



SHRIMPERS TRUST



NEWSLETTER – Volume 2 Issue 18

THE INTRODUCTION – Editor Robert Craven

THE ROLLERCOASTER NATURE of the 2006/7 campaign doesn't relent, with Shrimpers supporters consistently riding the crest of a wave before plummeting to the depths of a disastrous low.

Those who have supported the club for a lot longer than myself tell me that it has always been this way, but this season just seems to have captured that spirit more than any other.

Who would have thought after the momentous events of Wednesday 24 and Thursday 25 January that we would now be worrying, no matter how irrationally, about the prospect of not moving to a new home at Fossetts Farm?

Who would have believed, as a neutral observer, after the morale-boosting 3-1 victory at St. Andrews and the 5-0 televised thumping of Queens Park Rangers, that Blues would still be planted very much in the relegation zone?

But then who, after failing to win any of the 17 Coca-Cola Championship fixtures between August 26 and December 2, that the Shrimpers would have any chance of staying in the second tier of English football at this stage at any rate?

Immediately after the last edition of the Shrimpers Trust newsletter went to print and out in the post and via email, the Councils of the Borough of Southend and the District of Rochford met to vote on the proposals for Southend's new stadium at Fossetts Farm.

I think that I was reasonably optimistic about Southend Council backing the decision, despite the recommendations of the Planning Officers that a decision should be deferred until a more thorough set of plans were tabled.

However, Rochford have been notoriously difficult to appease, and it came as a complete shock when those inside the chambers at Rayleigh's Civic Offices and the hoards locked outside were relayed the decision that they had approved the plans.

The Football Club, as well as ourselves, created a feeling that supporters could be influential, and I am sure that this was the case. Unfortunately I was unable to attend the Southend meeting, but the evening masses at Rayleigh must have had some sort of effect

upon the decision-makers who wended their way past them.

If you are confronted by a hundred or more football supporters as you walk into the voting chambers, that has to say something about the vast swathes of support that the stadium plans have in the area.

Now we just have to await the decision of the Secretary of State, Ruth Kelly, for the final rubber-stamping. By nature, all Southend United are more than a little worried about this, but before the activities of last week, we were all cautiously optimistic.

There is very little to suggest that this should not still be our viewpoint, but when it comes to moving away from Roots Hall, we are naturally pessimistic – we have been disappointed on so many occasions.

So when the *Southend Echo* got the chance to muscle in on a story of reasonably national significance – raids also occurred in Gloucestershire, Leicestershire and Warwickshire – it was unsurprising that they blew the fanfare.

'Blues Boss In Fraud Probe' blazoned the billboards around the town. Forget the fact that chairman Ron Martin and his company, Martin Dawn's, offices at Roots Hall were investigated as part of a police operation, this was an opportunity for the newspaper to get an exclusive.

Despite Chris Phillips doing an excellent job reporting on Southend United for the paper, it has always appeared that there appears to be an underlying current of dislike for the town's football club, a strange situation given the positive image that a good team can give to an area.

Of course, the *Echo* will argue that it has a responsibility to report on behalf of the whole town and not just the football club. That is as may be, but the sensationalising of the story will have done nothing but raise people's suspicions of the validity of Ron Martin's actions in securing the new ground, something that has not been called into question in the slightest.



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And so, now we are plunged into another period of anxiety, waiting desperately for news from the Government and from the police authorities that Ron, and Southend United Football Club, are able to continue with what will be a massive move for the area.

Please see the statement issued by the Shrimpers Trust later in this newsletter for our official stance on the matter.

Back to incidents on the pitch, and if Blues do end up returning to Coca-Cola League One after just a single season in the Championship, then it is hard to look further than the team for ultimate responsibility.

It is easy to look back at refereeing decisions – and who knows how many of those we have been on the wrong end of in the current campaign, from Jermain Defoe's offside goal in the Carling Cup quarter-final, to Barnsley's F.A. Cup equaliser in stoppage time at Roots Hall to Leicester City's second goal at the same venue in the much more important League fixture.

