

MARK O'HAIRE'S LEAGUE ONE PREVIEW

League One 2026/27 Outright Preview

There are divisions where the ante-post market tends to tell you most of what you need to know. League One has rarely been one of them.

The third tier has developed a habit of rewarding those prepared to look beyond reputation and short prices. Across the last 26 completed seasons, the average League One champion has gone off at 16/1, exactly half were available at 12/1 or bigger and eight were priced at 20/1 or larger.

That is useful context for a 2026/27 campaign headed by Leicester City. The Foxes could conceivably make a mockery of this level: their squad contains top-flight and international pedigree, their resources dwarf most of the division and Russell Martin's men possess enough technical quality to dominate most League One opponents.

Price is another matter. Only three League One favourites or joint-favourites this century have won the title – an 11% strike-rate.

Leicester's ceiling is enormous, but the defensive side of Martin's football and uncertainty surrounding a club that has suffered three relegations in five seasons introduce enough doubt for me to leave the short prices alone.

They are the likeliest winners. They just aren't my favourite bet.

Promotion: Luton Town (11/4)

If Leicester set the standard on raw talent, Luton (7/1) are the side I trust most to chase them.

We don't have to imagine what a promotion-calibre Luton might look like. Jack Wilshire's side finished last season with eight wins from an unbeaten final 11 matches, scoring 23 goals and producing 2.45 expected goals per game.

The Hatters missed the play-offs by a point, but the wider process backed up the results: only two League One sides allowed fewer shots per game, while their 0.56 shot ratio ranked third-best.

Late-season surges can deceive, but this looked more substantial. Wilshire eventually found a midfield and attacking structure that worked, Kasey Palmer has returned permanently and George Johnston and Callum Marshall add further quality to a largely retained core.

Luton have spent three years tumbling from the Premier League to seventh in League One. Last season finally provided evidence that the decline had stopped.

At 11/4 for promotion, I'm willing to bet the late-season version of Luton is much closer to their true level.

Promotion: Plymouth Argyle (9/2)

Plymouth are another side where the final table disguises just how good they became.

Argyle were bottom in November with 13 points from 15 matches. Following Derek Adams' arrival as Director of Football and a switch to a more secure 4-4-2, the Greens collected 60 points from their remaining 31 games. Only the eventual top two bettered that return.

The transformation was stark: Plymouth improved from 1.13 points per game across their first 23 fixtures to 2.04 across the final 23 – essentially automatic-promotion pace over half a season.

Losing Lorent Tolaj is significant, but Plymouth have reinvested, strengthened defensively and added Harvey White's creativity and dead-ball delivery.

Crucially, the improvement wasn't simply a finishing streak. Plymouth created 130 big chances against 101 conceded last season and finished with a positive shot balance.

We're being asked whether one of last season's strongest teams from November onwards can carry that performance into August. At 9/2 for promotion, I'm happy to find out.

Promotion: MK Dons (5/1)

Backing a newly-promoted side at 5/1 to go up again will make some uncomfortable. Historically, it should: only 8% of League Two promoted sides this century have immediately won another promotion.

MK Dons, though, aren't typical newcomers.

They have spent aggressively, possess substantial League One and Championship experience and employ a manager who has repeatedly solved this division. Paul Warne has four previous League One promotions on his CV.

Ryan Wintle, Dan Barlaser, Charlie Goode and Sam Nombe are not survival signings. This is recruitment designed to compete immediately.

The numbers support the ambition. MK created 128 big chances while allowing only 63 last season, producing their division's best big-chance ratio, while their 0.55 shot ratio was also among the strongest.

There are reservations. They dropped 23 points from winning positions and occasionally relied upon superior individuals rather than controlling matches. But the summer business should improve precisely that.

The average League Two promotee might not warrant a 5/1 promotion bet. MK Dons aren't being built like the average League Two promotee.

Relegation

There is an understandable temptation to attack the promoted clubs, yet only 16% of League Two promotees have gone straight back down this century.

Bromley are the obvious name at the head of the market. I'm far less convinced they should be treated as obvious relegation material. The jump is enormous and their reliance on physicality and dead balls must translate upwards, but there is a clear identity here.

Andy Woodman's side went unbeaten at home last season and scored 31 goals from set pieces. They know precisely what they are, which matters in a relegation fight.

