

WEAR DOWN SOUTH



Waaaaaarrrrrgggghh! *Promotion Special*

Official Magazine of the
Sunderland Supporters' Association
(London and Southern England Branch)

2024-2025 Issue Four

SAFCSA (London & Southern England Branch)

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Thanks to all those who contributed to this edition of the newsletter. All contributions for the next issue should be sent to : Eileen Sproates, 49 Fassett Road, Kingston-upon-Thames, KT1 2TE or emailed to eileensproates@aol.com

The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of Sunderland AFC Supporters' Association.

Wear Down South

Season 2024/2025 – Issue Four

Editor's Bit

What a day, eh? What an experience.

To be honest, as underdogs I didn't really expect us to win at Wembley, given our terrible run in *(and not feeling too well on the day – special thanks to Karen and Caroline for getting me through)*, but somehow the way it happened made it extra sweet – first with that last-minute super-human header from Dan Ballard at the SOL, then the relief of VAR (what a wonderful invention!), Mayenda giving us hope and then, unbelievably, Tommy Watson scoring that goal - THAT goal - again with only seconds left.

Everyone going simultaneously bananas, hugging perfect strangers, jumping up and down and screaming like loonies. Did you blub like a bairn? You either get football, or you don't.

For now, still in the afterglow, I'm deliberately ignoring any transfer rumours – ins/outs/will he go/won't he go. As expected Jobe has already gone, Riggsy looks like he's on the way – I hate losing players, and the hard work and stress as a Sunderland fan starts again in August. It's been 8 long years out of the Premiership, and let's just hope we make a go of it this time.

Many, many thanks to the many of you who have sent contributions for this Promotion issue of WDS – it's been a joy (and a laugh) to relive the experience through others' eyes. If we get to the Champions League next season, though, I'm not sure my editing skills could cope. So let's not do that, eh?

Keep the Faith,
'Til the End.

Eileen

Next issue whenever-ish - All contributions are always very welcome - contributions/ideas are welcome at any time, no need to wait for me to send out a call to arms as I file everything away for the next issue...

Membership Matters

New members

As you can probably imagine the Branch has suddenly become popular since our play off success among London and SE supporters.

So I have pleasure in introducing the following twenty-nine new members who have joined since the last WDS edition:

John Blissett, Alex Bournat, Thomas Brettell, James Briars, Olive Canavan, James Coltman, Mark Dixon, Adrian Fielding, Chris Foggin, Martin Gent, Chris Green, Alex Grey, Ian Hall, Rhys Hall, Philip Hannon Clewley, Peter Hill, David Hodgson, Leann Hogg, John Kaler, Pete Lally, John Lounton, Melvin Mayne, Dermot McKibbin, Callum Newton, Simon Nicholson, Jeffrey Ramsdale, Benjamin Rayns, Raymond Sexton and Lewis Templeton.

Membership renewals

Existing branch members should by now have received an email inviting them to renew their annual subscription to the Branch.

If you haven't already done so I urgently .urge you to do this as soon as possible – preferably by PayPal, credit/debit card or BACS.

If you have not received a reminder email please check your spam folder. If it is not there then please contact me.

Bernie Hutchinson
bernie.hutchinson@hotmail.com



NISSAN, WASHINGTON
92 cars wish us Good Luck before the final



Régis:

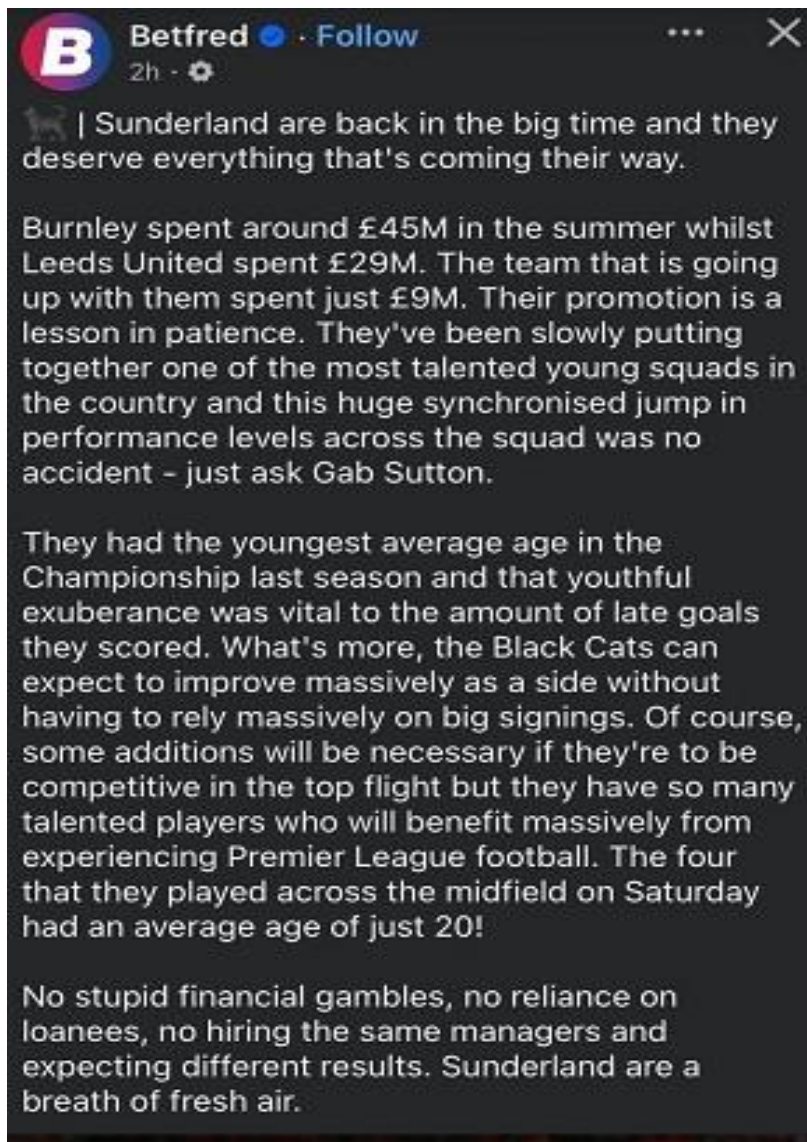
“It’s a fantastic scenario for us, again. Like the semi-final, just absolutely fantastic. Tough for the coaches and fans probably but again we showed strong character. Even when we were not dominant, even when we have struggled as a squad, we stay connected and stick to our plan. Then later in the game, you feel that maybe can change the momentum. This was the case today.



Kyril Louis-Dreyfus marked the club’s emotional return to the Premier League with a heartfelt tribute to his late father, Robert Louis-Dreyfus, in a touching Instagram post.

Just hours after Sunderland's dramatic 2-1 victory over Sheffield United in the Championship play-off final at Wembley, Louis-Dreyfus posted a powerful black-and-white image of his father wearing an Olympique de Marseille shirt, standing pitchside at the French club he once owned. Alongside the photo, the caption read:

“Premier League. This one’s for you. Your love for the game lives on. We miss you.”



***Tony Mowbray was a VIP guest at the Final.
(here with Ros and Bobbi Potts)***

“I am told the Sunderland own ers invited former Tony Mowbray to Wembley, and that says a lot. They know that, ironically, the Middlesbrough legend built the foundations of this side. And that really is a class act from the Stadium of Light hierarchy.”

Graeme Bailey, EFLAnalysis.com

Chairman's Chatter

Hi Everyone,

What a couple of weeks. From THAT Friday night at the CBS Arena to THAT Dan Ballard goal—unbelievable. In the words of Frankie Francis, I've never seen scenes like it at the Stadium of Light. The place was absolutely electric. And then THAT Watson goal, at Wembley no less. Calm, precise, placed beautifully into the corner. Tears.

Moments like these will stay with us forever. This team is something special—young, hungry, fearless. A far cry from where we've been over the last decade. But now, with a management, ownership, staff, and squad who genuinely seem to love being at Sunderland, we're heading somewhere exciting.

A huge thank you to all the branch members who came together at different points over the playoff weekend. Sharing those experiences—the laughter, the nerves, the sheer joy—was a reminder of what this club and branch means to all of us.

It all kicked off Friday night at the Ink and Fountain, a brilliant evening catching up over a good drink (and some highly praised food!).





Then Saturday morning, the early start at The Lord Wargrave. The atmosphere was a mix of excitement and nerves as we attempted to gear up for what was to come.



Post-match, we packed into the Argyll Arms, right next to Oxford Circus Station—the perfect spot for a pint (or twelve), reliving every moment and celebrating Sunderland and Regis Le Bris. More tears.



And a massive shout-out to everyone who turned out at Southwark Brewery for the playoff games—I heard over 100 of you were there for each match, creating an incredible atmosphere. Amazing stuff.

A playoff campaign like no other. Now, the PREMIER LEAGUE awaits, and with plenty of games down South, there's so much to look forward to.

See you soon.

*All the best,
Matty Foreman
Branch Chair*

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***Standing room only:
The Southwark Brewery, Semi-Final playoff***



BRUCE ON LINKEDIN

Following Wembley, David Bruce, the club's Chief Business Officer, posted the following on his LinkedIn profile.

"Til the End". Well it really was! What a 24/25 season for Sunderland AFC!

"I still haven't come down from what was the most incredible football experience of my life last weekend. My boyhood club is going to the Premier League. It still doesn't feel real given what this club has been through in our recent past, but times are changing.

"I'm so proud of what our group of employees have achieved. We have staff that understand what it means to our brilliant fans and care deeply. We have re-established the heart of our club so that we can deliver across every interaction with fans. This club has its should back.