And the decisions that the match officials take do not even themselves up over the course of a season. Look at the teams at the bottom, and they will all point to naff calls from referees and their assistants at some stage in the campaign. Leeds United will point to Richard Creswell's effort that appeared to cross the goal-line at Birmingham City recently.

In terms of importance, things like that will never equate to the same level of fortune being afforded to clubs over the course of nine months of slog.

But the sides that get themselves out of trouble are not the ones that mope around looking back at what has gone wrong – they are the ones that pull their socks up and battle it out.

Thankfully, it appears that the team we have here at Southend United are prepared to do this. Both at Sheffield Wednesday and at home to Leicester, despite being on the end of some shocking decisions, Blues continued to fight to the final whistle (some might say literally).

And because they are giving their all – in both cases after indifferent first halves – they will

get unconditional support from those huddled on the nation's terraces. And that is only right.

But it also means that if we do end up struggling, and losing, in our battle to avoid relegation, it will be because we were simply not good enough.

Although the 4-0 defeat up at Sunderland appears to have been the worst reverse of the previous month or so, the losses against Crystal Palace and Wednesday were much more damaging to our hopes because they were fixtures that the Shrimpers should have won.

They should have been won on paper, on current form, and they should have been won on the pitch with the chances that were created.

Many of the team that we go and watch week-in, week-out, have been winners, either at this club or at others in their career. And for that reason, Southend United will always have a chance, right up to the final whistle of the final match of the season.

By the next time that I write for this newsletter, we will all have a much better idea of how things are going to pan out. We have winnable away games at Ipswich Town and Hull City and must-win home fixtures with relegation-threatened Burnley and Leeds United, whilst Colchester United are the visitors on what could be a very Good Friday.

The support of Southend United supporters this season has been, especially of late magnificent. We can be quiet at the Hall, but that is often the case with clubs at home.

Away from southeast Essex, it is a different story, and Johnny Cash's 'Ring Of Fire' is given a new lease of life when belted out at places like Oakwell and Hillsborough as opposed to the funereal renditions at home.

We can still make the final difference around the country, becoming the twelfth man and sucking the ball into the net, along with all the other dated clichés that you can remember!

Up The Shrimpers – keep the faith and make your voice heard,

Rob



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THE INTERVIEW – Southend United Media Manager Dave Scriven

When the Shrimpers Trust meet up with Dave Scriven, it is in the plush new surrounds of the designated Press Room at Roots Hall; the chambers where the locals and the nationals grill the likes of Steve Tilson and Freddy Eastwood on a weekly basis, against the backdrop of the advertising board that gives the likes of Insure And Go and Haart value for their sponsorship of Southend United.

As we settle down, Dave modestly takes the credit for the Shrimpers' double-promotion winning campaigns: "I want this to be included," he reveals light-heartedly. "We were in League Two when I started here, and we have won two promotions in my time at the club. I'm really the tactical mastermind behind Steve Tilson and Paul Brush!"

It is perhaps a measure of Scriven's comfort in his surroundings that he is able to joke in such a way. However, there is no doubt that the Shrimpers have progressed, both on and off the field, since the former unofficial website editor and Shrimpers Trust webmaster and committee member landed the role of Media Manager at Roots Hall.

"The club have progressed at first team level, and in turn, we have become more professional in our dealings with the press," Scriven states. "No-one was dedicated to this role before I arrived, but now we are more proficient on matchdays in looking after everyone. We also provide better communication out of the club."

Some may smirk at this final remark. How often do supporters feel that they are the last to know about a transfer involving the Blues? It is a source of stress to Scriven as well. "It is the single most frustrating point when I can know for weeks that we are going to be signing someone, and I read about it in the local press but I cannot report on it. Then, you see people putting down the club off for not disclosing it! Until it is official, though, you can't say a thing - we have to be 100% certain."

Possibly the hardest week of Scriven's life with Southend United came when the club drew Manchester United in the fourth round of the Carling Cup, but once again, he takes the whole episode in his stride. "Fortunately, we'd had a number of big games already: the play-offs in 2004/5 and the two LDV Vans Trophy Finals. When we won League One, every match at the end of the season was big, and had to be dealt with on a greater scale."

