

Beat: Sports

Cambridge United coach helping turn Huntingdons season around

Number two: Nathar Al-Khatib

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USPA NEWS - Manager Jimmy Brattan has praised Nathar Al-Khatib for the impact he has had since joining Huntingdon Town as his assistant six weeks ago.

Al-Khatib, a former professional footballer in his native Iraq who now also coaches in the academy at Cambridge United, hooked up with the Hunters at the start of November following the departure of previous number two Ryan Hunnings.

Since then, Huntingdon have gone six games unbeaten in Chromasports Division One, including giving league leaders Pinchbeck United an almighty scare in Saturday's 1-1 draw.

They have also knocked St Neots Town Reserves out of the Hunts Intermediate Cup, and their only defeat since Al-Khatib's arrival was an unlucky Hunts Senior Cup exit to St Ives Town.

"We're really lucky to have Nathar as part of our set up," [?] said Brattan. "He's brought a wealth of experience to the club and we work really well together. "He's had a massive influence on our upturn in form. He could walk into any club at a higher level and do a job."

Brattan also believes being skint has helped give his side a resilient attitude. Only three years ago they were able to throw cash around and finished second in the Premier Division, but two years of struggle followed when the purse strings were shut, and after a second successive bottom place finish, there was to be no second reprieve and the club were relegated.

"Every club we come up against has some form of budget," [?] he said. "I think we're the only team in the league who don't. But the players know if they don't pull together, results won't go their way, and they work their backsides off for each other.

"The last two seasons have hurt the club, and they don't want to be at the foot of the table again. We want to put the club back on the map and get it back to where it was a few years ago, when they were the team to beat."

Pinchbeck, who are five points clear at the top, certainly felt the force of Huntingdon's new togetherness. Although a Liam Rodden own goal put the Hunters behind, they were level within five minutes when Corey Kingston netted against his former club.

Huntingdon could easily have won it too, but Jamie Waterworth, normally so reliable from the spot, missed a penalty on his return from injury.

"I've never seen Jamie miss before," [?] said Brattan. "He normally goes for precision and sticks it in one of the corners, but he went for power this time and cleared not only the goal, but the wall and trees behind it as well.

"A few of the lads were asking why Jake Waterworth didn't take it as he scored two penalties last week when Jamie was out. But Jamie's our penalty taker and was the first one to take the ball."

Meanwhile, in the Premier Division, Eynesbury Rovers shrugged off the loss of Declan Rogers to St Ives by holding Wisbech Town to a 3-3 draw, having led 3-2 until conceding a penalty two minutes from time. Top scorer Dom Lawless bagged a brace and Jordan Brown also netted, while rookie keeper Josh Bonaiti made some fine saves.

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