



SHRIMPERS TRUST

NEWSLETTER – Volume 2 Issue 7



THE INTRODUCTION – Editor Robert Craven

HAPPY NEW YEAR, and welcome to the first Shrimpers Trust Newsletter of 2006 – I hope that it has been worth the wait!

Firstly, as ever, I offer my apologies for the tardiness of this publication – suffice it to say that it is one of my New Year's Resolutions to make sure that it is on time from now on.

As part of that, I am looking to turn the Newsletter into a monthly event, which may mean that a few pages are shorn each time, although it will add up to the same content at the end of the year.

And, if 2005 was a spectacular twelve months, then what can we expect from 2006?: If it is anything like it's predecessor, there will be a fair share of highs, lows, drama and entertainment from the Shrimpers.

As I write this, we are just 29 days into 2006, and already we have seen Blues go unbeaten through the month of January, climbing to the top of the League One table in the process.

I know in the last edition, I said that I felt that Steve Tilson and Paul Brush were going to have to tackle one of the trickiest spells in their managerial career to date. That was either helped or hindered days later when United were dumped out of the FA Cup by Milton Keynes Dons.

Slowly but surely, the dynamic duo turned the situation around. True, a four game losing streak was followed up by a sequence of three goalless draws in four games, but at the time of going to press, Blues are unbeaten in 11 and leading Colchester United by two points at the top of the division.

Tilly's managerial success was further emphasised when Peter Taylor chose him to help him coach England's Under-21 international at the KC Kingston Communications Stadium in March.

That Tilson has been selected – regardless of Taylor's connections with the local area and his history with the Shrimpers – despite a complete lack of experience in the top two divisions, from where the majority of the side will be selected, shows how highly he is regarded in the game now.

One of the major bombshells to explode already this year on a major scale was the announcement that England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson is to depart his job after the World Cup Finals in July 2006.

The usual names are being banded about: Steve McLaren, Sam Allardyce, Alan Curbishley, Stuart Pearce and Paul Jewell are the Englishmen most highly fancied to take the country forward when the Swede leaves.

Perhaps whenever Sven's successor departs the job, the new young crop of home-grown talents will have emerged in the top two divisions. Tilly, with the Shrimpers, and Phil Parkinson, his rival at the helm of Colchester United, occupy the automatic promotion spots after FA Cup Fourth Round weekend, but there are more, people like Peter Jackson at Huddersfield Town and even perhaps Martin Ling at Leyton Orient.

For now, though, each must look at their own clubs, and Tilly can be proud of the way that the squad at Roots Hall has held together. It says something that the only on-field bust-up that we have seen between players was between Spencer Prior and Mitchell Cole in the trying conditions of Hartlepool United.

Still the Seaside only have a very small squad, and so each and every component, when fit, has to be prepared to fight for the cause. An 'us against them' mentality – one that has been so successfully harnessed by Martin Allen at Brentford – is imperative at this time.

It also says something that there is some kind of link between the supporters and the players. I have read in many places that journalists think that the squad's end of match 'lap of honour' is a little extravagant, but after so many years where there was no communication between the playing staff and the people that regularly turned up to cheer them on, it is refreshing that the team applaud those that have got behind them for 90 minutes.

This intrinsic link was shown further on Friday night when supporters in the South Upper declared "We are staying up!" Far from being a negative chant, it was a sign of respect that supporters are listening to what the club's



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manager has to say, and encouraging him to make the next step up.

At Hartlepool, too, the squad made the sacrifice of their shirts to supporters by throwing them into the away end to say thank-you for the tremendous support, not just in the snow after a 270-mile journey, but up and down the country after a sticky patch.

It says something that there has been very little dissent about on-field activities, even when the side endured eight matches without a victory following the spectacular 'eight in a rush with Tilly and Brush'.

Many words have been exchanged, though, on the subject of Blues' ridiculous winter fixture calendar. That so many United fans have managed to make trips to Hartlepool, Blackpool and Oldham Athletic inside a fortnight (the figures were roughly 115, 350 and 450 respectively) was a fantastic achievement.