"In the build-up to the Manchester United game, everyone wanted to know about Southend United Football Club. It wasn't that we hadn't known anything like it, but just the magnitude involved. Every paper wanted to send a reporter down, and all the television stations and radio companies were interested as well."

By now, Scriven is in full flow: "We had so many requests, that in the end we had to stage a Premiership-style Press Conference. Ideally it would have taken place on a one-to-one basis as it normally is, but that was not possible. We try to protect the players and offer up a certain individual who has a connection to the club - in this case it was Kevin Maher as he had played in the F.A. Youth Cup final against United."

"This was the highest amount of requests we had every received for one game, and we had to turn some people away. The way that the rights are distributed for television, SKY had the live coverage, ITV had the highlights and MUTV also had certain rights as the official station for their club. All of them had to be accommodated in a ground [Roots Hall] that is not designed for it. In the end we had to say that SKY had the priority camera spots as they had the majority of the rights and had paid the most money. We even had to turn away regional television, but they were alright about it."

Even when the match was over, the nature of the 1-0 win meant that there was even more work to do. "After the tie, it was a bit mad!" Scriven details. "Fortunately, I'm friends with Matt Hudson, my counterpart at Colchester United, and he came down and helped me and Dean [Simmons, Scriven's assistant] on the night. It was a great help having someone who knew what had to be done."

"The next day was an absolute killer - we were at home the following Saturday and we wanted the programme to have decent coverage. In the end we stayed up until half-past-one or two o'clock in the morning to do that. We didn't quite expect what followed, and by the time that I got in at eight the next day, my mobile had already been ringing."



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“It was literally relentless all day, and as soon as I put down a call on my mobile, I was picking up the office phone and vice versa. Wednesday is the players’ day off, and we don’t generally bother them. We had to tell everyone that they were off and some media services that I hadn’t even heard off, like the British Armed Forces Radio, could not seem to grasp that they couldn’t speak to who they wanted to.”

If it sounds like Scriven did not enjoy the day, then it is an unfair reflection. After all, this is what he took the job on for - big days when the profile of the club grows to national importance. “In the end Steve Tilson came in and we did a Press Conference which went out live on SKY. Freddy Eastwood is a shy person, and really didn’t want to speak to anyone. It was a big deal for the club, and eventually I had to do some interviews myself!”

So how the former IT student end up landing the job? How do you get to work for the club that you have supported all your life? “I was actually approached by Ron Martin and Geoffrey King in the winter of 2003/4. It was tentatively discussed whether I would be interested in the role, and by the end of that season, I was in place, so I had the whole summer to prepare for the job.”

As we have seen, the position of Media Manager includes a wide range of responsibilities. “What doesn’t it include?” Scriven bats back. “There is the local and national press, as well as our in-house publications.” How do the two media types differ? “The local boys are fine, they really are a pleasure to work with, The nationals always look for the same angles; they don’t know enough about our level. It can get monotonous and frustrating - after the recent 5-0 win over Queens Park Rangers, I had to voice my annoyance with SKY, as despite Kevin Maher scoring two goals, they wanted to speak to Freddy, even though he didn’t score.”

Being a lifelong fan of the club, it must be difficult to report on the side when things are not going well, though? “There are good and bad points to the job. It is good to work for a club that I supported as a boy and to see the goings on behind the scenes. But if we have lost, then I am like a bear with a sore head the next morning. You do become unattached from supporting.”

The conversation inevitably turns to the conga at Oakwell and the rousing rendition of Johnny Cash’s ‘Ring Of Fire’. “When there’s the cold Tuesday nights in Carlisle, it is alright to be sitting up in the Press Box, but when you get an occasion like that Cup replay at Barnsley, like Steve Tilson said at the time, you just want to be involved. When we played at Swansea City on the last away trip of 2005/6, I had covered every other game from the Box, but I wanted to be amongst the fans that day, so I decided to do that.”

