pressure on the velvet surface of the JLD. No more mud bath pitches and sub-zero temperatures, but most likely some questionable refereeing and definitely some battle cry speeches from the respective captains. But where is the Cup going to go? Being the degenerate gambler/speculator, I'm going to try and give some background analysis on where the cup might land, who to look out for and a few "sleepers" for fantasy football.

Here we go then...

THE FAVOURITES - HALIFAX FIRSTS - 3/1

Many college players might be shouting "that should be us" at the screen on reading this and begin preparing the hate mail, but league tables very rarely lie. Halifax firsts have scooped both the Winter and Spring college leagues this term and will look to complete the Holy Trinity by lifting the cup come the end of term. The Halifax squad, rich in depth at the best of times, will have the luxury of bringing in a sprinkling of university football firsts and seconds players to compliment the line up. University striker Conor Brennan will lead the line for the 'Fax, but Mark Lund's team might well look to a handful of freshers who have broken into the top University teams to help compliment an already accomplished side. Alex Tringham and Dan Turley will immediately step in to add considerable bite to the backline, while Ashley Daly will look to control the action from a centre-midfield role. The Halifax fresher who could have the greatest impact, however, is Jack Beadle, who could well be given a free role in Halifax first team version 2.0. Lightning fast and possessing the ability to make defenders look very flat-footed indeed, Beadle is the worst kept secret in college football and will undoubtedly terrorise opposing defences all

summer long – he's not bad shout for golden boot either.

With the only potential problem coming in the group stages in a 28th may midday showdown with Vanbrugh firsts, whom Halifax edged past 1-0 back in February With remaining fixtures against two of the weaker seconds teams in James and Langwith, followed by a mismatch against Goodricke thirds, winning the group should be a formality and so long as any complacency doesn't creep in, it could well be their cup to lose. A semi-final battle with either Derwent or Alcuin firsts is likely.



Halifax will be favourites for this tournament, after an impressive college football season so far. Photograph by Arran Bowen-la Grange.

THE NEXT BEST THING - DERWENT FIRSTS - 11/2

In World Cup terms, Derwent are the Brazil to Halifax's Spain and are probably the biggest threat to Halifax achieving cup glory. Derwent will be looking to improve on the disappointment of a surprise exit to eventual champions Alcuin firsts in the 2009 semi-final, after only conceding two goals in the whole tournament to that point. Resolute defence will again be present for Derwent – they will be able to look to the experience of Dom Henney and Greg Gardner to provide a solid pairing at centre back. Derwent, perhaps crucially, also have the psychological edge over the much fancied Halifax, consigning them 1-0 earlier in the term. The only major hurdle to negotiate in the group will come from defending Champions Alcuin firsts in what will no doubt be a scintillating clash on May 13th – the corresponding league fixtures producing 2-2 draws, but for Alcuin, or any team to stop Derwent they will have to contend with Derwent talisman Chris Barnett. A University first team stalwart, he is a big threat at the set piece and is armed with a bullet shot. On his day he's a shout for the best player in competition (again, cue the hatemail). Another question for Derwent could be how attacking they really want to go. 4-3-3 is most likely, but Derwent do have the personnel to play an effective 4-4-2 or 4-5-1 if needs be. Ed Lacaille is likely to be the target man for Derwent and they will need him to be on top-form from the very first game.

THE OUTSIDERS - ALCUIN FIRSTS 8/1

On paper, Alcuin does not appear to have the defensive muscle of Derwent or Halifax, but write them off at your peril. The underdog role for Alcuin seems to fit them just fine, stunning much fancied Derwent in last year's semi-final despite being considerable underdogs on that day. In 2010, despite a weaker defence on paper, Alcuin can count themselves lucky to have arguably the biggest choice of attacking options in the

competition. An all round threat in University firsts striker Dan Cox, UYAFC Golden Boot winner Joe Cooper, an imposing powerhouse striker in Udy Onwudike and a wildcard in last years revelation of the cup in the nimble Parris Williams. The problem for Captain Miles McDermott could be how to best utilise these options as Alcuin also possess two out and out wingers in McDermott and Ali Laird. The most likely scenario will be for McDermott to stick to convention and start 4-3-3 with the trio that did so much damage last year in Williams, Cox and Laird, but a 3-5-2, which Alcuin have used before, may also be used.

Attacking options aside, for Alcuin to contend they will have to get the best out of their defence with only one recognised player there in the form of Jack Crane. Despite not being as sound at the back as they were last year, which may tell in the later stages, it might not become a problem if they front men are top form.

Derwent firsts await in what could be the tie of the group stages. If they manage to stun them again, Alcuin could gain the confidence they need to progress and overcome a possible match-up with Halifax somewhere down the line.

