

Supporters Q&A with Phil Brown and Steve Kavanagh - Transcript

By Robert Craven

Below is a transcript of the Question & Answer session held with Southend United Manager Phil Brown (PB) and Chief Executive Steve Kavanagh (SK), hosted by Shrimpers Trust Chairman Paul FitzGerald (PF) on Monday 2nd September 2013 at Roots Hall. Please note that some sensitive quotes have been removed as requested.

Q. How's it going Phil?

PB: *"First and foremost, thanks very much for the invite for coming along here. I think I met with Paul [FitzGerald] and the rest of the Shrimpers Trust about two months back at the end of last season which, for me, was a disappointing end, but the bottom line is it was all about planning and preparation for this season."*

"It is coming along nicely, but obviously, we are always going to talk about as managers, constraints - the transfer embargo, etc - but at the end of the day, it hasn't really affected me in a negative way. I think it's affected me, if anything, in a positive way because you've got to deal with 20 players and that's all there is to it. Now I suppose it's when the catalogue of injuries that you get as a manager during the course of the season, when they start mounting up, I think maybe you have to ask a certain question to the chairman and to Steve [Kavanagh, chief executive]: 'Can we move on the transfer window, etc., etc.?' and I think the answer will be yes, but the bottom line is I don't have a problem with the embargo."

"I don't have a problem with the fact that we're a fairly young team. I think from Saturday, and it's nice when opposite managers in Paul Cook, last weekend at Chesterfield, and we're talking about Wycombe's manager as well, Gareth Ainsworth, who are good, solid characters and good honest men in football, and they both are very complimentary. Now one of them sort of patronised me last week because I think he was ecstatic that they beat us in the 95th minute; this week I think it was a different kind of compliment; they praised our strength, they praised our quality, they praised our character. They said, quite simply, that we will be there at the end of the season and I firmly believe that and I think that, you've all my comments in the paper and you've all been to the games, we've just got to grow a little bit quicker at the moment than what we are."

"When it came out in the press at the weekend that we were 23 years old on average for the full 18 at the weekend, that in itself highlights what our slight issue is at the moment and our slight issue is defending set-pieces as I made reference to but we'll learn. I think when we add the likes of Phillips and the likes of Timlin to the starting eleven along with the 20-year-olds that we've got in the team: the Bentleys, the Thompsons, the Cliffords, the Leonards and the form of Freddy Eastwood at the moment, all of these things are slowly but surely...the season hasn't really started for me yet, we're only five games in and we'll get a good gauge after about ten or twelve games when we find out people's strengths and characters when you're playing when the weather conditions have changed and you're going into a different season; you're ten games in, your form is either hitting and you're in the team regularly or you're knocking at my door and asking why you're not and all of them questions will be answered early on in the season for me."

"At this moment in time, the simple answer is: I'm very happy; 1). With the fact I'm Southend United manager, 2). We're at the right end of the division and I think we'll be there at the end of the year and 3). With the backing that Steve alongside me and Ron will be giving me this season."

Q. Are you aware that the last two times we've gone up from this division we've then gone straight up again?

PB: *"We'll get the first year out of the way first! I honestly believe that, and Steve's been at a successful club as well, once you start something moving forward, it's very, very difficult to stop it. When you've got people thinking in the right way, in the right manner, acting in the right way, acting in the right manner, once that starts moving forward, it takes a hell of a lot to stop it."*

"You do get thunderbolts and you do get shocks to your system. When I talk about a thunderbolt, I'm talking about a Bill Beswick terminology; Bill Beswick was the psychologist that helped Steve McLaren when he was with England. He talks about thunderbolts where you get real shocks to your system during the course of a season, but once a system is in place... I've just been talking to Paul about the training ground. People are now looking forward to coming into work because the environment's right. People now are looking to want to get out there and train and improve and work hard"

and when you've got that, and the results follow, and the results keep on following, the confidence goes the right way and then the whole thing starts spiralling upwards.

"I really felt, and I'm not here to berate or slag anyone off with regards to last season, but I really felt the training ground and the environment was conducive to losing. It was a funny mentality that had good players, we all had good players last year, and yet they were just doing enough. You can't be in football just doing enough, you've got to be in football, at full tilt, every day so that when it comes to a Saturday, you cross the white line and you can play at full tilt. And then, when you've got a group of players like that, the opposition will struggle.

"Where Paul was concerned, Paul was a poorly man; Graham Coughlan was running the show when I arrived at the club. Paul was probably at the training ground for an hour a day if that, some days he wasn't there and this game of management is 24/7. It is 100% of your time. You've got to be able to be on the end of a phone at 3 o'clock in the morning for an emergency to make sure that those thunderbolts don't stop the wagon from moving forward. That's the most important part.

