

SUSCT NEWSLETTER 20

SIR Francis Drake, Lord Nelson, the Duke of Wellington, Emmeline Pankhurst, Winston Churchill and Stan Collymore. All heroes and heroines down the ages to one degree or another and now joined by nine more with the true Blue blood of Southend United coursing through their veins.

Yes, take a bow SUSCT chairman Trevor Bashford, treasurer Craig Fillary, committee members Martin Penton and Theresa Wellham, superkid Mathew Harris from the United ticket office and fans fantastique Viki Brown, Kathy Nicel, Steve Stow and Paul McKenzie.

This Friday (November 10), after just a day's training, our awesome ninesome should be diving into the ether over the Northamptonshire countryside with just a parachute standing between them and a premature farewell to our promotion campaign. And they are doing it for one reason only – to assist our efforts to raise funds for the football club. All of them deserve our thanks and admiration and I look forward to imparting some tales of derring-do in No.21 – floods and storm-force winds permitting – as well as details of just how much their sponsored skydive brought in. Thanks already to the Westcliff Casino for the backing they have given via Theresa. It adds up to a superb effort all round.

If you read Trevor's beautifully crafted Macclesfield programme notes – he really has a way with words these days – you will have picked up that we are having a real fund-raising push at present.

QUIZ queen Donna Fillary has this time put in a massive amount of work to get our first SUSCT Grand Christmas Draw on the road. Now it is up to all our members to support the cause by buying the tickets – and selling them! Everyone who receives this newsletter by e-mail will be receiving two books of tickets very shortly. If you receive the newsletter by post, you will find your two ticket books enclosed. These are not for throwing in a corner and forgetting. They are for flogging at the first opportunity and this is a task that should not be beyond anyone. If you can't find any willing purchasers, do your good turn for the year and buy them yourself. Once you have done so, return the completed stubs and your £10 to Donna at 39 Coniston, Southend-on-Sea, Essex, SS2 6SL. Or you can hand the lot to any committee member. There are always plenty in the Shrimpers before matches. If you cannot sell them – and that will be a pretty pathetic effort – it is equally vital you return your tickets to Donna so that someone else can do the job for you. If you can sell more, ring Donna on 01702-512169 or e-mail her on craiganddonna@supanet.com and the tickets will be straight in the post to you. I will give a future mention to our top vendors. We now have nearly 500 members. If the majority do the business, we will be well along the way to our overall target. The first prize is £1,000, runner-up nets £500 and third place earns £100. There will be extra smaller prizes, too, including some £5 McDonalds vouchers. Half-time during the Boxing Day clash with Leyton Orient is when the successful numbers will be pulled out of the hat, meaning it will be an even happier Christmas than usual for some of the faithful. **IT COULD BE YOU!** But remember, you have to be in it to win it.

OK, on into the murky depths of SUSCT NEWSLETTER NUMBER 20. As long as the Macc men do not do the dirty on us, it should be an incredible 13 unbeaten. That must be our best run for around 30 years, since the days when Billy Best and Bill Garner were running amok in the old Fourth Division and we enjoyed regular gates of 12,000-plus. Ahhh, happy times.

The surge in optimism since Dave Webb's arrival has been so tangible you can almost lay fingers on it. We may still not always be playing classic football (Exeter?), but the visible increase in effort from the players plus the readoption of a 4-4-2 system that means opposing keepers are now having to work for their money rather than bringing their deckchairs along is refreshing to see. Suffice to say that one brave/crazy committee member has had a monster bet on us getting to the Second Division that makes my £5ew look a mere drop in the ocean.