"Everything we did during Playoffs was best-in-class. I truly believe that when we are at the top of our game as a club, no-one can beat us. Looking around Wembley before kick-off, it was clear to anyone our fan base deserved to be in the Premier League. Playoffs needed to feel like a step change, and it did : the bus, the superb content and story telling, the player arrival and fan welcome at the SoL, the stadium Tifo, and not forgetting the late drama. on the pitch! It did not feel like the regular season - we had our point of distinction.

"Wembley was magical. Seeing so many ex-players, legends, managers, family and friends in emotional states of frenzy was a reminder of what this means to our city and our club. The great man whose name now adorns our West Stand was particularly emotional, and so was I. What a day!

"We have a lot more in store for this amazing club and we are excited to be back in the most important league in sports.

"Sunderland fans we know what your support means and we do not take it lightly. We won't get it all right but we strive to do right be you every single day.

We are Premier League."

"I spent a little bit of time with [KLD] at the after-party. I was mainly thanking him and congratulating him because it's no mean feat taking over a club in that state and getting it into the Premier League.

"We haven't prostituted our future. We're going in a relatively strong situation. We're not in horrendous debt. It's been done very cleverly, in my opinion. There's nothing more competitive than professional football. Every team in the Championship loses money. Some lose £60 million or more. Nobody makes a profit. I think he's done remarkable. I really do. I take my hat off to him.

"Him and Kristjaan are football savvy, which I think is a great thing for the future. They don't get everything right, but they're getting a lot right. They're not like Ellis Short and know nowt. They're not like that or the chancers. They're football people and they get Sunderland."

Bob Murray, Echo, 7th June

The Playoff Final



The London Branch social was a well-attended affair with excellent refreshments and a great atmosphere, before we moved on to the main event in the shadow of Nelson's Column. A helpful officer of the Met Police directed us towards a gap in the police barricade through which we were able to smuggle a few cans. These were highly-coveted indeed, with one bloke willing to pay a tenner to take two of them off our hands. We might be the London branch but we don't charge London prices, mate.



As the air filled with songs, smoke and fireworks, we decided to retreat to the nearby Slice of Life, usually a tourist trap but today a haven for the red and white army.

Aware that the real business was still to come, we made the sagacious move to retreat home just after midnight and to keep our powder dry.

Waking up at an unreasonable hour for a Saturday, the nerves which had so been subconscious hit like a tonne of bricks. This was actually happening, and in less than ten hours we would know whether the coming summer would be one of golden optimism or tinged with disappointment.

Arriving at Kings Cross, I finally caught sight of a few lesser-spotted Sheffield United fans, before heading to Coal Drops Yard to meet fellow supporters from the London Branch and beyond. There was a trendy market that had not escaped from the Mackem takeover, and one of the lads working there was generous enough to offer discounted cocktails, while playing Sunderland anthems in the background, so spirits were high despite the tension.



The second wave of realisation dawned as we disembarked the Met line at Wembley Park, and saw the great arches in the distance. Finally the Blades fans made themselves known, as the two armies of red and white split into opposite directions, with us veering off into what had always been the “lucky” end of Wembley for us.

I was very pleased that we’d be sporting our white away kit rather than the Wetherspoons plate-inspired blue effort, which didn’t have the best of records this season. The pre-match display of flags and the emergence of a new-and-improved ‘Til the End tifo came and went, and the time for build-up was over. United came at us from the start, and Patterson produced a blinding save before many had even had a chance to catch their breath. On a rare foray forward we won a corner, only to be stunned as Hamer broke away at pace and fed through Campbell to chip Patterson. First blood to the Blades.

Then came a crucial intervention by the first of two unlikely heroes. Harrison Burrows’ long-range strike felt like a dagger through our hearts. The dream seemed to be dying, and I found myself rationalising that we weren’t quite ready for the Prem anyway. But then, it dawned on us that the usually infuriating VAR delay might actually be in our favour. The referee announced that the United player had interfered with play by blocking Patterson’s view, and hope was rekindled.

Seeing the Lads attacking the end with the Sunderland fans brought fresh invigoration to the crowd, and we suddenly seemed to emerge as a force in the game. Le Bris’s substitutions had some of us scratching our heads, but before long it became once again clear why he’s in the dugout managing a professional sports club and we’re watching on. A beautiful move saw Mayenda played in, and Sam Fender’s arch foe emphatically smashed the ball home with his right, as half of Wembley erupted.

You could almost sense the years of failure and doubt emanating from Sheffield United and their supporters. We’ve been there on the other side of it too many times to count. Sunderland’s pressure grew, and just as we were mentally preparing for extra time, long-time Facebook Da striker target Kieffer Moore mislaid a lay-off to Watson, and, well by now we all know what happened next. It genuinely seems impossible to describe that feeling without resorting to clichés, as the ball curved slowly into the net. Catharsis, relief, ecstasy; it was all these and a hundred feelings more.

There was of course a thankfully short but still nerve-wracking period of further added time to navigate, but even the most pessimistic of fans seemed to believe the day would be ours. The whistle went, and it was us. It was finally us. These last few weeks have given us not one, not two, but three moments that will, to various degrees, be talked about in pubs, on trains, and in homes across Wearside and beyond for generations.

We basked in the Wembley euphoria and watched the Lads lift the trophy. Tears were shed, strangers were hugged. Eight years underlined by anger, humiliation and disappointment were washed away. None of us are naive enough to think that it will be plain sailing from now on, but the future in the Premier League was absolutely not a conversation for now. For a club like ours, football is about moments, and this one is unlikely to ever be topped.

For our part, we made our way back to Kings Cross and the Star of Kings pub, but it honestly wouldn't have mattered where you went, with the whole city again flooded with even more jubilant Sunderland fans. Some talk of future top flight away days emerged, but tomorrow's hangover, the transfer window, and the Premier League fixture release date were all out of sight and out of mind, as were the memories of Gillingham away, Phil Parkinson, Martin Bain. All that mattered was that spectacular day and night that we could all finally enjoy together, from Wembley, to Wearside, and to every pub and living room across the country and beyond.

A week on from that spectacular high, the usual naysayers are back, with nobody podcasters telling us that we'll break the low points record, that we'll get embarrassed every week, that Jobe Bellingham isn't good enough for the top flight, and other such tedious soundbites. My honest advice would be to just ignore them all and bask in this glow for as long as humanly possible. There are clubs across the country who'll never enjoy a moment as good as the three we've been blessed with over the last month. If you can't cherish times like this, then you might as well give up.

See you in the Premier. How we got there, I don't know, how we got there, I don't care, all I know is Sunderland's on our way.

Ben Littledyke





Alex Baverstock on his way back from the Brewery – bumps into Big Ian Holloway who just did his last Talk Sport commentary from Wembley.





Now the dust has settled and I have watched the highlights 100 times. I just wanted to say what an unbelievable game and what an absolute pleasure it was to see us win at Wembley and go up to Premier League. I'm still pinching myself as I don't think it's real and I don't think it ever happens to us!

Before the game and at half-time me (like the other 1000s of fans) really didn't think we could do it but somehow our team of youngsters pulled it off and have put their name into folklore.

I'm not usually a blubber at the football but I was overcome with tears towards the end of the game - it just feels special and different to the other times. I'll never forget the noise at the end of the game as we bellowed out Wise Men Say but also the memories of the weekend with my dad, brother, uncles, cousins and friends.

It means so much to the city but also to all of us down South and elsewhere who are missionaries for Sunderland and love to see the city prosper. Let's not worry about the Prem for now - as the song goes, only fools rush in.

***Ha'way the lads!
Ben Pringle***



I met some other fans at the Southwark Brewery as it was already full. We grouped up and went to Vinegar Yard nearby instead to watch the game on the big screen. The group hug at the end as we were begging the ref to blow the whistle made me really feel part of a big community, of something more. I will cherish that moment for the longest time.

Davide (Giussani)





*Before and immediately after
(with tears of absolute joy)... Waaaaagh!
Clive Stevenson*



The Editor, Ros and Karen waiting for kickoff...



A refined pre-match lunch after drinks at the Hilton– Caroline and Karen

*A few hours later
- Caroline when Tommy scored →*





L to R: My brother David Cohen, Clive Goodman, Me (Philip Cohen), my son Jack Cohen

What a magnificent day wasn't it?

We scrabbled around trying to get tickets in the Sunderland end and eventually my brother came through and we were so grateful he did because it was an epic!.

Despite our horrific last 5 league games, we clearly saved our best 'til last and we found a hero in Dan Ballard at the last gasp against Coventry to make a Wembley date with Sheffield United.

As if the drama couldn't possibly increaseWell we're talking about Sunderland aren't we?

From the initial confusion with the strips at the very start (we're old and short-sighted 😊), to the heart stopping incident with the early save from our man of the match, to their impressive first goal and the crushing moment when we thought we were 2-0 down with an absolute mountain to climb. It didn't look like we had a chance, but that reprieve with the help of VAR was all we needed to kickstart the revival and we dominated from then on.

We deserved to come out on top, but of course we had to leave it to the last possible moment - and what a moment it was with Tom Watson (my personal man-of-the match) supplying the coup de grâce. (We will miss him next season)

The crowd didn't stop singing (we dominated their fans with volume) and the players celebrated with us at Wembley long after the final whistle was blown.

Apart from winning the match, my favourite moment was hearing one of our fans trying to engage the bartender in some football banter in the Lionesses bar about 45 minutes pre-kick off.

Apparently they were both talking the same language but you couldn't have guessed it from the look of the bewildered (English) guy serving the pints.... he literally did not understand a word he was hearing - even after it was repeated....priceless!

My brother and I were at the 1973 Cup Final and that was the greatest sporting day of my entire life, but this performance easily muscles its way into the top ten for drama, entertainment and sheer grit.

STID
Aal the best,
Philip Cohen



“This was the half second before
Tommy nicked the pass”

Clive Goodman

Ros and Bobbi Potts managed to meet the team at the St Pancras Renaissance hotel where they were staying:



.... With Wilson....





with Dan Neil

and Patrick Roberts



Navigating the playoffs as a mixed-team household.