THE GROUP OF DEATH - GROUP A

Goodricke firsts, Wentworth firsts, Derwent seconds, Alcuin seconds, James thirds

Who gets out of this group is going to be very interesting indeed, as every team is capable of a slip-up or a surprise. While Goodricke are big favourites for the group, they have been plagued by inconsistency - Langwith firsts pulled off the shock of the college league defeating them despite only having nine players on the field. Goodricke do, however, possess some real class capable of deciding any game. Towering centre back Chris Grayland will be tough to get by while University seconds captain Ben Smith will provide high-motor performances in every game. Goodricke will hope that any performances akin to the Langwith game will not appear again as other teams in the group might not let them forget it.

Wentworth are going to be an unknown quantity, but judging on the leagues, they are no longer the pushover they once were. They would be favourites to go through second in almost every other group, if it were not of the strength of the second and third teams behind them. Derwent seconds are in a rich vein of form, comfortably claiming the Spring seconds league and possessing some under-rated gems in the likes of striker Ben Smith - they are more than capable of toppling the post-grads. Alcuin seconds won the winter league with a delicious brand of counter attacking football, which might spell trouble for opposing teams on the JLD with its golden surface compared to the puddle of 22 acres. They will look to Matthew Stopforth's ability at the dead-ball and can also count in the six foot five striker Alex Brown to not be on the end of anything in the box, while a resilient James thirds will be waiting to capitalise on any unfocused opponents and have a potential gem in fantasy football points - Tevez-like front man Andrew Yates.

Goodricke should control this group, but any slip up at any point will leave the door open for Wentworth and both seconds teams to capitalize. It is a strange coincidence the two seconds teams that were able to make it into the quarter finals last year were Alcuin and Derwent. With this being the cup, there is going to be an upset or shock somewhere and Group A could well see the biggest of them all - don't bet against both seconds teams progressing.



Last year the tournament was won by Alcuin firsts, who were inspired by the flair of Parris Williams. Photograph by George Lowther.

FANTASY FOOTBALL TIPS

AVOID - THE OVER PRICED STRIKE FORCE

While picking the two most expensive strikers on the list isn't the worst idea you can have, you are leaving yourself open to not getting many points if one of them misfires. With 50m to spend, and the two most expensive strikers last year worth £9.5m and £8.5m respectively (Connor Brennan and Tom Ragan), you're putting over a quarter of your stock in two players. Should one get injured or not do the business, that's money wasted. You will also be left with having to fill the squad up with "dead money" – players that are in third team midfielders that won't score or set up lots of goals.

DO - FIND A SCORING MIDFIELDER/DEFENDER

College captain in defence? More than likely he is going to have a role at set-pieces, whether it's going up for corners or taking the things himself. These guys will be valuable pieces in your fantasy team and a defender that scores/assists will get more points for it than a frontman – plus the added value if they keep a clean sheet. Mark Lund of Halifax and Miles McDermott, who was listed as a defender last year, immediately spring to mind. Proof of finding that elusive defender with a knack for goal can be seen in Halifax firsts from 2009 – defender Shaun Evans amassed a whopping 35 points including four goals from centre back.

Instead of stacking off lots your money on two expensive strikers, you would be better off finding a first team midfielder that will score you some goals. Again, goals are worth more for a midfielder than a frontman and he is more likely to get an assist or three if they manage to destroy a few of the weaker teams in group. It's all about value for money and a goal scoring midfielder is a good lynch-pin for the team. Last year Alcuin had now graduated Ed Murrills in their ranks, who top scored last year with 43 points, while the value in picking him was found with him being cheaper, at £7.2m, than some first team strikers.

AVOID - PICKING FROM ALL ONE COLLEGE

Even if it's Halifax 1sts - in their case it is likely that the players in their first team will have a higher value than the equivalent in another college, and not all of them are going to be getting you points. Value can be found in the more-underrated colleges. This year it seems to be James firsts and they should easily win Group D. Forward James Offord represents great value at £5.6m playing in front of as strong midfield, while Oscar Lynch, who has experience within the University 1st team, is an absolute bargain in my opinion at £4.5m.

DO - UNCOVER A SECOND OR THIRD TEAM GEM

Especially if your going for a 4-3-3 and are spending money on a strike force. Second and third teamers are almost always under the £4m mark and they will be crucial if you want to beat your mates at fantasy football. Defenders of a strong seconds team are often good value too if you have invested in a high-priced attack, while picking up that bargain thirds striker might be pay-off if they begin pulling off some heroics. A case in point from 2009 would be Thomas Gibby of Alcuin seconds, who at 3m and a return of 20 points, scored higher than a number of first teamers who were worth between £1.5m and £5m more than him. The search is on to find his equivalent this year. A decent shout will be John Pinkstone, captain of Derwent seconds who, playing in the unpredictable Group A could nab a few goals and maybe even a man-of-match bonus as he looks to drive his team to victory.



Do not forget to pick players from the seconds and thirds teams, as they are just as likely to score big points in the early stages as some of the higher valued signings. Photograph by George Lowther.

FANTASY FOOTBALL SLEEPER PICKS

By this, I mean players who are either under-priced, looked over or discounted for being in supposed weaker teams and represent excellent value for your fantasy team!