"This thing is moving now, but it's a small movement. When the season kicks on and then we get further down the line we will get results that will be a shock to the system but, if everything's in place, then we'll be able to deal with it better. When I first arrived, I don't think we were ready for that. Now I'm here, now the training ground's in the right environment, it's the right place to come into now, the youth policy at the club has always been a success story and long may that continue, the whole environment in terms of the working people that come to the club on a daily basis, people that have been working here for years and years, I'm getting positive comments from them which is music to my ears because it's not just about the players, it's about the whole place, the whole package, whether it be someone who makes sandwiches, someone who makes coffee, somebody who comes to support and they get the right kind of service and they come back with that positive mentality, they come the following week and they're ready to get off their seat and support the team, then the players appreciate that and you'll see the end product then because you'll see a better performance on the field of play.

"For me it's moving forward, just slowly at the moment but, once it gathers momentum, it'll take some stopping. If, God willing, we do have success this year, I ain't stopping, I want to keep moving forward."

Q. I wrote you a letter and you called me up at quarter-to-nine in the morning...

PB: "It's just what I am as a person. I think I will come-and-go, Steve will come-and-go, the chairman will come-and-go, we are transient, we are the ones who move on, whereas the one constant in any football club is the supporters and, if you can't get up at 9 o'clock in the morning and pay that respect, then I'm a bad manager as far as I'm concerned.

"You have the right to write to me, you have the right to complain, you put your bums on the seats, you support the club, you pay your dues and therefore you have an opinion. I've been taught along the way by numerous old managers that don't have that opinion; now I disagree with that. I think a supporter has the right to ask a question, and if he doesn't like the answer, that's a different argument but you do have the right to ask a question and, if I haven't got the time to give you an answer, then I'm a bad man. That won't be the case. Whenever somebody writes to me or phones me up, they'll get my time, that's for sure."

Q. Could you tell us what the position is with Michael Timlin?

PB: "It's very difficult for me to get on first base with Tims because I've not seen him play. I have as the opposition's manager, but as the manager of the football club, I've got people at the club who's opinion is that he's a good footballer, we had a 14-game run last year where he was part-and-parcel, he was the engine-room, he was a driving force, he was a spokesman, he was vocal on the pitch, plus all of the football side of things, and I've always thought Tims was a very good character.

"If you'd've said to me when I first walked into that changing room and there were 26 bodies in that changing room, one of these is going to go to jail in the summer, Michael Timlin would've been the 26th out of the 26 that I'd've guessed. I couldn't've believed that Tims had done what he'd done. He's served his due, he's done his time and he's in the camp again.

"Steve had to go to the governor at Chelmsford Prison to try and get day release for us to get him onto the training ground. At first we were going to get Ben Clarkson to go and do physiotherapy work - have you been into Chelmsford Prison? It's got an Astroturf, an omniturf, second-to-none, Premier League standard, it's got an indoor gym, the facilities are there, but if you haven't got a coach or a physio on hand day-in, day-out to make sure Michael's doing his work, then he's 23 hours in his cell and you're doing press-ups, sit-ups, you're going to come out with a washboard of a stomach but you're still not playing football. His fitness levels went backwards.

"Tims is a driven person individually; he dislocated his shoulder and he came back in record time. The physio and the surgeon have said, at this moment in time, he is two months ahead of schedule with regards to the broken leg, but he's a driven individual. He's one of those who comes in at 8.30 in the morning and he's straight in the gym, straight with the physio, he does his work there, he comes on the ground, he does his work on the grass, goes back in the gym; he doesn't leave the place 'til 4.30. He is the type of person you want around, but I still had the opinion that he was playing catch-up. He was probably trying to tell me 'I'm ready, I'm ready' and we had a couple of games behind closed doors, one against a college, we beat them 12-0 and it wasn't really a test, but then we played Dagenham & Redbridge the following week and it was 3-1 and 'm thinking he's not far off, he's just short."

Q. Do we need to change the way we deal with officials?

PB: *"I had that meeting this morning with my backroom staff saying that we need to back off. The pressure that the referees are under to start off with is immense; at the end of the day there are three teams that go out there on a Saturday and we have to respect that, and I've said that to my backroom staff and myself. I've got to take myself away from that below the line mentality; when I'm performing to the best of my ability I've got a 9 and a 10 in my head, when I'm performing below the line, what I call below a 5, it's something that's took me there."*

"Now it could be the opposition's manager: Paul Cook, he deliberately tried to upset the floor of our team, we were playing well and he thought, 'I've got to do something here,' and he's a divisive kind of guy, he's always thinking, 'How can I get an edge? How can I stop their team from playing? Right, we'll upset the bench.' The focus then comes off the field of play onto the bench and now you've lost your play, you've lost your way forward. At Chesterfield we were solid, we deserved to get something from the game, in fact in the last 20 minutes there was only one team that looked like they were going to win the game, but I decided at that moment in time to detach myself from Paul Cook and that's what I've got to do where referees are concerned. We are going to get bad decisions."

