



SHRIMPERS TRUST



NEWSLETTER – Volume 2 Issue 16

THE INTRODUCTION – Editor Robert Craven

I think that when we all look back on this season, we will be totally confused as to what has gone on at Roots Hall.

Twice this term Southend United have succumbed to Wolverhampton Wanderers, matches which have summed up the manner of our numerous defeats in the current campaign.

At Molineux, supporters were confronted by a bemusing spectacle – a scintillating start when Steven Hammell struck the crossbar, then a mad fifteen minutes with Wolves scoring three times, then the remainder of the fixture as the Shrimpers dominated away from home.

Then at the Hall, Blues went down by a single goal, scored by central defender Jody Craddock, who bravely got down to nod past Efe Sodje and Darryl Flahavan. And other than that goal, neither side threatened the scorers.

But immediately after both of those matches, United have recorded incredible victories. When people look back through the record books, they will notice that Blues defeated Manchester United, 1-0 at the Hall in the fourth round of the Carling Cup.

It will be a famous success, regardless of what happens overall this year, and it will be one that every one of the supporters inside the ground and watching in television will remember for the rest of their lives.

It will be one of those moments, like what were you doing when Kennedy was shot, or when Elvis died, or when Kevin Pietersen won back the Ashes for England. Where were you when Freddy Eastwood curled his shot past Tomasz Kuszczak for the only goal of the Shrimpers first foray into the last sixteen of the Carling Cup?

Blues became just the third side to defeat the Red Devils in all competitions when Uriah Rennie finally blew his whistle to signal the end of that match. All three had defeated them 1-0, Arsenal and FC Copenhagen before us. Happy anniversary Sir Alex Ferguson!

No-one would have known which team was fifth and which team was rock bottom when Southampton followed Wolves to Roots Hall in December.

And maybe that has been the problem across the season, because whenever United have come across the top opposition, they have performed well, with the possible exception of the SKY televised clash with Cardiff City in September.

Blues have drawn 0-0 at Burnley and 1-1 at West Bromwich Albion, both clubs expected to be in the play-off shake-up at the end of April and start of May.

Meanwhile, back at Roots Hall, the Shrimpers have picked up points against Preston North End (keeping another clean sheet) and Plymouth Argyle, as well as all three against the Saints.

What that suggests is not that Southend are way off the pace in the division, but instead that they are able to compete with anybody. So what has left them seven points adrift of safety at the foot of the Championship?

One aspect would almost certainly be the spine of the team, which on paper looked to have been retained, but on closer inspection, has actually been ripped to shreds.

Freddy Eastwood relied on an experienced partner in League One last season – he played well off of Shaun Goater, and the other forwards learned from the Bermudan international as well. Goater has since retired from the game, leaving Eastwood to lead the line alongside the likes of Matt Harrold and Billy Paynter.

Maybe one day Eastwood will be the senior partner, but in his first season at the second tier of English football, it is wrong to believe that this should be his role. Against Southampton, Lee Bradbury had returned to full fitness and was ready to start and lead the line – the difference was noticeable.

In midfield, Kevin Maher has arguably been the player of the season. But the Shrimpers captain has yet to find a team-mate to take on the Mark Bentley role.

In 2005/6, Luke Guttridge largely kept Bentley from the team with a string of excellent performances, but more than any other play this term, he has failed to make the step up.



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Whether this is because of the quality of Championship or due to a rumoured fall-out with boss Steve Tilson is irrelevant; Guttridge's shocking form has meant that that Blues have greatly missed Bentley.

The one-time Dagenham & Redbridge midfielder was exactly the sort of player that it seemed United required at times during November – someone to win the ball and offload to Maher for the skipper to spray across the park.

Would Bentley have been able to make the step up? That is one that is too difficult to answer, but Southend do have an improved model in Alan McCormack in on loan from Preston North End.

Although he made his most memorable contribution in a Shrimpers shirt (at Macclesfield Town when he netted a brilliant brace for those that don't remember!) from the right-hand side of midfield, he is a box-to-box player in the mould that Guttridge became last year.