GOALKEEPERS

Dom McMahon (James firsts) - How he is the seventh cheapest goalkeeper is beyond me - at £4m he represents excellent value. James firsts don't have a bad draw either, so the clean sheets could be abundant.

DEFENDERS

Jake Delaney (Alcuin firsts) - Despite being listed at 8m, he will line up against weaker teams in midfield and being a nightmare to mark at the set-piece, he will score goals. Against the stronger teams in the group he will be at the back and if Alcuin do the business, he's getting you clean sheet points as well.

Will Taylor (Alcuin seconds) - A real gamble here at £3.5m. A versatile player who is Alcuin seconds utility man, he is listed as a full-back but will find himself on the wing by the end of the game. Lethal from the

set-piece in the thirds league, he will get his chance from the dead ball in the seconds too and could rack up the points.

MIDFIELD

Matt Scaysbrook (Vanbrugh seconds) – A central midfielder who is strong in the tackle but also loves to drive on looking for goals; he is going to be an excellent addition to any fantasy team and scored some healthy points last year. At a price of £4.2m he has a lot of upside for mid-priced midfielder

Jack Fisher(James thirds) – Available at a low price of £2.3, can play on the left wing or up top – often the centre of attention for the James attacking options. Likes to drop in to midfield and dictate the play, so if James thirds start mixing it up, he is likely to grab the goals. A definite risk, but his price will be low and the reward potentially great.

FORWARDS

Dom Green (Wentworth firsts) –Was a Halifax first player, now a post-grad who has lost none of the quality of last year. Wentworth are likely to look for him to produce the good, much like Bruce Starkey is for Langwith, except Green has a price-tag of £4.5m to Starkey's £7m. He represents really good value and could be a nice addition to those opting for a three man attack.

Ben Smith (Goodricke firsts) – £5.5m for the University seconds captain is going to be very difficult to pass on. If Goodricke perform as they should and win Group A, it's hard to bet against Smith to top the scorers for the Hes-East men. Has a good midfield behind him as well.



14 comments

? 6 May '10 at 3:46 pm

didn't alcuin win the spring term league?...

[▲ Report](#)

Badger 6 May '10 at 3:55 pm

It definitely wasn't Halifax

[▲ Report](#)

The Truth 6 May '10 at 4:20 pm

Derwent won the league in Spring term.

[▲ Report](#)

D 6 May '10 at 4:29 pm

Great article, but just a few points.

Halifax didn't win in Spring. Not sure anyone did, being as there was only 3 or 4 games, but Halifax definitely lost one and drew one.

I don't think you can call Alcuin outsiders. They are probably 3rd favourites, perhaps even 2nd faves.

Also, I don't think assists count in the fantasy football.

If people who know the 2nds and 3rds players well could tell me which ones score goals it would be appreciated. I let's have some stats on top goalscorers from the 2nds league. I want the edge on my opponents so I can win the £10 M&S vouchers or whatever the winner gets.

Good read.

 Report

David Ambrozejczyk

6 May '10 at 4:37 pm

Just a note that I dropped the ball on the two most expensive strikers. Brennan and Ragan are the most expensive this year, not last year as - put in the article.

Sorry for the confusion!

 Report

nah

6 May '10 at 4:45 pm

nah, derwent didn't

 Report

Dirk Kuyt

6 May '10 at 7:02 pm

D - 3rds top scorers from this year:

<http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?pid=3905174&op=1&o=all&view=all&subj=8540553041&aid=-1&oid=8540553041&id=708343066>

 Report

George Lowther's Photo Round-Up

6 May '10 at 9:42 pm

BRING BACK THE ROUND UP FOR THE COLLEGE CUP

 Report

Josh Allen

7 May '10 at 1:33 pm

Just a note on Alcuin 2's six-foot five striker Alex Brown who despite his height has not scored a header in college football and therefore cannot be expected to nod it in or more brilliantly put "to nod be on the end of anything in the box."

 Report

Mart Poom

7 May '10 at 3:42 pm

Apparently Halifax had a behind closed doors game last night. Any reports?

 Report

Re: Allen

7 May '10 at 4:00 pm

No one takes what ambro says seriously anyways.

xx

[Report](#)

Rumour

7 May '10 at 8:20 pm

I've heard that Mark Lund hasn't slept properly for weeks because he's so worried about the pressure that Halifax are under to win the competition this year.....

[Report](#)

Barry Venison

7 May '10 at 11:46 pm

He shouldn't either. No 'favourite' has ever won it; Derwent didn't win last year, Alcuin didn't win the year before and Halifax didn't win it the year before that...

[Report](#)

Hoi Nouse!

9 May '10 at 12:02 pm

Any chance we could get an article with the groups and fixtures laid out clearly?

Yes, I can work out the groups from the draw but it'd be nice to see them organised in one place!

Keep up the good work lads

[Report](#)

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