



# SHRIMPERS TRUST

## NEWSLETTER – Volume 2 Issue 10



### THE INTRODUCTION – Editor Robert Craven

**HOW DOES IT FEEL? Just over a year ago, the Shrimpers were playing teams like Carlisle United, Northampton Town and Leyton Orient...**

In fact, had we stayed in Coca-Cola League One, we would have faced that trio once again, but those days are behind us, at least for the nine months minimum stay that we will experience in the Championship.

It might have a slightly different name, but we're in what was the old First Division (at least, it was the First Division for the majority of our time there – prior to that plain old Division Two sufficed). And that means trips to the Stadium of Light, the Ricoh Arena, the Walkers Stadium and Pride Park, not Saltergate, Glanford Park or Millmoor.

Having said that, I'll miss the old grounds. I'm one of those people that loved going to the Vetch Field because it was a 'proper' football ground. At least I'll still have Layer Road to look forward to, and likes of Kenilworth Road, Loftus Road and Selhurst Park are hardly palaces, if you'll forgive the pun.

I got a lot of telephone calls from the *Southend Echo* in the week leading up to, and following, promotion (I hope you're not all bored of seeing Rob Craven, 23 from Prittlewell in your local paper!), asking what it meant to be back in the second tier of English football.

Of course, it goes without saying that promotion means different things to different people. The last time we were at a comparative level, I didn't go to nearly the volume of matches that I now do, certainly not away from home, so it's a chance to put that right.

After visiting Carlisle, Torquay, Exeter, Darlington, Hartlepool and Bristol Rovers, it's a chance to visit some clubs with a more illustrious history, and I certainly don't mean that in a derogatory manner, because for some peculiar reason, I feel much more of an affinity with those sides than I ever will with Leicester, Derby or West Bromwich Albion.

As supporters, we got a chance to do that a little bit in the last couple of years, ironically on either side of the Trent. We've faced Notts

County plenty of times before, sure, but the fact remains that they are the country's oldest football club.

But this year we played at the City Ground, home of Nottingham Forest, the first club to have won the European Cup and subsequently dropped to the third tier of their domestic competition. Yes, the players froze in a 30,000-capacity ground over half-full, but what a place!

This year, there's a few more of those type clubs. Leeds United were Champions League semi-finalists just over five seasons ago, and unless they beat Watford in the play-off final, Southend United will play them for the first time ever in any competition.

Just down the A12, twenty miles on from Colchester, are Ipswich Town, UEFA Cup winners in 1981, at a time when they twice finished runners-up in the old, old First Division (the Premiership for younger readers).

Norwich City reached the third round of the same competition in the early nineties, having recorded a third-placed finish in the League, and Preston North End did the first ever double in 1888.

In a way, I'm pleased that Colchester United are with us to share in the journey, and it would be nice if another 'small' club in Swansea joined us rather than Barnsley. At least we have good records against those two teams so that leaves only one club whose record we would have to better to stay up!

I possibly would not have been saying that before our first ever trip to the Liberty Stadium, when we were treated brilliantly by the Swansea supporters, and there appeared to be a mutual respect between the two clubs.

I never thought that I would see Swans fans clapping Blues' buses out of Wales without a rock, a brick or bottle of alcohol in sight, but maybe the new ground has diluted the idiot element, and away fans will be able to visit without trepidation.

The club is moving into a new age, a new division and up to a new level, just as the first century of football in southeast Essex is celebrated. 2006/7 being the Centenary



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season makes next year's calendar of fixtures all the more exciting. Hopefully SUFC won't let us all down with the choice of Centenary match and other celebrations that will be going on.

Away from the Shrimpers briefly, and the attention of the country will be focused firmly on Sven-Goran Eriksson and his England squad as they make their way to Germany for the FIFA World Cup this June.

Personally, I believe Sven's positive squad selection (a result, no doubt, of his impending departure and replacement by Middlesbrough boss Steve McLaren,) deserves applauding.

The whiners who say that Theo Walcott, at 17 and having not made a Premiership appearance with Arsenal, is too young, are the same people that would have berated Eriksson had he gone back to the old, failed, guard. Jermaine Defoe and Darius Vassell have had chances in the white shirt, and thrown it away, so why not give an untested, confident, surprise package an opportunity to delight?

