

## Progress but not success ... yet

**So, that brings us to a close for the 2021/22 season and finishing midtable in the National League given the circumstances definitely feels like progress given where we were at the start of the campaign.**

It is to be hoped that Saturday 9th October 2021 proves to be the nadir in the history of Southend United Football Club. A 4-0 home defeat to Chesterfield, interrupted by supporter protests against the running of the club by Chairman Ron Martin (a week after his infamous and ill-fated visit to the away end at Solihull Moors), was followed by the release of Phil Brown from his duties as first-team manager for the second time.



There is absolutely no doubt that the National League is an extremely tough division and the efforts of Kevin Maher, Darren Currie, Mark Bentley and the backroom team since then have been encouraging. This group have the Shrimpers Trust's full support and backing, and for a brief period during a 13-match unbeaten run, it was nice to be able to dream of sneaking into the play-offs, however fanciful that suggestion sounded. Next season the aim must be for those aspirations of promotion to be realistic.

Southend United belongs in the Football League. We are in the National League due to the mismanagement of our football club at the very top. We have our eyes firmly set on the future but we cannot forgive or forget the mistakes that have been made until we see tangible success, and this season's improvements should not be seen as an excuse to settle for complacency in the 2022/23 season.



We have already formed a great relationship with Kevin and his team, and we have provided financial support this year towards the improvements in the club gym.

The recruitment and identification of targets has been impressive, helped by Darren's connections with Sheffield United and John Still's immense and incomparable lower league knowledge, and there is some real promise in this area. The Shrimpers Trust expects the club to build and support the backroom in the offseason and we will be watching this closely. We have seen far too often our club do business far too late (and often the wrong business) which has left us playing catch up at the start of the season. We don't expect any excuses this offseason

and certainly do not want Kevin and the teams' hands being tied like has happened with so many of his predecessors.

The Trust has continued to support the club's Academy, and this year was no different as we were delighted to continue our official sponsorship of the U18s squad. Failure to achieve success next year puts elements of our club at risk, including the youth setup. After year 1 in the National League 50 percent of the funding stops, and after year 2 Ron Martin and the parent companies will need to find a way to finance the entire Academy without financial support from the EFL, or perhaps they could take a decision to shut it down entirely. The Trust see the Academy structure as imperative to the future of the football club (as shown by our continued sponsorships), and thus see the next season as vital in the progression.



The Trust had been consistent in its demand for a new Chief Executive since the departure of Steve Kavanagh and had continually called for this to improve communication between the Football Club and its supporters. We were pleased that the Chairman finally accepted that he needed assistance in the running of the Club and appointed Tom Lawrence last offseason (after a, not so, gentle nudge from Stan Collymore). We have regular dialogue with Tom through various meetings and ongoing communication channels and have a strong working relationship. We will continue to support Tom in trying to make Southend United the best it can be, both on and off the field. There is no doubt that Tom has an incredibly tough job and we hope the impact he can make will only increase as the standards are increased to the necessary level.

What about Ron Martin? This remains a concern of the Shrimpers Trust. Communication levels have reduced in recent months with the Chairman, although that is not unusual for periods over the last 20 years. We continue to regularly ask questions behind the scenes regarding various key aspects such as the development of the new stadium and, of course, the pending HMRC engagement. We continue to be reliant on the funding of Ron and parent companies and see the continuation of pressure and understanding on these elements to be of utmost importance to the stability of our Club.

The Shrimpers Trust have continued to work tirelessly to improve aspects of the Football Club and the community and summarise our achievements for the year as below:

**- Social Inclusion scheme expanded with visits from the Lancaster Lions, Southend Youth Voice, ASD Little Heroes and Vibrance). Special thanks to Karl Lansley for all his work assisting the Trust and to our sponsors.**



- Youth sponsorship continued for the 15th Season

- Gym refurbished

- Junior Blues – to say we have been disappointed in the way the Junior Blues has seemingly dropped off the radar with the Club is an understatement. A new database, which took a year to materialise, confirmed our worst fears, with less than 50 members on the annual membership scheme. To that end, the Trust is planning to take back the administration of the scheme ready for the start of the new season, whilst still working alongside the Club to keep our fans of tomorrow engaged and happy in their support of our team.



- We are now donating money from our ever-expanding Retro shirt sales to the Jeff Astle Foundation, who do so much to help with brain injuries within football

- SUEPA – Has grown by 25% in the last year and membership now stands at over 350. We now have over 50% of players still alive as members.



- 500 Ukrainian refugees helped to a place of safety via our buy a scarf scheme, demonstrating how we've reacted in a unique way, quickly, to a real need for the good of all.



- Improved working relationships with other formal fan groups

The supporters are the lifeblood of football and of Southend United. We are encouraged by parliament's progress in the fan led review into the ownership of football clubs and supporters' involvement in decision making. We look forward to seeing more output in this area over the coming weeks.

The Shrimpers Trust try our best to represent the views and interests of all fans, but we accept we will not please everyone. We are an elected group of volunteers who act on your belief on what is best for the Football Club, whilst being accountable to our membership. We are always looking to diversify our board and membership, and should you wish to get more involved please contact our chairman on [pfitz666@aol.com](mailto:pfitz666@aol.com). We would love to have you involved!

We wish you all the best for the summer and look forward to seeing you all next season.