

Southend United Supporters Club



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SUSC NEWSLETTER NUMBER NINE

THE car journey from Long Beach, through the outer suburbs of Los Angeles up to Big Bear Lake in the San Bernardino Mountains of California takes about two hours. Much of the freeway makes the M25 look like a dirt track - six lanes wide, plus one for cars with two or more passengers and another for drivers willing to pay a toll to knock a few more minutes off their travel time. And that is just in one direction! Traffic is flowing beautifully smoothly, the sun is shining bright and hot and it should just be a question of which of the dozens of fast food emporia along the route advertising the 'world's biggest burger' ought to be graced with my party's custom.

But I'm uneasy, twitchy. The mind is wandering, concentration difficult. Lucky I am only a passenger. The time is 11.50am, Tuesday October 19. That is 7.50pm back in the old country. In other words, five minutes after kick-off against Lincoln. Have we banged one in yet? This was the first Roots Hall League clash I had missed since New Year's Day 1996 and not being able to discover how Blues were getting on was potentially psychologically damaging. At journey's end, I could have done an E.T. and phoned home. Yet it was getting late and that seemed a bit over the top. So what about the Los Angeles Times? That carries Limey sport these days. Next morning, ah yes here we are. Champions League - Arsenal stuffed by Barcelona, M***** U***** turned over by some gallant snail guzzlers and Nationwide League.....not a sniff. Computer access was out and as I never did find an American who had even heard of Southend United - let alone SUSC - I somehow accurately guessed that not one of them could care less how we had fared. And so it became a case of waiting until Heathrow the following Sunday before I was put out of my misery. 2-2, another lead blown and a sorry 1-0 turnover by Peterborough the day before to boot. Welcome back.

Still, as Daddy Blair would have us believe, things can only get better. But have they? Suddenly we are riding the crest of a slump. Hull was hellish. Were we playing with five at the back or four? Beard and Booty certainly did not seem too sure. Gordon Connelly destroyed Brighton second half as an out-and-out winger, but against the Tigers was floundering around again for 90 minutes 30 yards infield. Tolson and Carruthers worked their butts off once more, but got little worthwhile support from the middle men. Instead of being fourth by getting three points, we were 10th after getting none. One step forward at Exeter, followed by two steps back. Very frustrating.

As for 0-0 at rock-bottom Chester, I hope our brave band did not suffer too much. Mel was dropped at the Diva Stadium, so, totally out of character, let me be controversial for a

moment. That was never justified. Mel has been faultless in virtually every game since he came into the side and is a deservedly popular player. OK, he had a poorish game by his standards against Hull. But if every one of our players was axed after one below-par display, we would not have a team to put out. Mark Prudhoe, who I remember throwing a few in during his Stoke days, must now prove himself to the fans as well as his pal Alan Little.

Darlington was like the Humberside horror revisited. They had not scored an away League goal for 578 minutes before arriving at Roots. We put that right in 10. Little said there was 'no passion' first half - not the only time he has claimed that this season. Please put the problem right then, I would say. Darlo's second was such a shock the clock stopped on the Frank Walton Stand. As for Leo, our prize asset could blow a potential Premiership future unless he goes in for a bit of anger management. He is niggled far too easily, even if it is not difficult to guess by what. He looked ready to take on the whole Quakers squad, let alone moaning Marco, as he roared down the tunnel on the whistle.

Ah ha, what's this? £2 for a programme instead of £1.80? Plus £1 on admission charges? Peter Storrie, what have you done now? Well, there is only one way to find out - and that is to ask the man himself. Which is exactly what you will be able to do on the night of Wednesday, December 8. Hopefully, just 24 hours after we have taken our first giant strides towards Wembley by seeing off Cheltenham in the Auto Windscreens Shield.

Peter is primed to be grilled by you on the cash issue, the new ground issue and any other issue (except the Blair baby ~~ZZZZZZZZZZ~~) at the next SUSC Question and Answer session at the Shrimpers Club, kick-off 8pm. This should give us the clearest insight yet into where the club is heading, and at what price, so get the date in your diary NOW. It is a 'must not miss' event. (Don't forget the mike, Trevor).

So on into the bowels of SUSC NEWSLETTER NUMBER NINE. At your committee's meeting on October 14, we got the details of Alan Caulfield's resignation. Bubbling hormones and various other obligations mean the Blues lure is not as strong as it was, so a committee place is up for grabs. Volunteers have been flooding in - at least two - who will be considered at our next get-together on December 2. Alan was thanked in absentia for the effort he has put in over the past two seasons.

The recent quiz night raised a very welcome £158. Of that, £103 has gone to St Christopher's School for special needs, with SUSC retaining £55 for our own funds. Muchos gracias once again to all those who supported a good evening.

Trevor reported our financial position as secure as the IMF, meaning all those who plan to travel down to Torquay with SUSC on December 28 can look forward to a late Christmas present. Coach travel for a bargain-basement £5. Yes, a paltry FIVER! This offer is open to all members and Junior Blues on our books by November 30. Non-members can still travel - but for £25.