The Irishman's quality at this level is not in doubt, and on loan at Motherwell in recent seasons from Preston, he has showed that he can perform on a similar-sized stage. We await with vigour the McCormack-Maher axis in the centre of the park.

And in defence, last year the best central partnership was Adam Barrett and Efetobore Sodje. Barrett had climbed through the ranks from League Two, and at times his ability to perform at Championship level has to be debated.

For much of the season, United have been forced to play two ageing centre-halves in Sodje and Spencer Prior. One or the other should be fine, but with both, there is a lack of any sort of pace, and this is perhaps an area where Peter Clarke will be able to regain his place.

Clarke is not a poor player, and he has played at England Under-21 and Premiership level whilst with Everton. He is also a determined character, and he has put his heart and soul into whatever position he has been asked to fill.

Asked to play in the centre of midfield, he did not shirk his responsibilities and he held his head high even when things were going wrong, particularly at Wolves. In his natural habitat, alongside Sodje, he may be answer to a solid back-line.

Of course, we all have our answers to the problems that have popped up this season, but the ultimate task lies with Steve Tilson. I would implore every Shrimpers supporter to stick by Tilly, however tough times get in the next few months.

The side has struggled, but the man has only managed twenty games at Championship level, so any talk of the sack should be ruled out.

Maybe the Wickford-born Southend legend requires a little help, and some sort of advisor or director of football may be a viable solution if things are looking particularly bad in January.

But we must not forget, through all of this, where we were three years ago when we were losing to the likes of Boston United and being thrashed by Mansfield Town at Roots Hall.

This team has come a long way, and in the cases of Darryl Flahavan, Barrett, Prior, Che Wilson, Mark Gower, Maher, James Lawson and Eastwood have come right through from League Two.

They are two massive steps up to make in two seasons, and it may be that Blues finds themselves taking a step back before moving on again. It will not be easy to stomach, but all we can ask is that the team on the field tries its hardest, and the management duo do all they can in the January transfer window to bring in any fresh personnel that may be needed to make a fight of this season.

Supporters will not tolerate displays like those at Barnsley, or at home to Hull or Wolves. But if the team keeps fighting, challenging for every ball and is capable of defeating a side like Southampton, then they will be more patient. Lets try to enjoy the next few months.

Up The Shrimpers – Keep the Faith,

Rob



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SUPPORTERS DIRECT NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2006

Date: Friday 13th October 2006

Time: 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Venue: The British Library, Euston Road, London

Shrimpers Trust representatives Terry Jeffreys and Robert Craven travelled to London to attend the National Conference of Supporters Direct back in October, and here is a resume of the day's events.

Supporters Direct is a national collective of Supporters Trusts, and currently numbers 147 Trusts, with projected targets of 150 and 200 envisaged to be met in the coming years. This total includes clubs from the very top of the football pyramid, such as Manchester United, to the bottom, where coincidentally FC United of Manchester are represented. Speaking at their National Conference in October 2006 were Sport Minister, Richard Caborn MP, and UEFA Head of Communications, William Gaillard.

Caborn spoke first, citing Northampton Town, the very first Supporters Trust, as the pioneer for better governance and democracy. He complimented Supporters Direct for their important role at the time of the ITV Digital collapse: *"Reflect on the Doomsday headlines,"* he said, *"when 20 or 30 clubs were expected to go out of existence. We have come out of it well."*

The Sheffield MP earmarked the three principles of Supporters Direct as democratic ownership of football clubs, a civic or community responsibility and a footballing balance that needed to be struck. *"This structure has revolutionised the way in which football clubs are run,"* he declared. *"The UK has the best landscape for success in football, with 40,000 clubs watched by two billion people worldwide."*

"75% of Football League clubs now have supporters trusts, with half of the Premier League following suit. In Scotland the figures are even better – all clubs in the Scottish Premierleague have a trust, and 60% in the rest of the Scottish Football League. Our voice needs to be heard throughout football."