It flew in the face of the Football League, who came up with the most idiotic journeys, possibly since its inception. Even their own arguments failed to stand up – January 2 was a designated 'holiday' date, unlike 28 December or 7 January.

The only connection between Southend United and Blackpool is that both are famous seaside resorts...separated by some 270-odd miles! Is it no wonder that a couple of years ago we made the 340-mile journey to Carlisle at the start of January?

As you will see from later sections of the Newsletter, we are looking to set up a Question & Answer session with Ron Martin. It

is one of the things that you, our membership, most request of us, but as you will be able to tell, it is not always easy to set up. Please be patient!

On the plus side, youth team coach Ricky Duncan has always said that he is willing to undergo another grilling from Shrimpers supporters, so hopefully we will be able to host another evening with Ricky in 2006.

We are now getting to the business end of the season. I'm sure I don't need to tell anyone that our support is absolutely vital from now on in, especially in trips to Yeovil, Brentford and Colchester United over the next five weeks.

At home, too, this is where we need to pick up points if Southend United are to enjoy consecutive promotion campaigns for the second time in fifteen years.

There are eight fixtures remaining at Roots Hall, and all of them are winnable. It would be laughable to suggest that Southend will be successful in all eight, but 24 home points would certainly aid the away effort where we have become traditionally a good, organised outfit under Tilly and Brush.

Let's hope that by the time of the next Newsletter, I am still talking about promotion – but as my mate Mark Wallis put it yesterday, if we do finish seventh, remember that October day when we lost 2-0 at home to Boston United. All wouldn't seem so bad then!

Up The Shrimpers,

Rob

SPONSORSHIP APPEAL – by TERRY JEFFREYS

I was recently in the unfortunate position where I needed to find a roofer to carry out some repair work for me. However, because, I had access to the membership database, I was able to see if we had any roofers amongst our membership and there was a fair chance that I would know the person.

In the end, I was able to use the services of one of our members and he did an excellent job for me. It then occurred to me that there must be a very good cross section of trades and skills amongst our members. It also struck me that these members may want to advertise their services to nearly 1500 other members of the Shrimpers Trust.

The main expenditure of the Trust is the printing and postage of the newsletter and we thought that those members with trades and skills to offer may be willing to advertise them in the newsletter in return for a contribution towards the costs of producing the newsletter.



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We would suggest that for the sum of £50 and we are flexible on this amount, the advertiser would have their name and services in an advertising section of the Shrimpers Trust newsletter for twelve months. If anyone is interested could they please contact me, Terry Jeffreys, on terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com or 01268 523974.

THE TRUST – What We've Done

Committee Meeting Minutes (09/01/2006)

The first Committee Meeting of 2006 took place in our regular haunt of the Spread Eagle pub next to Roots Hall. In addition to the fundraising activities that you will find later in this Newsletter, Lee Bird revealed that all was set for the Leg-Waxing for Saturday February 25 and the home match against Walsall. Lee, as well as Joe Elliott and our chairman, Trevor Bashford, will be taking to the pitch with three beauticians to raise money for the Trust, and I'm sure that you will be hounded for your pennies over the next few home matches.

Total membership at the time of the meeting stood at 1494, so very close to a magical 1500 figure, but there was due to be a massive cull due to the amount of people on final warnings about lapsing who had joined from the West Ham United game in the Carling Cup last season.

Terry Jeffreys was disappointed that he had not heard from John Stannard or Ricky Duncan regarding the purchase of an exercise bike and the sponsorship of the cost of Joel Ledgister's lodgings by the Trust. He lamented that, although he may have been misguided in thinking so, he expecting them to "bite our hands off" regarding sponsorship, and that we shouldn't have to chase them to think of things to purchase, but by now they should be coming forward with ideas of their own.

Coach travellers were up 37 to 471 for the season, but despite this, travel was still operating at an overall loss. This was almost entirely due to the special offers – free and reduced trips – given away this season.