Another Q & A session we are mulling over for the new year is one involving some representatives from the media e.g. Sun, Echo, local radio etc. But this would need guaranteed backing or we would end up looking daft.

Neville Roach has written to thank us for sponsoring him this season. Poor Nev. The ink was

hardly dry on the page in the programme than he was out of the side and struggling even to make the bench. But that, sadly, is the curse of SUSC. Just ask Tony Henriksen and Regis Coulbault. At least you bounced back against Darlo. Keep plugging away, mate.

We were unable to be represented at the Keep Barnet Alive march on October 31, though we pledged our backing to the organisers. Let's hope we never have to try to invoke the support of the other Nationwide League clubs to keep us going. And we should not need to, as long as the new ground becomes a reality.

With that in mind, Jerry Moss was planning to attend a Southend Council meeting on 'Green Developments'. Sounds like where the first local GM crops will be going in, but actually the idea was to see if any new stadium issues were discussed by the suits.

Following one or two previously well documented 'problems' on our coaches this season, a code of conduct has been drafted to ensure everyone on board realises their responsibilities and what is and is not acceptable behaviour. But it is pleasant to report that things seem to have cooled down on that front and, so far, the 'code' has not had to be issued. Great.

The National Federation of Supporters' Clubs is looking to get us back in the fold and it looks as if we will agree to rejoin. We just have to be sure of the financial implications.

PC Paul Byrne, the police liaison officer for Southend and not Blues' former Churchill's resident, is keen to discuss his role with the committee. We will be inviting him to a future meeting. Kathryn has requested he turns up in full uniform with handcuffs at the ready. Oooooooh, I say.

Richard has the plaque for the Blue Boar well in hand and it should be available for unveiling before a home fixture shortly. Watch this space and the local press. The old Supporters' Club plaque, which was in the East Stand, has been moved to above the Shrimpers Club entrance. You can't miss it.

The latest monthly talk-in with Messrs Main and Storrie took place on October 25. They revealed that once the new stadium plans are out in the open they will be holding get-togethers with all relevant parties - that includes us - and will show details on video and via computer simulation of the treat we can expect. There will be around 16,000 seats for starters, with room for expansion when necessary (if necessary?). Right now it is just down to ironing out the final niggles. We have an assured 600 tickets for the Brighton jaunt, so all those with the necessary vouchers, tickets etc. from our longest-haul destinations can breathe a little easier. The club plans to hold an AGM next month - there's a thing - with full audited accounts available. How times have changed. The next tête-à-tête is due on December 13.

The SUSC website is almost over the finishing line, as is Blues'. If you are stuck for a Christmas gift, you could do worse than visiting the club shop. It has been turned around in fine style by Mrs Main.

A reply to my letter voicing concerns over the quantity of howlers in the programme arrived from Peter Storrie while I was Stateside. He wants to let those currently running the publication try to iron out any problems before thinking about summoning outside assistance. Fair enough, though Saturday's

effort had our coach heading for York on Tuesday December 17 and not Friday. Peter's spelling was faultless - though I would like to have seen a few full stops rather than commas in one 81-word sentence!

Talking of letters, I dashed off an e-mail to Sky Sports a couple of weeks back. I watched their Football League Review programme on the Thursday following the Brighton game so I could relive our classic comeback. All First and Second Division games were shown, then came Barnet, Darlington and Rotherham, then.....Shrewsbury v Chester, then end of programme. Six Third Division games were ignored - including ours. And why? Obvious, isn't it. Third Division? No one cares, do they Andy Gray? Er, Alex Ferguson, can Richard Keys kiss your backside again this weekend? I told their sports chief they could have cut a pitiful interview with Alan Ball to get in the action the fans really want to see. Needless to say, I never got a reply.

A strange thing happened when I reached Page 76 of the book I am currently reading called Every Dead Thing. Labelled the 'most frightening novel since Silence of the Lambs', this incident was indeed truly scary. The central character tried to ring the sheriff of a small town police department. The sheriff was out, but his deputy was there to take the call. The deputy's name? Alvin Martin. Phew. Makes the hairs stand up on the back of your neck. Sorry to say that anyone who has heard Alvin punditing on Sky or Talk Radio of late would agree he would probably have made a better copper. But at least it is comforting to know that while he was in charge, all our problems - so he claims - were down to lack of money. Nothing, of course, to do with the fact he may not have been much good as a manager.....

And there, as Freddie Mercury said in I'm Going Slightly Mad, you have it. This will probably hit your letter boxes - thanks, as usual, to Richard's superb distribution system - some time before this weekend's Plymouth trek. Good luck to all aboard. Right now, we look as if we need it.

NR

P.S. Due to Richard Coxell's computer having to go into dock for repairs, there is no exiles newsletter this month. Normal service will be resumed next month.