Many members will be aware that I am a mixed team household. I have 8-year-old twins and a Coventry supporting other half. We joked when I was pregnant that the first one out would be a Sunderland fan and the one who was 15 minutes later, would be Coventry. [see p.60- Ed.]

8 years later, we've tried to be neutral and do the whole "we support both teams in this house" thing, so that the kids don't feel pressured to support one team or the other. But I've been delighted that the year the kids have started loving football is the year that Sunderland have decided to be brilliant. They've been to the CBS more than the SOL but they've never seen a loss at the SOL. We went to Burnley at home in August and were delighted. We went to Plymouth at home in January and were slightly less delighted but they did ask for Jobe and Rigg tops in the club shop, which made me beam with pride, and I couldn't throw my money over the counter fast enough. (They have Haji Wright tops, to balance it out, and I can accept this as we have the same surname).

Throughout the season we thought we were doing well with the neutrality, but they did start drifting towards different teams, the youngest started wearing his Jobe top for footy training, but the other was more keen on dad's team. Then came the 3-0 at the CBS. That really did solidify it. We realised at that point, we had one of each. I figured I needed to properly nurture the Sunderland one.

So I was terrified when the playoffs came round. I'd said they could both stay up late and watch the first leg, thinking it was going to be Bristol City, and we could all watch together. But of course, I couldn't watch it with Coventry fans, and then had to turn down a ticket because I couldn't leave him with his dad and brother both supporting Cov. I took him to a SAFC friend's house and watched it there. Then we crept home after Mayenda's goal and I told him not to wind dad up too much.

For the second leg, they went to bed (school night) I went to the pub while dad stayed at home. Coming home at midnight and trying to be magnanimous was really hard after five pints and Dan Ballard. The following morning was harder - watching the highlights with both kids not knowing the score. Having one delighted son and one devastated was quite challenging - and I was still buzzing myself of course. I'm not sure I did commiserations very well, to be honest!

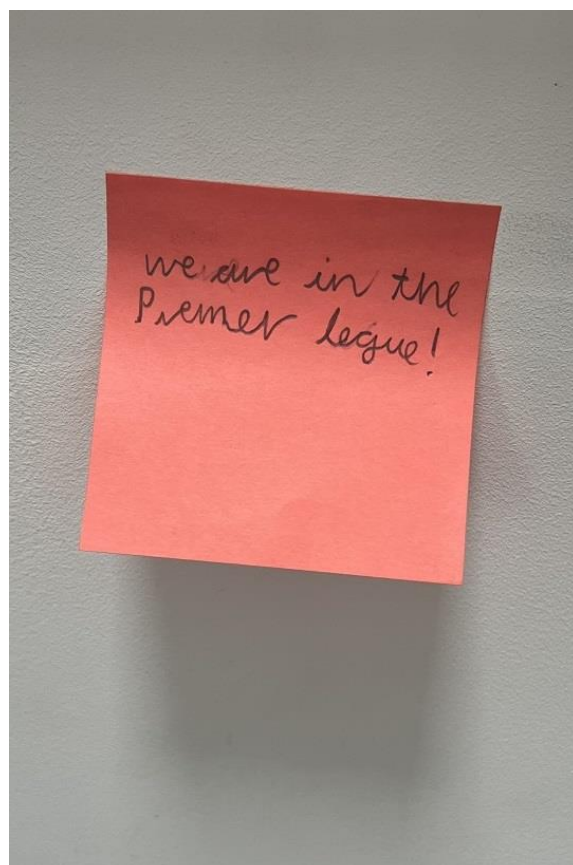
We'd already agreed that whoever won the semis, we'd have a big day in the house with flags and bunting and all support the one team. So being offered a spare ticket the night before for the match and turning it down was HARD. I promised him I'd watch it with him. He was so excited, and I did think that this was the moment, that if we got right, he'd be a Mackem forever.

So we did - four of us supporting Sunderland. And fair play to the Coventry Wrights, we all bounced up and down together. We screamed, we fell over and we sang. And part of me wished I'd been there, but most of me was glad I got to experience it with him, and see the moment he became a Sunderland fan for life. It's got him, now.

I woke up the next morning and he'd got up early and stuck post its all over the house with messages on like "We are Premier League!" and "Sunderland have won the playoffs!". His mates are Spurs and Arsenal, but he's already looking forward to the Premier League trading cards with Luke O'Nien on them. I told him tentatively about Jobe probably leaving for Dortmund, and expected tears, but he just said "Can I have an Enzo top then, mam?"

So we have a new proper 100% Sunderland fan in the fold now. And I'll work on his brother.

Helen Wright



Hey Eileen!

I wanted to share some photos - I was on holiday in Greece during the final, using a dodgy VPN to stream the game live on my mobile phone!

The moment Tommy scored and the final whistle was blown shortly after I ran and jumped straight into our pool.

HA'WAY the lads! WE ARE PREMIER LEAGUE!

Thanks,
Carl (Young)

Going....



Gone...



C'mon Sunlund!

[blimey, you should see the video! – Ed.]



Jonathan Roberts (r) gets to see the match

On any given day I live about 10 miles as the crow flies from Wembley. On 23rd May I headed to Kings Cross to the North East in the complete opposite direction for my brother's wedding. The Grand Central to York was classical cancelled putting my plan for 2 pints in the York Tap onto the back burner, but still squeezed in 1 pint. York was full of red and white

Got off at Durham, again full of red and white but this was a killer.

My parents have recently become village pounces having moved from god's country of Consett to Lanchester. My brother was getting married in Blanchland. It was picturesque but has a sat in the back lawn at the Lord Crew, my home for the next 2 nights, staring out into the rolling Durham hills, my mind was split between seeing my brother marry a lovely lass and the challenge Sunderland had to face at Wembley the next day.

I was pleasantly surprised to find out that Blanchland shares a DH8 postcode with that of Consett and wondered what 12th Century Monks would make of this, or W.H. Auden who had fond memories of staying in this part of Consett in 1930.

The day of the wedding and nerves were running high, a roaring hangover, shower, a breakfast and a pre-wedding pint all before 12noon and to the Abbey for the wedding. Not a man of god myself I did say a few prayers and sent them in the directions I hoped someone would listen.

Whispers going around "is the match on anywhere?" - "aye, the Sandyford room" - however my cousin forgot the device so as I was getting photographs taken he was sent back to Consett to get the device. The Sandyford was my bedroom

Come 3 o'clock there were about 6/7 people with pints and cans in hand in my room watching the first half, a drab affair but aware of the VAR goal chalk half before Wembley.

Speeches at 4pm and to the grand hall. My phone was upside with a quick look between speech. Speeches were done at 16.20 and the phone was overturned.

Went for a visit to the loo only to hear my brother's brother-in-law say "they've scored" and my cousin "Jonathan, we have scored!" and the scoreboard ticked to 1-1. Back in the game. At 92 minutes my stream went, reset the app only to see Tommy Watson run to the corner flag, had we? Clearly those behind me had now seen the goal.

Murmurings "we're up" "god we have had scored" and the classic "get in" all celebrations that were slightly muted. 6/7 minutes later, hands beating the table at full time as if we had agreed an item at a union meeting.

We drank our body weight in beers, champagne, gin and tonic... in fact anything alcoholic into the early hours.

We were promoted. Banter years completed and hopefully never to darken our door again. We spent more time bottomed out in League One than we had in the Championship on the way up.

Whilst I wasn't at Wembley my play-off final day was unique and not to be beaten. My brother got married, which is a pleasure to witness, Sunderland got promoted and it was a good ol' fashioned Consett piss-up and I wouldn't swap it for the world.

Jonathan Roberts



Flashback to the last WDS Promotion issue:

Jonathan and Norman the dog were in Trafalgar Square the night before the game....

Tale of the Tix

We'd done it !! Thanks to Desperate Dan Ballard we were at Wembley once again, and the challenge of procuring tickets for the final looked harder than ever this year. Small allocation, playing another "big club" this was going to be one leap too far, I was adamant, and certainly not a King of the Wild Frontier to boot.

We needed four. Four ffs. One for me, my kids Liv and Louis, and Liv's sister Tess. None of us ST holders, so although we have a fat chunk of Black Cats points ranging from 35 - 80 each, ST holders had priority when they went on sale at noon and they would probably take them all. A cheeky heads up at 12.15 that the club were letting non ST holders place orders and we were all sorted (or so we thought). As we are longstanding away day travellers thanks to the legend that is Andy our ticket officer, I had no qualms in securing these from the club. I've long felt that BC points should be taken into consideration for non ST holders by the club from supporters branches.

The club cancelled out our orders the next day and refunded everything, so we were back to square one. Fair enough, hey ho.

As an aside, the club mysteriously took around 250 tickets off sale that had been left unsold for days the day before the game. Clearly ST holders were all covered off, so again I'd note, remember your branches but I guess that's a debate for the pub.

Match day - 5, still no tix.

Match day - 4 and Liv (a self-confessed social media whore with way too many of those things called "followers") had secured two seats in Club Wembley thanks to a friend of a friend of a friend of a friend who worked at The FA.

Two down two to go. Opportunities came and went, a music industry mate had given his debenture seats to someone else the day before, my shipping agent surrendered their CW seats last year, my MD's mate had left the leisure industry, this one just wasn't going to happen.

Match day - 2. Now picking up a whatsapp message whilst driving at 80 mph on the M40 should of course always be frowned upon most of the time. Your honour I plead guilty but with the extenuating circumstances of a message of one ticket available,, I offer no defence and will happily serve my time. Three down, one to go.