Caborn then arrived at the important stage of his speech: *"I am delighted to announce a funding package for Supporters Direct. The 'Football Family have come together and a three-year deal has been put together worth £1.8 million. Supporters Direct will now be able to expand and incorporate rugby union, rugby league, cricket, speedway and ice hockey. It will provide an opportunity to launch community-based clubs."*

He then put the pressure on the European Union to allow football to be governed differently to other businesses. *"The Nice Agreement recognised that sports trusts should be treated differently. There is an urgent need to give football the right to govern itself through the EU and Europe as a whole,"* he said. *"Fans and supporters must be at the heart of the Independent Football Review [find out more at www.independentfootballreview.com]."*

However, Caborn was at pains to point out that this would not lead to added interference from abroad: *"This will not be Brussels take-over of sport. The autonomy of sport must be retained – this is absolutely essential. The responsibility here lies with football governance, which has to be fit for the purpose."*

"Supporters Direct is a uniquely British institution, but it could spread throughout Europe. We must take this opportunity to rebalance sport throughout the EU, matching commercialisation with governance. This is all about empowering sport to run itself."

After Caborn was presented with a framed photograph of his beloved Bramall Lane, it was the turn of William Gaillard, once regarded a joke figure within the UEFA ranks, but now becoming an extremely passionate and well-respected figure.

Being a Frenchman, it was perhaps inevitable that he would start by recounting a revolution: *"The English Revolution of 1688 lies at the heart of all clubs. At the start, these were not always football clubs –*



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they were quite often suppressed – but in time it spread to the clubs of Europe. It was about democracy and membership; there was no ownership, just a common purpose.”

“By the 1890s, football clubs became private, and in the 1980s they went public as they were listed on the stock market. UEFA’s Vision Europe document said that this was not a good mix – you either violated the market or the sport, and it was an inherent contradiction.”

Gaillard then moved on to the inception of Supporters Direct in the “small English city” clubs of Northampton Town, AFC Bournemouth and York City, and into Scotland. “UEFA saw that this was probably the future of football, and it was taken to the Executive Committee. If football was in the hands of members, then UEFA needed to do something about it.”

The spokesman then announced his organisations part in the funding. “UEFA has announced that it will fund a feasibility study by Supporters Direct to take this into Europe,” he declared. “This will be located in London and will spread through a European Conference. Supporters Direct is tremendously innovative and useful, and the Independent European Study, thanks to Richard Caborn, is bringing everyone together.”

“This could turn around football on our continent,” Gaillard continued. “The purpose is to protect football from Brussels and the European Court of Justice; those that know nothing of football. They were threatening the autonomy of sports bodies. We are not putting British football into the hands of UEFA: FIFA deals with world football, UEFA deals with European business and national associations will remain important nationally.”

Having allayed members’ fears, Gaillard went on the attack: “The specificity of sport should be recognised, as should the autonomy of sporting rules. The courts are being used to contest doping bans, relegation, and the logical conclusion of this is a legal case to challenge penalty kicks! Clubs complain about international teams and players coming back injured. International sides are being attacked by the very people, money-driven, who will ruin our clubs.”

“The Nice Agreement is a terrific opportunity for the principles of autonomy and subsidiarity of clubs,” he concluded. “And the best way that this can be represented is through Supporters Direct spreading into Europe.”

It was then time for Supporters Direct Chief Executive Philip French to step forward and thank the speakers, Richard Caborn, William Gaillard and Alex Phillips, who had lectured at the previous meeting in 2005. French spoke on the big challenges ahead regarding the threat of takeovers, and was pleased that most of the battles in the previous twelve months had been won.

The speeches delivered had “challenged views on club structures and ownerships”, French said. “The very role of clubs within communities is at stake, and the core principles of democratic supporters representation and accountability are at its heart.”

Both Terry and myself left the lecture hall in an extremely positive frame of mind – two of the most important figures within the British government and UEFA had announced large funding packages, but more importantly had recognised the role that supporters have to play in the future of football, not just in this country, but right across Europe. Finally it seems that the men at the top are listening, and that the coming years will be a positive time for supporter representation at football clubs.

