

SUSCT NEWSLETTER 16

ONE door shuts, another one opens. And who is that beating a hasty retreat past the exit sign? Why, none other than our old friend/adversary Peter (£120,000 a year) Storrie. It surely comes as little surprise that his alliance with Blues has come to an end. He and John Main somehow never struck as a partnership made in heaven and if there was a power struggle I suspect our chairman would have been the victor favoured by the majority. The farewell platitudes were regulation. Whether they were heartfelt is another matter. Personally, I think the holiday camp boss transferred rather too many delusions of grandeur with him from his time as chief executive with the Hamsters. He might have brought in sponsorship and raised our profile with local business. But his edict on only being able to buy a ticket of your choice in any area of the ground more than two hours before kick-off on match days got right up supporters' noses. I would love to know how much abuse ticket office staff have taken for that one. And what has it achieved? We are supposed to be in the business of attracting fans, not alienating them. So how about scrapping that Storrie legacy before we kick off again? I see Essex County Cricket Club could be next up to be bowled a few of his googlies. Meanwhile we can try putting that £120,000 to better use.

As for Spud, was he such a dud? Peter Taylor prepares to move into the heady realms of Leicester's Premiership hot-seat, having guided Gillingham into the First Division for the first time in their history. In the light of his undoubted success with England Under-21s, before his scandalous removal by personality bypass victim Howard Wilkinson, it clearly suggests his sorry Roots Hall spell was due more to our player inadequacies than his own. And let's face it, his successors have hardly set the world alight so far. Perhaps they should have concentrated more on their Norman Wisdom impersonations.....

Right, into the serious business of SUSC NEWSLETTER NUMBER 16 – with the emphasis on serious as we approach potentially momentous times in the history of fan relations with the football club.

Your committee got together on May 30 and again on June 13. The latter was chiefly for updating the latest moves on the Supporters Trust and, unfortunately, was the first committee meeting I have had to miss since being voted aboard. Sorry.

THE non-appearance of the plans for the new ground – FOUR different deadlines have been missed - is turning into the longest-running farce since Brian Rix was dropping his trousers nightly at the Whitehall Theatre. United's Boots and Laces project appears to have universal political backing, both local and national, so there is no shifting blame there. Paul Fitzgerald and Kirstine Nicholson have met with David Amess MP (Southend West) and SUSC president Sir Teddy Taylor MP (Southend East), who both give their full agreement. Sir Teddy suspects just 'a hitch'. Well, if that is so, what the hell is it? Paul is now trying to arrange further clarification meetings with John Main – though it appears we will all be getting the chance of a one-to-one at his planned roadshows - and Ron Martin. John has said recently "If you are wondering what happens if we don't get the planning permission, quite simply we will have to pack up." But there will be no permission given for anything unless the plans come out of the woodwork! Paul will also be seeking the views of United's other directors, who seem to have been the mute side of quiet on the issue. Aren't they wondering what is happening? Or aren't they bothered at the prospect of becoming potentially the first Accrington Stanley of the 21st century? Martin Dawn plc made an investment in United which they were confident they would get back. If that situation should change, the plug could be pulled and 94 years of history go down the toilet. And if Southend did go bang, there would be no keeping a League place as Southend United 2001 or whatever. Current Nationwide League rules say you go bust, you go out – rescue package or not. We would be another Aldershot saying hello to the Rymans League Division Three.

The gravity of the moment has raised awareness of the fact that just as it was supporters who made Roots Hall a reality, so they may have to lead the fight to ensure United's survival. And this is where the transformation of SUSC into the Southend United Supporters Club Trust comes in. This hugely complicated issue has been

handled so far in the most professional way imaginable by our four-person team of Derek Murr, Paul, Trevor Bashford and Kirstine. They all deserve our gratitude for their commitment to a thorough investigation of the project and the time and effort they have put in. Kirstine, unfortunately, has just had to resign from both the committee and our Trust panel because of her new job – at Leyton Orient! We wish her well – off the pitch – and thank her for all her efforts. Martin Penton – you saw him for about two seconds as the half-time whistle sounded against Swansea on the Channel 5 TV documentary – is taking over on the Trust team. Plus we already have at least one more volunteer for the committee. Yes, we're that popular.

FORMATION of the Trust would mean establishing a charitable organisation to raise sufficient funds via the fans and the Football Trust to give us the financial clout to be a power within the football club. Shares would be bought if and when available and a board presence sought. Nothing can be done without the agreement of our membership, so do not feel there is any sort of fait accompli element here. An EGM will have to give the go-ahead and that is the point we are now at. The EGM will be held on TUESDAY, JULY 11 at the Shrimpers Club, kick-off 8pm. It is vitally important that as many as possible of our members attend. Derek has already produced a draft brochure for issue to explain all to every interested party. You should find one enclosed with this newsletter, along with a letter of explanation from Trevor. If not it will turn up. We hope Brian Lomax, who was a major figure in the Northampton Town trust, will attend the EGM to give further details and clarification on what is involved. Major decisions have to be made and if you genuinely care about Blues your voices have to be heard at this crucial gathering. Our aims and objectives will remain the same – 100 per cent backing for Southend United FC. In other words 'To help – not hinder'. We want to get John Main on board and hope he can see why we are heading where we are. For further details in depth, I recommend you to our website www.susc.co.uk to the 'Trust' section, where you will shortly find an update on the current state of play and any other relevant issue in what is a highly complex undertaking. DON'T FORGET – TUESDAY, JULY 11!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Talking of the website, it surely has to be one of the best supporters' sites around. Well, we'd like to think so, if only for all the work Richard Coxell and 'Scorch' have put into getting it finally fully up and pumping. Both richly deserved their vote of thanks from the committee. It has been a long wait, but well worth it. Dip in and enjoy it at the first opportunity. Hopefully, the 'Meet the Committee' section will be completed shortly. One or two are a bit shy.

