

## NEWSLETTER – Vol. 9 Iss. 05. – May 2014

### THE INTRODUCTION – Paul FitzGerald

#### They think it's all over - and it is.

Not sure I can add much that hasn't been said or debated on the end of our season. Of course it was tough to take. But we need to pick ourselves up and use this experience to ensure it doesn't happen again.

My overriding memories are of our lone striker, a large number of loanees - one or two who proved to be outstanding (step forward Egan and Sokolik) one or two who didn't....! Of course, young Daniel who made such a breakthrough is something that we can all be proud of as Trust Fans. We may not be the biggest of the clubs' sponsors, but we have been there year after year, supporting the youth and I think it only right we take a tiny piece of credit.



At this time of year of course, players deemed no longer part of the plans are released and this year is no different. It didn't really happen for Freddy this time round, but we'll never forget "that" goal, nor some of the excellent performances we know he was capable of. Poor Marc Laird - a real mainstay for us a while back, injury put paid to that - so sad. Two youngsters released are Ryan Auger who's been with us some time and Luke Chambers who of course was never going to get a look in while Daniel remains - especially with our young England Keeper following up behind. Both have been invited back for pre-season training, so perhaps the door is still open for them. Mark Phillips too is off (perhaps not that surprising) - and finally Bedsente Gomis....maybe we never saw the best of him....Let's wish them all well in whatever comes next for them, in or out of the game.

I've enjoyed the season, certainly more so than in some previous years - a decent cup run and right to the last second, something still to play.

It will be interesting to watch the arrivals lounge over the next few months. It seems to me we have the bones of a good squad, but the loanee replacements and an urgent need for a striker are presumably something troubling Phil Brown, as much as me.

Our player of the Year night was a success with Ryan, Daniel and Ben getting the majority of votes and no surprises that John Egan picked up the goal of the season. I'd like to thank those who helped Paul Yeomanson put this together, Tom Biggs from the Club for taking pictures of the awards, Scott Barber for filming them and Scott Wallace from SX Sports Media & Film Production for the on screen content plus all those from the committee who helped set up the bar, and finally to Ron Wallace from SX Sports for his help during the evening. The entire squad was in attendance along with the youth team and the management - with Phil Brown as usual doing his bit for fan engagement.

Despite the season being over, the Trust's work continues. We have a Liaison meeting soon and a meeting with Ron coming up, to discuss the development (or lack of it)...is it really 14 years since that AGM revolt and the renewed promise of a new stadium (renewed from Vic's Basildon threat)

Enjoy your summer break and here's to automatic promotion next year.

The Trust committee is always looking for new blood - so if you would like to get involved in any of our activities at any level, please don't hesitate to contact us.

**As ever, you can contact me at [pfitz666@aol.com](mailto:pfitz666@aol.com) if you'd like to comment on anything the Trust does or does not do.**

## SHRIMPERS TRUST PLAYER OF THE YEAR AWARDS

The Shrimpers Trust held their 2013/14 Player of the Year Awards on 30th April in the Shrimpers Bar at Roots Hall. Trust members were joined on the night by Phil Brown and his management team plus the Southend United 1st team squad. Ricky Duncan and his under 18's Youth team squad also attended.

The evening included various presentations to members of the first and youth teams, culminating in the Trust's 2013/14 Goal of the Season and Player of the Year awards.

Trust Vice Chairman, Paul Yeomanson who was host for the evening opened by extending a warm welcome to everyone and in particular thanked Phil, Ricky, the management team and the players for attending the event.

### **Youth Team Awards:**

The Trust's ongoing involvement with the Youth structure was highlighted, which included donations made to the Centre of Excellence, as well as shirt sponsorship of the Youth team which had been in place now for over 6 years.

The under 18's had this season finished a respectable 7th in the Football League Youth Alliance and had reached the 2nd round of the FA Youth Cup. They had also reached the 2nd round of the Southern Section of the Football League Youth Alliance Cup narrowly losing to Portsmouth.

Congratulations were extended to goalkeeper Ted Smith who had earlier in the year secured a professional contract with the Club, as well as having been a regular in the England under 18's squad. In addition Josh Banton, Jack Bridge and Jason Williams had been offered pro contracts with Southend United. Kane Farrell had been offered a 3rd year development contract for next season.

### **Player of the Year:**

The winner of this award was presented with the Tom Grace Memorial Shield. The Youth Team Player of the Year award had previously been renamed in memory of avid Southend United supporter and junior member of the Trust Tom Grace, who sadly had passed away at the age of 15 in 2007. Tom's father Len was on hand to make the presentation. Overall winner was Ted Smith, with Jack Bridge as 1st runner up and Jason Williams as 2nd runner up.

Following the presentations Ricky Duncan spoke about his work as Head of Youth and his key objective of producing as many players as possible who would make the transition into the first team squad. It is worthy to note the continued progress being made in this respect. Ricky finished by adding how appreciative he was of the Trust's ongoing support and how he very much valued its involvement as a key sponsor of the Youth set up.



### **Top Traveller Awards:**

For the 2013/14 regular season the Trust had again run coaches to all away league and cup fixtures, having covered some 9,534 miles so far.

There were currently ten supporters Scott Barber, Clare Brocks, Shane Chapman, Alan Gifford, Lesley Hicks, Brian and John Illsey, Gaye Overall, Darren Posnack and Warren Sadler who had travelled with the Trust to all these games. With the small matter of the play offs still outstanding additional mileage would of course be added to the current tally. It was therefore confirmed that the customary Top Traveller Awards would be made at a later date.

