

# Bantams grab point late on

**BRADFORD** City Women came from behind to earn a point for the third league game in a row this season, as they drew 1-1 at Barnsley in the FA Women's National League Division One North.

The home side started quickest, dominating possession and exploiting the space out wide, but City keeper Hannah Richards was only called upon once in the first half, as she tipped a free-kick over the bar.

The first half was a scrappy affair and City struggled too. Their only real chance came on 25 minutes when Harriet Jakeman shot wide with a long-range effort.

After the break, City came out looking the stronger of the two sides, creating a number of half chances that were squandered.

Those misses looked costly when the Bantams failed to clear their lines, and provided Courtney Csomor with an easy tap-in at the far post to give Barnsley the lead after 66 minutes.

But City continued to press, forcing Barnsley into conceding a number of fouls.

It was one of these fouls that gave City a way back into the game. As substitute Sophie Hawkins broke through, she was brought down from behind in the Reds box, and player-coach Charlotte Stuart coolly converted from the spot.

This galvanised the home side, who had a late penalty shout turned down and nearly scrambled home an injury-time corner.

After the game, City's

manager Chris Hames said: "We didn't play to the level we expected of ourselves. We struggled to play the football we wanted to. But despite that, we have come to a tough place and earned a good away point."

"Similar to the Norton game earlier in the season, we have to take the result in context."

"We haven't played a competitive game in seven weeks, Barnsley are fresh out of their last one a week ago. Today was just our fourth league game of the season, it was their ninth competitive game, so it's no surprise they were sharper."

"In spite of that, we were able to limit them to very few chances, despite their possession, and we looked more threatening in the moments we went forward."

"It's the third time we've earned a point after falling behind, which isn't a bad trait to have."

"It's now about kicking on and believing in ourselves to push for the three points in games."

City's next game will see them visit Chester-le-Street on January 3, the first of four consecutive away trips.

Their reserves, whose game at Brighouse Town Development was postponed at the weekend, start 2021 with derbies against Huddersfield Town and Leeds United.

City announced yesterday that they have signed goalkeeper Liz Hobson from Sheffield FC.

She has played on loan for the Bantams before but has now signed permanently.



Neil Spence (ball in hand) in action for Bradford & Bingley just over a decade ago

# Concussion struggles for Salem coach

## RUGBY UNION

By Nathan Atkinson

T&A Sports Reporter

**BRADFORD** Salem head coach Neil Spence has openly discussed his battle with early onset dementia, after years of playing rugby union, professionally and locally, took its toll.

Spence, who is only 44, talked about how it has changed his personality, his daily life as a teacher and coach, and what steps will hopefully be taken to make the sport a safer place.

He said: "I'm at exactly the same stage as (England World Cup winner in 2003) Steve Thompson."

"I've been diagnosed with early onset dementia from brain scans and neurological assessments I've had, and I have clinical evidence of CTE (a progressive degenerative disease of the brain)."

"It's a daily struggle, just doing chores takes a lot longer than normal. Lessons at school and sessions for rugby take more planning too."

"The worry is that it gets worse and I can't do those jobs any more."

"There's no definitive prognosis as such, it could be a rapid decline over the next 10 years, or it could be a slow one where I plateau."

"People have said it's changed my personality, where I used to be very outgoing, now I'm often anxious, confused and depressed."

Spence, who played professionally for Leicester, Gloucester and Rotherham, and locally for Bradford & Bingley, Ilkley and Otley, said: "I'm in that first generation of professional rugby players, starting at 19 or 20."

"Back then, there were no real guidelines to say we had to go off and stop playing, there weren't the concussion protocols or HIAs (head injury assessments) like now."

"It's important to come out and talk about it, because there's contact all day, every day in rugby union."

"You've got maybe 40 players fighting for places in the starting line-up in training, so even that's competitive."

Spence is one of a number of players, alongside Thompson, joining a lawsuit against the game and suing.

And those former stars want 15 'commandments' introduced into the game.

Spence explained: "We're just looking at how we can change rugby for the better."

"I've got so much out of the sport, whether that be friendships or travelling the world. I love it to bits."

"We don't want to rip up the rules, but just to have a closer look at welfare and player safety, in the hope that the next generation don't suffer in the same way."

"It's looking at things like limiting contact in training to minimise head traumas and knocks. Maybe having windows in the season where you have contact training."

"We feel that there needs to be concussion spotters watching on at games, to assess if someone's suffering with a head knock, someone who is better educated on all that than a head coach."

"We'd like a HIA test to see where you are at cognitively at the beginning of each season, then after a knock, see where you are after that."

"There needs to be better education on concussion and head injuries for players, coaches and officials, as well as better after-care."

"Hopefully, if we get it right, there'll be no need for that after-care in the future."

# Great Xmas present for cool Cullen



JOE Cullen will finally enjoy Christmas that little bit more this year after putting up a stunning display to win only his second match at the William Hill World Darts Championship.

The Bradfordian had lost nine of his previous opening games at the prestigious tournament, which meant he always exited before the festivities.

He did not let that record deter him though, comfortably capturing a 3-0 victory over Wayne Jones.

Cullen got off to the perfect start, scoring three out of his four doubles to ensure a clean sweep.

It looked like the next set would follow suit until Jones launched a late comeback.

A couple of 180s handed 'The Rockstar' a two leg advantage before missed chances and an 11 darter pulled his opponent level.

The world number 16 built a solid lead in the last leg and finally checked out at the fourth attempt.

Despite going in front in the final set, the 55-year-old simply could not keep up with the favourite in the scoring department.

Cullen dismantled the former world semi finalist by reeling off three successive legs, bagging his sixth 180 along the way, to end on an average which creped over the 94 mark.

Speaking to the Sky Sports cameras post-match, he said: "I would have been happy even if it finished 3-2 as long as I came out with a victory on the other side."

"I have been putting the hours in on the practice board and I think my results have shown since the Matchplay, even the games I have lost I have played okay."

Cullen will now face a man just one place beneath him in the rankings, Jonny Clayton in the next round after Boxing Day at the Alexandra Palace.

For the Wyke dartist, it will be a clash like no other against the Welsh World Cup winner who he is highly fond of.

He added: "Normally I would say I approach each game the same but it is a bit different. Me and Jonny are good friends."

"I beat him in the Grand Prix so I am sure he is eager to get one back on me. It will be a good game."



Charlotte Stuart (centre) netted a late equaliser