"We've got to keep our focus and our mentality. If I put myself in Ryan Leonard's shoes, who's a 20-year-old boy, he's looked to the sidelines, his manager has lost the plot, the arguments on the sidelines are between the two dugouts or with the fourth official, his focus and attention needs to be on the field of play. We don't need to be a distraction, we need to be a help to these young boys."

Q. Are you looking at changing the way you defend set-pieces?

PB: *"It's a good question. There's arguments for and against zonal marking vs. man-to-man. I've always, as a coach, gone man-to-man at corners because there's no offside so you're in the face of the opposition, but when it comes to a wide free-kick, depending on how high or deep or as up the field of play it is, there's a cut-off point where I go, 'This is a zone' because you now have to utilise that space between the back four, or the back zone, and the goalkeeper."*

"If I've analysed the first goal a million times (on Saturday), I believe my goalkeeper was probably too deep and we spoke about that at length. He's a big Jussi Jaaskelainen fan is Dan Bentley, he wants to go and see him work at West Ham and, with my contacts at West Ham, he will do that, but what Sam Allardyce used to do was he was a big believer in your presence on the field of play. Now Sam was never an elegant footballer by any stretch of the imagination, but what he knew he had, he had a 6 foot 4 frame and that was a giant of a man. 6 foot 4 in them days was a big lad, 6 foot 4 now is one of two or three on a field of play on each side."

"Now when you've got a 6 foot 4 goalkeeper, who's in white, if he makes himself more of a visual presence to the guy who's taking the free-kick, that for me is the moment that that guy who's taking the free-kick now bends it away from the goal, he doesn't bend it towards the far post as you've seen many, many goals that have gone past everybody and just gone in at the far post. Now all of a sudden he's pulling it away from the goalkeeper because that presence is visual to him first and foremost."

"All I've said to Dan Bentley, it's a learning curve for him; he's been watched by England on Saturday, this kid's got a great future, but it's those small details that'll make him a better goalkeeper, make us a better back four unit, it'll prevent us from conceding goals."

"He's going to have to stand up to that [pressure], that's life. You can't get away from the fact that he's 20. He's 20, but he's still 6 foot 4, he's a big frame, so what I'm trying to say is he's got to utilise what he is and what he has, and that's a big frame in all white. I can't believe 'keepers are allowed to wear all white. If that's not a presence visually then he's doing something wrong. All Sam used to say to Jaaskelainen was 'Stand four yards off your line.'"

[PB then gave a physical demonstration about the benefit of standing four yards off of the line]

"I've probably said too much about set-pieces because I'm attracting the attention of the media, but until this goes away, which it will do, we're going to have to be on our mettle. Again, a 20-year-old boy, does he know what mettle is? They don't do, they? They don't know what mettle is.

"I'll never forget Billy Hayes, God rest his soul, a fantastic guy. I was making my debut for Hartlepool United, 1978, against Peterborough, we won 2-1 and I played alongside Billy Hayes, and then we went to Hereford the following day. We were 1-1 in the 89th minute and I'm in the wall, I'm playing centre-half alongside Billy Hayes, but I was big enough to be in the wall, so I'm standing on the edge of the wall and Hayesy's screaming at me 'Set-piece, set-piece!' I haven't got a clue what a set-piece is, I didn't know what a set-piece was, it was 35 years ago, I'm standing on the edge of the wall and the ball was just rolled down the side, bang! We got beat 2-1, he grabbed hold of me and I was a player who had lost the game because I didn't know what a set-piece was, and I certainly knew what a set-piece was after that!

"But these are learning curves. I'll never forget that, it was 1978, I'll never forget that, and that happens to you. These kids will learn. These kids will find out...certainly what a set-piece is! We're going to go through highs and lows. When we've got an average age of a squad as low as what it is, we can blame whatever, we can say we should be spending millions on this, that and the other. That's what we are at the moment and 'm happy with it. I'm happy with these kids; these kids are going to make this club a lot of money.