Current Top Junior Traveller Scott Doherty (5,204 miles) would also receive his award at the same time.

A thank you was extended to all supporters who had travelled with the Trust so far this season. The Trust looked forward to everyone joining them to travel for the play offs and then welcoming everyone back in August ready for the new season.

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## *Trust Travel Co-coordinator Presentation:*



Ryan Leonard was asked to make a presentation on behalf of the Southend United supporters who regularly travel on the Trust coaches to away games.

As had been mentioned already the Trust will take at least one coach to every league and cup match. This requires considerable organisation both in terms of coordinating bookings and running the coaches on the day.

Clare Brooks had again this season worked tirelessly as Trust Travel Coordinator and in making this presentation her friends and fellow travellers wanted to thank her for all her hard work throughout the season which was thoroughly appreciated.

## **Junior Blues Player of the Year:**

The Junior Blues Player of the Year as voted for by the Trust's under 16 members was presented to Southend United goalkeeper Daniel Bentley by Junior Blues member Stanley Clayton. Stanley had been selected at random from entries received to present the award.



## **Goal of the Season:**



The Martin Cramner Goal of the Season award, named in memory of lifelong Southend United supporter Martin who had passed away at the start of the 2010/11 season aged 40, was presented by his wife Zoe Cranmer. The contenders for this award as voted by Trust members, were Ben Coker vs Newport County (A), Freddy Eastwood vs Torquay United (H), John Egan vs Scunthorpe United (A), Kevan Hurst vs Chesterfield (A) and Jamar Loza vs Oxford United (H).

On loan Sunderland centre half John Egan was confirmed as a very popular winner in recognition of his 30 yard screamer vs Scunthorpe. This was the first goal scored in senior football by the Ireland under 21's international.

## **Player of the Season:**

Manager Phil Brown presented the main award of the evening. 2nd runner up went to defender Ben Coker, 1st runner up went to the Blues versatile midfielder Ryan Leonard, with Trust members voting goalkeeper Dan Bentley as Player of the Season for 2013/14. The popular shot stopper and former Blues Youth team player narrowly beat team mate Ryan for the top spot.

Phil Brown on behalf of his management team and the players took the opportunity to thank the Trust for their continued support and financial backing over the last season, which he said was greatly appreciated. Phil gave the example of a time



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during this last season when the team had been in urgent need of funds to purchase basic fitness equipment and on the way to a game he had called the Trust for help and had been given immediate assistance.

Tribute was given by Phil to his squad of players; the management team and backroom staff. All who he said had worked so hard throughout the season and had been fantastic. It had been a total group contribution.

The attitude and commitment of the whole of the squad had been first class for the entire campaign, from the starting eleven, to those on the bench, as well as those players working to get their opportunity. In particular Phil praised the contribution made by the loan players, both those who still remained at the Club and those who had since returned to their parent clubs. This group had added certain value.



On a slightly negative note Phil expressed his disappointment that no Southend United player had been included in the League 2 PFA Team of the Year. Along with the likes of Dan Bentley, Ryan Leonard and Ben Coker there were a number of other players that he might name who would be worthy contenders to get into the PFA team.

Phil said he knew he could depend on supporters, who had been fantastic both home and away this season, to continue to give full and vocal support to the team for our last home game of the season, so that we could keep the winning momentum going into the play offs. The backing by the fans was so important to the team and could prove to be the difference that gets us over the finishing line so as to achieve League One status next season.

Paul Yeomanson wrapped the evening up by thanking Phil, Ricky and the rest of the management team plus all the players for taking the time to attend the evening. On behalf of everyone he of course wished Phil and the 1st team squad the very best of luck for the forthcoming play offs.

Thanks were also given to Trust members who had attended on the night and to the various people who had helped organise the evening.

It was noted that the auction held (signed match ball from the FA Cup game vs Hull City, Daniel Bentley's shorts, Ryan Leonard's shin pads and Ted Smith's goalkeeper gloves) raised a commendable £265.00. The raffle added a further £124 to Trust funds.

### GOING TO THE DOGS!!!

**The Shrimpers Trust are organising a trip to Romford Greyhound Stadium on Friday 27th June 2014.**

At a cost of just £20.00 not only will you get admission to see an evening of Greyhound Racing but you will also get a Fish & Chip Supper with a Dessert, a Free Drink (house wine, house beer or a soft drink) and your Race Card.

The price includes return Coach Travel from Roots Hall leaving at 17.30pm.



**To book your place please complete the booking form enclosed with this newsletter or alternatively you can book online by Credit/Debit Card in the Events Section of the Trust Shop at [www.shrimperstrust.co.uk](http://www.shrimperstrust.co.uk)**

**If you require any further information please contact Clare Brooks on 07980 363092 or by email at [travel@shrimperstrust.co.uk](mailto:travel@shrimperstrust.co.uk)**

## FUNDRAISING

### 100 Club

The latest winners in the scheme, pulled out of the hat during weekly draws since the last newsletter were **John Smith, Andrew Perry, Clare Brooks, Tim Wilson, Richard Harrington, Peter Brock, Rick Napper** and **Richard Cunningham**.

The nature of the 100 Club means the more people that sign up, then the bigger the weekly prize. To register your interest, you can still contact Alan Perry at [alanperry4@hotmail.com](mailto:alanperry4@hotmail.com) or by calling 01702 476458 and put yourself in with a chance of winning the weekly prize.

Remember, the more people that sign up to the scheme, then the higher that prize will be. By setting up a standing order for just £5 a month (or just £60 a year), you put yourself in with a chance of winning around £28.00 per week at the present time.