The underlying numbers provide a warning – Bromley collected 87 points from an expected 68.6 – but they also generated more shots than they allowed and have recruited specifically for their existing style. They'll turn matches into scraps, load the penalty area from dead balls and make home fixtures thoroughly unpleasant.

The market sees a League Two club stepping beyond its natural level. I see enough organisation, continuity and specialist weapons to believe Bromley can make survival uncomfortable for their rivals.

Instead, I'm more interested in established League One clubs whose trajectories are pointing the wrong way. And with four clubs taking the plunge, it could pay to have a swing at a bigger price or two.

Relegation: Peterborough United (3/1)

For years Peterborough were synonymous with buying young attacking talent, developing it, selling it and finding the next one. That conveyor belt isn't functioning at the same level. Posh have finished 18th in consecutive seasons and another summer has brought important departures, including Kyrell Lisbie to Millwall.

More alarming is the defensive process. Peterborough conceded 14.3 shots per game last season, the second-most in League One, and allowed more big chances than anybody else. They conceded 68 goals despite an xGA figure of 75.7, suggesting things could easily have been worse. Historically, League One's worst defence has been relegated in 70% of seasons this century.

Luke Williams is a coach I respect, and Harry Leonard offers a genuine goal threat if retained. This isn't a prediction that Peterborough are doomed; it's a price argument.

Consecutive 18th-place finishes, important departures and some of the division's weakest defensive numbers make 3/1 worth taking seriously.

Relegation: Barnsley (4/1)

Barnsley's name carries considerably more weight than their recent trajectory. Their League One finishes have been fourth, sixth, 12th and 15th across the last four campaigns as part of a longer decline.

Daniel Stendel's return generates nostalgia and there is unquestionably young talent at Oakwell. But David McGoldrick, Davis Keillor-Dunn and Adam Phillips have departed, removing a substantial share of last season's attacking output.

That matters because the defence was already vulnerable. Barnsley conceded 2.39 big chances and 12.9 shots per game, while scoring 68 times from only 56.6 xG. An attack compensating for defensive problems has subsequently lost several of the players responsible for that finishing.

Stendel's high-intensity football could rejuvenate them and Patrick Kelly and Reyes Cleary provide upside. But relegation bets don't require certainty.

At 4/1, Barnsley's trajectory, defensive vulnerability and loss of established attacking production put them firmly into the conversation.

Top Goalscorer: Jake Beesley (33/1)

The Top Goalscorer market is naturally volatile, which makes me happier hunting at 33/1 and 80/1 than taking the obvious names at short prices.

Jake Beesley is probably the easiest of my three outsiders to envisage contending. He arrives at Bradford after eventually turning excellent underlying numbers into goals at Burton, but the attraction is the fit.

Bradford were the second-lowest scorers in last season's top half despite finishing fourth and regularly produced crossing opportunities without possessing the natural centre-forward to maximise them.

Beesley changes that. He's a genuine aerial target, gives Bradford somebody to hit directly and should thrive on the service Graham Alexander's side already produce. That's what I want from a big-priced goalscorer bet: not simply a good player, but one whose new environment could materially increase the chances he receives.

Top Goalscorer: Ben Knight (80/1)

Ben Knight is the price that interests me most. He was Cambridge's only double-figure scorer last season, hitting 11 in 35 during their promotion campaign, and also has penalty responsibility.

Cambridge are unfashionable, which helps explain the 80/1. They aren't expected to dominate League One, but Knight is their standout attacking talent and can both create for himself and contribute from the spot.

There is also a case for Cambridge being underestimated. Their promotion was founded on exceptional process: only 8.1 opposition shots per game alongside a 0.59 shot ratio and 0.66 big-chance ratio.

Cambridge don't need to challenge for promotion. We simply need them to outperform modest attacking expectations and their most dangerous player to claim a sizeable share of the goals. At 80/1, that's enough.

Recommend Bets:

- [Luton to be promoted \(11/4\)](#)
- [Plymouth to be promoted \(9/2\)](#)
- [MK Dons to be promoted \(5/1\)](#)
- [Peterborough to be relegated \(3/1\)](#)
- [Barnsley to be relegated \(4/1\)](#)
- [Jake Beesley top goalscorer \(33/1\)](#)
- [Ben Knight top goalscorer \(80/1\)](#)