Centenary Meeting (January 2006)

Believe it or not – and judging by the eerie silence echoing around Roots Hall, the latter is far more likely than the former – we are now under six months from celebrating 100 years of Southend United Football Club. One can only hope that members of the Blues backroom staff have been saving themselves for one massive effort to get the celebrations underway. Fingers crossed, of course, that the team deliver the best possible present in promotion to the Coca-Cola Championship.

Take the Centenary Match itself, for instance. Fair enough, when I was serving on the committee, it was reported back that many of the big guns: Manchester United, Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool, Celtic, Rangers, Spurs, were either not interested at all, or failing that, unable to commit to the pre-season schedule at that stage.

However, a Trust suggestion to invite a foreign team (someone such as Hertha Berlin, whom United faced in 1908 and who have dedicated a section of their museum to the Shrimpers, or Olympic Marseilles, who Southend played twenty years later) was thrown out as being too expensive. A big-money fixture with another team was put forward, and agreed, but the Club have not even tried to contact them!

Time is running out, but I will remain happy if Swindon Town Reserves (our opening opponents in the Southern League in the 1906/7 season) come down rather than West Ham United. We shall see.

On a more positive note, the First Day Cover contest has concluded, and the winning entries judged, and I am sure there will be more publicity on this in the months to come as we build up to



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2006/7. The Trust also has launched its own initiative for a special DVD to mark a period in the club's history, although as talks are ongoing with the original producers, I must simply say, watch this space!

Liaison Meeting (19/10/2005)

The new Stadium Manager, Chris Baker, has received a number of requests for smoking areas to be reinstated at Roots Hall. Club director Geoffrey King revealed at the October Liaison Meeting that he was loathed to go back on an agreement with the Safety Committee, especially since SUFC have been nominated for a 'Clean Air' award.

The 'matchday announcer' (I say that with fear of inviting Trade Descriptions to look at this Newsletter!) who so confidently boasted the visit of "Yeovil City" was relieved of his duties as he had "little or no knowledge of football". *Quelle surprise*. Mr. King invited members of the Trust who felt that they could undertake this important matchday job to contact him directly.

GK apologised for problems with the Season Ticket cards – yes, the ones we waited a number of games for before they arrived – and proclaimed that he was very happy with ticket.com, who supplied them. Unfortunately, my problems continued until December 30, when I obtained a new card from the Ticket Office, the barcode reader never quite accepting the previous one.

Terry Jeffreys and Paul Yeomanson manfully raised the question of a Q&A with Ron Martin again, citing the length of time since the last. GK said that he did not envisage a problem, although he did not like the idea of both sides of the Fossetts Farm debate meeting in a public forum. The club will be trying to break the attendance record (modern day) for a reserve match at Roots Hall, if Brian Wheeler agrees. The new £3 and £1 charges won't help matters, although this initiative would surely involve inviting local schools along for free.

Liaison Meeting (14/12/2005)

The last Liaison Meeting of 2005 was held on 14 December, with Paul Yeomanson at last being able to inform the Club that the Trust had received the player's donation to Quid-a-Goal from the previous season. GK reported that Ron Martin would be happy to have a Q&A with the Trust, and asked for a series of dates. At this stage, we have yet to receive a response to the list of dates we have provided SUFC with.

GK had spoken with Brian Wheeler, and the Club would be pleased to break the attendance record for a second-string clash at the Hall. He added that local schools could be invited and "it just needed organising". Worrying, given the somewhat sketchy details regarding our Centenary Match, I would suggest.

The Club Shop has been performing very well, with 1650 home and 980 away shorts sold. Whether there will ever be a club shop at a new ground should provide us with cautious optimism. Well, at least Uncle Ron has "every cause" for the aforementioned positivity. The Government are funding the hospital development at Fossetts Farm, whilst the Roots Hall lease is reviewed on a week-to-week basis.