### Quid-a-Goal

**Our Quid a Goal scheme has now finished for the 2013/14 Season.**



**This season the total raised is £1,872.25, which is considerably up on last year's total of £1290.00.**

Alan is in the process of contacting all those that took part in this season's QAG and we would ask that you forward any monies owed to us as soon as possible.

We have already asked Ben Clarkson, the club physio to identify any equipment he needs for the forthcoming season, which some of the funds raised will pay for.

Details on the Quid A Goal scheme for next season will be published in our next newsletter.

## 2014 WORLD CUP PREDICTION COMPETITION

**It's not too late to enter the Trust's World Cup Prediction Competition – closing date is Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> June.**

The format is the same as in previous years with score predictions required for each of the group matches and then predicting the teams to reach each of the following rounds.

The competition is open to everyone and not restricted to trust members (or one entry per person) so feel free to pass this on to work colleagues, friends, family, whoever.....the more the merrier!

The entry fee is £5 per entry with half going towards the prize pool and the other half to trust funds. The prize pool is then split with 60% going to the winner, 30% to the runner up and the remaining 10% to third place. Obviously the more entries we get, the bigger the prize pool gets!

**And along with the cash prize the winner will also receive a unique piece of memorabilia from the World Cup. Either a signed script or a signed photo from the BBC's World Cup Team in Brazil.**

**Further details including competition rules and an entry form have been enclosed with this Newsletter.**



## MEMBERSHIP

### Welcome to New Life Members (Total 219)

**Tom Archard.**



Life Membership of the Trust currently costs £100.00 if you have an email account or £125.00 if you prefer to receive Trust Mailings by post.

If you are interested in joining this group please contact our Membership Secretary, Paul Yeomanson via email at [membership@shrimperstrust.co.uk](mailto:membership@shrimperstrust.co.uk).

You can also join up as a Life Member in the Membership Section of the Trust Website [www.shrimperstrust.co.uk](http://www.shrimperstrust.co.uk), and postal applications will also be accepted at **Shrimpers Trust, PO Box 5830, Southend-on-Sea, SS1 9FD.**

### Welcome to New Members since the last Newsletter

**Tom Archard, Daniel Burton, Graham Dalgarno, Lisa Emmerton, Scott Emmerton, Darren FitzGerald, Stephen Lansley, Dean Overall and Liam Sullivan.**

**\*\*Please note that the Shrimpers Trust would like to know if any of its members' addresses change, or if they have a new email address so that newsletters and other correspondence can be sent to the correct address. Please send any change of address details to **The Shrimpers Trust, PO Box 5830, Southend on Sea, SS1 9FD**, by email to [membership@shrimperstrust.co.uk](mailto:membership@shrimperstrust.co.uk) or alternatively fill in our on-line contact details form which can be found in the Membership Section of the Trust Website, [www.shrimperstrust.co.uk](http://www.shrimperstrust.co.uk) \*\***

## NEW MERCHANDISE

**The Trust is launching a new range of merchandise over the coming months and the first of these are two new styles of Polo Shirt.**

The first is a 'standard' cotton polo shirt manufactured by Gildan or Fruit of the Loom and will be available in navy with white embroidery or white with navy embroidery.

These polo's will feature the new Trust Logo on the left breast and the Trust's website URL on the right sleeve.

**With sizes from small to 4xl they are priced at £20.00 plus postage & packing if required.**



The second polo shirt is a 'polyester' one (similar to current football shirts), is manufactured by Joma and is available in navy with yellow trim. Again these polo's will feature the new Trust Logo on the left breast and the Trust's website URL on the right sleeve.

**This style polo is available in sizes small to 3xl and are priced at £24.00 plus postage & packing if required.**

An order form has been enclosed with this newsletter or alternatively you can purchase these online from the Trust Shop on our website at [www.shrimperstrust.co.uk](http://www.shrimperstrust.co.uk)

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## The second item of merchandise is a stylish Coffee Mug.

The Sparta Ceramic mug comes in midnight blue with the new Trust Logo printed to both sides in white.

Priced at just £6.00 (plus postage & packing if required) the mugs are a must for your kitchen or office.

The Coffee Mugs can be purchased online from the Trust Shop at [www.shrimperstrust.co.uk](http://www.shrimperstrust.co.uk)



## WE WANT YOUR FOREIGN COINS

**It's nearly holiday time and when you come back do you put all your foreign currency in your man draw? Or you didn't get rid of your old British coins before they went out of circulation? Well bring them to us and we can bank them into Shrimpers Trust coffers as a donation.**



We appreciate that, in this economic climate that a lot of people will not be in the fortunate position to make monetary donations but why not give us your old foreign coins which are unused and we can put them to use.

This also applies to lower denomination of foreign bank notes, so if you're feeling generous, bring those to us too!

From the next home game we will have a bucket in the Shrimpers Bar for your foreign currency, come and see us and dispose of it. Alternatively, you can send the currency to **The Shrimpers Trust, PO Box 5830, Southend on Sea, Essex, SS1 9FD** or pass to your favourite committee member.

Thanks in advance and up the Shrimpers!

## THREE PEAKS CHALLENGE

**Starting on 16<sup>th</sup> June Trust Committee Member & Newsletter Editor Jon-Paul FitzGerald will be taking on the Three Peaks challenge to raise funds for Havens Hospice – please read the following message from JP, and help him if you can**

On the 23rd December 2013, my Grandad, Peter White, died of a brain tumour at home in Rayleigh. The ordeal of what my family and my Grandad went through would have been even more difficult without the support of Havens Hospice. I will be dedicating my participation in this event to not only his memory, but also to raising money for the hospice which helped look after him in his final weeks, in the hope that they can continue to provide care for those in his position in the future. RIP Grandad, I will be thinking of you all the way, love you always.