Match day -1. London Branch Socials are essential events, beer flows, bantz had and Porterfield normally manages to get on the scoresheet. After a couple of hours and thanks to right place right time, the last ticket was sorted, a call made to drag the joyous recipient away from Trafalgar Square with her six winning lottery numbers including bonus ball, and as ever #wealwaysfindaway

The four of us wondered why the hell we'd bothered because we were probably going to be battered the next day (I was fearing 0-3), but it's what you do innit, wouldn't miss it for the world.

Thanks to Tommy Watson, we probably had the best matchday of our lives !

Rob Hutchison

Only Fools Rush Off

I got my ticket on the morning of the game. My mate had a barney with his girlfriend the night before, and she stormed off on the 7:30am train back to the North East, leaving him with a spare.

Never been so happy to see love on the ropes. One couple's argument is another man's golden ticket.

Simon Davis



***Celebrating with the family on Saturday and my 1973 scarf
(I was there)***

***Best regards
Sid Palmer***

All in the Family

Life-long fan Poppy (7 months) watched the match on the small screen at the family gathering in Southend-on-Sea. This is Poppy before and after;

From grandma Sarah Meyrick:

"Poppy in honour of her Great Grandad Arthur Campbell & Great Uncle Trevor Campbell in Heaven, lifelong supporters of Sunderland AFC & always with us xx"



From Lesley Campbell and Ian Durban:



The eldest (Ian, 75 years) and youngest (Poppy, 7.5 months):

'We'll be alright if we follow the game plan'

...



...and the second goal goes in!



It was my son's first Wembley visit as a Sunderland fan. He turned to me and said it was the best day of his life 🥰

Paul Newton

Just one of the best weekends of my 60 year old life with friends , family and strangers whose shoulders I cried upon. I'm a new member and look forward to meeting up.

Martin Gent



...with friends from NE whom I first met at 3-years-old.



...with my nephew who flew home from Australia especially. Fourth time in 12 years. Expensive passion.



...my daughter born and bred in the SE who just loves the warmth of Sunderland fans. Converted her despite my wife & son being Newcastle fans.



May 24: A Different Day

I am looking forward to reading in *Wear Down South* all about the wonderful match day experiences of people who were close to the action. I felt very remote that day. I live in the USA; and at game time, I had a long-standing commitment for a speaking engagement.

So I did the best I could: I wore a discreet (and sometimes lucky) Sunderland shirt to the event. I gave strict instructions to friends and relatives to maintain communication silence with me until I could get home and watch the recorded game without knowing the result.

But, of course, my wife Mary texted me anyway: “Do you want to know the result?” I knew that she would not be so cruel as to notify me of an adverse outcome. So I texted OK, and literally had to sit on my hands for the rest of the meeting.

I drove home very carefully ... but with vintage rock n roll at full volume.

Well done, The Lads!
Richard Ingman



ENZO

It is 20 seconds from the end of 212 minutes of the Championship play-off semi-final between Sunderland and Coventry City and the aggregate score is tied. He had already placed it in the D, just away from the corner flag, but there is a final moment of intimacy. Le Fée brings the football to his lips and kisses it. Why? "Because the ball is like a wife," he says. "You know, you love to caress."



The giant clock at the Roker End of the Stadium of Light ticks towards the very last second of the two minutes of stoppage time that have been added, and finally Le Fée, his legs burning from the 14.6km he has already run, strikes the ball with his right foot so that it will arrive in front of Ben Wilson, the Coventry goalkeeper, as he has been instructed to do by Dan Neil, the Sunderland captain.

"When I walked to the corner I was, 'OK, calm, calm'," he says. "I was thinking about the goal we can score. I was tired. I just prayed. Then, I can feel as soon as I kicked it. The sound. I feel if it's good or not and this one, yeah, I felt good, so after it was like slow motion. And then I saw the ball go in."

And Le Fée's life has also been one filled with the most extraordinary pain and we will come to the moment the midfielder found his father's body lying on the bed having committed suicide, and yet he still trained all week without telling his team-mates. Those words jar, even now, in writing them, but Le Fée's natural ebullience is not rocked when the topic is tentatively opened. "No, we can talk about this," he says. "It's OK. When I was six, I said to him, your train has taken the bad way, I will keep the good way. Do you understand?" Do you mean your path? "Aah, yes, my path."

First meeting with Le Bris

Le Fée's path first crossed that of Régis Le Bris, the quietly assured Sunderland head coach, when he was ten years old and Le Bris was the academy director at Lorient. Le Fée was a small, gifted youngster that Le Bris thought so much of that he spoke with the boy's grandfather, Herve, about possibly moving into a boarding school at the age of 13.

He was 17 when he had to undergo surgery because of a fracture to the tibial tubercle, at the top of the shinbone, as a result of playing on with Osgood-Schlatters, a common cause of knee pain in youngsters, particularly during growth spurts. He was out for a year. "I spoke to him [Le Bris] a lot during that time," he says.



"He helped me when I was injured. He spoke with the physios. The day after a game we would speak about the game. He spoke about my training. He kept the relationship with me. How important was he for me? A lot."

Le Fée settled [at Sunderland] straight away, including an excellent debut on a Friday night away to Burnley. There is a strong argument that Sunderland have not had a player like — or as good — as Le Fée in half a century but he emphasises the importance of how quickly he settled in to regaining his love for the game.

"Since my first game here, my first training as well, I enjoy my football," he says. "I enjoy to be on the pitch. If I can't enjoy my time on the pitch, I will be shit for sure, so if I enjoy, sometimes I can be shit — you can't always be good, something can happen — but in general in my head I know I will enjoy and I will be good."

"I think the fans [at Sunderland] don't know me before. I come from Roma, a big club. I come into

the second division in England so some people can think, 'Aah, OK, he come just to play but he will not be serious', but when I play football and I enjoy, as I am doing now, I can give my life on the pitch."

The troubled father

It is towards the end of our time together that the subject of his father, Jérémy Lampriere, is mentioned. Lampriere was imprisoned for much of his life for violence, drugs and possession of a gun. Le Fée was brought up by his mum and grandmother.

"How much has it impacted me? Phew, a lot," he says. "When I was three he put me directly on the pitch. He was a great player. From when I was eight to 12 and after 14 to 20, I think, I would visit him in prison. Normally I train but every Wednesday I would go to the prison to see him. At 18 I started to see him alone."

By the time Le Fée was 20, his father was dead. "It was Wednesday and I found my dad in his bed," he says. "The day after I have to go to the police because they have to ask me something and I said, 'No, I can't, I have to train.' The day after, again, I train, and the day after we play against Lens, away, and the coach didn't know."

"He knew only one hour before the game when my grandfather called him and he says it's crazy that I didn't say something. In the dressing room nobody knew. I am like, my problem is my problem. I think it's because of this, now I can speak.. Now I am free."

His is the path less travelled: from prison gates to Lorient, to Rennes to Rome and then to Roker, and now Wembley. If Sunderland win, it will be his permanent home.

"I want to be in Sunderland next year, for sure," he says, emphatically. "I work since the last six months for that. Now it is one game, and it is the most important game of my life."

From Martin Hardy, Friday May 23 2025, The Times

Come Home! We Love you!

Extract from a recently-filmed Man U fans' interview with Amad Diallo:

"What's the second-best stadium that you've played in, after Old Trafford?"

"Stadium of Light," [no hesitation at all]. They take care of me and my family. They give me everything to shine with them. Because that club gave me confidence. So I have to say Stadium of Light apart from Old Trafford because I love them and I wish them all the best and yeah, it's the second-best stadium where I play."

"The fans will be happy to hear that and they're having a good season as well. You must be keeping an eye out."

"Yeah, I watch every game."

"Really?"

"Yeah, Really."

"Love that."



@RisingBallers

RANDOM REFLECTIONS

When we left Wembley after our 2022 League One play-off victory over Wycombe, I felt as emotionally excited as I had been for years. After a series of changes of ownership, I believed then the takeover by Kyril Louis Dreyfus meant the club was now in safe and cautiously ambitious hands and we could be at the start of a progressive and potentially exciting recovery of status.

So why was I not quite so exhilarated this time? The general chat at the Branch Social on pre-Wembley eve had been "It's going to be tough, we've had a brilliant season (perhaps exceeding early expectations?), so as long as we don't suffer an embarrassing defeat, all is not lost." Of course we hoped for a win but we were ahead of the curve in KLD's 5-year plan and had a young team which could only get better. So for me winning the Wycombe game had been essential, winning the Sheffield one would be (and now is!) a bonus. Perhaps there was also a feeling that the fates (in consecutive 122nd and 95th minutes) had treated us kindly?

Perhaps the most important factor in this year's chance of promotion would be the extent to which our Play-Offs team would still be around this August. The vultures were already circling around our more talented players. Failure at Wembley would make it difficult to hang on to them; success might at least persuade them to stick around at least one more year. Already (as Jack Clarke and Super Tommy Watson had shown) our salary structure meant we could not compete with clubs who offered Premier League level wages; in the harsh (and agent laden) business world of football, club loyalty and team spirit will always be stretched to its limits.

So we have a very interesting summer (and late August) ahead of us. There are some who, seeking every bit of gossip, claiming inside knowledge, or just hooked on Sky Sports News (who have 24 hours daily to fill by exaggerating the slightest whiff of a story), have already decided who we should, and shouldn't, be signing. In doing so they are enthusiastic to spend every penny of the Premier League's guaranteed TV money as well as expecting KLD and Juan Sartori to chip in too! They conveniently forget that a proportion of the TV money will already be ring-fenced for improved contracts for the retained players and the Profit and Sustainability restrictions with which the club will now have to comply. Personally I shall do my best to isolate myself from all the speculation and trust both "the model" and those in charge of it who have done a largely commendable job to date.

