

# Semipros enjoy moment in spotlight

**N**o one gave Farnborough a chance against Arsenal. After all, it's been 94 years since a non-league team beat the defending FA Cup champion — Crystal Palace over Wolves in 1909.

There were 102 places separating Arsenal and Farnborough in the English pyramid.

Still, the players from Farnborough, a member of the non-league Football Conference, had cheered watching at a local pub when they got the news on television that they had been drawn with Arsenal, winner of the 2002 FA Cup title and the favorite to defend its Premier League crown.

Win or lose, Farnborough's semipros earned a moment in the spotlight — and a big payday at that.

Indeed, there was never any doubt about the result of the fourth-round match. Farnborough was down two goals after 23 minutes and saw defender Chris Lee sent off five minutes later. But it was only 2-0 until the 68th minute, when Francis Jeffers scored his second goal for Arsenal. Rocky Baptiste scored for Farnborough two minutes later before the Gunners added two goals to make the final score 5-1.

The heavy defeat didn't take a smile away from Graham Westley, the former Farnborough player who took his old club out of bankruptcy four years ago with money from his office cleaning-business and serves as the club's chairman, manager and press officer.

"We have gone about the job in a way that means every-

one is going to have a memory that they can enjoy eternally," he said.

Westley didn't think twice about shifting the game from run-down Cherrywood Road (capacity: 4,900), where Farnborough once ran off an 87-game unbeaten streak against amateur opposition, to Arsenal's Highbury Stadium.

"These are blokes who have played in front of 100,000 people in foreign countries where people are looking to come over with knives and kill you," Westley said of the Gunners. "They're experienced in hostile environments, and, believe me, Farnborough would not be a hostile environment in their reckoning."

Farnborough netted roughly \$1 million from gate receipts and program sales — enough to wipe out its debts.

For two weeks, Farnborough players trained full-time. Westley splurged and took his players to the Spanish training center in La Manga — the same center where MLS clubs Los Angeles and San Jose will spend part of the winter.

"They have loved it," Westley said. "For the first time, they have felt like professional footballers."

Westley had praise for his players after the game.

"Their heads stayed up throughout the 90 minutes," he said. "It would have been very easy for them to throw the towel in."

And he had thanks for Arsenal.

"They were kinder to us than I thought they might be," he said.



By Paul Kennedy

Farnborough's Garry Butterworth fights for the ball with the Arsenal's Ray Parlour and Patrick Vieira during their FA Cup clash at Highbury.

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