And when the team gets thrashed 4-0 at Sunderland, how tough is the job then, sore head apart? “First and foremost, we do have a responsibility to make sure that Southend United Football Club are seen in a positive light. You have to balance the reporting of the facts with the fantasy of the club and being fair on your work colleagues.”

“The players know when they have had a bad game. We have got to be professional, but when you work for an unofficial site it is much easier to be opinionated. You have to be as honest as you can and admit when Southend are the poorer side, but if the opposition wins easily, it is obvious that they are the better team.”

Scriven insists that he has no problems obtaining interviews with players - “they are happy to speak to me whenever - either by phone or in person” - and is delighted to have Dean Simmons on board to assist him: “He is great, and is the unsung hero at times. When I am tied up, it is great to have someone else there to make sure that things get done.”

The focal point of the Shrimpers Media department has to be the website on a day-to-day basis, but in print, it is the 84-page matchday programme, ‘The Blues’. “It is a lot of work to produce,” Scriven reveals. “It is one of the biggest publications, and it will be interesting to see which club can get up to 100 pages. I’m not sure that our printers could handle that, but they might have to try!”

“Planning it is the hardest part, especially when you are dealing with other clubs. We try to get it all done in a week to ten days and often the Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday is taken up completing it in the run-up to a game. It is difficult to allocate time to everything, but I think we do quite well, and we are grateful to all of our contributors for all of the help they give us - we can always do with more though!”

Scriven declares that the awards that he picked up for Most Improved Website in 2004/5 and Programme Of The Year the following season are his proudest moments, but the job is not at all easy: “It can be a problem to keep



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things fresh, and Wednesday are a slow news day, so you will often see articles about Tickets or the Community popping up then.”

“Sometimes you can get bogged down by the work, and it isn’t nine-to-five but more 24/7 in its nature. I can be at home and have to write an article on a player signing because I have been waiting until five o’clock at work and it hasn’t been finalised before I leave. You quite often find yourself proof-reading a programme at one in the morning, but you can’t get too annoyed and we remain grateful to our volunteers.”

He is “grateful for the chance” to work for the club, even though he did not think it would ever be his job to work in the Media Department for the Blues. “I have been offered two other jobs at clubs that were, at the time, above us in the League, but working in football doesn’t appeal to me, even if the press side does. I just enjoy working for *this* football club.”

We conclude by looking to the future. “There will be a re-launching of the website in the summer, although it will still be under the auspices of FLPTV, who we have a contract with for the next ten years. There are sides that the supporter does not see which are positive with them, but I would like more freedom.”

And what of the new ground? “I have been involved with the publicity and the marketing around Fossetts Farm, and Roots Hall is very dated, so I have enjoyed working with Phil Bigwood at the BBC to work on providing the best facilities for them when we make the move. If it is easy for the cameras, then there is more chance that we will get more games.”

The Shrimpers Trust would like to thank Dave Scriven for his time. Remember, you still have the chance to grill another member of Southend United’s staff, assistant physiotherapist Ben Clarkson, so please send your questions to info@shrimperstrust.co.uk as quickly as possible

SHRIMPERS TRUST STATEMENTS

Police Investigation at Roots Hall

Since the events of Thursday 1st March 2007, there has understandably been widespread speculation over the arrival of a large number of police to carry out an investigation at Roots Hall.

The Shrimpers Trust has spoken to senior management at the club and has received assurance that the results of the current investigation will not implicate either Southend United FC, its Board of Directors or their business interests, including Martin Dawn.

The Shrimpers Trust acknowledges the considerable success and stability that Ron Martin has brought to the club in recent years and wishes to re-affirm its total support for the Chairman and SUFC.

All our matches between now and the end of the season are crucial and we urge supporters to use all their efforts to get behind the team as we continue our fight to stay in the Championship.

Hull City Tickets

The Shrimpers Trust will shortly be receiving a consignment of tickets for the away fixture at Hull City’s Kingston Communications Stadium. This follows the attacks on both vehicles carrying Southend United supporters and the fans themselves outside the KC Stadium on the last occasion that the Shrimpers visited the Tigers. Hull chairman Adam Pearson was very apologetic at the time, and promised the Trust a number of tickets for the corresponding fixture the next time that the two teams met.