Q. How good are the kids?

PB: *"I don't want to put any more pressure on them; I've already said Dan Bentley will play for England and probably I'm getting too excited but I rate them. You saw the best of Lenny, Lenny's coming, slowly but surely, that was his best performance on Saturday and we want to compound that. What do you mean by that? The next game's got to be as good, if not better, so now all of a sudden you've started your career and it's off and running. You don't want to go Wycombe away, then the next game you go down the dip, you need a consistency and the young boys don't know what that means yet. They've got to get a season under a belt, then a career it just follows on but to get to 25, 26 you've got to have played.*

"By the time I was 25, I started at 18, I'd gone 44, 44, 46, 46, 44 and then I had a fall-out with the chairman and got the sack! But these things happen. They don't know what a career means yet. They don't know what it's about yet, but they will. They will improve, no doubt about it with good seniors around them these lads'll improve. I don't know how far they will go, have no idea yet.

Q. Do they need keeping on the straight and narrow?

PB: *"Bentley? Not really. He's not ugly enough yet and what I mean by that is the scars of war, the scars of battle; he hasn't got any yet, really. I'm asking players to put their head in in the six-yard box to get scars to stop goals from going in but Dan hasn't. He over-shot the runway if you remember against Chesterfield in the first few minutes when he came out to the byeline on the right-hand side and the kid went round him but Thompson actually got back and the lad fluffed his lines and it went out for a goal-kick. People forget that, but I don't because that is a possibility.*

"Young kids will do that, but you've got to be there as a father, you've got to be there as a coach, you've got to be there as a group of supporters and give these kids time. If I drop a clanger, I expect you to come and whack me, I expect to get some stick, but that's life, I'm big enough and I'm ugly enough. These kids are not; they haven't got any scars of war yet, but let's get a couple of seasons under their belt and then see where it takes us."

Q. We never seem to capitalise on attacking set-pieces...

PB: *"It's an interesting point because if I go back to my time as an assistant manager at Bolton Wanderers with Sam, Sam was always responsible for defensive set-pieces and I was always responsible for attacking set-pieces and we went something like 16 consecutive goals at Bolton Wanderers and every one of them was a set-piece. Does that mean I'm doing my job right? Does that mean I'm doing my job better than Sam? No, it doesn't, it's the personnel.*

"In the 17th game, or the 17th time we were playing, we were playing West Bromwich Albion on Boxing Day and Kevin Davies played up front for us, number 9. We played 4-3-3 and he was down the middle. We have a flair 7, we had a flair 11, we had three players in central midfield: Kevin Nolan, Jay-Jay Okocha and Gary Speed. They gave us something different each one of them, but we had 16 goals consecutive set-pieces and what was that down to? Kevin Davies; the personnel.

He got injured probably two or three minutes before half-time in the West Bromwich Albion game, it was 0-0 and Sam said to me, 'I'm going to put Henrik Pedersen down the middle for the second half.' So I had to sell my idea to him. I said, 'Put El Hadj Diouf down the middle.' And he went 'Number 9. Nah,' and that he thought that the number 9 was always big, strong, bold and took the hits, as Sam used to play the game, he was the one hitting the number 9, so the number 9

was always a big, strong lad. So I quoted the 16 consecutive goals; Sam didn't know that, so when you back your argument up with facts and figures... I said '16 consecutive goals from set-pieces,' he thought about it, we had 3, 4 minutes before half-time, then he had half-time to think about it. My sales pitch worked; he didn't put Henrik Pedersen, he left him on the bench, he put El Hadj Diouf down the middle. We scored the next 17 goals, not one of them a set-piece because we changed the personnel and the qualities of that personnel.

"Do I want to score goals from set-pieces? Of course I do. Do I want to score goals from outfield play through fluent football and 25 passes and put the ball in the back of the net? Of course I do. Do I want both? Absolutely. That's what I'm after; I'm after a fine balance, a fine blend. Now we can nail it, ten games in, you still haven't scored a goal from a set-piece yet we're top of the League, we've won every game with open play and good football. Do you have an argument? No, you have a point, but I'm just trying to put my opinion across. We'd all like to win games of football 3-, 4- and 5-0 and we'd all like to score wonderful goals and probably all like to play the Arsenal way to a certain extent but it's all about winning; how you win doesn't matter does it, really? It doesn't matter how we score the goals, it just matters that we score goals.

Do you know the goal [on Saturday] came from a set-piece, and it's the second phase of a set-piece? John White, halfway line, puts the ball into their box, headed clear, comes back to John White, he then goes pass, pass, three, four passes, Lenny gets a driving run, and we talk about the fitness levels at the club but Lenny's one of the surprising ones. Lenny's one of the quickest ones at the football club, but you don't get to see it in the position that he's in, but he drove past their midfield like they weren't there and the next guy he's facing up to was Doherty and he's actually slipped the ball when Doherty's coming out his slot, he's slipped the ball past him and it's a great finish from Freddy.