Walcott, the more statistically-minded of you may recall, was one of Harry Redknapp's substitutes when Southampton visited Roots Hall to give Blues a 3-0 televised tonking in the Carling Cup this season.

He has scored five goals from thirteen starts, all of which came for Saints in the Coca-Cola Championship, so his selection is a big thumbs up football outside of the Premiership (so is that of Owen Hargreaves, but I'll gloss over that!).

Norwich's Rob Green has been named as the third-choice goalkeeper, and Andrew Johnson of Crystal Palace is on the stand-by list if Wayne Rooney's metatarsal does not recover in time, so there are three players who each played in the second tier in 2005/6. West Ham United skipper Nigel Reo-Coker was also an integral figure in the Championship twelve months earlier.

So how long until a Shrimper earns his international stripes, following in the footsteps of, err, Tesfaye Bramble!? There is a 'B' international at Reading's Madejski Stadium on Thursday 25 May, and Freddy Eastwood's 49-goal haul in the past two seasons cannot go

unnoticed for much longer, even if those strikes came in the bottom two divisions.

Kevin Maher played regularly for the Republic of Ireland's Under-21 side, so he could be in line for Eire's full squad if he starts the season well and they are short of midfielders for their Euro 2008 qualifying campaign. Depending on Darryl Flahavan's ancestry, he could join him there if Shay Given was injured.

Those three names will all be important as Steve Tilson and Paul Brush look to secure Championship status in the coming months. There will be no talk of promotion again, and that's not defeatist, simply realistic.

Tilson, Spencer Prior and Andy Edwards all enjoyed double promotions twice, once at the start of the nineties, the second in the middle of the naughties, but the third step is too far.

Tilly's name will now start to be linked with vacant managerial positions, such as those at Hull City (should Peter Taylor leave for Charlton Athletic) and Ipswich Town. Apart from the fact that he now plies his trade in the same division as those two clubs, I'm sure that he would realise that Southend United are *his* club.

Some managers are lucky with one side, and whilst I do not deny that Tilson is an excellent coach with fantastic back-up in Brush, Southend are the club that he will be the most successful at. The Shrimpers run through his heart, he is a local lad, and for that reason he does not have to whip up passion and hype that he does not believe in.

Anyone that waited for his singing after the Bristol City game will testify to that. Blues are lucky to have him on board, but as I commented at the end of the last campaign, the hardest task is the one that awaits.

That challenge, to stay in the Championship against outfits with truly better resources and bigger squads, who still secure parachute payments from the Premiership, should be cherished as an opportunity. Even at £380 for a season ticket, it is one that can't be missed!

**Up The Shrimpers,**

**Rob**



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### THE DIARY...Saturday 30 April 2006