At this stage, a series of different seminars were set up, and the Shrimpers Trust attended lectures on ‘Football And Its Communities’, ‘The Football Association and Governance’ and ‘Trust Secretaries’. You will be able to read more on these seminars on our website, www.shrimperstrust.co.uk.

If you wish to find out more about Supporters Direct and the role that supporters trusts can play within football, then visit their website at www.supporters-direct.org.uk.



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THE SHRIMPERS TRUST KIDS

Blues' Youths Results

Sat 04 Nov | Puma Youth Alliance League | Colchester United (h) | L0-4

Sat 11 Nov | Puma Youth Alliance Cup | Oxford United (a) |

Sat 18 Nov | Puma Youth Alliance Cup | Brighton & Hove Albion (h) | W1-0 | Jones

Sat 25 Nov | Puma Youth Alliance League | Queens Park Rangers (h) | L0-1

After beating Gillingham 7-2 at the end of October, Blues Youths might have been expected to build on that result and race up the Youth Alliance League table, but an inexperienced forward pairing of Rhys Henry and Tashan Abeyinka have often been left to lead the line in the absence of injured duo James Lindie and Steffan Gaisie.

Lindie hopes to be back in time for the FA Youth Cup clash with Coventry City on 13th December, but Gaisie is a long-term worry having been struck by a serious blow in the very first pre-season friendly against Woodbridge Town back in early July.

But the fact that the duo have been missing has undoubtedly contributed to a month in which the Shrimpers teenagers fell to three defeats – two at Boots & Laces – and just one victory, against Brighton & Hove Albion. That triumph had actually nothing to do with the fact that yours truly was called into duty as an assistant referee when the designated official failed to arrive at the ground, and everything to do with a solid defensive display in high winds, and a fine headed goal from Ronnie Jones.

A similarly narrow triumph could have been picked up against Queens Park Rangers seven days later, but unfortunately Rhys Henry's penalty was saved on the stroke of half-time, and in the second period a strong, physical Hoops outfit netted the only goal of the game through Keiran Murphy.

The first two fixtures of November were less close, with Colchester United beating Blues 4-0 at Boots & Laces and then the Seasiders travelling to Oxford United in the PUMA Youth Alliance Cup, where they were sunk 3-1. Ricky Duncan will be hoping that December, with matches against Wycombe Wanderers, Coventry and Leyton Orient, will yield better results.

THE TRUST – What We've Done

Committee Meeting Minutes (27/11/2006)

The Trust have been approached by Peter Miles, who along with Dave Goody has been the author of many of the definitive books on Southend United of the past fifteen years, to distribute copies of a new Quiz Book that he is putting together. Please look out in the newsletter and website for more information on this in the coming weeks and months.

We will also be anticipating a response from Southend United into some research carried out by the Trust after discussions at our last committee meeting. In it, we discovered that ten Coca-Cola Championship clubs operated a priority system based on rewarding supporters who travelled to the majority of away games for away matches, whilst four others asked fans to retain their ticket stubs in case of 'big' matches during the course of the campaign.

Full Minutes of the Trust's Liaison Meetings with Southend United are available to download from the Shrimpers Trust website, www.shrimperstrust.co.uk. The archive goes right back to the very start, over five years ago, and includes meetings up to September 2006

Curry Night (29 November 2006)

25 people attended the first of our Curry Nights to be held at the Maharajah on the London Road in Benfleet. An excellent time was enjoyed by all present, and it is Alan Perry's intention to return to the same venue next year when we next attempt this type of social evening.



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Shrimpers Trust Events List

****STAR EVENT** Shrimpers Trust Annual Christmas Draw**

On New Years Day, at half-time in the Coca-Cola Championship clash with West Bromwich Albion, the Trust will be making its annual Christmas Draw, with the top prize this year of £1000. Further prizes of £500, £250, custom-made golf shoes, a signed Southend United squad football and a bottle of champagne are also available. Please return ticket stubs to Richard Coxell at the address listed on the tickets, or drop them in at the Shrimpers Bar at any subsequent home fixture before WBA. If you require more tickets, please drop by at the Birmingham City game.