This will be the Coca-Cola Championship clash on Saturday 31 March 2007, and the tickets, which will be distributed to the 67 supporters on the Shrimpers Trust coaches that were attacked before the remainder of given to the top travellers in the 2006/7 season, should be received in the week beginning March 5th.

Supporters who believe that they may be entitled to a ticket should, if they have not been contacted by Travel Officer Chris Berry, get in touch with him immediately on 01702 558 978 or 07703 898 698. Those fans are also urged not to purchase tickets from the club’s Ticket Office for the match. If they have already done so, please call Chris as soon as possible.



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THE SHRIMPERS TRUST KIDS

Blues' Youths Results

Sat 20 Jan | Puma Youth Alliance League | Brentford (a) | W3-1 | Henry 2, Abbey
Sat 27 Jan | Puma Youth Alliance League | Leyton Orient (h) | W3-1 | Moussa 2, Smyth
Sat 03 Feb | Puma Youth Alliance League | Brighton & Hove Albion (h) | W1-0 | Herd
Wed 14 Feb | Puma Youth Alliance League | Rushden & Diamonds (a) | W3-1 | Lindie, Noel, Herd
Sat 17 Feb | Puma Youth Alliance League | Gillingham (h) | L0-3
Sat 24 Feb | Puma Youth Alliance League | Northampton Town (h) | Match Postponed
Sat 03 Mar | Puma Youth Alliance League | Colchester United (a) | Match Postponed

Southend United's Under-18s enjoyed another magnificent run over the last month to haul themselves into contention for the South-East Conference of the Football League Youth Alliance.

A run of six straight victories, which ended when Gillingham raided Boots & Laces for a 3-0 victory on 17 February, had previously seen Blues Youths go top, but for the time being it is the Gills and Queens Park Rangers who lead the way, three and two points ahead of the young Shrimpers respectively, with Colchester United also in title contention.

It was disappointing then, for the match against the U's originally scheduled to take place at the Garrison 'B' Ground before being switched on account of the weather to the Seaside's base, to be called off barely half-an-hour away from kick-off due to a waterlogged pitch. Southend's clash with Northampton Town at Boots & Laces had also been called off, this time because the Cobblers were competing in the area semi-finals of the Youth Alliance Cup against Colchester a week earlier.

In the first match of the period, Rhys Henry gave United the lead against Brentford in Osterley as he smashed in at the near post after dribbling down the left flank. Lee Smyth then set up with young forward for his second of the morning, this time a clinical finish, and Davis Abbey's pinpoint shot completed the visitor's scoring early in the second period. A late consolation did not dampen spirits.

Leyton Orient had won 1-0 in the original League clash at HQ, but in doing so used four substitutes, and when the fixture was rearranged, the teenage Shrimpers gained revenge in rousing style, again triumphing 3-1. Again United dominated from start to finish, and Belgian Under-18 international Franck Moussa opened the scoring from Smyth's cross.

Rhys Henry struck a post from a first-half penalty, but Blues' Youths made it 2-0 when Smyth exchanged passes with Luke Thurlbourne to blast home. Again there was a late consolation to blot the Shrimpers' copybook, but only after Moussa had collected Henry's centre to convert his second of the game.

Brighton & Hove Albion were next to visit the fortress off Eastern Avenue, succumbing to a solitary Johnny Herd strike. Fielding five Under-16 players, Ricky Duncan's side secured the points when the left-sided defender burst forwards from the back before smashing into the net off of the goalkeeper's elbow.

The following Saturday's fixture at Rushden & Diamonds' Nene Park fell victim to the snow, but was hastily rearranged for the following Wednesday, allowing Southend to climb to the top of the table. Again the scoreline was 3-1, with James Lindie opening the scoring having returned from injury. Rushden immediately equalised, but Smyth and Thurlbourne combined to help Reiss Noel head home from close range. Herd netted his second goal in two games by rifling a mishit clearance into the roof of the net.

