

Kit's a bit of alright for H&W historians

by Rod Gilmour

THEIR kit may have been described as one "Alan Partridge would have been proud of", but Hampstead & Westminster are on course to have the last laugh after a history-defining season was confirmed at the weekend – their play-off berth signalling the Maida Vale club's best-ever finish.

And the club with the third-longest stay in the top flight may well look back to an evening earlier this season, which dug deep into the soul of the north London outfit, to understand their current achievements.

With an influx of debutants at the start of the season, a social evening was put in the diary to indulge in the club's archives.

And for that they turned to Ian Smith, who managed the first team for five years up until 2002 before moving to Exeter.



Old school: Hampstead & Westminster in the 1950's

"It was an attempt to reconnect with what we stand for and what we want to achieve," said Smith, who still holds a deep passion for the club and travels to most away games.

"Most of the team were intrigued and the colours was a significant question."

The club's dark and light blue colours, as well as kit design, hark back to the 1890s and have stayed true ever since – despite a report in the *St Albans Observer* in 1999 suggesting that the 'new look' kit was akin to a Steve Coogan cre-

ation. On showing the article to the current team, he said: "The report's rather scurrilous comments provoked a few wry smiles!"

For player/coach Kwan Browne, the evening proved crucial in "finding something inside ourselves to work harder".

The Trinidadian said: "The atmosphere around the team is great but when a team is together for long, they survive on extra fighting spirit. We survive on playing quality hockey. We talk a lot about digging that deep and playing for Hampstead.



Favourite shirt: Hampstead's Michael Watt in action

"It was about why we wear the same kit for so many years, why we got into the Premier Division and who scored the goals. It was to get us to get a love for the club.

"We all love playing, we enjoy our hockey and the group dynamic is great but

we are trying to find something to bring our extra edge."

Toby Roche, now into his fifth year as club captain, added: "We have quite a high turnover of players year on year due to our location but Smithy's talk demonstrates to new join-

ers where the club has been and highlights simple things like our shirts – which are the same as the original Hampstead shirts."

Smith said he would "love it" if Hampstead & Westminster, who have already accrued unprece-

dent points in the top flight, achieved Premier Division title glory at Lee Valley next month.

He said: "It's so vital with other clubs in south London who are bigger and those who have merged.

"There is one small slip between that and oblivion."