

Fleetwood Town took the Conference by storm last season, gaining automatic promotion after finishing with 103 points, narrowly missing the record of 105 set by Crawley Town the previous campaign.

The Fylde Coast side had a phenomenal year, racking up an impressive 29-game unbeaten run in the league, scoring more goals in the Conference than any of the Football League teams, and reaching the third round of the FA Cup for the first time in their history after giant-killing victories over Wycombe Wanderers and Yeovil Town.

A large part of Town's dominance of the Blue Square Bet Premier was striker Jamie Vardy, who became the league's top scorer with 31 goals.

The 25-year-old earned the Non-League Player of the Year award as well as a £1m switch to Championship side Leicester City.

The face behind Fleetwood's continued success belongs to chairman Andy Pilley, a local businessman and Blackpool supporter who took charge of the club in 2003.

Since then, Town have stormed to five promotions in seven seasons as the club have gone from strength to strength, both on and off the field.

Midfielder Nathan Pond is just one member of the Conference champions' squad ready to embark on his first ever season in the Football League.

Fondly nicknamed 'Pondy,' the 27-year-old has spent his entire career at Fleetwood, developing into a firm fans' favourite in the process.

Pond joined the club in March 2003 and made his debut at St Helen's Town in front of just 81 fans.

Since then he has played over 300 league games, experienced five promotions, and made a smooth transition from midfield into centre back.

A virtual ever present for Fleetwood last season, Pond forged an unlikely partnership with captain Steve McNulty in the heart of defence, and contributed largely to Town's success with a string of solid performances.

**LIZ OWEN** went to find out how Pondy is shaping up ahead of the League Two campaign...

### **How's pre-season going so far?**

- I think it's going alright, it's a lot of hard work but we've all been getting on with it together.

### **What's the mood in the Fleetwood camp like?**

- We're in a good, confident mood and we've got a lot of experience that's been brought in, so everyone's looking forward to the season really.

### **Is it more intense this pre-season compared to previous years?**

- I think there's a lot more quality on the training pitch when we're doing the ball-work, but fitness-wise it's similar really.

**What does it mean for you personally to represent the club you've spent your whole career at in the Football League?**

- I'm made up, it's a great achievement and hopefully I can hold a place down in the first team.

**Did you ever think it would happen when you first joined?**

- No, not at all. We were five or six leagues below the Football League and I wasn't really expecting it to happen so quickly.

**Last season you played in the more unfamiliar role of centre-back, how do you feel you've adapted to the role?**

- I've still got a lot to learn! I thought I adapted very well last season but this season's going to be a lot tougher than last season.

**Is the plan for you to continue in that role?**

- Yeah, as far as I know.

**What do you think you would have been if you weren't a footballer?**

- I don't know, I'm not too sure. Just a normal guy with a normal job probably!

**What do you make of Town's new signings?**

- Most of them are big-name players who have played at a very high level, they've looked good in training so hopefully they can keep it up when the season starts.

**What's Micky Mellon said ahead of the new season?**

- Not a lot yet – but we're second favourites to win the league, and he said that's a good thing and to get off to a good start.

**What are the club's aims for this season? Promotion?**

- Yeah, the club are really ambitious and every season we go for promotion. Even though it's our first season in the league we'll be trying to get out of it at the first chance.

**Do you think you'll manage it?**

- We've got a very good chance. As I mentioned, the bookies have got us as second favourites. You get more opportunities than the Conference; you've got three automatic places, then you've got the play-offs, so for a top seven finish you've got a great chance of getting out of the league.

**What fixture are you most looking forwards to?**

- I've got a friend who plays for Bradford, so Bradford away – the second game of the season. They get a good crowd as well and they're a former Premier League side so that should be a good game for us, a good test.

**Is he one of the players you're looking forwards to coming up against?**

- I don't really pay interest to what other players I'm playing against! Just my own team mates.

**For fans of League 2 clubs who want to know more about their new opponents, how would you describe Fleetwood, its players and its ambitions?**

- The players are a mixture of very young, hungry players and experienced players who have been brought in over the summer and the ambition of the club is there for all to see. They've had five promotions in seven or eight seasons, so we're a very ambitious club with a mixture of youth and experience at the moment.

# THE FLEET IS IN!

BUT NATHAN POND SAYS THE ODD ARMY WON'T BE BATTERED

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## YOU'VE SPENT YOUR WHOLE CAREER WITH THE CLUB – WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO NOW REPRESENT THEM IN THE FOOTBALL LEAGUE?

"I'm made up, it's a great achievement and hopefully I can hold a place down in the first team."

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## LAST SEASON YOU PLAYED IN THE MORE UNFAMILIAR ROLE OF CENTRE BACK. HOW DO YOU FEEL YOU'VE ADAPTED TO THE ROLE?

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## WHAT'S BOSS MICKY MELLON SAID AHEAD OF THE NEW SEASON?

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## WHAT'S THE CLUB'S AIM FOR THIS SEASON? PROMOTION?

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## DO YOU THINK YOU'LL MANAGE IT?

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## WHAT FIXTURE ARE YOU MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO?

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## ARE THERE ANY PLAYERS YOU'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO COMING UP AGAINST?

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