Bad news for our away travellers, at least on the coaches, where any reciprocal deals can be thrown out of the window. SUFC don't charge away coaches to park, as they do so on a public highway. If we seek the sanctum of a car park, we will be copped for £10, £15, £20. Persistent standees at the back of the East Stand are due to the lack of legroom, and the West Stand is 'self-policing' for the meanwhile as the club seek to solve the standing crisis at Roots Hall.

** Full details of these meetings are available online at www.shrimperstrust.co.uk **



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Shrimpers Trust Christmas Draw

One of our former Committee Members, Mike Smith, now residing in Spain, was the winner of the Christmas Draw, pocketing a cool £1000, or however many Euros that equates to! Speaking to Paul Yeomanson soon after the event, he did manage to work out that it related to nearly 400 pints of beer in the local bar, so there is little doubt how he plans to spend it!

K. Ward won the second prize, £500, and June Cleeve £250. David Aston of Birmingham won a signed short and P. Carter a signed football, with those garments being shipped to Birmingham and Southsea respectively! In total, the Draw raised nearly £5000, but a special mention must go to Steve Stone, who sold 1950 tickets himself. Thanks very much once again Steve.

The Trust is seeking new initiatives in order to make both of our Draws, at Christmas and at the End of the Season, more appealing. Any possible ideas should be directed to either Paul Yeomanson or Alan Perry on the email addresses listed below.

100 Club

John Walton became the lucky recipient of £420 over the Christmas period when he won our 100 Club Festive Spectacular. Since then, there have been slightly more modest successes of just over £40 for Paul FitzGerald, Paul Manning, Mike Roles and Andrew Perry. Please email Alan Perry (alanperry4@hotmail.com) or call him on 01702 476 458 for more details on how to become a winner in the weekly draw.

Quid-a-Goal

As Southend United complete their 34th fixture of the 2005/6 campaign, strikes from Luke Guttridge and Mark Gower in the 2-0 success over Swindon Town earned a further £121.50 from those who pledged for various causes at the outset of the season. That brings the grand total up to £2831.75, an increase of nearly £200 on the amount raised by the end of January last year. Of course, this time last year, we still had numerous LDV Vans Trophy matches to complete, and a couple more League fixtures, but we remain on target to defeat that overall total.

Quiz Night

Just hours after Southend United had thrashed Brentford 4-1 in Coca-Cola League One, the Shrimpers Trust membership was treated to another fantastic night thanks to Quizmaster Guy Rickard and his able assistants, brother Nigel and Paul Yeomanson. Alan Perry was, as ever, the man charged with organising the occasion and sorting out the food from the ever-reliable Fish House, and it is to his credit, as well as those present, that the event raised in excess of £700 for the Trust. Thank-you to all who attended.

New Life Members (total: 104)

An extra special welcome to the latest additions to our Life Membership: **Ian & Stephanie Atkins**, **Brian Collins** and **Scott Peters**.

The Shrimpers Trust wish to welcome the following new members this month:

Ron Alexander, Steve Allen, John Atkins, Brian Chester, Lewis Coppen, Jamie Forsyth, Nicholas Haynes, Anthony Hick, Matthew Hurrell, Anthony James, Adam Malpass, Alan Marchant, Mrs. A. I Marchant, Paul Nelson, David Peck, Scott Peters, Jim Riches, Richard Roberts, Bob Sills, Keir Smith, W. Stevens, Michael Stoneley, Steve Tyler, Andrew Watson, Simon Webber, Joanna Welsh and Paul Wilding.



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COMING UP – The Trust Events Schedule

Race Night (11/03/2006)

Contact: Paul Yeomanson (at the Trust stand or via the website, www.shrimperstrust.co.uk) for more information

For the first time in 2005/6, we unleash a second Race Night on our membership inside one season. Our second Race Night, held earlier in the year, saw less people attend, but conversely, more money raised for the Trust, but we would like to see an upturn in both attendance and fundraising for this event. £3 is all that is required to gain admission to this all-ticket event – you must have purchased your ticket in advance to gain entry to the Shrimpers Bar on Saturday March 11. This is groundbreaking stuff for the Trust: the event is being held the night after Blues host Scunthorpe United in Coca-Cola League One, so hopefully many will attend despite the lack of a fixture earlier in the day.