- 4:26 a.m.** Wake up for the umpteenth time - it's been an uncomfortable night, one that there's no need to set the alarm for.
- 5.30 a.m.** The last early morning call of the campaign has arrived, or at least, that is what I hope. Without meaning for this to sound like I don't enjoy it, at the 25th time of asking this season, another away trip is the last thing that I want. I imagine the players don't fancy the play-offs either.
- 6.45 a.m.** I've had breakfast, showered, got the lucky clothes on. Over the last few weeks, 'lucky' clothes have been at a premium; during much of the season, I've been able to get away with the same shirts for weeks in a row, but with dropped points all over the place in April, it's more difficult now to come up with the right combination. I settle for what I was wearing at Barnsley, figuring that I can stomach a point, even if all three is still what is required for automatic promotion if Brentford stave off the challenge of Hartlepool United at Griffin Park.
- 7.05 a.m.** The rest of the 'Team Judas' gang arrive outside Chez Craven ready to make the walk to the coaches for the trip to south Wales. The omens are reasonably good - they were all on board for the visit to the Millennium Stadium and the 2-0 Play-Offs win over Lincoln City eleven months earlier.
- 7.13 a.m.** You know that it's a big game when Chris Berry arrives to organise the coaches early! Chris and the Berry Clan turn up to guide the eight coaches down the M4 on there way west.
- 7.57 a.m.** With 37 passengers picked up at the Odeon and Richard Shepherd and Chris himself having mopped up the other 51, it's on to the Watermill to fill the coach up.
- 8.42 a.m.** Beat Chris to the Watermill - *quelle surprise* - where the Blue Army is already in full voice. It shouldn't be alcohol-induced at this time of the morning, but nervous tension does abound.
- 8:47 a.m.** 'Team Judas' are asleep, heads on pillows. It was Matt's birthday the night before, and it transpires that they spent the night at the Casino. I got as much as sleep as them (namely nothing) but that was from the 'comfort' of my own bed.
- 9.30 a.m.** The money collected, it's time to stick on a DVD, not something that I ever overly relish. There's only one choice, and for once it goes down well. The 2004/5 Season Review brings back good memories for all Southend fans - look, there's Freddy's debut hat-trick against Swansea at the Hall!
- 11.39 a.m.** We pull up at Leigh Delamere services, the last of the eight to get there. At least my coach isn't about to blow up, a fate which 'Unlucky Alan' Perry appears to be faced with. Seriously, the transport wouldn't look out of place on 1960s drama 'Heartbeat', but when it's a Bank Holiday weekend, you sometimes have to put up with those kinda wheels.
- 12.35 p.m.** Over the Severn Bridge into the Principality. You pay £15 for the privilege of visiting Wales, but it's free to get out - strange that one.
- 1.31 p.m.** We're on the outskirts of Swansea, and a police cordon meet us to guide us to the Liberty Stadium, not quite as intimidating as the old Vetch Field, but you would expect 18,000 Welsh nutters to wreak havoc inside.
- 1.42 p.m.** Inside the ground, and in the obligatory position at the back of the stand. I say obligatory, thankfully our tickets were actually bought for that row, which is a rare commodity this season, as opposed to last when you could sit where you like. The price of success, but one that is welcome, to an extent!
- 2.12 p.m.** Time to show just how jittery I am. Matt mentions that Manchester United's Wayne Rooney could be out of the World Cup with a metatarsal injury, but I mis-hear the start and think that Freddy has been ruled out of this afternoon's encounter. The relief when it is only England's star striker is palpable.
- 2.59 p.m.** Out come the teams to a crescendo of noise and a cascade of colour. Nerves are frayed.
- 3.02 p.m.** The referee gets the game underway, with 1,900 Shrimpers in excitable mood.
- 3.21 p.m.** Blues have made the better start, with the Goat and Adam Barrett denied by last-ditch saves from Willy Gueret, but it is Swansea City who take the lead through one-time Southend transfer target Rory Fallon, who eludes the defence to rocket the ball past Darryl Flahavan.
- 3.30 p.m.** Southend pull themselves level for the first time on the afternoon after hard graft from Mark Gower on the left who sets up Eastwood for yet another scintillating strike from outside the penalty area. It's too early to go absolutely mad about, but at this point in time, we're going up.
- 3.35 p.m.** The lead is short-lived, Fallon again proving the thorn in Blues' side with a back-post header, After the ecstasy, deflation.