We reviewed the Player of the Season awards night and agreement was unanimous – a stonking hit to be repeated next year. It was felt Alan Little would have been better advised to come along, though nine points from our first three games will probably see him almost forgiven. It appears the players were so much in the party mood that afterwards they could not make up their minds between Tots and a trip to Romford to keep the good times rolling. Martin (prize purchasing), Derek (organisation) and Jeff Allen (Mr PA) all received further well merited pats on the back, while Julian Hails sent us a very nice letter of appreciation for the decanter presented to him by SUSC on his untimely retirement.

SEASON ticket price rises were basically regarded as highly unfortunate, but simply to be expected with the current state of United's finances. There appears the usual lack of thought, though. OK, it is nice to have a family enclosure. But if you prefer to sit elsewhere in the West Stand, why should kids' tickets go up so drastically to £135 if you sign up post-June 23? The East Stand looks the best bargain, but is the most expensive area of the ground anyway. Deferred payments have been axed and no one has forgotten last season's sneaked in £1 rise (another Storrie in memoriam), so it will be interesting to see how the fans react. Billericay, Purfleet, East Thurrock Utd and Great Wakering might yet be rubbing their hands – and filling their boots.

SUSC has agreed to let the football club mail our members with information about the club shop, special offers etc. Any member who is not happy with this should contact Paul and he will remove your name from the list.

The Open Day on July 16 should see our zone centred round a bouncy castle of some description. We will also be raffling the shirts of our sponsored duo Martin Carruthers and Neville Roach (small sewing jobs required on each). Anyone who cannot attend on the 16th but who wants to try for a shirt can purchase raffle tickets

government do decide on some sort of regulation for the distributing of finances in the wake of the Task Force. Meanwhile the Nationwide League are close to tying up a £350m deal with ITN and OnDigital. Or OffDigital as it is better known. Do you know anyone who has it? Who cares, though, as long as we get survival bucks out of it.

As we are on media matters, do you remember the halcyon days of the old paid-for Southend Standard? That was when ex-Blue Alf Smirk followed the team up and down the country season after season and made judgements from his experience and club contacts? How times have changed. Now it is a free sheet i.e. adverts fund the publication so it can be given away and editorial more or less just fills the spaces that are left. On May 12, they allowed someone named Steve Howett to give us his views on the club's current plight from 'Street Level'. Now Steve revealed he was a QPR fan. He backed this up by declaring 'theirs is the first result I look for on a Saturday night.' He next checks out West Ham and Fulham. And then, wait for it, 'since I've moved here I also check Southend's results'. Wow. That, it seemed, was qualification enough for him then to claim that Alan Little should be replaced, the current squad should go too as they displayed little pride or passion and we need a new direction. 'An adventurous manager and a team of flamboyant players is the only way forward'. Yes, Steve, and Bill Gates is going to finance it all for us tomorrow. He claimed QPR had revived under Gerry Francis, but forgot that Gerry has had multi-millionaire Chrysalis records supremo Chris Wright in the background. I would not have minded quite so much if the bloke had admitted ever having watched Blues play, but I did not get that impression. It was pure twaddle. Strangely, after his next offering he revealed he was moving on. I cannot say I am surprised.

AH, I feel better for getting that off my chest. And all that remains is to sign off until NUMBER SEVENTEEN, by which time those old pre-season nerves should be kicking in. If you want your newsletter by e-mail, just let Richard know. We folded and stuck in envelopes 270 at the last sitting, filling two Tesco bags which Richard then dutifully lumped down for distribution at Southend's central sorting office. The more we can do by e-mail, the lighter the load – and the lower our postage bill! Also don't forget that a swift response to membership renewal requests eases the burden on Paul. Any comments, moans, reaction, contact me at nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk

Jerusalem.

NR (18/6)

PS

1) Thanks for the massive response to last month's quiz question: Which United 'hero' of the 90s became a father for the first time at the age of 15? From the thousands of entries – OK, none - I can announce the winning answer was.....Paul Byrne, now doing a stint in the States after a spell in the Republic of Ireland at Bohemians and with whom he was substituted during this season's FAI Cup Final against Shelbourne. Try this one instead: Which United manager allegedly had a kleptomaniac son whose hobby was dressing-room petty larceny during matches? (My lawyers inform me that, for legal reasons, the answer to this one must be by word of mouth only!)

2) Euro 2000 update: I hadn't realised that against Portugal Kevin Keegan would be modelling his midfield on ours. Where was it? As for the Germans, these days they are more retreat to Berlin than march on Paris. But I love the water cannons. More to come.

3) Will we be sh***ing or shampooing next season, Alan?

4) EGM, TUESDAY JULY 11. Be there.