Football Programme Directory Annual Southend United Programme Fair (23/04/2006)

Contact: David Stacey of the FPD for more details – information available from the Shrimpers Trust stand

Last year I made the massive error of omitting the FPD Fair at the Shrimpers Bar, underneath Roots Hall, from the Newsletter, and I hope that I am making it up to David Stacey now by giving it a huge plug this year! Thankfully myself and Paul's Yeomanson and FitzGerald did not forget to look after our stand at the event, but aside from the usual goodies available there, the Fair contains a number of stalls offering programmes, badges and other merchandise for the football collecting connoisseur in Southend. Admission is just fifty pence, and with that you are entered into a prize draw to win a year's subscription to the FPD.

THE NEWS – Away from Home

Brentford

The main news away from Roots Hall this time around concerns our fellow promotion-hopefuls Brentford, with Bees United taking over a 60% share in the club from previous chairman Ron Noades. Ex-BBC Director-General Greg Dyke is the new chairman, and the following comes from their website, www.beesunited.org.uk:

Greg Dyke has been appointed as non-executive Chairman of Brentford Football Club by its new owners, the supporters' trust Bees United, who acquired the majority shareholding in the club today.

Bees United have raised £5.5 million to re-finance the club's debts and takeover a 60% shareholding from Altonwood, the company owned by Ron Noades.

Dyke, the former Director General of the BBC and Chief Executive of London Weekend Television, has been a supporter of the club since childhood when his brother Ian played in the Brentford youth team. He is a Bees United member and was one of the fans who gave the club a loan last autumn to help avoid a cash crisis. He was a Director of Manchester United in the late nineties but resigned when he joined the BBC.

Dyke said: "This is an exciting new start for Brentford. It is very clear to me that the club's long term future is best served by the majority shareholding being held by the people who care most about the club - its fans. Chairmen, board members, managers and players come and go in a football club but most of the fans are there for life. I have no doubt that the idea of a supporters trust running the club is the future for the likes of Brentford.

"I have been a Brentford supporter for more than 40 years and know how much the club means to people living in the area. Three of my children are big Brentford fans as are many of their friends. Living locally, I get to matches at Griffin Park in 15 minutes and attend regularly.

"The club is doing well on the pitch with great leadership from Martin Allen and his staff. As a business there are still some tough challenges to face and I am looking forward to working with the board and the staff at the club to help Brentford go from strength to



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strength. What this does mean, however, is that we have to live within our budget and the days when fans of clubs like Brentford could expect someone from outside to come and pour money into the club are over. The fans are now in charge."

In the past six months supporters have raised funds to provide a £1 million interest-free loan to the club through fundraising initiatives, with individuals taking out loan notes and several fans contributing six figure loans.

Altonwood have provided a £1 million interest-free loan with a further £2.5m from Barclays Bank, £0.5m from Hounslow Council and £0.5m from a company representing a supporter covering the club's overdraft and creating a £1 million cash injection.

Bees United chairman Brian Burgess believes the historic takeover was the best chance to secure Brentford's future as a professional club.

"It has been a difficult project to complete and we are extremely grateful to those who have helped to make it possible," said Burgess. "These include a number of very generous individuals and of course the thousands of fans who have contributed to the Back the Bees campaign, Ron Noades and his colleagues at Altonwood, Barclays Bank, and Hounslow Council.

"It is a great achievement but the hard work has to start now to make sure that the Club can continue to pay its bills and be successful both on and off the pitch."

Manager Martin Allen said: *"After a lot of uncertainty and a great deal of work, the takeover is finally complete. Time will now tell if this Club can move forward. But it must be said it is an exciting opportunity to continue to move onwards and upwards."*

THE MATCHES – Blues in Review

sat 3 dec: milton keynes dons (h) 1-2 [fa cup]

Southend's fourth straight loss was compounded by the fact that they had to give half of the gate receipts for this FA Cup clash to Franchise FC, but it could well end up being a blessing in disguise as many of United's promotion campaigns have been 'tarnished' by an early Cup exit, not least 2004/5, when they suffered a 3-0 defeat at the hands of Luton Town live on SKY television.