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- 3.47 p.m.** The half-time whistle sounds, and phones ring around the stadium to find out what's going on elsewhere. Brentford are losing 2-0, one rumour starts. The tannoy reveals the truth - goalless at Griffin Park and at this stage a point would be needed mathematically at Roots Hall seven days later.
- 4.05 p.m.** Second halves around the country are underway again. The stewards try getting us to sit down again - it's a futile effort as this thrill-a-minute clash makes sure that you are constantly on the edge of, if not off of completely, your seat.
- 4.23 p.m.** This time Swansea make the better start to the half, but it is in vain as Freddy Eastwood again brings Blues level. Shaun Goater knocks down a high ball upfield and the front man bursts powerfully between two defenders to slam past Gueret. You can almost forget the other 24 goals that he's netted this season - this one's the most important!
- 4.35 p.m.** Blues' best spell of the game has come to an end, and Swansea are piling on the pressure by winning a succession of free-kicks, but the mood is optimistic as it seems Southend are going up...for the moment.
- 4.45 p.m.** The inevitable text messages start to come in - Kevin O'Connor has put Brentford in front, and with the Shrimpers on the back foot, an almighty roar is needed to spur the lads on. Tense, nervous energy fills the stadium; throats are dry, the old Vetch terracing might have come in handy as people just want to wander around.
- 4.51 p.m.** 150 miles away in west London, Hartlepool United central defender Michael Nelson might just be making history for Southend United as he fires home from ten yards. The cheering starts to my right, but I don't believe it. Maybe it's cos of the experience at Grimsby when rumours went around that Bury had equalised against then rivals Swansea, but I still think we need to win!
- 4.52 p.m.** Wayne Gray, a second-half sub, is stuck through on the left-hand side, but despite having the legs, he doesn't have the guile to head goalwards, and he drifts towards the corner flag. I'm screaming at him to create another chance, praying for a win.
- 4.53 p.m.** The final whistle sounds at the Liberty Stadium amid widespread confusion. I look down at 'keeper Darryl Flahavan, who is shrugging his shoulders. Tilly, Brush and the subs race on - they must know it's all over at Griffin Park.
- 4.55 p.m.** After a couple of minutes of celebrating, the referee blows time in the capital. This is written with the benefit of hindsight - I'd assumed it was all over at the same time as our match.
- 5.10 p.m.** The players leave the pitch, having posed for the cameras, done their dancing and taken the plaudits. No-one was moving in the away end.
- 5.16 p.m.** Swansea reappear to do their end-of-season lap of honour. 2,000 Shrimpers possibly outnumber the home fans left, but we all give the Jacks a tremendous reception.
- 5.24 p.m.** Over half-an-hour after the final whistle, an impromptu conga breaks out in the away end. There's much hugging and handshaking done. Trust treasurer Darren Posnack is standing in a daze in the middle of the walkway. This is what promotion does. Somehow it is even better than doing it through the play-offs though, you feel you've really earned it, rather than sneaking through as an appendix to the main season.
- 5.26 p.m.** Wander back to the coach - thankfully that's still there and hasn't left without me! Our leader, Mr. Bashford, is heard rounding up the troupes, bellowing that the coaches are on their way, so people had better get back on them.
- 5.29 p.m.** Going past the main entrance to the Stadium. At the old ground, this would have been intimidating, but this time, the hundreds gathered applaud (yes, applaud!) the supporters' coaches away from the ground.
- 5.32 p.m.** We draw to a halt to give the rest of the coaches a chance to catch up, outside a pub. Once again, in the centre of the city, this would've been a little nerve-wracking, but the same applaud emanates from those boozing up inside.
- 8.15 p.m.** Pull in at Reading services. This is the place where I finally, once and for all, believe that we're up. Look at the bookies, where the days scores are scrolling round - Brentford 1 Hartlepool 1; Swansea 2 Southend 2 the screen says. Championship here we come! It's weird, but I wouldn't truly believe it all until I had seen it for myself.
- 10.38 p.m.** Walk into my house at the end of a long and draining day. It doesn't matter that it's late, nor that I've gotta be up at half-five the next morning to cover a youth tournament for work. Southend United are in the Coca-Cola Championship, and the world is a better place!



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### THE SHRIMPERS TRUST KIDS

#### Blues' Youths Results

Sat 8 Apr | Luton Town (a) | W4-1

Thurs 13 Apr | Gillingham (h) | W2-1

BLUES' YOUTHS made it ten games without a defeat as they beat Luton Town and Gillingham inside five days to conclude the season in fourth place in the Football League Youth Alliance South-East Conference.

Shrimpers Trust-sponsored central defender Reiss Noel was amongst the goals at Luton Rugby Club as the young Shrimpers thrashed the Hatters 4-1 by the M1 motorway. He rose inside the penalty area inside eight minutes to head home Lee Smyth's corner kick.

Luton pulled a goal back just two minutes later, but Ricky Duncan's men were back in front minutes before the interval as Smyth threaded Charles Ademeno through, and the speedy striker converted.

Smyth was involved for a third time during the second period when he swept the ball into the path of Steffan Gaisie after fine work from Callum Kearns and Franck Moussa for the front man to net. Ademeno added a fourth on the counter-attack as he burst clear of the Luton defence.

At home at Boots & Laces later that week, Joel Ledgister, the original recipient of Trust money at the start of this season, helped to give Southend the lead when he lofted the ball over the Gillingham goalkeeper for Gaisie to tuck home.