So what will I go through? The event is a trek to the top of three of the tallest of Britain's mountains, Snowdon (Wales) 1085m, Scafell Pike (England) 978m and Ben Nevis (Scotland) 1344m. All of which I will climb, with my team, within 24 hours. That is a total of 27 miles and an ascent of 9800 ft.

Donating through JustGiving is simple, fast and totally secure. Your details are safe with JustGiving – they'll never sell them on or send unwanted emails. Once you donate, they'll send your money directly to the charity. So it's the most efficient way to donate – saving time and cutting costs for the charity.

So please visit my JustGiving page [www.justgiving.com/jpathispeak](http://www.justgiving.com/jpathispeak) and help if you can.

## THUNDERBIRDS ARE GO! – SUFC 1<sup>st</sup> TEAM MATCH REPORTS

**Welcome to our new Southend United 1st Team Match Report section for the 2013/14 Season.**

This season the match reports are being written by Trust Member Gary Beard, and as you read them you will realise that they are not your normal run of the mill reports, which you have probably gathered from the title.

The Trust Committee would like to thank Scott Barber for providing us with match reports in previous seasons.

**Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2014**  
**Burton 1 Southend 0**



**Play Off Semi Final 1<sup>st</sup> Leg**

Fierce headwinds struck the Thunderbird as she dodged in and amongst the storm clouds. Curtains of rain sweeping across her window screen each time her pilot attempted to turn her back on course. The streaming water was both a blessing and a curse. Fortuitous because it helped to hide the worst of the weather away from her nervous passenger's; a pain because it made it harder for her pilot to judge just when it would be safe to make a dash from one passage of smoother air to another.

Experienced with flying in such conditions Mike was nevertheless relaxed at the helm. Less sanguine though were the trio of fellow Thunderbird's that had he picked up from Tracy Island an hour or so earlier. Denzil, totally unable to look forward, cowed in his seat pretending to be doing something that he called Maffs, the rest of the world sums!

Behind him, and to his left, sat Uncle Albert. His attire, having already suffered more indignities than any clothing should be safely subjected to, looked more than ready to retire. But still he sat there, proudly perched upon his seat, just like a five year old out on a birthday outing. His long suffering brother had promised him a balloon to blow up if he behaved and the prospect of such an event had him totally entranced. Not so Boycie, who was reluctantly accepting that he, would have to eat all of the picnic vegetables all by himself. This was because his usual partner at such gastronomic feasts, Marlene, was absent enduring more localised inclement conditions. Hopefully he had gazed around at each of his companions before quickly reaching the perfectly correct conclusion that he was on his own as far as that repast was concerned. Indeed, with both Mike and Albert having just got outside a full English, and Denzil clenching his teeth together whilst turning green with fright, it was highly doubtful that anyone would be ready for a 'little something' for quite some time.

As they progressed further North Mike occasionally had to dip his craft down below the clouds to check for landmarks; the electricity in the atmosphere having played havoc with TBII's state of the art navigational systems. Unfortunately such actions got misinterpreted by his crew as "Him being lost again!" Outrageous claim's!!, especially given that it had plainly been a different roundabout each time!

Eventually though the Pirelli tyre factory came into view and with it a busy scene, full of other Blue's supporters all hurrying towards the nearby stadium. Without too much ado Mike moored up his Thunderbird in a good position to make a quick getaway after the game; allowing the four T'Birds to head for the cover of the stadium. The wind was still blowing a gale and with even more water than Albert passes in the night pouring down from the sky; it was not a time to linger about.

Indeed the miserable conditions were not anywhere near what Blues prefer to play in. Remembering our long barren patch which covered the far from dry days of February and March; matching up the climate then with that of today's. It wasn't overly long before gloomy forecasts concerning the games result were being forecast by most of the inhabitants of the packed away end behind one of the goals. Over 1,600 hundred Blues had made the trip and, with the home fans barely making a noise, it was almost like we were at a home match. Everywhere you looked; there were blue shirts or Southend scarves being waved about. Such colourful scenes, taken together with the sheer incredible volume of our support, meant that, if the team were even half as up for it as their supporters, we were going to win by a cricket score. The players, out there on the pitch waving back at their exuberant supporters, clearly felt the same. All signs that Team Blue was coming out to play and that, all being well, fun were going to be had by all!

Only things turned out to be far from well. Just seconds into the match and it became clear that Burton were not interested in playing football. Instead all they wanted to do was time waste, cheat and otherwise con the referee into giving them decisions. These reports have a glorious record of paying scant respect to the League of greed; often comparing it unfavourable with our, hopefully soon to be departed, own. But today, witnessing the downright cheating and pushing that the team in yellow and black were doing, one felt ashamed to be associated with it. It was disgraceful and the authorities should be looking towards bringing charges against Burton, and their arrogant manager, for bringing the game in disrepute.



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One of the many reasons why that won't happen is that their tame referee just meekly went along with their charade. He was truly pitiful, having less control over the game than a two year old their bladder. Accordingly they pushed and shoved our players all over the field. And when, after having patiently waited for the referee to award us a free kick and having requested of him several times why such were not forthcoming, White reacted tor being pushed off the field so hard that it's a wonder that he didn't join the Blues fans, guess who got booked! Indeed it was to be a long, long 25 minutes before the whistle first blew in our favour.

