

= West Midlands (Regional) League =

The West Midlands (Regional) League is an English association football competition for semi-professional and amateur teams based in the West Midlands county , Shropshire , Herefordshire , Worcestershire and southern Staffordshire . It has three divisions , the highest of which is the Premier Division , which sits at step 6 of the National League System , or the tenth level of the overall English football league system .

The league was formed in 1889 as the Birmingham & District League to cater for teams in Birmingham and the surrounding area , but soon became established as one of the strongest leagues outside the Football League itself , with teams from as far afield as Bristol and Wales taking part . After the Second World War it absorbed the rival Birmingham Combination to become firmly established as the leading league in the area , but a gradual decline in its status began in the late 1950s and it now operates at a much lower level than in its heyday .

The league currently acts as a feeder to the Midland Football League Premier Division , to which one team is promoted to each season . Approximately fifty teams compete in the league each season , with new members regularly joining from a number of lower , more local leagues .

= = History = =

= = = Early years = = =

In the late 1880s , Birmingham and the surrounding region boasted many of the country 's strongest football teams . Six of the region 's leading clubs joined the first two national leagues set up in England , the Football League and the Football Alliance , but there were still many teams in the area keen to participate in league play . On 31 May 1889 a meeting took place at Birmingham 's Grand Hotel with the view to forming a Birmingham & District League . A total of 17 clubs were invited but only 13 attended , of which 12 were selected to form the new league , to commence play in the 1889 ? 90 season . The one club which sent a representative to the meeting but was not invited to take part in the league , for unknown reasons , was Worcester Rovers .

The 12 clubs competing in the league 's inaugural season were Aston Victoria , Great Bridge Unity , Hednesford Town , Ironbridge , Kidderminster Harriers , Kidderminster Olympic , Langley Green Victoria , Oldbury Town , Smethwick Carriage Works , Unity Gas Department , Wellington St George 's , and Willenhall Pickwick . Although Kidderminster Olympic topped the final table , no championship was awarded as a number of fixtures had not been completed . This situation was to be repeated in each of the subsequent two seasons , in both of which Brierley Hill Alliance , who had joined the league for its second season , topped the table but did not win the title . The early years of the league also saw new teams joining and existing ones dropping out almost every season , but once the league 's structure settled down , it came to be regarded as one of the strongest leagues outside the Football League itself , rivalled only by the Southern League and the Midland League .

Despite the league 's name , in the years prior to the First World War it came to include teams from as far afield as Bristol , Wrexham and Crewe , as well as including the reserve teams of local Football League clubs . A number of clubs which had enjoyed success in the Birmingham Combination also joined the league , which was seen as a step up to a better standard of football . The league 's large coverage area began to create problems in the 1930s , however , as many clubs found the long and costly journeys to away matches difficult , and began to drop out in favour of playing in leagues which covered smaller areas . In 1938 , Bangor City , Worcester City , Wellington Town and the reserve teams of Cardiff City and Wrexham all resigned from the league , reducing the numbers so much that instead of the usual format the organising committee decided to run two separate competitions each lasting for half of the 1938 ? 39 season , the first named the Keys Cup and the second the League Cup . By the time competitive football was abandoned in 1939 due to the outbreak of the Second World War , the rival Birmingham Combination , which had not chosen

to accept teams from such a wide area , had consolidated and come to be regarded as the region 's top league .

== Post @-@ war years ==

Although the league lost further clubs to the Combination , which was quicker to restart after the war , within a few years the League had regained its position of pre @-@ eminence in the region , increasing to almost twice its pre @-@ war size . During the 1952 ? 53 season the League 's committee proposed a merger of the two competitions , but the Combination rejected the idea , whereupon the Combination 's six best teams all resigned and joined the League . The Combination 's committee then attempted to re @-@ open the merger talks but , having just bolstered its ranks with six new members , the League was not interested . A year later , all of the Combination 's 14 remaining clubs , with the exception of West Bromwich Albion 's ' A ' (third) team , left to join the League , which effectively absorbed its former rival . The 40 member clubs were split into Northern and Southern divisions , which a year later were re @-@ arranged into Divisions One and Two , with promotion and relegation taking place between the two .

At the end of the 1957 ? 58 season , Burton Albion and Nuneaton Borough left to join an expanding Southern League , followed a year later by Hinckley Athletic . In an attempt to consolidate the league decided to expel all remaining reserve teams , reducing to a single division of 22 clubs . Four years later it changed its name to the West Midlands (Regional) League to more accurately reflect its catchment area , which now included very few teams from Birmingham or its immediate environs . For the 1965 ? 66 season the league was able to revert to a two @-@ division structure when it rebranded its existing single division the Premier Division and added a new Division One . By 1976 , a steady flow of teams joining from smaller regional leagues led to Division One being split into Divisions One (A) and One (B) , revised a year later to Divisions One and Two .

