

Southend United Supporters Club

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SUSC NEWSLETTER NO 4

The good news is everyone is talking about United. The bad news is it's the wrong one! But credit where it is due. Dimbo, sorry, David Beckham and the boys have completed the Treble and the tributes have been pouring in from lifelong Red Devils fanatics - Zoe Ball, Tracy Shaw, Posh Spice, Spike of 911 (that's a pop group not a Porsche) and some bloke called Gaz Coombes from Supergrass. Thank God Blues did not top the Premiership or that lot would be supporting us!

So surely MANU deserve credit from SUSC? OK, here goes. If Blues next season have as much luck as Fergie's mob did against Bayern Munich in the European Cup Final, if our opponents are as spineless as Newcastle in the FA Cup Final and our Third Division rivals attack us with all the Prem venom Keane and Co encountered during the past nine months, we'll be promoted by Christmas!

Aaaah, next season. Aren't you readers of SUSC NEWSLETTER NO 4 just pining for it already? Saturdays do lack a certain something without that sitting in the West Stand wondering if we will ever win another home game, without that quiet feeling of pride as the SUSC coaches bring an air of civilisation to another barbarian outpost or without that sweating in front of the Sky TV teleprinter praying our boys will do the business.

The final game of last season against Hartlepool just about summed what we had to endure in 1998-99. Plenty of unfulfilled promise, some players ready to scrap, some players who deserved to be scrapped and the feeling that Alan Little has a fair old job on his plate to get us straight up when we resume hostilities. Even with the addition of the new blood he wants. The lad who had his wedding blessed on the pitch before the game was fortunate his lovely bride did not seek an immediate divorce on the grounds of mental cruelty after being forced to sit through that 90 minutes. A pity, too, the usual suspects had to ruin the 'lap of honour'.

At least there was cause for a minor measure of optimism in the clash at Barnet. The old video replay button got a right hammering watching the goal highlights from that memorable day out. Sky gave us just a few significant seconds more than ITV, with the best moment surely being the horde of Blues fans behind the goal all leaping as one from their seats as Scott Houghton's cracking opener found the back of the net. The cameras also panned further left before Houghton crossed for Lee Hodges to tuck away our second and you wondered if there was a Barnet fan in the ground. All you could see were blue shirts. Tremendous - and that's when we are fighting for League survival. What might it be like if we are going for promotion? Here's hoping for a Millennium chance to find out.

I must apologise for the fact that newsletter connoisseurs will have been reading details of Barnet tickets etc in issue No 3 which were well past their sell-by date when said missive was eventually sent out. Blame rested with our current distribution company, who have been given a final warning to raise their game or face the consequences..... This is being penned on June 4 for send-off with Richard Coxell's Exiles Newsletter around June 7. So now you know.

Your committee met on May 27, following a slightly longer break between get-togethers than usual, with a typically varied agenda. First off, Trevor gave a detailed insight into the communications work he has put in with regard to our recent stewarding and security conflicts at both home and away games. Sadly, results have been depressingly

redictable.

Our chairman began his mission by contacting Chelmsford MP Simon Burns, currently pushing his Football (Offences and Disorder) Bill through Parliament designed chiefly to stop hooligan supporters travelling abroad.

The idea was that perhaps Burns might also be able to include some standard regulation of stewards and security firms within the Bill. No chance, apparently - though Burns passed on Trevor's concerned comments to Sports Minister Tony Banks for his views. Banks has always been something of a maverick, renowned for opening his mouth before thinking about what will come out. Many believe the blessed Blair gave him the Sports Minister's job purely as a way of keeping him "on message" rather than through any regard for his affinity with sport. It is also hard to pinpoint who is the more nauseating when it comes to pushing Chelsea - Banks or Mellor. Anyway, Tony deigned to come down from his Premiership ivory tower to inform us, incredibly, that standards of stewarding had undergone a 'major improvement' and this was why fewer police were now needed at grounds. Somehow he seemed to overlook that crippling police costs might be a relevant factor as well.

He also waffled on about specified training for stewards and that they could even get a City and Guilds certificate. Whether that was in stewarding, blocking views or GBH he didn't say. But, naturally, like any politician worth his salt, he was sitting on the fence and not commenting on the detailed problems we encountered at Rochdale, Plymouth and Darlington - other than to say that the Football Licensing Authority had been assured the police were happy with the stewarding at those particular venues. Thanks, Tony.

We will now be writing to the Independent Supporters Association and the Football League Supporters Association to get their thoughts. We have also kept our president, Sir Teddy Taylor MP, informed. He will bear our views and information in mind whenever relevant.

Our SUSC member who found himself unjustifiably banged about and then banged up at Rochdale has been warned by his legal representative he could face a year's ban from attending matches. The Police Complaints Commission are presently investigating the case. A letter to us from the Rochdale board over the incident revealed the police had effectively told them to "shut it" while any investigation remains ongoing. Plymouth did not bother to reply to our complaint of a junior member being manhandled at Home Park. As for the FA's head of safety and security, he took the Banks route of platitudes and party line flim-flam, but refused to be tied down on the stewarding/policing matters that affected us - though it does appear Darlington boss Dave Hodgson and his training staff have been severely reprimanded for their antics towards our supporters after the defeat at Feethams.