Available from Thursday 14 December: The Team We Call United DVD

The Shrimpers Trust will be making 'The Team We Call United' DVD available from Thursday 14 December to help mark the club's centenary. If you would like a copy of the recording, which was made by the Bushell brothers in the late 1960s, please complete the request form at the back of this newsletter. There will also be a Question & Answer session, hopefully with Shrimpers legends Billy Best and Andy Smilie, in the New Year. Please visit www.shrimperstrust.co.uk for up-to-date information on this.

Saturday 20 January: Shrimpers Trust Quiz Night

Venue: The Shrimpers Bar, Roots Hall | Time: 7:30 for an 8:00 p.m. start | Contact: Alan Perry on 01702 476 458 or at alanperry4@hotmail.com | Tickets: £8 (adults) or £5 (children) including supper.

100 Club

There is still time to contact Alan Perry on alanperry4@hotmail.com or by calling 01702 476 458 to register your interest in the 100 Club in time for our Christmas bumper draw, which will see the Trust give away £400 to one lucky winner. The weekly prize at the moment is just a touch under £40, but the more people that sign up to the scheme, the more that this increases. Simon Rayner picked up his second prize in a month, as has Kathy Jeffreys in recent weeks, whilst committee members Trevor Bashford and Paul Fitzgerald joined John Clench in scooping the weekly winnings.

Quid-a-Goal

Ricky Duncan is the recipient of our Quid-a-Goal money this season and, having sponsored first-year professional Joel Ledgister's shirt for the 2006/7 campaign as well as funding travel for Joel and Reiss Noel in the past fifteen months, we liaise with Ricky regularly to see how we can assist over the course of the whole season. We are also publicising the Under-18s results this season through this very newsletter.

Please get in touch with Alan Perry via the usual methods (01702 476 458 or alanperry4@hotmail.com) or download a form from our website, www.shrimperstrust.co.uk to make a pledge. You can monitor the total on the website, and at the start of December, on the back of three blanks, it stood at £1328.55. Hopefully the team will follow in the footsteps of Freddy Eastwood and Alan McCormack over the next month and raise the total towards the £2000 mark.

Life Membership (total: 118)

Stuart Braithwaite has become the latest Life Member of the Shrimpers Trust. We welcome Stuart to the fold, whilst if you are interested in becoming a Life Member, please contact Paul Yeomanson at info@shrimperstrust.co.uk or by meeting him at the stand in the Shrimpers Bar on any home matchday.

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

Mark Balcombe, Ian Bloye, Mr W. D. Brown, Mrs C.B. Brown, Beryl Cannell, Ronald Cannell, Gary Champion, Linda Champion, Derek Collingwood, Gwyn Dalley, David Duncan, Mike Edkins, Ray Elsdon, Craig Fillary, Donna Fillary, Jamie Ford, Anthony Gray, Terry Hollands, Frank Hullyer, Trevor Hunt, Dean Huntley, Colin Hutton, Kevin Jones, Frederick McLean-Brown, James McLean-Brown, Lara McSweeney, Gary Sanders, James Smith, John Smith, Paul Smith, Robert Smith and Stephen Wolfendale.



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THE MATCHES – Blues In Review

sat 4 nov: wolverhampton wanderers (a) 1-3 (championship)

Matt Harrold may have bagged Blues third away goal of the campaign, but there was little else to cheer on a miserable afternoon in the West Midlands. Strangely, the second period did contain a lot of positives, but the manner of United's defending in the first half, coupled with a perceived lack of effort amongst the ranks after conceding three quickfire goals, left a nasty taste in the mouth.

The Shrimpers came out of the blocks fastest, and less than two minutes had passed on the clock when Steven Hammell struck the crossbar with a free-kick from just outside the box. Freddy Eastwood was a constant threat in the opening ten minutes, but then things all went horribly wrong.

An uncharacteristic mistake by Darryl Flahavan between the posts allowed Leon Clarke to poke Wolves in front, and a side that had previously been bereft of confidence suddenly jumped to life, with Jody Craddock scoring the goal of his career, a hook into the top right-hand corner, before a powerful Clarke header found the corner of the net.