	Pl	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
Brighton & Hove Albion	22	14	5	3	51	19	+32	47
Rushden & Diamonds	22	12	5	5	43	25	+18	41
Queens Park Rangers	22	12	4	6	44	34	+10	40
Southend United	22	9	6	7	26	33	-7	33
Wycombe Wanderers	22	9	5	8	33	30	+3	32
Gillingham	22	8	7	7	40	33	+7	31
Brentford	22	9	3	10	40	52	-12	30
Leyton Orient	22	7	6	9	32	35	-3	27
Northampton Town	22	8	3	11	30	36	-6	27
Colchester United	22	7	4	11	28	32	-4	25
Luton Town	22	6	1	15	24	38	-14	19
Portsmouth	22	4	5	13	23	47	-24	17

Carl Patten had already hit a post and Gaisie, Moussa and Smyth all wasted good chances to extend the lead, with Belgian Moussa striking the crossbar just before the break. After half-time, James Lindie forced the 'keeper into a good save and then saw a shot from a Ledgister centre hacked off of the line.

Gillingham equalised against the run of play when a forward was left unmarked in the six-yard box, but Blues resilience was proved when Gaisie grabbed his second five minutes before the end by slotting confidently into the bottom right-hand corner.



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### THE TRUST – What We've Done

Committee Meeting Minutes (24/04/2006)

Paul Yeomanson unfortunately reported that the Trust-organised Question & Answer session with Garry Nelson had seen only ten members present. The Committee as a whole were disappointed with this response, and it has to be emphasised that without membership support, these sort of evenings cannot be staged. The next such event is anticipated to be a Q&A with a couple of the stars of the late 1960s to celebrate the launch of the 'Team We Call United' DVD just before the start of next season.

This year's Southend Carnival Torchlight Parade will take place on Saturday 19 August, so it will be all eyes on the fixture list, released in mid-June, to see if the Trust will be able to help promote the club and Trust activities with the help of our fully-liveried SBC Leisure coach and the BlueBelles.

Scott Peters, who had by now been welcomed to the meeting as the latest member to express an interest in joining our committee, helped to give the existing group an insight into what sort of publicity the Trust get to the general Southend United supporting membership. Hopefully over the next few months, the Trust website, [www.shrimperstrust.co.uk](http://www.shrimperstrust.co.uk), will be getting a makeover and there will be a series of ways in which we can raise our profile.

The Trust will once again be present at the Shrimpers On-line Open Day at Way Tyler Country Park on July 16th. The event went well last year, so it would be excellent to see a number of new faces at this year's Open Day.

*\*\*Full Minutes of the Trust's Liaison Meetings with Southend United are available to download from the Shrimpers Trust website, [www.shrimperstrust.co.uk](http://www.shrimperstrust.co.uk)\*\**

### Player of the Year Night

THURSDAY 11th MAY 2006 saw the Shrimpers Bar host the annual Shrimpers Trust Player of the Year Night, incorporating the End of the Season Review...

175 Shrimpers Trust members brought vouchers for the yearly event, a celebration of the club's Championship-winning season, and they were able to get autographs and chat with the entire first team squad, minus former Manchester City duo Shaun Goater and Lee Bradbury, as well as Steve Tilson and Paul Brush, Ricky Duncan and Luke Hobbs from the Centre of Excellence and Geoffrey King and Steve Tilson.

Kevin Feasey again put together a DVD package with match footage of almost every League One fixture in the campaign which was split into three sections and punctuated by a series of awards. The cue for the first awards of the evening was the win over Nottingham Forest, a club record eighth successive win. Tilly and Brush picked up glass decanter sets depicting 'Eight In A Rush' to reward their record.

The Trust's top travellers were also rewarded, whilst the SJS Player of the Year award was revealed to have gone to goalkeeper Darryl Flahavan. Freddy Eastwood got a 1-2-3 in the Goal of the Season reckoning with his strikes against Barnsley (away), Hartlepool United (home) and Blackpool (home) coming through in that order.

The Player of the Year award was given in reverse order after the third segment, including the nail-biting 2-2 draw with Swansea City and Championship-winning win at home to Bristol City. Luke Guttridge was voted number three, Flahavan compounded his successful evening with second, whilst Freddy Eastwood cleaned up at number one. Ron Martin and Steve Tilson both gave their thanks at the end of a fantastic event.