I'm confident that other member contributions to this newsletter will have concentrated on the football side of things, so I'd like to reflect on some wider club issues. For it is clearly apparent that it is not only on the field of play that things have improved during the Louis Dreyfus ownership. As well as infrastructure improvements at the Academy and Stadium of Light, there has been a huge improvement in the Fanatics retail operation of Hummel replica kit and souvenirs (exemplified by the enlarged and standalone shop), a host of new partner services and, from next season, the often lambasted Ticketmaster operation has been taken over by SeatGeek.

The pre-match experience at the Stadium has risen to a new level and the 'Til The End marketing and fan engagement leading up to the play-offs, at Trafalgar Square, and in Wembley itself, was superb. Whilst our seats were decorated by the stripes of the red and white flags and magnificent Tifo, all the Blades' fans could do was twirl their scarves! Undoubtedly the credit for much of this is due to Chief Business Officer, David Bruce, who,

a year ago, brought back to his home town club a wealth of experience in the American MLS. So, overall, I haven't been as confident for ages that the club is in good hands!

More trivially, my thoughts on the season ahead are :

1. Am especially looking forward to visits to Everton's new stadium at Bramley-Moore Dock and to Liverpool's Anfield which has been expanded since we last played there.
2. How many away tickets will we get for the games at Brentford and Bournemouth?
3. Not having knees crunched at Luton and QPR or having to wait in a long queue to access New Bermondsey station.
4. The bonus of so many "home" games" at Arsenal, Brentford, Brighton, Crystal Palace, Fulham, Tottenham, West Ham (but crammed trains to Sunderland when we play these clubs at home!)
5. Fewer midweek games but the new TV deal of extra live coverage means that weekend games can be on any of 4 days at various kick-off times.
6. Less (than in the EFL) warning of games chosen for live TV.
7. VAR (yes I'm a fan now!)
8. A maximum £30 ticket price for away games.
9. Looking forward to walking over the new Keel Crossing footbridge to catch the 5.31 Grand Central train back to London.
10. Hoping the above will be applicable for more than one season.

Haway the Lads!

Ian Todd

[David Bruce's LinkedIn Wembley posting is on p.11]



Mr T - Celebrating at the local sports club





jobebellingham 
Sunderland Stadium Of Light



1/12



16.5K



298



Liked by wilsonisidor21 and others

jobebellingham Dear Sunderland,

It's time for me to say farewell to all the loyal people of Sunderland, who have powered me through two incredible years in Red & White.

Your support, on so many occasions, has completely blown me away, especially in the times of adversity which we pulled through together. You welcomed me with open arms as a kid leaving home for the first time, and I am proud that our relationship has grown to be so strong ever since. Your support for the team and I since I arrived at your beloved club was unwavering, and for that I am forever indebted to you as people and supporters.

I will always represent Wearside in all that I strive to achieve for the rest of my career, wherever that may be. I hope that I have made you proud along the way, and in return you have made me the player that has reached the heights I find myself at today. So thank you. I will love and remember you fondly for the rest of my life, from the bottom of my heart.

I tried to embody the passion you have for the city on the football pitch and I'm so incredibly delighted that our journey came to an end with a victory at Wembley to restore the club in its rightful place.

To the staff, players & most importantly the supporters thank you so much & good luck for the future.

Jobe, Adopted Mackem.   less

judebellingham  

ajialese  

7 minutes ago



KRISTJAAN Speakman believes Jobe Bellingham's progression on Wearside and record-breaking move to Borussia Dortmund is further evidence of the "strength of Sunderland's strategy and what's possible".

The club's sporting director said Bellingham "lived and breathed Sunderland every step of the way" during his two years on Wearside and believes the midfielder made a lasting impact at the Stadium of Light.

Bellingham has today completed his move to Borussia Dortmund, joining the Bundesliga giants for €33, plus €5m in add-ons.

Sunderland confirmed the fee they will receive is a club record and that they have negotiated sell-on clause understood to be 15%.

The sporting director, Kristjaan Speakman, told the club website: "Jobe wanted to create his own story, be part of a new Sunderland, and make a lasting impact. He achieved all of this and, although we are naturally disappointed to lose a player of Jobe's quality, everyone at SAFC wishes him well in this next stage of his journey."

Bellingham is the flag-bearer for Sunderland's policy of investing in young players with potential and leaves having played a key role last season in promotion to the Premier League via the Championship playoffs.



Sunderland's 17-year-old midfield prodigy **Chris Rigg** has become one of the most sought-after talents in European football, with SEVEN Premier League clubs considering moves, along with two from Europe

The Black Cats, however, have placed a hefty £35 million valuation on their homegrown star and are determined to retain him, especially after losing Jobe Bellingham to Borussia Dortmund, sources have stated.

West Ham, Manchester United, Liverpool, Arsenal, Everton, Crystal Palace, Brighton, Bayer Leverkusen, and RB Leipzig are all showing interest.

Teamtalk, 11th June

The story of a lifelong untypical Sunderland supporter

Born in Barnet on the 17th of May 1940, 9 days before Dunkirk!

My Dad was football mad, and when the War ended, for several years he would take me to watch most Barnet home games in the Athenian League.

Barnet were one of the best amateur teams in England, but I needed a professional team to support and although my whole family were Tottenham, I chose Sunderland because I liked the name, little realising how far away Sunderland was from Barnet! I stayed with my choice through thick and thin and have never ever regretted it. The warmth, friendliness and the passion of the supporters are second to none.

My first Sunderland game was a 3-0 win against Tottenham Hotspur in March 1954, then came a 3-1 win against Arsenal in October 1954 and a 3-2 win against Tottenham Hotspur in October 1955. This was Sunderland, and things were about to turn for the worse quickly and one month later the score was Luton 8 Sunderland 1. More defeats to Luton followed notably 6-2 in 1956 and 7-1 in 1958.

In September 1960, following a 2-1 defeat at Portsmouth, waiting at the station for the train back to London the players arrived to catch the same train. Never one to miss an opportunity, I walked straight up to my favourite player, Charley Hurley, and we had a great chat. He was very friendly and gave me at least 15 minutes of his time.

I had to wait until April 1962 for my next Sunderland win, 1-0 at Leyton Orient!

..

My first home game was a 1-1 draw against Plymouth Argyle in March 1963. The home supporters around me were very friendly; one even offered to share a sandwich. The friendliness left a lasting impression.

I went to that game because I was shortly to go to the Bahamas for my first overseas posting with Barclays Bank International. My career then took me to Malta, Nigeria, Ghana, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Swaziland, Lesotho and Kenya. In nearly all these far-flung outposts there were fellow Sunderland supporters. SAFC has a far reach indeed.

I then had a two-year spell in London when I joined the London branch of the SAFCSA. I enjoyed many trips to the north-east with them and I remain a member of the branch because I like to keep in touch and enjoy reading Wear Down South.

In 1977 I married Kerry in Zambia. Being an Australian she was naturally good at sport, and she sort of understood my obsession with my football team but did not really like football. In nearly 50 years I have only managed to get her to two Sunderland games.

When I returned to England in 1998, I bought a house in Oxford and joined the Heart of England branch of SAFCSA based in Coventry. I went to many games by coach with them and even had a season ticket for two seasons around the turn of the century.

Thanks to friends, Mark, Terry and Peter I have travelled by car to home games and more recently and my son, Nick, has been with me to make sure I came to no harm.

I was lucky enough to be at 2025 play off final at Wembley at the Sunderland supporters end, and nothing will ever beat the experience, the atmosphere and passion were unforgettable, and I feel there is no better time to bow out while my team is on the up and I have seen Sunderland win at Wembley at last! I am 85 now and not very steady on my feet and Kerry has been wanting me to stop going to games for some time.

From now on it will be Nick Barnes and Gary Bennett on the radio and Sky when the lads are on TV.

My statistics: -

Member of the 92 Club

Attended the World Cup Final in 1966

Total number of games seen 1200

Sunderland games seen: -

Home

Wins 50 Draws 20 Defeats 13. Goals for 104 Against 60

Away & Neutral Grounds

Wins 65 Draws 46 Defeats 74. Goals for 256 Against 256

Best wishes and thanks for your friendship along the way.

Peter Bolton



The Story of my Season #5

I've supported Sunderland AFC for as long as I can remember. My dad first took me back in 1987 when I was just four years old.

I can't recall much about that first game – York City at home, I think – but from that moment, I was hooked.

Players like John Kay, Gary Bennett, Gordon Armstrong, Eric Gates, and Marco Gabbiadini were my heroes.

Even now, if Gary Bennett walked in, I'd be more excited than seeing Mbappé! I was lucky growing up – by the time I was nine, I'd seen Sunderland promoted twice and been to an FA Cup final and a play-off final at Wembley.

Those early trips to Roker Park felt magical, surrounded by the smells of pies and cigarette smoke and the roar of the crowd.

Over the years, from the highs of the Peter Reid era and the move to the Stadium of Light to Roy Keane's unforgettable promotion season, I've followed the club through every twist and turn.

Even after moving down to London, I never lost that connection. Now, it's even more special because I get to share it with my 10-year-old son.

Born in Lewisham but raised a Sunderland lad through and through, he proudly wears his Sunderland coat to school, standing out among his Arsenal and Liverpool-supporting mates. It reminds me so much of my own childhood.

He's been mascot at the Stadium of Light, idolises Dan Ballard and Luke O'Nien, and is every bit as obsessed as I was at his age.

This season has felt like a return to something really positive. The emergence of homegrown talent like Chris Rigg, Dan Neil, and Anthony Patterson makes it feel organic, like we're building something real and lasting. We started strong, unbeaten at home until mid-February and sitting top until November.

While results dipped once the play-offs were secured, I'm not worried. I believed on Friday and I will believe tomorrow against Coventry. The intensity will be there – from the players and from us in the stands.