Q. Are you happy with the size of the squad? Have you got the players to fill in?

PB: "The analysis of what the chairman asked me to come in for and the feedback I was giving to him was it's not the fact that's it's the size of the squad - when I got here the size of the squad was massive; I must've had 27, 28 players at Wembley on the day where everybody wants to play - but for me 20 is not a problem until suspensions and injuries kick in as I made reference to at the start.

"If you've got 20 that are competing for places, plus you've got Cauley Woodrow, who's put pen to paper today for a youth loan, so that's another 18-year-old boy in the camp. They give you legs, they do give you energy but the quality of this kid, you know; I think he got transferred to Fulham from Luton for £250,000 or something as a 15-year-old kid and he looks like he's got good habits, he looks like he knows where the back of the net is, so that'll be another good addition.

"The injury to Laird was a bad injury for me because I think the boy was playing some good football and I think we missed him in the next game for sure in terms of the creativity of our game. Bennett was another massive shock because this kid could play centre-half, he could play left-back, he could play in front as well and we could've changed the system to three centre-backs, nice balance on his left foot, big, strong individual, so that's going to be a major setback and we've been asking the Football League if they'll take a little bit of pressure off the 20-man embargo but we're not getting anywhere with that.

"We're at 20, we're at 19 actually, but it's not so much a deadline today as a week respite and then hopefully, if you do OK injury-wise, suspension-wise, then when the transfer window opens again you can do a bit of business.

"The amount of players that are available at this time; Steve just said they're all getting paid up now so that they're free to move in the transfer window and there's hundreds of them about. The one thing I'd say about the chairman and the chief executive is they allowed me to bring in a chief scout. I know the chairman makes reference to the fact that Paul was collecting players to a certain extent and I know what Paul had been thinking; 'Well, I brought him in and he's not good enough so I'll go for the next one,' and before you know it you've got a group of players who you think are not good enough but you're having to use because they're there as opposed to Bob Shaw, who has 16 or 17 years' at every level of football and he's got a fantastic record. We were talking about bringing Negrado into Hull City and look where he is now, we were talking about Soldado; it's not rocket science now but it was then because these players weren't ready but we were talking about bringing them to English football then.

"He's got a great record and he's got a history of it as well; he can bring filing systems and all the records from the last 15, 16, 17 years and he can also do this level because he's done Under-21s. He spotted Cauley Woodrow three, four years ago. I went to Man City vs. Fulham Under-21s looking at a kid that was playing central midfield for Fulham. We got told we could get him out, a German lad, and I'd watched the first half and I thought he's not good enough and I was ready to leave but the one that catches my eye all the time is the striker, so I get back to work on the Monday and Bob's come in on the Monday - he lives in the north, Bob, so he comes in once or twice a week - and he came in on the Monday and he just said, 'What was the game like? What was the midfield player like?' 'No.' He said, 'What about Cauley

Woodrow?' and straight away I knew that he knew that this player's going to have a career. They way that starts, he's not going to be in Fulham's first-team at the moment, so if we can get the benefit, like we did with Britt Assombalonga, and I'm not saying he's the same as Britt Assombalonga by any stretch of the imagination, he's an 18-year-old boy that's got to come in here and try and hold down a place first and foremost so I don't want to put too much pressure on this kid, but he has got a career ahead of him.

"That's the one thing I'd say; not bringing me into the club, not bringing Dave Penney into the club, not bringing Graham Coughlan back, it's getting the recruitment policy right at the club. I think that's the most important part of our future."

Q. What about the other lad from Watford?

PB: *"He's still about, he's only a 17/18-year-old lad but, my word, if he walked in here you wouldn't be able to get in the lift. He's a very big unit. We've got time. The 20-man embargo, obviously we've got injuries and stuff like that; when we think it's right to get a striker in we'll go for the striker. There were certain things about the lad at Watford, he just wasn't ready, he was 2, 3 weeks down the line."*

Q. How's Barry Corr's fitness?

PB: *"Barry, by his own definition, isn't 100% yet because he had a little bit of a stop-start pre-season and he needs managing. He's a big unit with not a great history of good knees, so he needs managing on a day-to-day basis. He came in on Thursday last week and just said, 'I can't train,' and I have a policy at the football club that if you don't train on Thursday when I'm doing 11v11, then you're not going to be involved on Saturday, so Barry tried to come out, but I thought it wasn't right, I've got to ease my policy on a Thursday, so I didn't do my 11v11 on Thursday, I did it on a Friday and Barry came out, so I picked my team on Friday and we played on Saturday. If I could get the policy stringently in place for a Thursday, 11v11 so the players know what they're doing Friday, so come Saturday they're well-versed, I'd go with that but obviously there's certain dispensation for certain ones but Barry's in that special dispensation."*