Eastwood struck the woodwork soon after Harrold's consolation as Southend briefly threatened a comeback, but it was too little, far too late, and United had hardly warmed up for the visit of Manchester United in the greatest possible way.

tue 7 nov: manchester united (h) w1-0 (carling cup fourth round)

Amongst the coal, a diamond. In a season thus far packed with despair, Blues chalked up one of the greatest victories in the 100-year history of the club, on their first appearance in the last sixteen of the League Cup. Now a quarter-final awaits against Tottenham Hotspur at White Hart Lane!

Sir Alex Ferguson celebrated twenty years in charge of Manchester United by naming a strong side against the Shrimpers, including Wayne Rooney and Cristiano Ronaldo, who both received the ire of the Roots Hall crowd. It was another possible star of the Premiership, Freddy Eastwood, that stole the following day's headlines, though, when he stepped up to curl home a thirty-yard free-kick past Tomasz Kuszczak 27 minutes in.

It was from an almost identical position to the one that Hammell had smacked against the bar three days earlier, and I was glad that I hadn't had a sneaky tenner on the Scot at odds of 80-1 to be first goalscorer. David Jones immediately struck the inside of a post at the other end as the Mancunians attempted to reply quickly, but this was to be the Shrimpers night.

And, other than Eastwood, Flahavan's evening. He denied Ronaldo from set-pieces and from open play as the Portuguese winger single-handedly tried to pull the Premiership leaders level. He was stopped every time by the Southampton-born custodian as Southend joined Arsenal and FC Copenhagen as the only sides to defeat the Red Devils at the time.

sat 11 nov: preston north end (h) d0-0 (championship)

Between the two Carling Cup wins over Leeds United and Manchester United, Southend had lost all three Coca-Cola Championship fixtures, so it was important that another League defeat was averted at the Hall against high-flying Preston, who started the afternoon just one point off of Cardiff City at the top of the table.

David Nugent, an England Under-21 international, did threaten the United net, but it was Carlo Nash who had the first real save to make, denying Freddy Eastwood at full stretch before Matt Harrold hit the follow-up wide. The second half was a tale of Efe Sodje, solid at the back and dangerous at the front, seeing his header nodded off of the goalline by Danny Pugh. A point was something to build on.

sat 18 nov: plymouth argyle (h) d1-1 (championship)



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After the first half of this Championship clash against the Pilgrims, supporters' frustrations boiled over and the Blues were booed off of the Roots Hall turf for the first time since the dark days of Steve Wignall and the basement division. At the start of the day, the club were bottom, four points from Barnsley in 23rd and five from safety, four minutes in and they trailed to Bojan Djordic's low shot.

The rest of the first period was a write-off, with only Argyle's incredible lack of intent to increase the advantage stopping Blues from trailing by three or four goals at the break. Still, the second 45 minutes did not appear to be starting in any better fashion until Alan McCormack, signed on loan from Preston the previous day, was introduced just before the hour mark.

Straight away his presence brought about renewed purpose, and Eastwood and Harrold combined to set up Mark Gower for a fierce equaliser. McCormack could have made it 2-1 minutes later, but he just failed to get a touch onto a low centre and then saw Luke McCormick save his strong effort. Efe Sodje could also have won the game for the hosts, but his header cleared the crossbar.

sat 25 nov: colchester united (a) 10-3 (championship)

A match that included three dismissals was decided by the first, a contentious decision by referee Steve Bennett and his assistant in front of a packed Barside terrace. Karl Duguid was robustly challenged by opposite number Kevin Maher, and having attempted to tug the Shrimpers skipper back, dived back to the floor clutching his face.

Video evidence suggested Maher swung an arm in Duguid's direction, although it also seemed that this did not actually make contact. The U's captain's explanation for his spectacular collapse was that Maher "chested" him and stuck his head in his face. No mention of any real contact, and as a result, a shameful act of play-acting. All of this was missed by the Shrimpers faithful, who were busy watching Jamal Campbell-Ryce produce a stinging shot, tipped over the crossbar by Aidan Davison.