By then though we had had weathered what little attacking options our hosts had to offer and were beginning to make some tentative assaults of our own. Their cry baby manager did not like this and so began weeping all over the 4th official demanding that his little treasures be protected from such evil brutes. His china dolls were similarly minded cowards. They could certainly hand it out, but take it back? There was more chance of a bank cashing one of Albert's cheques!

Weak chinned bullies to a man, Burton began throwing themselves to the ground every time we won the ball of them. Their pet referee aided and abetted by his like sighted linesman, reacting by awarding them free kick after free kick. It became so ludicrous that one of their defenders even hit the ground before we had got within ten yards of him. And yet the officials did nothing. Not a thing. Naff all. Apart that is from continuing to give them free kicks.

Thank you Football League. One of the most important games in our season and you provide us with officials that have less backbone than jelly fish. No one was asking them to be our side. All we wanted was to see them administering the laws of the game, impartially and fairly. We experienced neither, and the situation nearly got Uncle Albert arrested!

The whole story is as yet unclear. Indeed it's perfectly possible that full details will not become available until the 20 year rule has passed. Accordingly it's only possible to report what was observed, namely Albert being accosted by two grim looking security guards. The resulting interview wasn't nice cop, bad cop either. Indeed both men were walk ins for any violent parts in the Sweeney. Albert of course bleated his innocence, honest guv. To which they responded with knowing looks before asking him to explain himself once again; warning that they had witnesses and that this was the last time that they would be asking politely.

Well, faced with such a difficult question about his very existence Albert was in a quandary. But there's more to our tribal elder than just a lot of noise, smells and scruffy clothing. He's been around the block more than a few times has our Albee, and so he wasn't about to start screaming for his brief. Instead he began his defence by going on the offensive ... "When I was in the war ....

Well, the two stewards, so brash and confident just moments before, and so sure that they had their blagger bang to rights, were now beginning to realise how isolated their position was. Just two of them up against an Albert. Their retreat, shall we say, was not glorious. Their accusation... unknown. In Albert's case it could have been virtually anything anyway and with all the practice he's had at getting away with things ... Losers, just like their team!

Back on the pitch, the game had become almost all ours. Only one side was playing football, the other seemingly content (Or perhaps it was all they were capable of doing!) to just hoof the ball or preferably one of their opponents. We even began to get awarded some free kicks in and around their area. To be truthful we wasted them though; kicking the ball high over the goal on almost every occasion. Earlier in the season Coker had been scoring from them for fun. Nowadays though they get taken by either Corr or Hurst and our scoring rate from set pieces has sadly become rather dismal.

Other chances were coming our way though but each time their goalkeeper got in the way; that's when our shots weren't running straight at him. Equally he was winning everything in the air. Some of this was undoubtedly due to their defenders habitual habit of pushing our forwards just as they were about to head the ball but credit should still go to one of the few home players who was playing the game with a straight bat. So with us pretty much in charge of the game and asking most of the questions it was right against the run of play when, upon a rare raid into our half of the field, the cheating, deceitful, underhand offspring of unmarried parents, scored!

We had in fact been attacking but young Murphy ran into traffic allowing a long clearance to be made up field. White, who had pushed up to support his teammate hurriedly chased back, but , Egan, realising that he wasn't going to make it moved out wide to cover the gap that had opened up in our defence. A cross into the box then got deflected straight to one of their forwards on the edge of our box who played a neat one, two with his colleague to elude Sokolik's attentions, before chipping the ball over the despairing Bentley.

Just seconds before halftime and the cruellest cut imaginable had just been administered. The home crowd went ape, oh for at least a nanosecond before resuming their vow of silence. Indeed the stadium was ringing out to our cries "Come on You Blues!!" as the game restarted. But as powerful as our desire to get level was, there simply wasn't enough time before the whistle blew and the field was cleared to the sound of our defiant

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chants of “Wembley, Wembley”. Someone amongst the home fans might have waved a scarf, there again it more probably was just the wind. Supporting a team called “The Brewers” you already know what sort of artists both the home fans, and their team, were!

Second half and within minutes Burton were at it again. This time it was one their defenders who blatantly punched the ball out of Leonard’s path inside the area. Committed right in front of the linesman, eyes all turned to the referee who totally absconded from his duties. Enflamed, the Blues fans behind the goal and just 10 yards away from the incident began braying for blood. Corr asked, politely, why no penalty had been awarded and got waved away for his troubles. Clearly, despite probably being able to review some of his first half ‘decisions’ courtesy of Sky TV who were covering the match, the referee was not for turning.

Then, within a period of just three minutes two offenses occurred that even this ref could not ignore. First Burton’s No 6 handled the ball (The incident happening miles away from either penalty area all the officials saw it !!) then just moments later the same player tripped Leonard over just as our midfielder was about to run clear into the area. Result, one dismissed player whose manager later claimed had been mistreated. Perhaps the brewery have run a tap into his dugout because that’s the only way to describe the views that this particular misanthrope expressed after the game!

With Burton down to just 10 men and Corr beginning to lose it with the home crowd, Brown opted to make changes. Off came the two men with bookings against them plus Murphy, and on came two fresh forwards, Eastwood and Barney alongside Straker. Blues switching from a 4 5 1 formation to 4 4 2 in order to accommodate these changes. Bad move!

Not necessarily the substitutions, but with Burton now packing seven against our four into midfield the number of attacks that we were making began to dwindle. Very soon almost becoming zero. Such an unhappy state of affair lasted until just 10 minutes before the end of the game when the home players began to run out of steam. This allowed us to go 3 6 2 and as a result we began to storm down upon their goal. But the ball just wouldn’t fall kindly for us, and when it did. either a fortuitous foot would get in the way or the shot would go wide.

