

Time's a great healer

There's more to a football club than 90 minutes of action. Mike Ward unearths the individuals who have one thing in common... a love of the Albion



If any of our first team ever need a bit of guidance on the penalty-taking front – and I'm not saying they do, of course, perish the thought – then I think I've found them the perfect mentor.

He's called Kerry Mayo. Yep, THAT Kerry Mayo. There is, after all, only one... Okay, so he doesn't actually play for us anymore, but that's not to say they couldn't still study Kerry's faultless technique.

"I took six in my career," he reminds me, "In penalty shoot-outs and stuff like that, and I never missed one! If you go on *YouTube*, you can see my winning penalty against Millwall (coolly sending the keeper the wrong way in the 2006 Johnstone's Paint Trophy quarter-final at The Den).

"In fact, if you ask Michel Kuipers and John Sullivan I'm sure they'll tell you I was the best finisher at the club. It's just I never got that far up the pitch to have a shot!"

I have to say it's great to find Kerry in such good spirits, given that his career ended on such a miserable note.

Though he'll always be gutted he never made it to the Amex, at least in a playing capacity, the initial shock of being forced out of the game two years ago through injury seems largely to have subsided.

"It was tough to accept at first," he concedes, "because that season I was the fittest I'd ever been. But I'm not bitter or angry. I was more upset than anything. It was a freak accident."

The incident in question happened at home to Tranmere on March 28, 2009. Kerry remembers it all too vividly.

"I'd come on as sub with about ten minutes to go. I played the ball out and landed awkwardly – but their winger then stood on me as well and my pubic bone dislodged.

"I'd never felt pain like it. It was excruciating."

Though it wasn't immediately clear how significant this injury was, Kerry would soon have it spelt out to him.

"I was told that to stay in the game full-time I'd need an operation to fuse the bone back together," he recalls.

"I'd have been laid up on my back for

nine months and then it could've taken a further 14 to get back to full fitness. By then I'd have been 34 – and without a club.

"Obviously, Brighton weren't going to offer me a contract if I was going to be sidelined for two years, were they? It's a business, I completely understand that.

"But it was still frustrating because I'd seen myself playing for several more years. I was always one of the fittest at the club, you know. I may not have been the quickest, as everybody knows, but my fitness was never a problem. I was inspired by what Guy Butters had done, continuing to play and read the game so well in his late 30s."

Staring at an uncertain future, Kerry's first instinct was to distance himself from anything football-related. It just hurt too much.

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"Before the start of the following season I took myself and my partner away on holiday to avoid all the usual pre-season hype on TV and in the newspapers. I couldn't face that.

"I'm fine about it now, though. Like they say, time is a great healer. Towards the end of last season I was going along to Withdean and cheering the boys on again. I'll always be a Brighton & Hove Albion fan, so it's nice to sit with other supporters."

Not that Kerry can entirely resist pulling on his boots again. He's got his own five-a-side outfit, Kezweldos, who play Monday nights at Stanley Deason in Wilson Avenue – and he recently signed for Newhaven.

"I can still get on the ball and make things happen," he explains. "I just can't sprint or do anything explosive. "After about 20 minutes I'm in absolute agony but it doesn't get any worse so I just ride through it, take painkillers to get through the game."

Of course, Kerry has mouths to feed, and this level of football doesn't exactly bring home the bacon – for himself, partner Jenny and their baby boy Harrison, born last June. So Kerry has been working for a local insurance firm, TPCM, in Church Road, Hove, as well as getting into the football agency business with Azzurri Sports Management (www.azzurrisports.net).

"I still had the mortgage and bills to

pay," he points out, with characteristic pragmatism, "so I joined the real world."

We can also expect to see plenty of Kerry at the Amex, where he hopes to get involved with the 1901 Club. "Being there on match days will be fantastic," he says.

All in all, then, is it fair to say life could be a whole lot worse right now for Kerry Mayo?

"Oh yes, definitely. Everything at the moment is very rosy. I've got a fantastic partner – sorry, I mean fiancée, we're engaged – I love my son to bits and I'm just looking forward to the future, whatever it brings..."