However, Gillingham ensured that any joy was short-lived three days later when they won 3-0 at Boots & Laces. Ricky Duncan out much of the defeat down to the fact that the side had played just a few days earlier and expended too much energy, but with 17-year-old Franck Moussa earning a professional contract in the month, it was still a time to cheer for United's youth team.



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THE TRUST – What We've Done

Shrimpers Trust Events List

****STAR EVENT** Saturday 17 March: Shrimpers Trust Race Night**

Venue: The Shrimpers Bar, Roots Hall | Time: 7:30p.m. for an 8:00 p.m. start | Contact: Paul Yeomanson at info@shrimperstrust.co.uk | Tickets: £3 (available from the Shrimpers Bar or via our website)

These Race Nights are always well attended, so please book your tickets as soon as possible to avoid disappointment. This particular event takes place on the evening of the vital Coca-Cola Championship match with Leeds United, and admittance is strictly by ticket only, so please obtain yours – now!

Saturday 14 April: Shrimpers Trust Quiz Night

Venue: The Shrimpers Bar, Roots Hall | Time: 7:30p.m. for an 8:00p.m. start | Admission: £8 (£5 U16s)

Contact: Alan Perry on 01702 476 458 or at alanperry4@hotmail.com.

The price includes a fish-and-chip supper from the Fish House, with a vegetarian alternative. Tables should ideally consist of eight people, but call Alan if you are alone or have a smaller group and he will attempt to allocate you to another table.

Sunday 29 April: FPD Annual Roots Hall Programme Fair

Venue: The Shrimpers Bar, Roots Hall | Time: 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. | Admission: 50p.

Shrimpers Trust member David Stacey and the Football Programme Directory bring their annual fair to the Shrimpers Bar the day after the final home game of the season against Luton Town. A must for anyone interested in Southend United and local football memorabilia.

****AVAILABLE NOW!!!** Team We Call United DVD**

The Shrimpers Trust made 'The Team We Call United' DVD available from Thursday 14 December, and over a hundred copies had been sold by Christmas. 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, although as yet the date has yet to be confirmed. Please keep checking www.shrimperstrust.co.uk for more information.

End Of Season Draw

If you receive this Newsletter through the post, then you will also find enclosed your End Of Season Draw tickets. If you obtain it via email, then these will be posted out to you separately. As usual, there are a whole host of prizes on offer, so please do your best to flog these to friends and family and help raise money for the Shrimpers Trust.

100 Club

Every week, we reveal new winners of our 100 Club on the Shrimpers Trust website, www.shrimperstrust.co.uk. Please check there to see if you are indeed a winner, with recent winnings being collected by Ken Jarvis, David Mason, Paul FitzGerald and Graham Hart. 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 and put yourself in with a chance of winning the weekly prize of just under £40. The more people that sign up to the scheme, the more that this prize increases.

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 during the past fifteen months, we liaise with Ricky regularly to see how we can assist over the course of the whole season. With the Under-18 team currently challenging for honours at the top of the South-East Conference of the Football League Youth Alliance, there could not be a better time to pledge your support.

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, with the total moving past the £2500 mark over the last few weeks.



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Life Membership (total: 124)

Welcome to our latest inductees to our Life Membership scheme: **Alan Gershlick** and **Tim Wilson**.

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

Chris Abrehart, Jean Barney, Clive Burlton, Mike Cocks, Nathan D'Alessandri, Glen Eckett, Chris Elliott, Ryan Frost, Massimo Galiero, Diane Gray, Ian Gray, Ken Gray, Stephen Gray, Ross Gurton, Terry Hall, Caroline Hargreaves, Simon Hayter, Warren Hill, Anthony Jones, Alan Marshall, John Marshall, Richard Molyneux, Kay Searle, Jim Simpson, Ron Wallace, Sandra Wallace, Scott Wallace, Margaret Ward, Chris Wheeler.