We did almost get level though on two occasions. The first was when a lovely cross by Hurst got headed, at the very last second, over the bar by a defender. It has been a desperate clearance that denied both Barnard and Egan who were rushing in at the far post. The second occurred when that man Egan popped up just inside the area to strike a beautiful shot that the goal keeper knew absolutely nothing about until the ball hit his leg and bounced to safety. So close and yet so far.

In the first half Burton’s goalkeeper had seemed a reasonable player; he even got warm applause as he took up his post for the second half from the Southend fans behind his goal. However now we hated him! Not because he had made the saves and not because the ball seemed to just keep running to him. No the reason why we wanted to let Albert butcher his guts was for the amount of time wasting and play acting he was doing. Every time the ball came to him he had to lie on it and cuddle it for some reason .Once, even after it had been retrieved for a goal kick!

Then, in the course of a goal mouth furry, he claimed the ball only to pretend that he had become injured. Now the wonders performed by the pitch side surgeons have long been admired by these ramblings, but none more so than now. Each and every hair upon the downed, and apparently dead, goalkeeper got loving stroked by Burton’s guardian of the magic sponge before, surgery and apparent miracle completed, the ‘departed’ soul returned to earth and bounded to its feet just as if it was brand new. Talk about swoon! Poor Denzil was so affected that he was struck dumb (There again it might have just been the sight of so much hair!)

The referee had little choice therefore than to play seven minutes of extra time. Those, sitting on sofa’s watching the match, have since assured the Thunderbirds that such a period of time was indeed played. But to us, they were over in seconds and although Blues pushed hard for a more than deserved equaliser, it was not to be. The cheats had prospered and the game was all the poorer for it!

On the way home, as a treat and also to boost depleted energy levels, a stop was made in Stratford upon Avon. Startled tourists, home grown and overseas, somehow fighting the urge to seek our autographs and have their photos taken with us. Mike and Denzil having to do the camera thing themselves. Visitors to either Facebook or our web site can witness the results!

So 1 – 0 down with 90 minutes still to be played. Hopes of the ‘W’ word haven’t completely vanished but unless we get officials prepared to stand up to Burton, the second leg of this fixture is going to be just as, if not more than, frustrating as the first. Despite our playing all the football and their committing all the sins, it is Burton who have one hand upon the key. And we have to take it back from them if the door to our promotion hopes is not to be slammed in our faces.

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Historically this season we have done well, very well on occasion, against sides that are prepared to play football as the gods would wish. But against those who have sold their dark souls to the devil have struggled. Now we have to score two goals against such a side. Can we do it? Of course we can ... can't we?

Come on you Blues !!

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**Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2014**  
**Southend 2 Burton 2**



**Play Off Semi Final 2<sup>nd</sup> Leg**

The sun drenched sea gently lapped against the stone steps. Lacking the clear blue clarity of its cousin's in the Med or Caribbean little could be seen below its coffee coloured surface. However strands of floating seaweed provided it with colour; splashes of bright, verdant, green that rippled in the wake of the occasionally passing boat.

Sounds of laughter and cheerful conversation filled the salty sea air. Patrons of a nearby tavern spreading themselves out; sitting either upon the sea wall or at one of the many tables that filled the pubs' seating area. Inside, it was just as busy. Queues, of pension day dimensions, wiggling, medusa like, towards the bar. A smooth, wooden barrier behind which harassed staff tried to maintain a smile whilst dealing with multiple demands for refreshment.

Eventually though, proud bearers of two full glasses of amber nectar, we were able to fight our way back through the crowd to claim a perch upon the aforementioned wall. With feet dangling just inches above the hungry sea and our immediate thirst quenched, we tried to relax from the tensions of just an hour or so back. We failed!!

Unsurprisingly really given all that was at stake and the manner in which it had been stolen from us. Victims of multiple muggings, all committed under the uncaring eye of officials whose very job it was to deal with such situations, we had experienced both away and now at home, two separate groups of officials who displayed the same inability (Desire?) to deal with our assailants who, instead of being given sentences longer than any that appear in these reports, had been rewarded with a trip to Wembley! It was just as if justice had taken a holiday leaving corruption at the helm. Some sociologists claim that it's therapeutic for sufferers of crime to relive their experiences. Believe me, it was not!!

Still we could not stop ourselves from replaying the game, and its consequences as around us happy, uncaring souls went about their business in blissful, possibly uncaring, ignorance of what had just befallen our beloved Blues. A two part series, the opener, (Not a crowd pleaser!) having occurred just six days previously, wounds were still weeping copiously from the mauling we had received at the Pirelli Stadium. However hopes had been high that, with a referee who had a reputation for waving cards in charge, Burton would not be able to employ their weapons of mass destruction.

Such cherished desires did not survive the first two minutes of the match as the Neanderthal tactics of Burton resulted in zero reaction coming from the officials. Corr had been pushed, shoved and held back and yet not one of the three, one not six yards from the incident saw anything untoward in his treatment. Perhaps the white lines denoting the penalty area had been painted too white; their glare blinding the referee to anything and everything that Burton did.

Mike, high up in the Thunderbirds roost, had witnessed everything though and he was going absolutely berserk. All week long he had feared just such a repeat of the previous encounter and now all his fears were coming true. Laying into the referee at such a volume that nearby spectators swiftly headed for cover, he demanded that free kicks be given and, almost immediately, his wishes were granted. Burton being awarded hoofs of the ball all over the pitch for misdemeanours by Blues that were mere stone throwing compared to the trench warfare that was being conducted by their visitors.