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### 100 Club

Matthew Walker, Darren Posnack, Martin Leonard and Jimmy Hummerston have all picked up the prizes over the past month, each pocketing a fraction over £40. With the club celebrating 100 years in 2006/7, organiser Alan Perry would dearly love out very own 100 Club to number 100 people, so please get in contact with him on [alanperry4@hotmail.com](mailto:alanperry4@hotmail.com) to register your interest.

### Quid-a-Goal

Providing that all the people that pledged to Quid-a-Goal keep to their promises, then the scheme will have been our most successful to date, with £4717 raised. No doubt this is, in the main, due to Freddy Eastwood's plethora of strikes, but it is also down to the success that the club have had throughout the season. Alan Perry has already sent out his forms requesting payment – please return these as quickly as possible.

This season, Quid-a-Goal has again primarily been put towards John Stannard's physiotherapy needs, but with the club's physio himself having acknowledged that we have just about seen to his every need, from 2006/7 we will be pushing the scheme towards the club's youth department. Already we have put money towards Joel Ledgister's lodgings, and he has been rewarded with a professional contract for the club's Centenary campaign.

Reiss Noel is the second major recipient of our money from the current campaign as we helped to finance his rail fares from Stratford in East London. Reiss has been offered a scholarship for next season, and has played an integral part in the Under-18s excellent conclusion to the campaign. Alongside Carl Patten at the heart of Blues' Youths defence, the club's future at the back is looking secure.

### New Life Members (total: 108)

Welcome to our new Life Members this month: **Colin White** and **James Ventris**.

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

Colin Ashby, David Banks, John Banks, Rebecca Beecroft, Thomas Bridge, Deborah Butcher, Maureen Callaghan, Alan Carey, Sam Carey, Alex Chidgey, Mark Coshever, Dave Cousins, Mark Daley, Derick Davies, Roy Davis, Leonard Deadman, Richard Deadman, Paul Edmonds, Jamie Finlinson, John Freemantle, Adrian Greene, Louis Greene, Zoe Greene, J.A. Hammond, Nick Hardy, David Holland, Joe Imich, Alan James, Alexander Kasparian, Paul Kelsey, Carole Kenny, Raymond Levett, Alan Nice, Malcolm Ostermeyer, Gareth Powell, Maxine Prickler, Daniel Ribbits, Jenni Ribbits, Colin Sanders, Laura Sharp, Andrew Stibbards, Graham Summerfield, Andy Tallis, Dave Tallis, Scott Thorne, Nick Tiffen, Colin Unwin, James Ventris and Joanna Warren.

## THE NEWS – Away from Home

### The Saints Trust

Last week, the Saints Trust met with Leon Crouch, the second largest shareholder in Southampton Leisure Holdings (SLH), to discuss the way forward for Trust involvement within the football club. Crouch agreed to a proxy of 100,000 shares to the Trust, and impressed as a genuine fan of the club, pledging to take out membership of the Trust. Crouch lent his support to the Saints Trust's claims for fan representation on the board of SLH.

Gavin Egan, vice-chairman of the Saints Trust, represented the fans' body at a meeting between Rupert Lowe, Crouch and the much-maligned figure of Sir Clive Woodward. Crouch and the Trust agreed on a number of points to push the Coca-Cola Championship club forwards in the future:



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- \* Fan representation on the board of Southampton Leisure Holdings;
- \* Separation of the roles of Chairman and CEO;
- \* A board made up of local businessmen and genuine Saints fans
- \* Agreement that Saints should be a top 10 club;
- \* That the most important man at the club should be the Manager;
- \* Season ticket prices for the coming season are too high;
- \* And that above all that Saints should be run as a Football Club and not as a business to make money.

Crouch added after the meeting: "the manager - not a head coach, director of football or the chairman - should be the most important man at the club. The current board have forgotten this and seem to have lost sight of the fact that Saints are first and foremost a football club for the community of Southampton."