Overall it is unfortunate we have had to get so deeply involved in such a mire. SUSC will back any member who has been mistreated by the authorities at whatever ground, though our key message has to be this: If you don't attract trouble, you probably won't get any. At least on a much brighter note we received a letter of compliment from Leyton Orient's senior steward for our 1,500 fans' excellent behaviour at Brisbane Road. Outstanding.

Turning into Eddie George, Trevor revealed continuing highly satisfactory levels of SUSC solvency. Paid-up membership renewals are along expected lines, though there was some disquiet expressed about the non-issue of membership cards. It was agreed that the turnover time between membership cash being received and a new 1999 card being despatched should be no more than one week. Anyone who joined SUSC before mid-May last year should have had their renewal form by now. If you have not, get in touch with Trevor or Kathryn at the addresses on the letterhead as soon as possible. If you want assistance or advice via e-mail, contact Richard Coxell on coxell@easynet.co.uk or yours truly on nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk

Trevor and Richard met recently with John Main and discussed numerous salient points.

i) Club programme: We should be getting an SUSC page as well as our usual travel page.
ii) Season tickets: Published prices and concessions look like the limit. But we are still trying to get more areas of the ground included and Richard, in particular, is pushing other additional 'imaginative' ideas.

Late news: Reductions extended to June 19 - with 25 per cent off merchandise as an extra sweetener.

iii) North Bank: Looks like no chance of a return for home fans, but the general feeling is we should keep pushing if

only to get one game back there as a trial. Fence removal is being reviewed

iv) John Adams: Appears set to linger on as a sort of director without portfolio. The club cannot handle any more possible litigation, what with Ronnie Whelan, Mike Lapper, Jeroen Boere, Fairclough Homes, Uncle Tom Cobley and all looking for their pound of flesh.

v) New ground: Being designed by the people behind Chelsea Village. 15,000-seater, extendable to 25,000 (when we get into Europe!) Ron Martin calling the shots through Delancey Estates. Car parking will have to be incorporated as there is none available in the way there is at Roots Hall.

vi) Club shirts: Olympic seem to have done a Reginald Perrin - and disappeared off the face of the earth. Rather than look to Umbro, adidas, Fila etc, the club has adopted.....Fairway! Their effort for 1999-2000 - with some yellow rumoured to be back in - should be available by the Blues open day on July 11.

vii) Club shop: Mrs Main, who has a retail background, will be revamping the premises - and not a minute too soon. The plan is to have it fronting on to Victoria Avenue so people can see it. The Victoria Circus location is no more.

viii) Alan Little Q & A: Promised for pre-season.

ix) Friendlies: Norwich for sure July 16. Late news: We've added Gravesend and Northfleet!

It was generally agreed this was a very useful exercise and it is encouraging to know that John Main wants such meetings on a regular basis.

SUSC will continue its highly successful coach travel to away games next season. We are likely to stick with Supreme if the price is right. Another big thank-you to Clare in particular for all her efforts over the past few months.

The 5-A-Side tournament is still on the cards to coincide with the July 11 events. A race night and another quiz night are also in the pipeline. As for the Alan Little grilling, see above.

The new shrimp mascot is no nearer birth due to a delay in negotiations with our Shrimp Season associates. Trevor is working on this, though the longer the hold-up the longer we are stuck with the terracotta eiderdown.

There is a possibility of the Shrimpers Club reopening. As a social venue for quiz nights, pool, Sky matches on widescreen TV etc it would be ideal.

But SUSC would not want to get too deeply involved in its running.

The prediction competition went right to the wire, with Mark Wallis collecting the £20 first prize ahead of Terry Edwards and James Welham. Mark pocketed the cash thanks to M***** U***** winning the FA Cup Final. We aim to repeat this next season, with a much prompter start, and will be looking for a far larger entry - plus a far bigger prize pot!

Jeroen Boere may not have been everyone's cup of tea as a striker, but no one deserved to be blinded in one eye in such awful circumstances. Richard Coxell and many other SUSC members have sent e-mails to his club in Japan. Talking of e-mails, Richard is looking at an update of our internet page in the near future.

An SUSC flag will be purchased before next season to be flown wherever possible. As for player sponsorship, we have not yet decided who will get the kiss of death which has so far landed with devastating consequences on Regis Coulbault, Tony Henriksen and Mick Gooding.

And there you have it. The committee's next meeting is on June 17. Any (valid) comments, get in touch. Just one closing thought. Tommy Mooney in the Premiership!!!????!!!

NR

Even later news flash

The Supporters Club is pleased to welcome a new member in Ian Leask from Minneapolis, Minnesota. Ian is a writer and has a book in progress about being a lifelong Blues fan who, for various reasons, exiles himself on the other side

of the world. If you've read footie memoirs like Fever Pitch, Among the Thugs or Steaming In you'll have some sense of what Ian is doing. Ian has his own website at http://members.aol.com/meanbrit/mag_ss.html where you can find a story "Piggybank" that takes place in Southend, published to some acclaim a few years ago as part of his short story collection "The Wounded". Ian would like to get the first draft of this new book finished by the end of the summer. If you can help out with anecdotes or encouragement contact Ian by e-mail MEANBRIT@aol.com or contact him by mail or phone at 6493 Mockingbird Lane, Eden Prairie, MN 55346 tel: 612-974-2053. Ian is also keen to hear from any fans who remember him from way back in the days of the "Pak". Ian comes over to England a couple of times a year and was at the Barnet game.

To Help - Not Hinder