The feeling was we might not have recovered as we did in the 2-2 at Blackpool had we not had the galvanising effect of a Webby half-time tongue-lashing to boost the troops – plus the fanatical baying of our seven coachloads of fervent backers. (Will we have seven for Carlisle, Chris?) DW got a great reception as he saluted home faithful against York and we squeezed out the three points 1-0 after the anguish of seeing Sammy the Shrimp given a pasting by Yorkie the Lion. Our York-loving Southend Council leader was also present, presumably thinking how much nicer it would have been to have watched the action at Fossetts Farm. Surely there can be no looming planning problems, can there? Barnet was a much more convincing 2-0 performance against a side likely to feature new player-boss Tony Cottee up front when we visit Underthrill in March. The only downside was we seemed to have lost 600 fans in three days. Hull, by all accounts, should have been blown away. When you win the corner count 14-1 you expect three points in the bag, not a 1-1 final.

EXETER was probably the game that really showed Webby where our problems lie. We rarely looked like breaking them down – apart from David Lee's 30-yard blockbuster – and were not helped by City's play-acting and some poor refereeing in a further 1-1 draw. Why are the refs always so far from the play these days (see footnote)? But at least we had put 800 on to the crowd from the previous Tuesday. You always know who they are. They are the ones sat behind you whispering: "Who is that little bloke with the black hair down the left. Yes, that one in the blue shirt." Mansfield had to be seen as a much better 1-1. It is not one of our happiest hunting grounds and the little bit of luck we got as they missed their penalty – though was it one in the first place, Leo? – was fully justified in monsoon conditions.

Monsoons. Quite prevalent in North-East India. And talking of India, who fancies a night of noshing with your SUSCT pals? Smooth-talking Jeff Allen has booked tables for 100 of us at the Maharajah Restaurant on Bread and Cheese Hill in Benfleet on Thursday, November 30 from 7pm onwards. The cost will be a mere £12 for an eat-as-much-as-you-like buffet, with English alternatives if you prefer. Anyone interested should again phone or e-mail Donna on the same number and e-mail address given with the Christmas draw info above. It certainly sounds tasty and it will be, literally, first come first served.

Everyone will have read that Ron Martin has been 'cost-cutting' at the Hall. Messrs Houghton, Prudhoe and Connelly have gone and now Mark Tinkler has been offloaded to Hartlepool after never really hitting the heights we had hoped he would. Unlucky for Peter McCabe of Duffield Computer Solutions in Stanford-le-Hope that he only recently agreed to sponsor the away shirts ofConnelly and Tinkler. They say if you pay peanuts you get monkeys. But when you look back, we have hardly got Rolls-Royces for paying over the odds. Apparently Webby was fuming when he saw some of the contracts. Fortunately, he was able to wind down at Reg Kray's funeral, where talk of contracts was also quite popular - allegedly. Sorry lads.

Cutbacks have even hit the Trust and at our committee meeting on October 16 there were early rumours that the football club would no longer print the newsletter for us. It was even suggested – gasp of horror – that we might have to produce only around six rather than a dozen each year to save precious cash. But it has now been agreed, very kindly, that United will keep printing if we provide the paper. I can hear the cheers now as we stay in normal production, with thanks again to Richard Coxell for all his efforts as head of distribution. However, please contact Richard if you can receive these tidings by e-mail. It makes our life easier and saves that stamp money.

THE Trust finances are in good health in Craig's Fillary's capable hands, further boosted by generous donations and the take from a superbly successful Quiz Night on October 14 which was worthy of a vote of thanks all round. The event brought in nearly £400, with Alan Perry's raffle alone netting £136. We had 16 tables settled down (plus four or five more previously turned away) once Boots and Laces was finally opened up nearly an hour late. Some of us had been sweating outside in the rain for upwards of 30 minutes wondering if we had got the date wrong. Quiz master Guy Rickard did a great job with his usual good humour, while yours truly and Wayne Gollin kept the marks pretty much bang up to date. There was just one point in it at the finish – and no moans. Great to see some United players and Steve Tilson there, the Fish House fish and chips were first-class, well done Donna – again – and we plan a repeat, possibly at a bigger venue, early in the New Year. See you there.