Spencer Prior was culpable for the first, bringing down Izale McLeod, the highly sought-after centre-forward converting from the penalty spot, but Blues grabbed a deserved leveller through Freddy Eastwood's fortunate strike. Mark Gower nodded over and struck a post, but on the break substitute Gary Smith robbed man-of-the-match Gower to fire home from distance and set up an away tie at Southampton.

tues 6 dec: chesterfield (h) 0-0 [league one]

There isn't a lot to say about this four goalless draw except a) at least it represented an end to United's four-game losing streak and b) it was still ultimately two points dropped. A woeful opening half saw just one Derek Niven shot on target for either side. A marginally better second period's most entertaining moment came when Paul Hall blocked strike partner Wayne Allison's shot on the goal-line and found himself offside to deny the Spireites the points.

sat 10 dec: bradford city (h) 1-1 [league one]

Dean Windass was the 'hero' of this piece, the 'keeper-biting porky front man turning shotstopper extraordinaire after usual custodian Donovan Ricketts rightly saw red for gesticulating a little too wildly to the South Stand whilst celebrating Steven Schumacher's low strike to give the Bantams the lead.

Windass, who had earlier rattled Darryl Flahavan's crossbar, was motionless as Gower whipped in a hanging free-kick inches inside the right-hand post, but after the break, the position was virtually made redundant by a lacklustre Southend front-line. City defended well, but with Eastwood and Wayne Gray off colour, Blues desperately required for an in-form forward.



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sat 17 dec: huddersfield town (a) d0-0 [league one]

There were no new candidates in this vital point at fellow promotion-hopefuls Huddersfield Town. The Terriers' supporters took great exception to Flav's tactics in using up every possible second to take a goal-kick, but in essence the 'keeper's cheekiness only outlined the measured and considered approach that Steve Tilson's men took into the fixture.

With a Christmas band playing merrily before the encounter got underway, they could have remained in position in front of either goal in a match that lacked any real creativity, Tilly being hindered ever more as Eastwood failed a late fitness test. The obligatory Yorkshire injury was sustained, Jay Smith limping off with hamstringing damage, and Flahavan made a most important late save, tipping away a Martin McIntosh header.

mon 26 dec: milton keynes dons (h) d0-0 [league one]

Goalless draw three out of four duly arrived with the second visit of MK Dons inside a month. Amid speculation that Wolves were sniffing around him, McLeod didn't start this fixture, and they missed him when Prior handed Dean Lewington's cross, centre-back Pablo Mills screwing the spot-kick wide. Luke Guttridge, back from injury, and Freddy Eastwood forced Matt Baker to make the only saves, but by now United were in dire need of a win...

wed 28 dec: hartlepool united (a) w2-1 [league one]

...which finally arrived, after seven weeks of waiting, at Victoria Park. The travellers on the Trust coaches had waited for news that the game was called off – Newcastle United's clash just up the road against Charlton Athletic was postponed an hour before the scheduled start – but when they arrived in Hartlepool they were met with a light sprinkling of snow. Eifion Williams gave the Monkeyhangers the lead when he tapped in his own rebound.

Darryl Flahavan continued to make a selection of fine stops in the minutes leading up to half-time, protecting what was by then a point as Freddy Eastwood converted Mark Gower's cross. A succession of corners saw Flav save from Thomas Butler, and when Darren Craddock pushed Wayne Gray, the striker had no problems in tapping in from twelve yards. A soft decision at the other end gave Chris Llewellyn a chance to level, also from the spot, but Flahavan guessed correctly to give Southend the points.

sat 31 dec: AFC Bournemouth (h) w2-1 [league one]

Just like London buses, once one 2-1 win comes along, another is sure to follow! The Shrimpers were made to look extremely leggy by the Cherries, who had not played for eight days, with this being United's third in six. Nonetheless, in the first half at least, Blues played with renewed confidence, and Eastwood had already hit the upright by the time that Gray was tripped by Neil Young – no, not that one – and scored his second penalty in successive fixtures. Young was dismissed as the last defender.

