

MARK O'HAIRE'S LEAGUE TWO PREVIEW

League Two 2026/27 Outright Preview

League Two has rarely been a division for the faint-hearted — and it has been an even less hospitable place for short-priced ante-post punters.

With 24 teams, 46 games and only two relegation places, the middle can become extremely congested. The financial differences between clubs are significant, but rarely enough to remove the division's inherent volatility.

A couple of inspired loans, an injury to a key striker or the right managerial appointment can quickly transform also-rans into promotion contenders.

The historical numbers underline the point. The average League Two champion this century has started at around 16/1, with 17 (65%) of the last 26 winners priced at 12/1 or larger and eight going off at 20/1+. Only Notts County in 2009/10 and Portsmouth in 2016/17 have justified favouritism by winning the division.

There is an important distinction between winning League Two and escaping it, though. Almost half of the favourites (or joint favourites) in the sample have ultimately been promoted. That is worth remembering when assessing this year's market leader.

Salford to win League Two (3/1)

History says taking a short price about the League Two favourite is dangerous, but Salford might have enough quality to buck the trend.

Last season's beaten play-off finalists have thrown considerable resources at ensuring there is no repeat. Macaulay Langstaff and Luke Molyneux are headline additions who would not look out of place a division higher, while Joe Powell, Elliott Bonds, Will Aimson and Will Norris further strengthen arguably the deepest squad in League Two.

Langstaff could be particularly significant. His spell at Millwall didn't work out, but his previous campaign at this level produced 28 goals in 46 appearances for Notts County. He joins a Salford side that ranked highly for shot volume last season despite scoring almost seven goals fewer than their expected-goals figure suggested.

The unknown is new manager Peter Cklamovski. His attacking, possession-based philosophy comes with defensive concerns and no previous experience of English lower-league football. Nevertheless, this is ultimately a bet on superior personnel.

At 3/1, I'm happy to back the best squad in the division to eventually prove it.

The dangers are headed by Grimsby and Bristol Rovers.

Grimsby's underlying figures were excellent last season: David Artell's team created more big chances than anybody and finished with one of the division's strongest shot and big-chance ratios. The obvious caveat is losing 24-goal top scorer Jaze Kabia to Leyton Orient, which removes their most explosive attacking outlet and adds risk to backing them at any price.

There is continuity elsewhere, though, after another progressive campaign under Artell. Historically, previous-season play-off sides also deserve respect: in nine of the last 10 seasons, at least one beaten play-off participant has returned to finish in the top six.

Bristol Rovers have a different attraction. Steve Evans transformed them late last season, winning 11 of their final 14 matches, and has subsequently built the sort of experienced, physical squad that tends to thrive at this level. The season-long numbers were less impressive, but Evans's promotion pedigree makes Rovers difficult to dismiss.

Oldham to be promoted (4/1)

Rather than chase another outright winner, Oldham at 4/1 for promotion makes plenty of appeal.

Micky Mellon's side finished 10th in their first season back in the EFL but improved significantly as the campaign developed. Their underlying numbers were encouraging too: Oldham collected fewer points than expected, posted a positive shot balance and created 110 big chances while conceding only 82.

More importantly, there is continuity. Mellon has six promotions on his CV, including two from League Two, and Oldham have retained the foundations of last season's competitive side while adding Ollie Norburn, Noah Chilvers, Elliott Nevitt and Keenan Appiah-Forson, plus Gus Scott-Morriss, who scored 17 National League goals from wing-back last term.

Their defensive record probably flatters them – only 44 conceded from around 58 xGA – but they were similarly wasteful offensively, scoring 60 from around 68 xG. Callum Kavanagh, a January deadline-day arrival who was previously close to double figures in a promotion-winning Bradford side, adds scope for over-performance up front.

Stable, well-coached clubs capable of incremental improvement have regularly prospered in this division. Oldham fit that profile nicely.

Accrington to be relegated (7/2)

Accrington have continually outperformed their resources, but fighting gravity gets harder every year.

Stanley operate on one of the division's smallest budgets and their underlying profile gives cause for concern. They created the second-fewest big chances per game last

season, with only 72 across the campaign compared with 102 conceded, while their defence performed better than the chances allowed suggested it should.

Cole Stockton is an interesting addition and could make a substantial difference, but plenty rests on him rediscovering his better goalscoring form.

There are warning signs that extend beyond the pitch, too: attendances have declined, owner Andy Holt has become less publicly prominent and the academy has been cut for financial reasons – notable for a club historically reliant on developing and selling players.

John Doolan deserves enormous credit for keeping Stanley competitive. This season's League Two looks stronger, though, and eventually those financial limitations may bite.

Northampton to be relegated (14/1)

Only two clubs drop out of League Two, so taking too many short prices in the relegation market holds limited appeal. Instead, it's well worth a look at the bigger prices on offer. There's historical justification for doing so: 10 of the last 12 completed League Two seasons have featured at least one relegated team priced at 9/1 or larger.

The speculative selection is Northampton at 14/1. This isn't an argument that the Cobblers possess one of League Two's two weakest squads. It's a price play on the possibility that last season's extraordinary collapse has left deeper scars than anticipated.

Northampton finished bottom of League One after winning only one of their final 26 matches and losing 11 straight to conclude the season. The process was similarly grim: they conceded more shots per game than anybody in the division and allowed the most big chances, posting the league's worst shot ratio.

Chris Hogg could prove an inspired appointment after working alongside Liam Manning, but this is his first senior managerial position and 17 players from last season's relegated squad remain.

At 14/1, relegation doesn't need to be the most likely outcome. With history showing that bigger-priced casualties regularly emerge, Northampton look precisely the type worth chancing.

Top Goalscorer: Kabongo Tshimanga (12/1)

Macaulay Langstaff is a perfectly fair Top Goalscorer favourite after scoring 28 goals during his last League Two campaign and joining the division's strongest squad. But 5/2 is simply too short in a market containing injury, rotation and transfer risk.

Kabongo Tshimanga at 12/1 makes far greater appeal. His January arrival transformed Barnet's attack last season. Tshimanga scored 12 league goals after joining from

Crawley – seven in his final eight appearances – and finished with 16 across the two clubs.

The environment is attractive. Barnet averaged more shots per game than anybody in League Two and produced the second-best shot ratio, while creating 123 big chances against 90 conceded. Dean Brennan wants his side on the front foot and Tshimanga is now their clear focal point. Given a full campaign, 20-plus goals is a realistic target.

Top Goalscorer: Max Watters (50/1)

For a bigger swing, Max Watters at 50/1 is worth a small interest.

His career has stalled since an explosive breakthrough at Crawley, where he scored 16 times in only 19 appearances, but much of his subsequent football has come at a higher level. He now drops back into League Two with Port Vale, whose failure in front of goal effectively relegated them last season: just 36 goals despite producing almost 50 xG.

Jon Brady has recruited Watters specifically to address that weakness and Vale possess enough midfield quality to supply him. For someone who has already demonstrated an ability to score at an exceptional rate at this level, 50/1 is worth chancing.

Recommended Bets

- [Salford City to win League Two \(3/1\)](#)
- [Oldham Athletic to be promoted \(4/1\)](#)
- [Accrington Stanley to be relegated \(7/2\)](#)
- [Northampton Town to be relegated \(14/1\)](#)
- [Kabongo Tshimanga to be top goalscorer \(12/1\)](#)
- [Max Watters to be top goalscorer \(50/1\)](#)