

= 1953 ? 54 Port Vale F.C. season =

The 1953 ? 54 season was Port Vale 's 42nd season of football in the Football League , and their fifth season overall in the Third Division North . Freddie Steele 's side were crowned Third Division North champions with 69 points out of a possible 92 , eleven points ahead of their nearest rivals . They also reached the semi @-@ finals of the FA Cup , and would be denied an appearance in the final due to a controversial goal from a dubious penalty . These achievements were based upon a record @-@ breaking ' Iron Curtain ' defence , and a solid squad of nineteen players , most of whom had taken the club to second in the league the previous season .

Seven still @-@ standing club records were set this season , including three Football League records . One Football League record was for the fewest Football League goals conceded in a 46 match season ? 26 , just over one every two games . Just five of these were conceded at home , another Football League record . This was based upon 30 clean sheets , again a Football League record . They also recorded a club record low of three league defeats , and a club record home clean sheet streak of eleven matches , lasting from 7 September 1953 to 13 February 1954 . Another club record was a streak of six away draws , lasting from 20 March to 26 April . They were undefeated at home all season , continuing a 42 match unbeaten run started on 8 November 1952 , that would last until 18 September 1954 .

The key players that formed the first eleven of 1953 ? 54 were : Ray King (goalkeeper) ; Reg Potts and Stan Turner (full @-@ backs) ; Tommy Cheadle , Albert Leake , Roy Sproson (half @-@ backs) ; Colin Askey , John Cunliffe , Ken Griffiths , Basil Hayward , and Albert Mullard (forwards) ; Derek Tomkinson (reserve forward) . Their achievements came as a team , without any outstanding stars , which caused The Sentinel to remark that the whole team were stars .

= = Pre @-@ season = =

The pre @-@ season saw no new signings as the young , mostly local squad that had finished second in the 1952 ? 53 campaign was enough for manager Freddie Steele . Steele signed a three @-@ year contract following his success the previous season . He considered signing Stoke City goalkeeper Dennis Herod , and the two parties held talks before he was instead sold to Stockport County for £ 500 . Alf Jones was given his first professional contract , whilst Selwyn Whalley (who was training to become teacher) , Harry Oliver and John Poole (both engineering apprentices) all were given part @-@ time professional contracts . Don Bould and Ron Fitzgerald returned from national service to become full @-@ time professionals . This gave the club a total of 21 full @-@ time professionals , six part @-@ time players and ten players aged 17 ? 21 who could only play and train if they could find time off from their compulsory two @-@ year national service . The strip was a traditional white shirt with black shorts , whilst the change kit of red and white stripes were donated by a friend of one of the club 's directors , who was a Sunderland supporter .

There was only one public pre @-@ season friendly on 13 August , which saw the club 's first team take on the reserves ; it ended with a surprise 4 ? 2 victory for the reserves , Roland Lewis scoring a hat @-@ trick . Pre @-@ season training consisted primarily of assistant manager Ken Fish leading a marathon running session from Burslem to Hanley and back to Burslem following a stop at a pub for a half @-@ pint of shandy . After returning to the ground Fish would organise a practise game . The fitness work was actually crucial to the team 's success , as Steele was ahead of his time in that he insisted that wide players should defend when the opposition were on the ball , in order to support the defence . Superstition was of great importance to Steele , who ensured that the team rigidly stuck their pre @-@ match rituals such as the intricacies of kit layout and the order in which players entered the pitch .

= = Third Division North = =

The season began with a 2 ? 1 win over Mansfield Town at Field Mill on 19 August ; Chris Marron put Mansfield ahead on 52 minutes , before Roy Sproson scored the equaliser on 69 minutes , Basil

Hayward scored the winning goal three minutes later after being the first to react to the rebound that came when Colin Askey 's shot hit the crossbar . The main surprise in the line @-@ up of the opening day was that goalkeeper Ray Hancock had been dropped in favour of Ray King after King impressed in the pre @-@ season friendly , the club 's positive season meant that Hancock was unable to win back his place in the side . Vale were then held to two consecutive goalless draws but remained unbeaten in their first seven league games , conceding just two goals . This run included a 3 ? 0 win over Darlington at Feethams , and a 4 ? 0 win over Barrow in which Hayward scored a hat @-@ trick . They had risen to the top of the table by the third game of the season and remained in first place until the end of the season . Of the Barrow first eleven that day three of the players were brothers : Jack , Alan and Bert Keen .

Vale lost by a single goal at Redheugh Park against Gateshead on 12 September ; Vale , playing in their change kit , were beaten by a 57th @-@ minute goal from John Ingham . This brought to an end the club 's then @-@ record streak of 16 games unbeaten . Four days later Vale recorded a 2 ? 1 win over Bradford Park Avenue at the Horsfall Stadium despite Reg Potts being injured with a swollen ankle early in the match . A 2 ? 0 home win over Workington on 19 September began a sequence of five clean sheets , with Jim Elsby standing in for Potts as Steele changed the starting line @-@ up for the first time in eight games ? this brought Potts ' run of 73 consecutive appearances to an end . The defensive fivesome of keeper Ray King , Tommy Cheadle , Reg Potts , Stan Turner and Roy Sproson began to be known as ' the Iron Curtain ' or ' the Steele Curtain ' (a play on the manager 's name) . A 21 September game against nearby unbeaten Crewe Alexandra was billed as a ' crunch clash ' between first and second , and a Sproson goal on 87 minutes won the match for the Vale . For the return a week later a stadium record 17 @,@ 883 packed into Gresty Road to witness a goalless draw at Crewe . The attendance figures were helped by the management team of the Crewe Works , who allowed their workforce to leave work an hour early in order to make it for the 5 : 10pm kick @-@ off . The draw was achieved despite injuries to Albert Leake , Hayward and John Cunliffe , who were replaced by Derek Tomkinson , Roland Lewis and Mick Hullivan .

