

SUSCT NEWSLETTER 14

THE PFA Footballer of the Year and the Football Writers' Player of the Year. Annually the supreme individual honours up for grabs for the stars of the English game. Until now. Suddenly there is competition from an accolade that the likes of David Beckham, Alan Shearer and Michael Owen will cry themselves to sleep over. Why? Because they cannot win it. I refer, of course, to the SUSC Player of the Season award.

This is a title that brings a whole new meaning to the word prestigious. It is the cream of the crème de la crème. And YOU can vote for the first recipient. At the end of NEWSLETTER NUMBER FOURTEEN you will find a voting slip. Decide which United 'star' of this somewhat unfortunate season most merits your recognition, fill in the details – remember only SUSC members can vote - and mail your verdict back to our invigilator Martin Penton. Nothing could be simpler. The player favoured with the most votes scoops the prize, which will then be awarded to the man in person at the grand SUSC Presentation Night at the Shrimpers Club on Wednesday May 3.

The plan for our exclusive buffet/disco evening – 7.30 for 8 – is that there should be a happy mingling of football club execs, players and, most importantly, our members. Now I appreciate gala occasions such as this, the Oscars, BAFTAs etc have a habit of attracting undesirable hangers-on. So rest easy that your committee will do its best to see that Madonna, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Chris Evans, Curly from Coronation Street, that Steps nobody etc do not, for once, get favoured treatment. This is a night for true Blues only. But tickets are limited to 250, so snap one up swiftly if you want to be at football's happening night of the new millennium. Call it our very own May Ball – but just £35 cheaper. For, incredible as it may seem, entry is FREE. Tickets are available from Derek Murr (details above) or can be obtained via any committee member. Let's have a big turn-out so this becomes a yearly gathering and not a one-off.

Plans for a race night and a quiz night were also mooted for the near future, along with a pre-season Q & A session with Alan Little, when your committee met on April 6. The new Elms venue was a haven of tranquility compared to The Railway, though it was agreed that gathering under the air-conditioning vent had been a mistake.

Yet while we are trying to rustle up some enthusiasm off the pitch, Blues seem intent on testing our loyalty to the limit on it. Those of you who have endured the last 10hrs 04mins without an away goal have my sympathy. I never thought I would see a time when having to work on a Saturday could be regarded as a blessing. John Main last week described some players in the team as 'overpaid under-achievers'. It must say something if even his patience is now wearing thin. OK, we beat Chester – but who hasn't – while the York encounter was a desperate 90 minutes. At least two home fans present were seen to have dozed off. Still we can always console ourselves with the fact that, along with Preston, we have so far hit the woodwork this campaign more often than any other Nationwide League side – 19 times.

I felt sorry against Conlon and Co for the visiting residents from the Polish town of Sopot, twinned with Southend, who had to sit and endure that clash along with the faithful. One of their number allegedly claimed we had a 30million team. Encouraging, eh? Trouble is he was talking zlotys – and there are about a million of those to the pound! Certainly I would say the boffins at NASA could save themselves a fortune when they go for a relaunch of the Mars Orbiter. Judging by his distribution that day, just stick it on the end of David Morley's right boot. Sorry, David. But then again, we did play York on April Fool's Day and Mr Conn and Merchant were running the line. We must try to keep that optimism flowing through our veins, though right now it ain't always easy.

Take the new ground. This massive issue looming over the club's future was addressed at the Q & A session with Ron Martin of Martin Dawn plc on March 23. Work again kept me away, though the feedback was that Ron was no Lenin. In other words, he had a problem communicating with the masses i.e. the 80-odd fans who

turned up. In fact, a number of people perceived that Ron tried to talk down to his audience in the way that some business people do who regard all football fans as one step up from the neanderthal. I do not plan to regurgitate facts and figures that those who were there or have read the Echo already know. But eight months down the line from the date when the bona-fide plans were due to be unveiled, there is still no sign. The sketches Ron used for illustration were no more than what was available back in August. Everyone wants to stand behind Martin Dawn on this. Without them, United might already have become a fond memory. But is there a debt problem? A remaining Jobson family link problem? A problem with Rochford Council? There has to be some reason for the incredible delay in submitting the plans. English Heritage do not want to comment on the situation regarding the potentially troublesome 13th Century mound, burial site, call it what you will, until the plans have gone in. At the moment, that makes the situation a bit like the one in Waiting for Godot – hanging on for something which simply refuses to turn up.

April is the fourth date we have been given and SUSC reckon it should be the last. If nothing concrete is unveiled by the middle of the month, Paul Fitzgerald will make contact with Ron Martin to try to arrange a meeting with him at Martin Dawn's Billericay bunker. There he might just be somewhat more forthcoming on definite detail. The fans have a right to know exactly what is going on and whether the Southend United patient has plenty of life left in it or is in terminal decline – especially when hands will soon be expected to plunge into pockets again shortly to fund the purchase of new season tickets. If we do not get concrete answers, then that money might just have to stay on deposit!