== Modern era ==

The Alliance Premier League was formed in 1979 , pushing the Regional League further down the English football league system . Successful Regional League clubs such as Bilston Town , Hednesford Town and Halesowen Town began applying to , and being accepted into , the Southern League , reducing the Regional League to the status of a feeder league , although their departures continued to be offset by a flow of new members from lower @-@ level leagues . Reflecting the demographics of the West Midlands area , a number of British Asian teams joined the league , including Sikh Hunters , England 's first ever all @-@ Sikh team . At the same time the catchment areas of the Regional League and the Midland Football Combination were increasingly converging , and by the early 1990s the standard of play and geographical coverage of the two competitions were considered to be almost identical . A new competition was formed in 1994 to cater for the best clubs previously split across the two leagues , and thus the Regional League lost ten of its member clubs to the new Midland Football Alliance , further reducing its own status .

The reduction in numbers forced the league to revert to a two @-@ division structure , but within two seasons numbers had grown again to the extent that Division One was split into Divisions One (North) and One (South) for the 1996 ? 97 season , a format retained until 2004 when the two Division Ones were re @-@ organised into Division One and Division Two . Although the league now operates at a level much below that which it occupied in its heyday it continues to survive and holds the distinction , jointly with the Northern League , of being the second oldest football league in existence , behind only the Football League itself .

== Structure ==

The league currently has no title sponsor . Previously it has been sponsored by Sport Italia , the Wolverhampton @-@ based Express & Star newspaper , and Black Country brewery Banks 's . In the 2014 ? 15 season , 55 teams are competing in the league , comprising 22 in the Premier

Division , 16 in Division One and 17 in Division Two . Some of the teams in the lower two divisions are reserve teams of clubs playing at a higher level . Each division is contested on a double round @-@ robin basis , with each team playing each of the other teams in the division once at home and once away . Three points are awarded for a win (increased from two with effect from the 1988 ? 89 season) , one for a draw and zero for a defeat . Goal difference is used to separate teams on the same points , having replaced goal average at the start of the 1978 ? 79 season .

Since the 1994 ? 95 season the Regional League , along with the Midland Football Combination , has served as one of the two official feeders to the Midland Football Alliance . The highest @-@ placed team which meets the Alliance 's entry requirements is promoted to the Alliance , and one or more teams may be relegated into the Regional League from the Alliance depending on the number of clubs remaining in each league . Prior to the 2006 ? 07 season , the league was defined as a step 7 league within the National League System , even though it fed into the Alliance , which is graded as step 5 . In 2006 the Regional League was re @-@ graded by the Football Association as a step 6 league . Teams in the top two divisions are eligible to take part in the FA Cup and FA Vase as long as their grounds meet the required standards .

Since the formation of the Midland Alliance , the Regional League has accepted applications for membership from successful teams in smaller local leagues within its catchment area . Leagues whose clubs have joined the Regional League include the Shropshire County League , the Herefordshire League , the Wolverhampton Combination , and the Kidderminster & District League . Several ambitious local Sunday league teams have also switched to Saturday play and entered the league . Bewdley Town , Bromyard Town and Ellesmere Rangers have all joined from county leagues since 1994 and subsequently gone on to gain promotion to the Premier Division . Regional League teams could also theoretically be relegated to the local leagues but in practice this almost never happens . The only teams in recent history to drop down to a county league have been Leominster Town , Kington Town and Hinton , who dropped down to the Herefordshire League in 2004 , 2006 and 2007 respectively , although all three clubs resigned voluntarily in favour of playing in a more local league as opposed to being relegated due to finishing at the bottom of the table .

= = Attendance = =

At one time the league attracted large crowds for matches , with 3 @,@ 000 spectators watching a match between Coventry City and Shrewsbury Town in 1899 . By the early 1960s , despite the league 's decline in status , Kidderminster Harriers were still able to attract crowds of around 1 @,@ 000 fans for home matches . In the modern era , however , crowds are much smaller . In the 1993 ? 94 season Rocester averaged around 100 fans for home games , and several of the team 's away matches drew crowds of less than 40 . Attendance figures are not currently published for league fixtures , however in the FA Vase in the 2005 ? 06 season home attendances for Regional League teams averaged around 50 , with only Wellington 's match against Alvechurch of the Midland Alliance drawing over 100 spectators .

= = Current member clubs 2015 ? 16 = =

The member clubs of the league for the 2015 ? 16 season are as follows :

= = = Premier Division = = =

= = League champions = =

= = = Birmingham & District League = = =

Initially the league consisted of a single division

Between 1915 and 1919 the competition was suspended due to the First World War .

Due to the number of teams having dropped dramatically , the 1938 ? 39 season consisted of two separate " half @-@ season " leagues . The Keys Cup was contested until Christmas and the League Cup for the remainder of the season .

The 1939 ? 40 season was abandoned due to the outbreak of the Second World War and the league did not resume operations until 1946 .

For the 1954 ? 55 season the league was split into two regional sections .

For the 1955 ? 56 season the league was re @-@ organised into Division One and Division Two .

The league reverted to a single @-@ division format for the 1960 ? 61 season .

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For the 1965 ? 66 season the league reverted to a two @-@ division format , now comprising the Premier Division and Division One .

For the 1976 ? 77 season Division One was split into ' A ' and ' B ' sections .

For the 1977 ? 78 season Division One (A) and Division One (B) were re @-@ organised into Division One and Division Two .

For the 1993 ? 94 season Division Two was discontinued .

For the 1996 ? 97 season Division One was split into two regional sections .

For the 2004 ? 05 season Division One (North) and Division One (South) were re @-@ organised back into Division One and Division Two .