



## SEASON OPENERS – FACTS AND STATS

By Steve Johnson

Welcome back to Goodison Park for the season opener!

Without wishing to tempt fate, following last September's 1-0 win at Tottenham Hotspur, we haven't lost in our past nine opening Premier League matches, winning three and drawing six. It's the longest unbeaten opening day run in our history.

Our most recent first day loss was a 1-0 home defeat to QPR in 2011, a match that was actually played seven days after the Premier League got under way. A week earlier we'd been due to start away at Tottenham, but riots in London had forced a postponement. That match also saw Ross Barkley's debut for the Club.

We've faced today's visitors Southampton in the season-opener only twice before – both at The Dell. In 1993 we won 2-0 with Peter Beagrie and John Ebbrell scoring in the first half and in 1951 we lost 1-0 as we began life in the Second Division for only the second time in our history.

So, who have we faced most often in our first League game of the season?

Well, the aforementioned Tottenham lead the way. We've met them 11 times in the past as the League campaign got under way – a figure that was helped by the fact that we played them four times in five season openers from 1910 to 1914!

Next up come their North London neighbours Arsenal, who we've encountered on eight occasions to start a campaign. Blackburn Rovers, Manchester United, Nottingham Forest



Dominic Calvert-Lewin heading the winner in last season's opener against Spurs

and Sheffield Wednesday are next with six each.

Our biggest win at the start of a season came way back in 1921 when we beat Manchester United 5-0 at Goodison. We finished 20th out of 22 teams that season to narrowly escape the drop – but the Red Devils ended up bottom of the league and were relegated!

Our worst Goodison start was rather more recent. In 2009 we lost 6-1 against Arsenal.

### Here are a few other oddities:

- Last season's opener against Tottenham was played on 13 September – with the season start delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was the latest start we've ever had to a League campaign and the first September commencement since 1914.
- From 1961 to 1967 we won all seven of our opening League games – our best ever run. Our worst run of defeats was from 2008 to 2011 when we lost four



Ross Barkley's debut for the Blues and a first day loss to QPR in 2011

opening matches in four successive seasons.

- And who have we never met in the first League game of the season? Several teams, actually. But the two most notable are probably West Ham United and...Liverpool!