On 3 October , Vale secured the biggest ever win at Vale Park when they beat York City 5 ? 0 . Seven days later Vale 's clean sheet streak came to an end , though they still secured a 2 ? 1 victory over Chesterfield at Saltergate ; Cyril Hatton was the scorer for Chesterfield , though it proved not enough to save his team 's unbeaten home record . Albert Mullard had a penalty kick saved towards the end of the game by goalkeeper Ron Powell , the only one of two penalties the club were awarded throughout the campaign . Vale then beat Tranmere Rovers 2 ? 0 after their defence successfully contained the threat posed by the division 's then @-@ top scorer Cyril Done . The following week they won 1 ? 0 at Halifax Town in a game where Ken Griffiths hit the woodwork three times .

On 7 November , Vale conceded twice in one game for the first time in the season , as Peel Park saw their Accrington Stanley side achieve a 2 ? 2 draw with the Vale . Vale lost a two @-@ goal lead in the match , as Ian Brydon scored after the ball got stuck in the mud and then Les Cocker scored the equalising goal after Ray King failed to hold on to a shot . By this time Vale were building a significant point advantage over the rest of the league . On 28 November , Ken Griffiths scored a hat @-@ trick as Vale ' tore apart ' a poor Rochdale side 6 ? 0 , exceeding the record Vale Park win that had been set only two months earlier .

Steele was investigated by a joint FA / Football League inquiry for his time as Mansfield Town manager in regard to suspected illegal payments ? found guilty , he was given a £ 250 fine (equivalent to around £ 6 @,@ 000 in 2014) . The good run of results continued though , as they beat fifth @-@ placed Barnsley 1 ? 0 at Oakwell through a Hayward goal . On Christmas Day and Boxing Day Vale recorded two 1 ? 0 wins over Chester , with Hayward again the only player to find the net . Captain Tommy Cheadle pulled a hamstring against Chester , and lost his place in the team as Steele moved the positions around to accommodate Derek Tomkinson in the team . Roland Lewis was made available on a free transfer in December , and moved to non @-@ league side Witton Albion .

The club were granted a licence to build a stand on the Railway Terrace at a cost of £ 25 @,@ 000

. Vale struggled in the league in early 1954 , losing 2 ? 1 to Hartlepool United in a fierce wind at Victoria Park . Cheadle was again absent through injury , as two goals from Tommy McGuigan ended Vale 's record run of 21 games unbeaten . Title rivals Gateshead then left Vale Park with a point after a goalless draw , ending the club 's record run of 12 consecutive home victories .

A shock came on 6 February , when Bill Shankly 's Workington earned a 2 ? 0 win at Borough Park ? the only time in the season Vale lost by more than one goal . Seven days later Scunthorpe & Lindsey United left Vale Park with a point as the home side came close to finding the net on numerous occasions without success despite one shot from Hayward partially injuring goalkeeper Norman Malan after he struck the ball hard into Malan 's jaw . Following this short run of poor form they next recorded a win against York City , securing a 1 ? 0 victory at Bootham Crescent . On 27 February , Chesterfield became the first away side to score at Vale Park since September , as they fought back from a two @-@ goal deficit to win a point . Vale had previously conceded just one goal in 20 home games over an 11 @-@ month period , and had last conceded twice in a home league game on 30 August 1952 .

On 6 March , Tranmere Rovers striker Bill Bainbridge put his side ahead at Prenton Park , but the Vale equalised within two minutes and went on to win the game 3 ? 1 . They beat Halifax 2 ? 0 the following week , with both goals coming in the last 14 minutes of the game . The trip to face Carlisle United at Brunton Park five days later saw six players sit out with injuries , leaving Hancock , Tomkinson , Len Barber , Elsby , Hulligan and Alan Bennett all to make rare appearances ; Ken Fish also took charge of the team as Freddie Steele was watching FA Cup opponents West Bromwich Albion . The game finished goalless , with both Hancock and " Cumbrians " goalkeeper Jimmy McLaren receiving praise for several excellent saves . Vale ended the month with a 1 ? 0 victory over Accrington Stanley despite Barber missing the second and last penalty the club would be awarded in the season .

Despite playing twelve games in thirty days throughout April they remained unbeaten . On 10 April they thrashed Stockport County 7 ? 0 in a ground record victory , with Hayward scoring a hat @-@ trick ? they were 6 ? 0 up after 36 minutes but then proceeded to play at ' a pleasant trot ' . The championship title was secured on 17 April at Spotland with a goalless draw with Rochdale . They conceded just two goals in their final seven league games .

Vale finished top of the table with 69 points , eleven clear of second @-@ placed Barnsley . Their 26 league goals conceded in a 46 games was a record . Just five of these were conceded at home , another Football League record . This was based upon 30 clean sheets , again a Football League record . Ray King kept 29 of these clean sheets , a record only equalled by Gillingham goalkeeper Jim Stannard in 1995 ? 96 . Vale 's tally of just three league defeats was a club record . They were undefeated at home all season , continuing a 42 match unbeaten run started on 8 November 1952 , that would last until 18 September 1954 . Their achievements was built on a settled squad of nineteen players , twelve of which played regularly . They were the first team to play 54 competitive games in a single season .

= = = Results = = =

Port Vale 's score comes first
Sourced from Statto .

= = = Final league table = = =