"Freddy is as well, to be fair. I went in this morning and I grabbed hold of him straight away. He's got a big smile on his face as you can well imagine, he's a big character, as you can well imagine and we have some feisty conversations, as you can well imagine! He had acupuncture in his thigh and I just said, 'Tell me I don't have to go out and get a striker, because it's deadline day,' and he said, 'I'll be on the training ground tomorrow morning. Full stop.' Because he's just so desperate to get out there and he's in a rich vein of form. Our challenge is to make sure that he stays in this rich vein of form; he's a better player than the Second Division by a long way but he is what he is. He's had his moves and he's done what he's done and he's come back to where he started and everyone knows about the Freddy Eastwood story. You've just got to try and understand these people, no matter who they are, they're in your changing room, you try and understand them and I think we understand each other at the moment."

Q. What happened to Jonathan Forte?

PB: *"We tried to get Jonathan in the camp but he was on a very good contract at Southampton and his business was to try and get paid up at Southampton, our business was to get a deal on the table at this end. Steve negotiated a deal at this end and we were happy with what we offered him and he was happy with what we offered him but he still hasn't been paid up at Southampton so it's a non-starter."*

"Apart from anything else, I want people to come here with a little bit of hunger and a little bit of desire to play for Southend and when you've just had a monster pay-off, then sometimes you don't come with that desire so we decided to move on. He was a big Kevan Hurst friend - I think he was best man at his wedding - and we were getting the right vibes from Hurst but we weren't necessarily getting the right vibes from other people so we decided to move on."

Q. Have you got the characters there if we have a bad spell?

PB: *"I think that's one of the main reasons why, when I was asked about my backroom staff, I was so adamant that I wanted Dave Penney and I wanted Graham Coughlan in particular. The reason I'm saying in particular is because what a sterling job he did last year without too much knowledge, without too much outside information of what he was doing on a day-to-day basis."*

"When I came into the football club he was absolutely delighted that he could just hand over all the pressure because I think he's a coach. I personally think Graham's a coach having been the assistant manager and he actually ran the training ground, he was under immense pressure. But I think he's got a great relationship with these young lads and he's not a development coach, he's first-team coach but I've had development coaches that are sitting on their backside drinking coffee with the manager in the afternoon and I'm looking at the grass outside and there's nobody out there. These kids are out there on a day-to-day basis; they're getting educated, they're getting training, they're getting strength and conditioning, they're getting fitness levels like they've never known, Jack Payne being a great example of that."

“He’s probably, pound-for-pound, one of the strongest boys in the camp, yet for a lad who’s 5 foot he’s phenomenal. He’s got kicked out of Tottenham because he was too small and then you think, I always go back to my learning curve; when you’ve got a kid that size, or when you’ve got a player that size they have to have one thing absolutely exceptional, different from anybody else and the one thing he’s got is, when you lift that shirt up, he’s got the biggest heart you’ll ever see and this is a kid that’s got a great chance.”

“He’s paired up with Cauley Woodrow today because they both left Tottenham together and we were putting pen to paper around about 4.30 this afternoon so they were both at the training ground, just playing pool and table tennis and then I went outside and I’d noticed that they’d both got chairs from the canteen that we’ve got at the training ground now and put them outside and they were watching the young boys train. That for me is what the game is all about; that for me is a passion and desire that will keep them in the game of football until they’re 34, 35, 36 and then they’ll probably be coaches.”

“There’s not enough of that about at the moment, and you’re talking about character. I’m looking at the senior players; I’m looking at John White, Mark Phillips, Luke Prosser to a certain extent now, Michael Timlin, Freddy Eastwood, Barry Corr, it doesn’t matter what positions they are, it’s what they actually bring in terms of mentality and, yes, you will all have your favourites and, yes, you will all think, ‘He’s wrong on him, there,’ but together, at this moment in time the group is so collectively together that if you kick one of us, we all feel it.”

“Now they’re young and naive, and they can’t get the referee on our side because they don’t know how to yet, but when they go into a tackle they are committed to the cause. You can’t ask any more then, can you? I’d like to get a Phil Brown in there, because I know what I could bring to the party, I’d like to get a Dave Penney in there because I knew what he brought to the party as a player, I’d like to get a Graham Coughlan in there who still thinks he can play, but we’re in there, and they’re getting the benefit of that, but we haven’t got that voice yet across the line, so when you take Thommo out because he’s with the Under-21s and bring Phillips back in, and when you look at the match reports that we done on Phillo in the first three games, what a partnership them two were forming, Phillips and Prosser, it reminded me of the days when I was at Hull City and we had a back four: Boaz Myhill in goal, Sam Ricketts, Michael Turner, Wayne Brown and Andy Dawson, that was the back four 44 games out of 46. That’s phenomenal when you think about it because of suspensions and injuries and loss of form and this that and the other, and that’s the kind of luck we need this year to try and keep our seniors in play.”