Cheered on by over 9,000 supporters we tried to stick to our task. But with Burton time wasting at every opportunity it was hard for us to build up any form of momentum. Cheers therefore met the referee's decision to advise their captain that any more such 'professionalism' would result in yellow cards. Such a pity then that, despite them taking as much notice of his warning as he was of their fouls against us, no caution was awarded for such underhand tactics until well into the second half!

Supping our, by now, sun warmed drinks we considered this. Its part and parcel of the game that referees judgments rarely meets with fans approval if they are not in favour of their team. Which is fair do's given that we are rather biased after all. But they are not meant to be too! Yet, over two games now we've witnessed decision after decision going to Burton. Of course mistakes get made, Uncle Albert being a prime example, but when replay after TV replay reveals the officials to have made so many, questions have to be asked. Is it just simply that our referee's and linesman are no longer up to the job, or is something much more sinister at work? Asian share prices rose after this result. Co-incidence?

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The tension in the stands was palatable. The faces of each and every Blues supporters drawn and strained as the minutes ticked by. A goal up after the first leg, Burton concentrating upon breaking our other, time, and apparently the officials, were on their side and so the mountain that we had to climb was beginning to take on aspects of the Himalayas. And then it became Everest itself!!

Yet another free kick had been awarded to them, possibly Hurst seized too loudly, and with the ball just outside and wide of our area, anxious thoughts squirmed their way into already nervous minds. Things had been bad enough with the referee ignoring our legitimate claims, but now that he was awarding 'imaginaries' to Burton the whole thing was becoming untenable. But what could Blues do other than line up and try to defend what was coming next? In an upside-down world the club would be fined by the F.A for bringing the game into disrepute should we have made any form of sustained complaint. Yet their very own officials were being allowed to darken its name at will!

You don't have to examine a crooked dice too closely to see that it is covered in sixes and so the fact that Burton scored from the referee's largesse was no real surprise. Perhaps our marking at the far post could have been improved (Their guy headed the ball in without anyone challenging him) but should we have been in the situation in the first place?

Two goals behind and the might of the authorities, plus Burtons boots, arms and legs against us. Life was not looking good. But urged on by their passionate fans Blues took a deep breath and resumed playing football the way that, once upon a time, it was meant to be. Hurst had earlier gone close with a curving shot from just outside the area that had resulted in their goalkeeper tumbling into the back of his net as he tipped the ball over the bar. Now he was attempting to torment them in another way as he, and his teammates, swept forward trying to get a goal back.

We should have got it too when, following some neat play by Straker and his eventual pass into space within the box, Corr with only the goalkeeper to beat should have buried the ball in the back of the net. Unfortunately though, in his keenness to keep his shot down and low, he mishit it and it just trickled into the relieved goalkeeper's hands. Corr's anguish was plain for all to see but, having already survived over 100 minutes of continuous battering from Burton, the big man was never going to admit defeat now. So instead he just picked himself up and got back on with it.

His attitude reflected that of his team, and we were now pressing Burton so hard that even the referee couldn't continue to ignore their 'professionalism' and so our own free kick's awarded total was beginning to mount up. Keep on at this rate and we might even, the two games taken together, get as many as they got 'given' in the first twenty minutes at their place!

As so often this season though our build up play kept breaking down on the edge of the area. Eighty yards from the net we would waltz by their players (Or be thrown to the ground depending upon whatever Burton felt like doing) but get as close as twenty yards and all our flair and skill seemed to evaporate. Still the ball was buzzing around their area and anything could happen. And it did!

Leonard, his back to goal, just outside the box and in line with the penalty spot, neatly controlled the ball upon his chest before swivelled to plant a dream of a shot into the back of the North Bank net! Gool!!!! and all our dreams were alive again!

The Hall had already been shaking to the sound of our support but now the roof was being ripped off it as everybody just went mad. Just moments before the Burton supporters, four coach loads and pit pony, had been celebrating their two goal lead. Now their lead was back down to one and guess in whose direction the ball was now coming. Yes, right back down their throats.

Each and every Blue appeared to all have grown two inches and gained a warp or two in speed. Burton in turn, their thoughts locked into how shiny they wanted their studs to look beneath the arch, looked slow and lumpy. A pub team in comparison. No change there then!

Their manager going totally ape on the touchline and crying to the 4th official for anything from a baby wipe to a wet nurse, was no longer a happy man. Accordingly he we was goading his team into even greater brutality. This confused his ape-like defence who couldn't understand what more they could do. They were already hoofing the ball miles up into the air every time it came anywhere near them. Failing that they performed the same subtle actions against any opponent who dared to come with 10 yards of them. So what could they possibly add to their game?

His tantrum got even worse when in the 39th minute and to roars of delight that can rarely have been rivalled within the Hall of Delights, we levelled the tie. Timlin, receiving the ball just outside the area swept a neat cross into it. At first it looked to be going to no one but then suddenly Straker appeared from in amidst a pile of Burton shirts to slip the ball into the back of the net.

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Well the ground just took off to scenes of utter bedlam. Everyone up on their feet, shouting and yelling for all they were worth. Our Hall has witnessed some fantastic moments over the years and this was right up amongst them. Smiles beaming out everywhere as total strangers hugged and danced with one another amid scenes of sheer abandonment and enjoyment. Supporting Blues hurts sometimes, but at times like these .... well they make it more than worthwhile. All the frustration and nail biting of the past week getting forgotten as everyone cheered and danced around! A brilliant, totally unforgettable moment.