Some of my best memories are from Play-Off games: beating Newcastle in 1990, Sheffield United at the Stadium of Light, that wild win over Sheffield Wednesday a couple of years ago.

I'm excited for the night and a little nervous, but this is what we live for as fans.

Hopefully, if we do the job, I'll be at Wembley again with my dad and my son by my side - three generations together. That's what makes it all so special.

Andy McIntosh (Travel Officer), SAFC.com 12th May

"There's a few nufc families in our resort in Crete so Matthew's been head-to-toe in safc gear since we arrived yesterday.

Rosie told him to put his smart shirt on for this evening but he's kept the home kit on underneath."

Andy McIntosh, Crete, 26th May



"He [RLB]'s very reserved, you probably don't get a lot of him, but he's very calm and he's been brilliant from the day that he's come.

"I can't say enough about the man. He's been great. He's made me enjoy football again, as did Tony Mowbray. And shout out to Doddsy [Mike Dodds] and Proc [Michael Proctor] as well. They've been fantastic with me the whole way through. There's a lot of people to thank. It's been a real team effort and well deserved.

"My mum is looking forward to Everton, my dad's obviously a Liverpool fan. I'm just looking forward to being with this club up there.

"Going from League One, Championship and then Premier League - it's been a joy and I can't tell you how proud I am."

Patrick Roberts, Echo, 30th May



I Was There: From heartbreak to heaven

Some weekends stay with you forever. This was one of them.

We've followed Sunderland through everything - League One slogs, Wembley heartbreaks, long nights and longer seasons. I live in East Hertfordshire now, Dom's up in Leeds. But when we booked those Play-Off final tickets, we knew it had to be together. One last roll of the dice. One more Wembley trip. Maybe, just maybe, this would be the one.

Friday was magic. We wandered Covent Garden, ended up at Trafalgar Square with hundreds of others just like us - laughing, singing, soaking it in. The city turned red and white. That aerial photo from the Club hit as we arrived and made it feel real. But honestly, it was more than football at that point. It was memories. Belief.



Even at the pub Saturday morning, we weren't nervous. Just ready. But walking down Wembley Way, it changed. The weight of it. The fear that it might happen again. The kick-off came and the first 15 minutes were brutal. We looked flat, leggy. Sheffield were all over us. Then they scored - and everything just drained out of the end. You looked around and people were stunned. Not angry, just silent. That quiet ache of "maybe it's not our time."



Then they scored again. Or so we thought. VAR changed it - and suddenly, it was like the lights came back on. You could feel it in the stands. The spark.

At half-time, it felt like grief. You go through it all - denial, anger, bargaining. We were just standing there, trying to process it. There was still a flicker of hope, but we were emotionally drained. Just praying for one moment.

And we got it.

Mayenda's goal - man, I'll never forget it. Roberts plays him in, and as soon as he hits it, time stops. It smashes the net. The roar... absolute carnage. We were hugging strangers, shouting, crying. It went from hopeless to hopeful in seconds. You could see it in the players too. They believed.

We didn't just hang on - we took control. The subs were fearless. The energy flipped. And then Tommy Watson - 19 years old, a kid - stepped up and seized his moment. The place exploded. Flares, limbs, people in tears. The kind of moment that stops time. That's the one we'll remember forever.

And when Enzo won that late free-kick, fist-pumped the crowd - we knew. It was ours.

At full-time, we just stood there. Hugged. Eyes full. All the years, all the hurt - it melted away.

We've been through a lot with this club. But this time, Sunderland gave us the ending we've waited so long for.

We're going up. Together.

Dom & Andrew Ridley, SAFC.com 28th May

LUKE O'NIEN - HERO



"Crossing that white line everyday with my team mates and the support of this incredible city, is an absolute pleasure each and every time."

February 2025



Sunderland defender Luke O'Nien was left requiring oxygen on the pitch after injuring his shoulder in the opening minutes of Saturday's Championship play-off final

"Oh my word! Probably my best game in a Sunderland top since I've joined the club - I didn't even play! I did nothing! I actually covered more distance when Eli scored and celebrating when Tommy scored than I did in my whole appearance today!"



Did you know:

- Dan Neil was the first local lad and boyhood fan to lead a team to victory at Wembley since Raich Carter in 1937.
- Our win comes after 8 years out of the Premier League. We were relegated to the Championship at the end of the 2016-17 season and then the next season were relegated to League One. We returned to the Championship for the 2022-23 season but failed in the semi-final playoffs at the end of that season. Overall this is our history in the football league system:
 - Seasons at Level 1: 87
 - Seasons at Level 2: 33
 - Seasons at Level 3: 5
 - Seasons at Level 4: 0
- Our Playoff semi-final first leg at Coventry 9th May was the first time we've won there in 40 years
- No team has ever got to a playoff final after such a dismal run of form - 5 successive defeats.
- and we have a new bridge across the Wear! The footbridge Keel Crossing opens this summer and will connect Keel Square in the city centre and the Sheepfolds/Stadium of Light area of the city. The name reflects the city's past as one of the world's most productive shipbuilding hubs during the 18th and 19th centuries.

BBC SPORT

"I've said it ever since I moved to Sunderland, I really love my football here.

"I love playing. I love the club, I'm happy where I'm at and if anything happens it's from the club.

"I love playing for Sunderland so I'm happy being there."

Trai Hume
Sunderland



WOMEN BLACKCATS

The Ladies finished the season in a crowded (only 7 points separating 3rd from 7th) mid-table position and it is time to look ahead.

At the time of writing the retained list has not been issued; many of the players who joined the club when it became fully professional were on 2-year contracts so undoubtedly a lot of work is currently going on behind the scenes to negotiate extensions, where appropriate, and to scan the availability of replacements for team strengthening. (I suspect Wembley may have been an understandable diversion of those in the hierarchy involved in such matters?) One player, and a favourite of many, who has decided to leave is tall centre back, Amy Goddard, who goes with our thanks for her dedication and best wishes for the future,

The league next season will be under the control of the newly named Women's Super League Football (formerly the Women's Professional Leagues Limited) and Tier 2, in which the Ladies play, will no longer be titled the Championship but WSL2. Discussions on possible changes to the structure and future expansion are ongoing but it seems certain now that nothing which might affect us will happen before September 2026.

The Football Association has decided not to press ahead with a proposal to expand tiers three to six of the English women's football pyramid that would have led to WSL B teams being introduced into the lower leagues in 2026. Sunderland no longer have a B team as such, relying on the arrangement with Chester-le-Street Town Ladies through which players in the pathway through the Foundation and Light and Professionals Game Academy are able to gain matchplay experience.

Opportunities for Branch members to watch Ladies games next season will hardly change. London City Lionesses were promoted to WSL1 but Crystal Palace Women were relegated back to WSL2 after a single season in the higher tier - so emphasising the chasm in standards which exists.

In the division as a whole, Ipswich and Nottingham Forest joined through promotion from the National League, replacing Blackburn who have withdrawn and filling vacancy created by Reading's absence last season. We will, as usual, advise members of the opportunities to watch games in our area once the fixtures are released.

Haway the Ladies!
Ian Todd



*‘I can’t really put it into words to be honest. Look around, it’s f***ing unbelievable,’*

Sunderland hero Tommy Watson caught in on-air X-rated TV blunder after sealing Premier League return in dramatic play-off final in his final game for the club,

Daily Mail headline, 24th May



“Eliezar Mayenda, héroe español de los Black Cats en Wembley”

AS.com 26th May

The Magnificent Seven await for the London Branch

When that fateful whistle blew on the 24th May and our place in next year's Premier League was confirmed, the causes for celebration were myriad. We'd stand a far better chance of keeping our better players. The club's coffers would be bolstered to the tune of £220m according to some sources. We'd be saved from the ignominious possibility of having Jack Clarke, Ross Stewart, or knowing our luck even George Dobson bagging against us next season. But for fans based in the capital in particular, the dominance of London clubs in the Premier League offers some tantalising away days at low, low prices for next season (beer costs notwithstanding). Let's take a look ahead at the swish London venues the Lads will be gracing in 2025-26.

Arsenal

A ground most of us have experienced at least once given it's just shy of 20 years old, the Emirates is still an impressive stadium and memorable away day. Arsenal's match-going fans are mostly sound, even though their relative success of late seems to have given a voice to their more insufferable section on social media. There are plenty of enticing traditional pubs in the area, and it's relatively easy to reach on public transport. Sunderland's last trip in 2021 saw Lee Johnson's team given a good 5-1 hair-ruffling in the League Cup, though it's hilarious how much his David Brent-esque banter managed to rattle their fanbase. I had to forgo my ticket for that one despite living a ten-minute walk away at the time, after my flatmate rather inconsiderately decided to get Covid, so I'm definitely looking forward to heading back.

Brentford

A fellow side in red and white stripes and the much-heralded success story of "the model", the one drawback of this plucky data-driven underdog's rise to the big time was the loss of their fantastic old school home, Griffin Park. It might have been falling apart and was probably a health and safety nightmare, but as legend says it was propped up by a pub on each corner and it was undoubtedly one of the highlights on any away fan's calendar. Sunderland have never played at its replacement, but I've been told by an Aston Villa fan that if you've ever been to AFC Wimbledon's new ground, you've basically been to the GTEC. Not exactly a ringing endorsement, and Brentford have a great home record these days so any points will be hard to come by, but it'll be good to tick off another of the 92 at least.

Chelsea

Newly-crowned Conference League winners, Chelsea seem to have really carved out a niche as a club seemingly constantly on the verge of total chaos but that seems to somehow achieve relative success. Sort of like an elite level Watford. Stamford Bridge was actually the scene for our last Premier League game back in 2017, a suitably humiliating affair which saw future Mag Javier Manquillo's opener wiped out by five Chelsea goals, as well as the shameful scenes when our team deliberately kicked the ball out for John Terry on the 26th-minute to be subbed off on the same minute as his shirt number. If the expression had been in vogue back then, this would've been rightly castigated as "utter woke nonsense". Chelsea are obviously based in a fairly upmarket end of London, even if some of the crowd don't exactly match the surroundings, and it'll make a nice change from cramming into the concourse of Loftus Road yet again like most of our recent West London trips.