“Mark Phillips is in the last year of his contract, that’s the point to prove, that’s the commitment that we need, that’s the one that you go, ‘Go on then, get another year by being in there game-in, game-out.’ He’s been out for two games and we’ve lost both games; what does that tell you? Mark Phillips is a big player this year, regardless of whether we can keep him in there or not keep him in there, he’s going to be a big player for us, but he’s in the last year of his contract and I’m hoping that’s the point he needs to prove that he’s good enough to play another season, hopefully in the First Division. Character-wise, I’d like one more, and it’d be an experienced one as opposed to a young one, but they don’t fall off trees these guys.”

Q. Any news on the stadium?

SK: *“No. We’re working hard on, Ron is working hard on it and we move ever closer and, hopefully, shortly we’ll have some good news.”*

Q. Not a lot of mention is made of the youngsters’ European Tours on the website or in the programme. It’d be nice to have some good news...

SK: *“Since I’ve come in with worked with the youth, and the youth is an important part of this club. I certainly believe in the youth department; it’s a way to evolve. I know Phil’s made comments about the number of players in a period of time he wants to see coming through the youth. We’ve got youth players now coming through into the first team. Saturday we have designated as Youth Day; that’s Youth Academy Day because we want people who are in the crowd to understand what our youth team is about and, to follow through what you’re saying, we want to raise their profile, we want to give you ownership of those players so that when you see the youth teams parading around the pitch on Saturday, give them a round of applause and actually, when I’ve done this before at a club, what struck me when we did this was the number of people out there, and hopefully you’ll see that. The number of kids that are there and involved with this club, all with their tracksuits, proudly representing Southend United.*”

“We are raising the profile of what the youth do. Tom [Biggs, Southend United Media Manager] on Blues Player is now going to be putting youth games on there, youth clips on there and hopefully he’ll take the point about the tours and getting feedback on those tours. It’s not always easy to get full match reports. We value the youth; it costs a lot of money to run the youth department, I’m not going to hide from that, but it’s an important part of the club and it’s important that the fans recognise that because to me, when you see Dan Bentley in goal, I think as a Southend United fan, you’ve got

that little touch more pride in that player because you know where he's come from and he's yours and that's vital to a club because that really helps build a future generation of players and support."

PF: "The largest amount of donations that we make a Trust is to the youth department and, by belonging to the Trust, you would be contributing to the future so, if there are any non-Trust members out there, this is just a very small sales pitch, please join up because your money will be well used, it will go largely towards the youth."

SK: "It costs, net of grants we get, over a quarter-of-a-million pounds to run and we talk about the financial difficulties this club has, that's an important investment in the future. And the way we improve the youth, we give them more tours and exposure, and one of the problems we have is that we're Category Three of this Elite Player Performance Plan. If anyone's looked into that, it's complex, and what it means is it's downgraded the quality we can play week-in, week-out which is why we send more tours overseas because they are playing against the AC Milans and different clubs and getting that level of quality opposition which also helps in terms of recruitment of a player."

"What the Academy needs is funding, and the Blues Lottery is out there. We've re-launched the Blues Lottery and on Saturday you'll see lots about the Blues Lottery, we've got an independent chairman in charge of the Blues Lottery, it is completely ring-fenced so I can't get my hands on the money out of the Lottery unless two people, who don't work for the club, agree with it. What I would say to people is to support the youth, please get involved with the Blues Lottery, you can win money, there's money prizes now and there are other prizes, but that support and that dedication of actually helping us do that is what will create the players of the future and then not only can you sit there and look at Dan Bentley and say Dan's one of ours, you can actually say I helped fund that kid through and that is vital to the future of the club."

Q. Do you find it difficult without regular reserve team football?

PB: "I don't think we do with the fact that we're now trying to keep up to speed with the Under 21 Leagues and we've already arranged 9, possibly 10, behind closed doors either at our training ground or training grounds in the area where we can control the environment. It's more beneficial."

"I know the old old-fashioned way was how the kids can progress through the kids and then through the reserves and into the first team; I've got that first team squad that I'm watching what they're doing on a daily basis and then we play Oxford United tomorrow at 1 o'clock at their training ground where 9 of the kids will play; we'll have Chambers in goal, Auger right-back, Tatham centre-half, Banton, Mitch Pinnock, Jack Payne, Michael Timlin will play, Kevan Hurst will play, Seedy Njie, so the kids are getting exposed to 1). first team football on a daily basis, 2). you're not in the first team you'll be playing in these Under 21 games so the likes of Michael Timlin playing alongside Jack Payne is important to us, we can put trialists in there without any fear of reprisals, so it's probably more beneficial that there isn't a reserves at the moment, and I never would've thought that maybe 10, 15 years ago but that's a fact now."