We couldn't believe it! Burton couldn't believe and certain triads in China were having reality problems too. We were not only right back in the game but looking like scoring a third, possibly even a fourth. But to everyone at football league headquarters relief the half came to an end five or six minutes short of what Blues required. Burton had been on the ropes and just a few minutes more would surely have seen us take the lead in the tie for the first time. Now they, and their shady manager, had time to calm down and sort out plan 'B'.

Second half and we almost scored immediately. Leonard strolling past tackles, legal and otherwise, to run clear into the box before unleashing a powerful shot from a tight angle that the goalkeeper did well to save. Hindsight being what it is, it's easy for critics to suggest that he should have played the ball across the area towards either Corr or Hurst. But given that our young, talented, midfielder had just about beaten every Burton player on the pitch it's quite understandable that only the gap between two posts was registering upon his mind. Still a third goal then ....

The incident clearly rattled Burton's manager who responded by making a series of substitutions. They also served to break up the game and as a result we began to lose some of our momentum. Also, now that the game was back on level terms, Burton abandoned all their time wasting and fouling; concentrating instead upon playing football.

Timlin had been rather fortunate to escape a booking in the first half when he committed a late tackle. Accordingly when he did commit another mistimed tackle the book came out. An event that turned out to be pivotal in terms of the fixtures final outcome. Because soon afterwards our influential midfielder got replaced by Conor Clifford. Possibly Brown wanted to save Tim's for the final, it's also more than likely that the fact that Timlin had missed out upon a visit to Wembley last term because of a broken leg also played a part. Whatever, without Timlin pulling the strings, we surrendered midfield to Burton.

It was obvious that a goal was coming. The feeling had been building for ten minutes or so as Burton, rather than us, buzzed around their opponent's box. We seemed to have lost our concentration and although we were getting the ball, we were soon guilty of tamely gave it away. No blame could be attached to the officials now, we were doing it to ourselves, and as the ground grew quieter so the pressure upon our goal increased. Their number 3, who until now had appeared to be a hoof worthy of any cow pat, suddenly revealed hidden depths, spinning past Coker to test out Bentley with a well struck shot. The incident was both concerning and relaxing. Obviously all the negative thoughts that had been building up concerned this shot. It had happened, we had survived ... game on!

Only such relaxing thoughts were premature. Lady Luck, remember her? Yes, that's the one, the whimsical wench who abandoned us for 14 games on the trot. Suddenly she was back on stage and handing out her blessings just as equally as the referee his free kicks. A ball into the area, a snap shot going miles off target, a stuck out leg, a rebound straight to a Burton player and suddenly the ball is in the back of the oh so wrong net!

Atlas had it easy! We had the whole weight of the whole universe abruptly crushing down upon our shoulders. Against all the odds we had fought our way back into this game and now the cruellest of rebounds falls to one of the wickedness teams ever to enter the league and we're right back in the mire. Equally instead of having 90 minutes in which to turn things around, now we only had twenty!!

Their fans went mad, their manager, having already made that trip long ago, just stood there unable to believe his luck whilst we for our part did what Southend fans always do. We simply redoubled our efforts to cheer on our team!

And, finding strength from somewhere, they responded. Burton's goal had suffered a charmed life during the closing minutes of the first, now it was doing so all over again. And when Lady Luck failed to respond to their approaches, sheer cheating did the job instead. Burton players throwing themselves to the ground every time we put in a corner or a cross. It didn't matter to them, or indeed the ref, whether or not a Southend shirt was anywhere nearby. Regardless, ball into area equalled dive, and of course their pet referee fell for it 100%. Not only stopping the game, AND our attacks, but awarding them a drop ball that resulted in us having repossession of it miles away from where it had been when play was halted.

Frustration was back at its previous high levels as this farce got played out. The award of six minutes of extra time gave hope though and so when, following a goal mouth free for all (Burton players all over the ground,

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one lying directly on top of Corr!) Leonard fired in what looked like a goal bound shot the crowd leapt to its feet in joy. Their celebrations were premature though because the ball flew an agonising inch wide of the post with their goalkeeper stranded.

The final whistle blew soon afterwards and Blues, to a man, were loudly cheered off the field. Bentley went down in tears within his area but was soon surrounded by Blues fans all keen to offer their support. It said everything about the team and their relationship with their supporters. Even when we are down, we, just like them, find it within ourselves to fight back and support one another. Burton might well be going to Wembley but we were the real winners today!

Our pints downed and looking to relive urgent missives from our stomach regions (We'd been too nervous to even consider having any breakfast) we wandered away from the busy pub and along the fishing town's single street. It was full of bustle and excitement; small children clutching ice cream cones that looked about to topple over at any second, parents herding their offspring hopefully towards where the loos were; teenagers, shirtless and in torn jeans, racing around; unimpressed girls, at least upon the surface, looking on with bored expressions.

Through all this we strolled, two rather forlorn, but oh so very proud, blue shirts. We'd been beaten yes, Wembley no longer a dream, but our team, Southend United, had played real football. Not just in these last two games, but all season through. With a bit more luck, plus some cash during the January sales, we might have gone up automatically. Instead we had had to try and achieve that goal via the play offs. Now the better team was being left to grace the second division for yet another season.

Possibly Burton are playing the game the way that the modern era requires. Doubt it somehow though and their comeuppance will come, possibly next weekend at Wembley, may be sometime later. But it will come ... either that or the game of football as we love it will die. Their tactics were ugly, underhand and, frankly, brutal. However that only reflects one club's attitude towards the beautiful game. It's the fact that is has been so supported over the two legs of this play off by the authorities that is the real worry!

Come on you Blues!!

*24<sup>th</sup> May 2014*