THE MATCHES – Blues In Review

sat 27 jan: tottenham hotspur (a) 11-3 (f.a. cup fourth round)

Our second trip to White Hart Lane in a Cup fixture this season was not as impressive as the first, when it took extra time and a dubiously offside goal from Jermain Defoe to settle the tie in the hosts' favour. This time another Jermaine, this time Jenas, scored an important second for Spurs with the help of his hand just minutes after half-time to tip the clash the homesters' way.

In all honesty it was no more than Tottenham deserved, having dominated first half possession and only having Robbie Keane's deflected strike to show for their endeavours. Flahavan was on top form again, saving from Keane and Jenas, and there was an outside chance of a comeback when United were handed a fortunate penalty after Hossam Ghaly was adjudged to have flicked the ball with his fist when challenging Matt Harrod.

Freddy Eastwood stepped up to slam the spot-kick past Radek Cerny, and briefly the five thousand-plus Shrimpers in the Park Lane End hoped again. Sadly, the belief last little more than five minutes as Mido directed his fierce shot past Flahavan and into the net via the underside of the crossbar.

tues 30 jan: birmingham city (a) w3-1 (championship)

When we all look back at the 2006/7 campaign, whether we retain our Championship status or not, it will be this result that we remember with the most fondness as the Shrimpers' best of the season. It may not have been the most polished performance, but the 3-1 win at the hostile home of one of the promotion candidates is not to be scoffed at.

What made it all the more impressive was that Blues got off to a wretched start. Having lost 4-0 at home to the Bluenoses, the last thing that the visitors needed was for defender Peter Clarke, otherwise rock-solid, to head Sebastian Larsson's through-ball past Darryl Flahavan and into the bottom corner.

Larsson also hit the post and Gary McSheffrey scuffed the follow-up before the Shrimpers fought back, City 'keeper Maik Taylor thumping a clearance against his own defender and Jamal Campbell-Ryce squaring the loose ball to skipper Kevin Maher to fire in.

A wonderful move early in the second period, again against the run of play, gave United the lead, Mark Gower's cross picking out Alan McCormack, who nodded down into the path of Freddy Eastwood for the front man to turn past Taylor. And with Birmingham still enjoying plenty of possession, Southend's short corner routine worked a treat to bury the match six minutes from the end, the big guns peeling away to allow Maher's corner to find Gower, who slamming into the roof of the net.

sat 03 feb: stoke city (a) d1-1 (championship)

A third straight away fixture resulted in a 1-1 draw with Stoke City, a creditable result that could have been even better, despite the nature of Freddy Eastwood's late leveller. United started brightly, with Lee Bradbury denied by Steve Simonsen at full stretch, but an uncharacteristic blip at the back allowed Ricardo Fuller the simplest of tasks to blast past Darryl Flahavan.

The goal came just minutes after defender Steven Hammell became the latest injury casualty this season, and Blues were in the process of reorganising when Fuller took his toll. Mamady Sidibe should



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have made it 2-0, but wastefully hacked over from close range, and Eastwood made sure that the Blue Army had something to cheer at the death, turning in debutant Richie Foran's low cross.

fri 09 feb: queens park rangers (h) w5-0 (championship)

Friday night football usually divides opinion amongst supporters between those who prefer their matches to be played on a Saturday afternoon and hate rush hour traffic against those who believe that playing under the lights and recapturing the spirit of promotion-winning sides in the 80s, 90s and 00s is unbeatable. Nobody would quibble with the television scheduling of this game!

Returning goalkeeper Simon Royce gave Southend the perfect start, hitting his clearance straight at Lee Bradbury, who turned past the Heybridge-born custodian on nine minutes. There were times from that moment onwards that a tepid QPR actually worried Blues, but four goals in the final twenty minutes ensured that the hosts romped to victory.