Until then an even match, in which Blues were worth at least a point, had seen its best chance fall to one-time Southend transfer target Kevin McLeod, who hit a shocking shot into the side-netting. Maher's marching orders changed the face of the game, and a tough task was made more difficult when Mark Gower followed him off to an early bath after picking up two cautions in two minutes, the first in complaint at the referee's assistant for his decision to send Maher off, the second for a ridiculously late tackle of retribution on Duguid.

Greg Halford, long touted as a possible talent at a higher level, scored with a cracking long-range strike as nine-man Southend attempted to hold on, and Pat Baldwin scored his first-ever competitive goal after Johnnie Jackson's effort had cannoned back off the woodwork. Chris Barker was sent off for a second bookable offence, but Blues misery was completed when Jamie Cureton netted a third.

tue 28 nov: barnsley (a) 10-2 (championship)

If it was bad enough to go down 3-0 away to your local rivals, it was just as bad to be beaten 2-0 by Barnsley at Oakwell after an extremely abject performance. This was a bad day from the outset, Maher losing his appeal against his sending-off at Layer Road and joining Mark Gower on the suspended sidelines, whilst loanee Arnau Reira also sat out the fixture after being injured by Franck Moussa in training.

Reira must have wondered what he had walked into as he sat in the away end amongst the 247-strong away contingent, and then witnessed his team-mates fail to turn up. There was widescale frustration within the ranks, with club chief executive Geoffrey King one of the main recipients, and unfortunately Steve Tilson joined him when he failed to make a substitution at the start of the second half with United 1-0 down and seemingly clueless.

They trailed to Brian Howard's 24th-minute finish, a goal gifted to him after Spencer Prior had recklessly conceded possession 25 yards from goal. In Tilson's defence, Southend did have the



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better of the second half, with Campbell-Ryce, Mitchell Cole and Matt Harrold all having chances to level. But Kyel Reid sunk the Seasiders late on with a free-kick that eluded everyone, before being shown a red card for a second caution.

sat 2 dec: wolverhampton wanderers (h) 10-1 (championship)

Another match, another defeat, and as the club equalled their worst-ever run of 17 League fixtures without a win I think most supporters' patience finally snapped. This was a truly dreadful fixture, decided by Jody Craddock's header early in the second half after Michael McIndoe had crossed into the penalty area.

I can barely remember a single shot from the fixture, almost from either side, and certainly Blues did not make Matt Murray in the Wolves goal earn his money for the week as he had his easily day between the sticks for the whole season. It would have to get a whole lot better than this as United sat ten points adrift at the foot of the table.

sat 9 dec: southampton (h) w2-1 (championship)

Just when you started to believe that it would never happen again, Southend picked up three points against a Southampton side harbouring genuine hopes of returning to the Premiership after a couple of difficult campaigns in the second tier of English football. To put this 2-1 success into context, Saints had won their previous four matches, racking up 13 goals in the process and defeating table-topping Birmingham City in a 4-3 thriller at St. Mary's Stadium.

But this game was different, probably to any that Blues fans had witnessed in the rest of the season as United fought from the very start. Lewis Hunt and Alan McCormack set the pace with a tough-tackling display in the centre of the park, and Freddy Eastwood and Lee Bradbury 'worked their socks off' up front to coin one of their manager's favourite phrases.

Both could have scored hat-tricks, but Eastwood in particular found goalkeeper Kelvin Davis in inspired form, although he did beat the former Ipswich Town shotstopper with a curling dipping shot from the edge of the penalty area midway through the opening period.

Efe Sodje made an important block after Darryl Flahavan had saved from Gregorz Rasiak, and from that interception, McCormack capped an undeniable Man-of-the-Match display with a stunning strike from 25 yards to make it 2-0. Southampton tried to fight back, but the Shrimpers had Lady Luck smiling on them, a goal chalked off for an infringement and the post coming to their rescue before Rasiak grabbed a late consolation.

Up the Shrimpers!
Rob Craven (10 December 2006)