Crystal Palace

Palace won the nation's hearts recently when they won the 2025 FA Cup, but I've had a soft spot for them ever since they became one of the few fanbases to openly call out our neighbours Saudi Arabia FC for their moral vacuousness. They lose some points for their ground being a pain in the arse to get to and for being nowhere near their eponymous train station, but we do actually have a decent recent record there, and Defoe's late winner back in 2015 brought about some of the best away limbs I can remember. The so-called Holmesdale Ultras can make an impressive racket for big games, but whenever I've been they've come across as little more than a small group of about 20 chavs jumping up and down to a drum for 90 minutes. Even Bristol City can manage that...

Fulham

The Premier League's and arguably English football's most wholesome away day, we enjoyed a brilliant trip to Craven Cottage in the Cup as recently as 2023. Tony Mowbray's lads more than held their own in a 1-1 draw, and we all believed for a glorious, fleeting moment that a then 15-year-old Chris Rigg had sent us through to the next round, before realising Abdoullah Ba was about ten yards offside in the build-up. With its picturesque surroundings and innocuous genteel crowd, Fulham is a fun away day for all the family. Where Millwall sees you herded through a metal cage by the police, Fulham offers you the chance to take a stroll along the Thames, or through the charming Bishops Park. And, in even better news, Mitrovic doesn't play for them any more. Definitely one to circle on the calendar.

Tottenham Hotspur

For copyright reasons it's now mandatory to either refer to this club by their full name or the moniker "Spurs"; the name Tottenham is apparently verboten. This irritating rebranding means that Sunderland start the season in the bottom three before a bill is even kicked for alphabetical reasons. Nonetheless, their space-age arena is probably the ground that most fans are looking forward to visiting the most, with the possible exception of Everton's new dockside stadium. I've been here twice; once as a neutral and once watching our U21s team in the Cup, and the place really does live up to the hype, even if the surrounding area does call to mind that meme of the Lamborghini parked in the ghetto. The self-pouring pints truly are a miracle to behold, and given Spurs' status as one of the most mental and unpredictable teams in the country, you wouldn't rule out a shock win for Sunderland, so this is not one to miss.

West Ham

Along with Spurs, West Ham are one of two clubs easily reachable by bus from my flat in Walthamstow. I had the dubious pleasure of visiting Upton Park back before its demolition, which was definitely one of the most hostile and unwelcoming venues in the country. The London Stadium is a world away from that experience, but some of the pubs around Stratford still offer that menacing East End Danny Dyer B-movie atmosphere for those seeking it. The ideal scenario would be for this fixture to fall in August, when the sun is still shining and the early season optimism is still intact, and the prospect of outdoor pre-match beers around Hackney Wick is still on the cards. Let's just hope the fixture computer is kind to us.

Ben Littledyke

**Some Famous Mackems with Ros and Bobbi
Millwall game, 29th March (our last home win before
THAT Coventry game!)**



Marco G!



Steph Houghton



Our Branch President, Steve Cram

Historic Ye Olde Swiss Cottage saved from demolition as pub given protected status

Ye Olde Swiss Cottage closed its doors on February 1.

On April 16 this year, Camden Council approved applications from Labour councillors, the Belsize Society, as well as Camra (Campaign for Real Ale) North London, to have the pub listed as an asset of community value (ACV). This means the pub will be protected from demolition for the next five years.

Should it be put on the market during that time, local campaign groups and residents will have six months to raise money to bid for it.

Evening Standard 30th April



Nags Head - Covent Garden is
with **Sunderland AFC** and
Sunderland Echo.

14h · ⚙️

Well what can we say! Well done to our friends in Sunderland with an epic win tonight to make the playoff finals again!! 🏆

We shall start getting the beer ordered in and ready for you for next weekend!! 😊🍺



Ex-Lads Watch





“MOM and taking Sunderland back to the Prem! Not a bad day.”

Jordan Henderson, with Jobe, Instagram

Jordan Pickford

“It’s great for a club the size it is and how big it is as a club. To see them back in the Premier League is going to be amazing. I can’t wait to get up there and play them at the Stadium of Light, it’s going to be a great moment for me.”

“I don’t like to see the Sunderland players go and celebrate. Players went across to the supporters at the end and they’re all celebrating, jumping around, a couple of them have got sunglasses on, look, you’re not there yet.”

Mickey Gray, Talksport, after Dan Ballard's goal, Coventry

“I’m with Micky on this one, the team shouldn’t have celebrated, they should’ve gone straight off the pitch and celebrated in the dressing room to look forward to Wembley.”

Kevin Ball, phoning in

However, before host Ally McCoist could express his shock at the comments, Bally said: “Only joking!” to much laughter.



A little bit of history - Coventry v Sunderland

Cast your mind back to 1977, when there were three teams in danger of relegation from the old First Division: Sunderland, Coventry and Bristol City.

Sunderland lost to Everton and were awaiting the result of Coventry v Bristol City, which had been delayed due to traffic issues around the Sky Blues' then home ground, Highfield Road.

As the Black Cats had been defeated, a draw would be enough to keep both the Sky Blues and the Robins up, while a loss would send either team down.

With five minutes left in the game, Sunderland's result was broadcast from the tannoy system at Highfield Road and with the score at 2-2, the game petered out with neither side particularly incentivised to go on and win the game.

Sunderland were relegated and left questioning the fairness of the decisions made by then-Coventry managing director Jimmy Hill, stirring up bad blood between the two sides.

Defeat Cuts Deep

"It has been two weeks since Sheffield United was defeated at Wembley by another team whose name I am not saying out loud (or typing). The Blades won't be going up to the Premier League after all.

I keep waiting for things to go back to 'normal' but still feel quite hollow.

*As a relatively new football fan, I am not sure how long it takes to recover from something like this."**

Ann Treneman, Times, 7th June

[* about 8 years petal. Been there, done that – Ed.]

Tributes have rightly been paid to the late **Cecil Irwin** for his great service as right-back to Sunderland A.F.C. His debut came when the club was at its lowest ebb. Our first-ever relegation in 1958 stunned the town of Sunderland. However, hopes of a quick return to the top flight were soon dashed. Our moderate start to the 1958-59 season suddenly became a nightmare. 5-0 and 6-0 defeats at Swansea and Sheffield Wednesday left us in 19th position in Division 2.

In desperation, manager Alan Brown brought in 16 year-old Irwin and 19 year-old Len Ashurst as full-backs and 18 year-old Jimmy McNab at left-half for our home game with Ipswich Town (20.09.1958). The gamble did not pay off. As Arthur Appleton wrote: 'The team was almost unrecognisable as Sunderland: it played nervously and badly and was beaten 2-0.' ("Hotbed of Soccer", 1960). Wisely, Alan Brown then let Irwin develop his talents in the reserves while the first team limped to a disappointing final League position of 15th.

Cec played only a few games in the next two seasons as Colin Nelson became established at right-back. Then, after a run of ten successive appearances, in the first team in season 1962-63, Cec suffered a broken wrist. However, he finally became our regular right-back in that glorious "first ever" promotion season of 1963-64.

Sunderland's return to the top League did not go as planned. Alan Brown's shock pre-season departure as manager left the team rudderless for several weeks until George Hardwick arrived. Then John Parke was signed from Hibs and Cec lost his place at right-back. Despite this, he stayed loyal to the club and later regained his place at right-back. Sadly, Sunderland were relegated back to Division Two in April, 1970. When Dick Malone arrived from Ayr United in October of that year, Cec switched to left-back for much of the rest of that season. It was in that position that he played his last Sunderland game, in a League Cup defeat at Bristol Rovers, 07.09.1971.

Cec was a strong attacking full back and very popular with the Roker Park crowd. He is remembered fondly by myself and, I'm certain, fans of my generation. He made a total of 349 first-team appearances for Sunderland and scored one goal. (I am grateful to "All The Lads" by Garth Dykes and Doug Lamming for those final stats).

Roger Mason



Cecil Irwin
1942-2025

Still thinking about our match winners 🥰



According to AI tool Grok3, this is where we (and the mighty Leeds of course) will end up next season in the Premier League:

- 16th: Leeds United - 42 points
- 17th: Crystal Palace - 40 points
- 18th: Wolverhampton Wanderers - 38 points
- 19th: Burnley - 34 points
- 20th: Sunderland - 30 points

Huh!

PREMIER LEAGUE RULES

Members may find it helpful to be aware of some of the rules which apply at our new elevated status and which are not always the same as those which apply in the Football League.

A. The Squad

After the closure of the transfer window (at 7.00 p.m. on Monday 1st September) the club must submit to the Premier League a squad list of up to a total of 25 players. The squad must contain 8 players who are "Home Grown".

(A "Home Grown Player" means a player who, irrespective of nationality or age, has been registered with any club affiliated to The Football Association or the Football Association of Wales for a period, continuous or not, of three entire seasons, or 36 months, before his 21st birthday (or the end of the season during which he turns 21).

Sunderland should have no problem in complying with this regulation from its own Academy graduates, let alone those who came through academies at other clubs. It does however impose a limit on the number of new overseas players we may feel attracted to sign as part of squad strengthening.

It is not unusual for a club to submit a list of only (say) 23 players to leave spaces for free agent players who may be signed after the closure of the transfer window. Nothing in this regulation prevents our own (but unlisted) U-21 or U-18 players from being used in Premier League games.