The season ticket issue was broached at our last monthly meeting with John Main, attended by Richard Coxell, Derek Murr and Paul Fitzgerald. There are no figures set in stone as yet, but don't bank on bargain basement for next season. What we do feel we must push for, though, and will, is for the club to come up with some sort of offer to attract both old and new fans – e.g. a family season ticket or £1 admission to the ground for all children. Unless you live in the fantasy world of the Premiership's top six, just upping costs these days and expecting supporters to accept them is a guaranteed loser. Did Peter Storrie hear that? We will also have a new kit for 2000-01, blue with a hint of yellow by all accounts but nowhere near as much custard as four or five years back. The club are keen for the old shrimp to reappear on the shirt badge and we will suggest they ask all supporters what they think via the programme. Charlton look like providing Ron Pountney's testimonial opposition, probably in early-August, though John Main was apparently staggered to discover all funds raised, bar costs for using the ground etc, will go to Ron and nothing to the football club. Funny old testimonials he must attend.

While the imminent new TV deal looks sure to pour zillions more into the pockets of M***** U***** and their big gun buddies, the outlook for we lesser lights continues to look pretty bleak. Blues need finance like any other business. So how can SUSC help? We raised with John Main the options available through the Football Trust, soon to be the Football Foundation and backed by a government suddenly aware that football fans have votes. This could involve fans making donations from their own funds or by means of special loans of up to £1,000, with the money forthcoming to be used by the club under very strict guidelines. There is no question of it just being poured down a big black hole like players' wages. We might be able to buy shares, fund the youth team, whatever. Even find our contribution merits a non-executive seat on the board. But nothing will happen without in-depth investigation. There will be further discussion with John and contact with, among others, Northampton supporters who have successfully followed this route. Your committee has appointed a working party of Trevor Bashford, Derek Murr, Paul Fitzgerald and Kirstine Nicholson, who works for the Football Trust, to seek out the best way forward. We will keep you in touch with progress.

Pity Neil Campbell never made it. Looks like his brother Andy at Middlesbrough will be the success in that family. As for Steve Jones, I'm yet to be convinced. Hopefully he will prove a better striker than boxer, if rumours about his falling-out with a team-mate at a former club are true! Meanwhile Mike Marsh may currently be inspiring Kidderminster to the Conference title, but there is no chance of him appearing in the Third Division next season as he received an insurance pay-out following his knee injury while with us. Talking of the Conference, I see a meeting of Nationwide chairmen decided to 'consider' increasing the number of Conference clubs promoted into the big-time and the consequent dumping of additional current incumbents

into non-league. Somehow I do not think the Rushden and Diamonds of this world will accept that for long from Messrs Main and associates.

Apparently Blues fans came 24th in a style poll of the British football scene conducted by Burtons and Duckhams. But what is style at a football ground these days? Five oafs somehow seated in the East Stand green seats v Chester decided it was unleashing a torrent of foul language to greet a poorish display as we all drifted up past the Far Post bar on the way out. These amoeba-brains were an embarrassment to every man, woman and child unfortunate enough to be in earshot. Yet despite their behaviour being equally unedifying during play, they survived the 90 minutes untroubled - unlike some of those who dared to voice criticism of our performance against York. It seems more than a dozen fans were invited to leave by stewards that day, following intervention from the dug-out. It's a funny old game.....

In the wake of the Ron Martin Q & A, SUSC has decided not to charge members and other supporters who attend such functions in future. We will try to raise funds during the evenings through raffles, scratchcards and the like.

I think Richard is getting a bit cheesed off being asked about the website. Rest assured, he is doing his best. Meanwhile we recently had a request from a non-member to sponsor his nascent go-kart racing career. I am afraid we had to say that was a non-starter as it is not the sort of thing SUSC was set up to do. Here's hoping his dreams do not go into reverse.

I am afraid I missed a crucial computer 'save' somewhere along the line in NUMBER THIRTEEN – I knew something would go to pot – and you all ended up getting the wrong version. Never mind, better luck this time. Thanks again to Mr Coxell for his superb cutting, pasting and distribution efforts. And the badge at the top looks a treat. Any queries or comment on NUMBER 14 can be addressed to me on nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk Our committee officials have their details in the header field on page one if you have any other matters to discuss.

Paul is dealing manfully with membership renewals and new applications. Remember, when your reminder that it is time to cough up again arrives, please return it immediately rather than filing it with the unwanted mail from Readers Digest, the Inland Revenue and your credit card company.

Right, back to the SUSC Player of the Year vote. Here comes the voting slip. Return it to Martin by post or hand or give it to a committee member to pass on for you if you cannot run to a stamp. The deadline for replies is FRIDAY, APRIL 28.

Name..... Membership No.....

My SUSC Player of the Season is:.....

Return to: Martin Penton, 18 Bladon Close, Braintree, Essex. CM2.5TB by April 28.

NR

Final thought. The Lunch Club – permanently off the menu.