Mark Gower fired a Kevin Maher centre into the corner of the net to calm Shrimpers' nerves, and then Efetobore Sodje rose to head home the captain's corner ten minutes later. Finally, in stoppage time, Maher doubled his tally for the season with two strikes, the first a curling effort from just outside the area before he found the opposite corner with a pinpoint free-kick. Survival hopes were raised...

sat 17 feb: sunderland (a) 10-4 (championship)

Sadly, in one fell swoop, all the good work of the previous Championship fixture was undone against a slick and smooth Sunderland outfit, unrecognisable under Roy Keane from the ramshackle mob that went down 3-1 at Roots Hall way back in August. After that win over the Maccams, it took United four months for Blues to register another, and one can only hope that we don't have to wait that long again.

The extra day's rest appeared to have done Southend no favours on their longest trip of the season, and within fifteen minutes, the visitors were two goals down. Peter Clarke was drawn out of position to cover for Steven Hammell, and he allowed Carlos Edwards to cross for an unmarked David Connolly to tap in. Then Lewis Hunt was inexplicably muscled off of the ball by Tobias Hysen, who coolly slotted past Darryl Flahavan.

From there on in there was little hope of forcing a way back on Wearside, and the lead could have been stretched on numerous occasions as Blues got caught like a rabbit in the headlights. Lee Bradbury and Freddy Eastwood could both have reduced the arrears but hit weak shots past Martin Fulop that defenders sauntered back to clear, and so Stern John hit a late double to help the Black Cats cruise home.

tues 20 feb: crystal palace (h) 10-1 (championship)

Whereas the Sunderland defeat could be written off as simply being outclassed by better opposition, this single-goal reverse to a woeful Palace side was a return to the autumn days when the Shrimpers were left to rue their fortune and a lack of penetration in front of goal.

Kevin Maher went close with what is dangerously approaching a trademark searing twenty yard shot, but too often Eagles' shotstopper Gabor Kiraly was not tested underneath crosses as neither Lee Bradbury or Freddy Eastwood was capable of gambling on getting to the ball first. Mark Gower's deflected effort was kept out with a sprawling save in the closest United went to scoring, but Palace robbed the points midway through the second period when Paul Ifil converted a misplaced clearance.

sat 24 feb: sheffield wednesday (a) 12-3 (championship)

Another defeat by just the odd goal, another case of a chance wasted to collect all three points. When Lewis Hunt turned in Kevin Maher's corner, all looked well, but the lead lasted just seconds before Marcus Tudgay peeled away from some haphazard marking to glance Wednesday level from Chris Brunt's free-kick. Still inside the first half-an-hour, Spencer Prior smashed Brunt's cross into his own goal, crazily finding the bottom corner when Darryl Flahavan appeared to have the centre covered.



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To their credit, United came out in the second half, backed by a brilliant travelling support, and fought hard to get back into the game, and equalised when Freddy Eastwood raced onto the Mark Gower's rangy ball and rounded Iain Turner. Turner made a point-blank save from Richie Foran, Hunt was bundled over in the penalty box and Lee Bradbury had a strike ruled out with Eastwood offside, but it was the hosts who grabbed all the points in stoppage time when Hunt blocked a fierce shot with his hands and Steven MacLean teased the penalty past Flahavan.

sat 3 mar: leicester city (h) d2-2 (championship)

With the rest of the bottom six all losing, this will either go down as a massive point gained or two points dropped when the season pans out ten games down the line. We probably won't be sure which until the next four games, all against clubs similarly in the mire, have taken place, but at the moment my mind is drifting towards the latter.

The first ten minutes saw Southend dominate, and Freddy Eastwood was denied by a tremendous double save from City 'keeper Wayne Henderson. But when play switched to the other end, Levi Porter was given too much space to cross and Iain Hume was allowed the freedom of Roots Hall to power in the header. The remainder of the opening period was turgid.

The second was much better, Blues lifting their game again after the break, and a typical low Eastwood drive past Henderson at his near post restored parity. It was anyone's game, but Richie Foran was sent off for a second cautionable offence, and the Foxes again took the lead when Hume converted whilst apparently appearing offside. Alan McCormack turned in when Matt Harrold's tenacity paid off, but will a draw against such sub-standard opposition be enough?

Up the Shrimpers!
Rob Craven (4 March 2007)