Additionally :

- Clubs may not register more than two players on loan at any one time.
- The maximum number of loans registrable in the same season is four, and, under no circumstances, shall more than one be from the same club at any one time.
- - The Clubs cannot loan to another Premier League club a player they have acquired in the same transfer window.
- The Club may loan not more than one of its goalkeepers to another Premier League club

B. The "Dreaded" PSR

Fans will want the club to Spend! Spend! Spend! to ensure survival in the Premier League. However they will be restricted in doing so by the Profitability and Sustainability Regulations whose intention is to somewhat level the playing field by preventing particularly rich clubs from running large deficits in search of success.

In simplest terms PSR allows clubs to lose a total of £105 million over the course of three seasons (i.e. £35 million per season) on a rolling basis. Costs of youth development, infrastructure improvements and, interestingly, the costs of an associated women's team, are not included in the loss calculation. Losses cannot be mitigated by sale of fixed assets.

The club will still have to make 2024/25 PSR submissions to the Football League but the Premier League finance clock will start clicking from July 31st. How does this affect us?

Well fortunately, with acknowledgment to “The Athletic”, Chris Weatherspoon recently published the following analysis :

“Sunderland spending the past eight years out of the Premier League means they’re the only club in the 2025-26 competition who won’t have the opportunity to benefit from at least one PSR year with an upper loss limit of £35million; instead, each of the three years within their PSR calculation are capped at an upper limit of £13m, or £39m in total.

“In fact, Sunderland’s PSR limit is even lower than that, as they’ve received no equity from ownership in recent years. To that end, their limit across the 2022-25 cycle is just £15million.

“For many Championship clubs that would be troublesome, but Sunderland have managed to get out of the second tier within three seasons of their 2022 promotion back to it — so before losses racked up too heavily. The club’s pre-tax loss across 2022-23 and 2023-24 was a combined £17.6million and after even some pretty stingy deductions — the club operate a Category 1 academy, and we’ve likely underestimated the cost of doing so — we reckon Sunderland’s PSR result over those seasons was actually £5m in the black.

“For the season just ended, we estimate Sunderland could lose up to £33million and remain PSR compliant. They will, therefore, be fine.

“They sold Jack Clarke for a sizeable profit last summer and then their play-off final hero Tommy Watson for a further £10million in a deal [announced in April](#), and had generally been at the low end of Championship operating losses in recent years. Promotion bonuses would worsen the bottom line, but, as detailed above, Sunderland won’t need to include those in their 2024-25 PSR submissions to the EFL.”

C. Away Accommodation

Where a stadium capacity is greater than 30,000, Premier League rules require 3,000 tickets to be allocated to the visiting team. Where capacity is less than 30,000, the minimum allocation is 10% of capacity.

In order to improve atmosphere at grounds, in 2017 the Premier League agreed that at least one block of away fans seats must be located pitch-side. It is however a guideline not a regulation and is not universally complied with, as witness St. James’s Park! It is a matter which Sunderland have in any case been discussing with their fans and this may add a new dimension to that debate.

D. Shirt Advertising

Gambling sponsorship will be banned from the front of shirts after the end of the forthcoming season. Leaked information about our 25/26 strips suggest we would not immediately comply but would at least have a year to change.

Ian Todd

Cheap at Half the Price

Sunderland owner Kyril Louis-Dreyfus will have to pay a reported £7.75 million to his players after winning promotion to the Premier League.

The Sun claims Dan Neil and Luke O'Nien, who finished top of the appearance table for the Black Cats, will take home more than £500,000 each after winning the Championship play-off final.

The bonus system is reportedly based on the number of games played throughout the 2024/25 campaign under Regis Le Bris, who will also take home some of the pot.

Each Sunderland player also received shares in the windfall.

The report claims starters received four per game, those who came off the subs bench received two, while unused substitutes got one.

Neil and O'Nien, who picked up a cruel injury just two minutes into the Wembley finale against the Blades, made 48 out of 49 starts for the first-team and qualified for the highest reward.

The majority of those who started at Wembley were mainstays in the starting XI throughout the season, so will reportedly take home between £400,000 and £500,000. The youngest of the squad, Chris Rigg, will reportedly take home a fee in the region of £400,000 after playing his part in winning promotion.

The figures are said to be before tax, which will be a major financial reward having ended the club's eight year absence from the top flight. The report also claims the initial bonus for winning the division would have been a reported £8million, just a £250,000 difference going up via the play-offs.

The fee in question is said to be a much higher payout compared to clubs who have won promotion in recent years, with Charlton Athletic's bonuses paid from promotion from League One just £750,000 on a similar pro-rata basis.

Now, the focus will be on Sunderland establishing themselves as a top flight force once again.

"It feels fantastic to have lived this moment with our fans," Black Cats head coach Le Bris said after the game. I am really proud of the work we have done this season. The players, the staff, and the people in the building have been really connected and believed that it was possible.

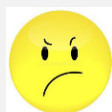
"In the end, the emotion and the feeling are really impressive. We are always focused on the present, and the path - the journey - is something we live together. It had its ups and downs, so we are always focused on the next step. In the next few days, we will realise what we have achieved together."

Chronicle 1st June

Grump's Corner #4

I've got NOWT to complain about. NOWT! Sack the Board!

Disgruntled Down South



Match Reports

The Coventry Match: Play-Offs 1st Leg: 9th May 2025

Two goals (Isidor and Mayenda)
set the whole pub off on a bender.
A draw would've done
but the fact that we won
added more than a dollop of splendour.

The Coventry Match: Play-Offs 2nd Leg: 13th May 2025

Our goal in the very last second
made certain that Wembley beckoned.
As a fan, man and boy,
that cauldron of joy
was one of my best times, I reckoned.

The Championship Play-Offs Final: 24th May 2025

I'd never much cared for that VAR
till today when it proved a real star.
With their 'second' ruled out
I cast aside doubt
that a win wasn't hoping too far.

Ian Mole



SAFC Fixtures 2024-2025 Season

Sat.10th Aug.	Cardiff City	2-0	O'Nien, Clarke
Tue. 13th Aug.	Preston North End (EFL Cup)	0-2	
Sun.18th Aug.	SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY	4-0	Cirkin, Mayenda, O'Nien, Mayenda
Sat. 24th Aug.	BURNLEY	1-0	Mundle
Sat. 31st Aug.	Portsmouth	3-1	o.g., Browne, Mundle
Sat. 14th Sep.	Plymouth Albion	2-3	Roberts(p), Mundle
Sat.21st Sep.	MIDDLESBOROUGH	1-0	Rigg
Sat. 28th Sep.	Watford	1-2	Isidor
Tue.1st Oct.	DERBY COUNTY	2-0	Jobe, Isidor
Fri.4th Oct.	LEEDS UTD.	2-2	Rigg, Browne/o.g.?
Sun.20th Oct.	Hull City	1-0	Isodor
Wed.23rd Oct.	Luton Town	2-1	Rigg, Mundle
Sat.26th Oct.	OXFORD UTD	2-0	Jobe, Isidor
Sat.2nd Nov.	Queens Park Rangers	0-0	
Wed.6th Nov.	Preston North End	0-0	
Sat.9th Nov.	COVENTRY CITY	2-2	Isidor, Cirkin
Sat.23rd Nov.	Millwall	1-1	Connolly
Tue.26th Nov.	WEST BROMWICH ALBION	0-0	
Fri..29th Nov.	Sheffield United	0-1	
Sat.7th Dec.	STOKE CITY	2-1	Watson(2)
Tue.10th Dec.	BRISTOL CITY	1-1	Roberts
Sat. 14th Dec.	Swansea City	3-2	Ballard, Neil, Jobe
Sat.21st Dec.	NORWICH CITY	2-1	Ballard, Jobe
Thu..26th Dec.	Blackburn Rovers	2-2	Rigg, Isidor
Sun.29th Dec.	Stoke City	0-1	
Wed.1st Jan.	SHEFFIELD UTD	2-1	Mayenda, Isidor
Sun.5th Jan.	PORTSMOUTH	1-0	Isidor
Sat.11th Jan	STOKE CITY (FA Cup 3rd Rd)	1-2(aet)	Aleksic
Fri.17th Jan.	Burnley	0-0	
Tue.21st Jan.	Derby County	1-0	Mayenda
Sat.25th Jan.	PLYMOUTH ARGYLE	2-2	Isidor, Hume, Patterson(og)
Mon.3rd Feb.	Middlesbrough	3-2	Neal, Isidor, o.g.
Sat.8th Feb.	WATFORD	2-2	O'Nien, Cirkin
Wed.12th Feb.	LUTON TOWN	2-0	Le Fee, Isidor
Mon.17th Feb.	Leeds Utd	1-2	Isidor
Sat.22nd Feb.	HULL CITY	0-1	
Fri.28th Feb.	Sheffield Wednesday	2-1	Mayenda (2)
Sat.8th Mar.	CARDIFF CITY	2-1	Mayenda, Mephram
Tue.11th Mar.	PRESTON NORTH END	1-1	Mundle
Sat.15th Mar.	Coventry City	0-3	
Sat. 29th Mar.	MILLWALL	1-0	Hume
Sat.5th Apr.	West Bromwich Albion	1-0	Hume
Tue.8th Apr.	Norwich City	0-0	
Sat.12th Apr.	SWANSEA CITY	0-1	
Fri.18th Apr.	Bristol City	1-2	Mayenda Hume sent off!!!!
Mon.21st Apr.	BLACKBURN ROVERS	0-1	
Sat.26th Apr.	Oxford United	0-2	
Sat.3rd May	QUEENS PARK RANGERS	0-1	

Playoff semi-finals:

Fri.9th May	Coventry City	2-1	Isidor, Mayenda
Tue.13th May	COVENTRY CITY(aet)	1-1	Ballard

Playoff Final

Sat.24th May	SHEFFIELD UNITED	2-1	Mayenda, Watson
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