James O'Connor repeatedly found himself in acres of space, and finally he made it count for the visitors as he swept a cross in for Steve Foley to score. Strangely, this perked up the wilting Shrimpers, and a sensational strike from the influential Guttridge, who had thus far endured a difficult afternoon, rose into the top right-hand corner to get Blues moving up the table again.

mon 2 jan: blackpool (a) w2-1 [league one]

Yet another 2-1 win – nobody amongst the 350-strong Southend contingent at Bloomfield Road was complaining – consigned Swansea City to second place and took United back to the top of the League One tree again. This was another Jekyll and Hyde display, with the first half one-way traffic towards the 'Pool goal. Mark Gower hit a post, James Lawson spooned the rebound over. Maher



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delivered again, and although Lawson's effort was clawed away, Mark Bentley swooped to nod in for 1-0.

The second 45 minutes was completely the opposite as the 'other' Seasiders ran riot. John Murphy sent two fierce shots just wide and Keigan Parker also missed twice when one-on-one. Finally he did net, touching home Ian Morris' through-ball, but the hosts had not banked on super-sub Freddy coming off from the bench, cutting in from the left and driving home a low shot just inside the near post in the last minute. Get in there!

sat 7 jan: oldham athletic (a) d0-0 [league one]

With many of their rivals in FA Cup action or out of the picture because of the knockout competition, United had a chance to stretch their lead to five points. It finished at three after a tough, well-earned point at Boundary Park against an Oldham side that had won their last three. Incredibly captain Maher hit both posts with two snapshots from distance inside thirty seconds, and debutant Efetobore Sodje struck the crossbar with a second-half header. Flahavan denied both Andy Liddell and Luke Beckett, and scrambled across his line with seconds left to keep out Paul Warne's late effort.

sat 14 jan: brentford (h) w4-1 [league one]

It was supposed to be really tough against Martin Allen's Brentford, but in the end it was one of those days when everything clicked and the Bees were sent away from Roots Hall with a flea in their ear. 'Mad Dog' Allen was constantly screaming at Lloyd Owusu and DJ Campbell up front, but if Blues example was anything to follow, he should have been geeing up his defenders to score!

Sodje grabbed his first for the club to open the scoring with a scrappy strike midway through the first half, and Eastwood blasted wide before Mark Gower doubled the lead. Gower and Gray wasted further opportunities, but Adam Barrett majestically rose to make it 3-0 soon after the break. Campbell immediately raced away for a classy consolation, made even more so when Che Wilson, a professional for ten years, slammed home his first-ever senior goal to make it 4-1.

sat 21 jan: tranmere rovers (a) d0-0 [league one]

Another form side to travel to, but Southend did what was required in gaining a point, even if that took north Essex rivals Colchester United to the pinnacle of League One. It was a decent match, but neither side really threatened to score, Calvin Zola denied by the man many are now dubbing the best 'keeper in the division. Rovers could have had three spot-kicks – from the far end I thought Mark Bentley caught Zola and Sodje almost certainly shoved Simon Francis, but equally a blatant handball in the Tranmere area was missed by the referee, and the unbeaten run was stretched again.

fri 27 jan: swindon town (h) w2-0 [league one]

Friday night football at Roots Hall was back, but it was hardly fan-fared in with any great relish. In the end it took two quickfire goals to give Southend the points, Guttridge scrambling home the first from close range and Gower serenely gliding in at the back post to caress across goal for the second seconds later. Top of the table again, with only one of the chasing pack realistically being able to catch us with their games in hand. That is, of course, the U's...

Up the Shrimpers!

Robert Craven (29/01/2006)