### THE MATCHES – Blues in Review

#### **fri 14 apr: gillingham (h) 10-1 [league one]**

It wasn't a particularly 'Good' Friday for the Shrimpers, who succumbed to a single strike from Tommy Black just seconds after the half-time break. Over 11,000 packed into Roots Hall expectantly, but in truth Blues never really got out of first gear in the bright spring sunshine.

Gillingham were on a roll with four straight victories behind them, and gave premature warning that they will be a threat at the top of the League One table next season when Matt Jarvis crossed for Black to touch home unmarked at the far post. With Efetobore Sodje ruled out for the rest of the season and likewise Spencer Prior injured, Lewis Hunt bore the brunt of the post-match criticism, although in truth his lack of position for the Gills goal was his only mistake.

#### **mon 17 apr: barnsley (a) 2-2 [league one]**

If losing 1-0 at home to Gillingham gave the Blue Army the jitters, then being two goals down at Oakwell after an enthralling first period was enough to send the 2,000-strong travelling supporters to despair. Southend hadn't been that bad against the Yorkshire club fighting for a play-off place, but two moments of misfortune cost the Essex side dear.

After 18 minutes, the Tykes were in front against the run of play with Freddy Eastwood and Lee Bradbury having already gone close. A goal-kick was headed against Lewis Hunt by Adam Barrett and Darryl Flahavan was unluckily beaten. Then, on the stroke of half-time, referee Phil Joslin missed Tommy Wright's blatant foul on Flahavan and Martin Devaney flicked in a header whilst unattended at the near post from the resultant throw-in, the ball taking a deflection from Kevin Maher.

The stage was set for Eastwood to haul his side back into the game. In the past I have likened him to a David Beckham/Andrew Flintoff figure for his ability to inspire his team-mates to new levels, and it was no different as Mark Gower swept Duncan Jupp's cross into the back of the net eight minutes after the break.

Eastwood then struck himself with his latest assault on the Goal of the Season awards. Picking the ball up- 20 yards out, he simply arrowed a fierce shot into the top corner of the net to bring Blues level. Paul Hayes (or rather Jupp!) diverted a low cross past Flahavan at the other end in a see-saw finish, but the effort was ruled out for offside and with Brentford only picking up a point, one more win would suffice for promotion to the Coca-Cola Championship.

#### **sat 23 apr: doncaster rovers (h) 10-1 [league one]**

Just like in their previous home outing, United wasted the chance to secure the three points required with an abject display. Doncaster Rovers only nominally had a play-off place to aim for





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with an extraordinary sequence of results, but they are notoriously difficult to break down, and so it proved.

Once again the hosts were the poorer side, and the punishment arrived within a minute of the restart. Committed again going forward, Duncan Jupp was left to marshal two forwards and when Lewis Guy crossed, James Coppinger was in place to slot home in front of an exultant North Bank, split evenly between Blues and Donny fans. Even then, Rovers were the better team, and Southend did not look capable of testing Alan Blayney in the visitor's goal.

### **sat 30 apr: swansea city (a) d2-2 [league one]**

For the full story of this match, see pages three and four – Fallon 2 Eastwood 2, but Michael Nelson gets the most important goal of the day!

### **sat 7 may: bristol city (h) w1-0 [league one]**

With Colchester United needing to beat Yeovil Town to deny Southend the title, it turned out that the Shrimpers didn't need to defeat City 1-0 at the Hall in front of another 11,000-plus sell-out, but it sure put the icing on the promotional cake for Wayne Gray to slot home three minutes from time and help the hosts power to the Championship rather than limping over the line with a fifth game failing to end in a win.

Gray had only been on the field for four minutes when he added his name to the history books by sprinting clear of a tiring Robins defence and sliding past substitute goalkeeper Nathan Abbey in front of a jubilant South Stand. But his role wasn't in the script.

The day, a 'Bermudan Bonanza Day' was billed in honour of outgoing front man Shaun Goater, and it was the Goat that was supposed to score the winner that secured the title. In a battle of attrition – United again came up against a club who should be fighting for the divisional honours next season – he was not quite fed, and the move that led to Gray's introduction was admitted as a fluke by boss Steve Tilson: 'I just wanted to give the Goat a send-off' was the sentiment behind his 83rd-minute withdrawal, all of the Hall rising to give the international a standing ovation.

**Up the Shrimpers!**  
**Rob Craven (17 May 2006)**