"I think the kids have still got a line through. If they can see a route through to the first team, and my word they can see it now can't they, when we're talking about the youth side in the first team at the moment and ones that are on the periphery, they've got a way forward, they've got access to us on a daily basis."

Q. What is it about Southend that appealed to you?

PB: "Ron's sales pitch three years ago was on the back of my demise at Hull City. I was put on gardening leave by one of Ron's big friends in the world of finance and he was the owner of Hull City. He asked me just to have a word with him and at the time I thought I was just coming out of the Premier League, I thought the owner of Hull City was trying to bury me into the Second Division. I had a good relationship with the owner, I had no reason to think that he was doing anything untoward or underhand, so I met Ron in Manchester and we had a great meeting for two-and-a-half, three hours where he sold a picture of the new stadium, but I just didn't think at the time, three years ago, that I was ready to come into the Second Division."

"I've then gone through a period in my career where I really felt that certain factions had turned their back on me in terms of football and I thought I was starting to lose the battle and what I mean by that is the media, directors, maybe one or two supporters, certain things I did, obviously when I sang on the pitch, when I talked to the players at half-time, all of those things were negatively affecting my career and I thought, second time around after the Preston experience, I firmly believe in timing and I think the timing's right for me, the timing's right for Southend."

"I was eager to listen to Steve's answer with regards to the stadium because I'm as keen as you to know when we're going to cut the first sod and when we're going to start construction and when that belief system grows within the club and from the outside looking in, all of those things everybody's waiting for, I believe in the man, I really believe Ron's not here, he's not b*llsh*tting, he's telling me the story and I'm buying the story."

"My end of the bargain is to try and get the club into the First Division, into the Championship and beyond, that's my end of the bargain and I'm ready for the challenge. That's why I'm here."

"If Di Canio gets the sack? Now everyone knows in here I'm a Sunderland supporter. Is that right for me now, at this moment in time? These things happen in football and I can't say that won't ever happen or whatever but as far as I'm concerned, I've started something here and I'm not a quitter. I'm happy with the challenge, I'm happy with the project and at this moment in time I'm happy with the support, certainly of Steve and the chairman. As Steve's said, I've not been refused a player, I do understand there is financial constraints in every walk of life."

"I really believe that this is real football. I think the Premier League is La-La Land, it's crazy. In a recession, how can anybody spend £500m, do me a favour, it's ridiculous, it's Fantasy Football. Is it better? I'm not convinced. I watched the Liverpool-Manchester United game with great interest and, lo and behold, you've got David Moyes there who'll be doing the same as what I did today, banging his head against a brick wall because he lost the game on a set-piece. That's football, that's the way it is. What we've got here is an opportunity. Just because we're Southend, just because we're in the Second Division, just because what's happening at the football it's a challenge and it's something that's getting me up in the morning and making me feel alive."

"I am looking for permanent residency. The uncertainty where football's concerned; I went to Derby County for my first job as a manager, I turned down a five-year contract at Bolton Wanderers at the time which stank of security - £1.5m, 5-year contract as an assistant manager, with no real pressure and just go on the training ground and work with a group of players that were good enough anyway, we're talking about World Cup winners - I turned that down to go to Derby County. Seven months later, I've been sacked. I've had the argument with my wife that we moved the whole family, within a month of signing the contract she's said, 'Well, you've signed a three-year deal, but you could be out of work in twelve months.' Lo and behold, it was less than twelve months. I was working with a group of individuals, three of them got jailed for fraud; that's what I was dealing with on a daily basis but the learning curve was phenomenal."

"Where football is concerned, it taught me a lot, where my family is concerned, it taught me a lot, where life in the Championship, in the Premier League, it taught me a lot and I then had to go back on the training ground at Hull and the rest is history. When my wife said, 'We're not moving,' I had to understand it wasn't the fact that she didn't love me anymore, it was the fact that we'd be putting our daughter under pressure because of my work. He's just started secondary school, the next five years of her life are important to me as well so when they start flying Southend to Manchester it'll be a lot easier! I can put up with 3, 4 hours on the motorway, I get work done in the car, I'm on the end of the phone. I've got good people around me, the backroom staff, the coaching staff, the management team in place, so I don't have to be here 24/7, I just choose to be here 24/7 until we get this thing really moving forward."