Our membership at 490-plus is currently around 40 per-cent up on this time last year and reflects the excellent job Paul FitzGerald has done as our membership secretary. Contact him at his addresses in the front page header field for any information or application forms.

The Chris Berry Travel Organisation just goes from strength to strength and we could have taken three coaches to Mansfield if we could have got them. We had nine no-shows for that trip, though that was nothing to the 50 or so for the Ron-subsidised Blackpool jaunt. And, sadly, enough is now enough. From and including the November 11 haul to Carlisle, ANYONE who books a coach seat and then fails to front at their pick-up point will face a punitive £5 surcharge the next time they want to book to travel away with us. We regret having to do this, but we feel we now have to have some sanction in place to face those either too selfish, thoughtless or just plain dim to pick up a phone and let Chris know that they cannot make a journey after all. We cannot keep turning away bookings and then finding ourselves with costly empty seats. Chris, as usual, is on 01702-558978 or 07703-898698.

ALL those going to Carlisle can at least look forward to being royally entertained before the game, as Carlisle Rugby Club have very sportingly invited us to use their facilities. Cheers. Hopefully, none of our members will be tempted into an excess that triggers more behaviour likely to cause both them, and the Trust, grief. On more than one occasion this season, certain people have encroached on the pitch after away games. This may seem like harmless fun, but is now ILLEGAL and the police are within their rights to ARREST you. What concerns us is that one of our travelling party could end up being held by the police and having to be left behind in whatever town or city we are in. So see sense - and cut it out!!! On a much more pleasant and light note, anyone travelling with us in fancy dress to Shrewsbury on December 23 can go for FREE as long as they have been on a previous away day this season. The normally attired can pay the usual price. It is up to you. I hear Chris is already spending a worrying amount of time trying on his wife's clothes. As for Brighton on New Year's Day, United's allocation of tickets is 700. We will try to arrange whatever voucher system we can for our regulars, but, unfortunately, there can be no guarantees of entry.

Our player sponsorships of Martin Carruthers and Tom McDonald get us two tickets for a future game of our choice. We expect to use these as prizes when the right occasion occurs. The Trust is also always trying to forge further links with other supporters' groups and we are currently investigating closer ties with Supporters Direct rather than the National Federation of Supporters Clubs.

Paul FitzGerald is looking, too, into how worthwhile it might be for us to try to aid in setting up a testimonial for Steve Tilson. More on that to come. Paul is also passing over some shares to the Trust. But if you want to buy some yourself, apparently there are 2,000 up for grabs from United in blocks of 10 @ £7 per share. Their actual worth at present is zilch, so this would be a purchase of love and faith based on the new ground being built - and filled every week - and United in the Premiership by 2005. Shares are a long-term investment, but these could be just a tad longer than usual!

Jeff Allen reported back positively on his two latest liaison meetings with Ron Martin. Anyone wanting information on responses to their questions to Ron or seeking to put questions in future should contact Jeff at jeffallen.premiere@virgin.net The Q & A session at the Shrimpers Club, hosted by Jeff in his own inimitable style and featuring mainly Ron, Trevor and Mick Maddocks of Rebus, was remembered as a big success and Ron remains keen to repeat the function at some time soon.

AN apology here to anyone who read SunSport's Hull v Southend match report in SUPERGOALS on Monday, October 23. It contained a quote from Hull boss Brian Little claiming that the reason we had played them off the park was because he could 'see a lot of his brother Alan in the way the team played'. This, of course, was tosh. The reason we have been doing so much better of late is because we cannot see anything of Alan Little in the way we are playing. I pointed this out to the sub-editor working on the report and suggested he knock it out. But he insisted it stayed. Why? Because he is a bitter and twisted Barnet fan named Steve Kingham, who was still struggling to come to terms with having watched us devastate his favourites just four days earlier. On the plus side, he did put his hand in his pocket as we helped him drown his sorrows in the Crooked Billet post-match.

I have also warned a colleague who inhabits the Barside at Layabout Road on a regular basis that any more pitiful cut-price bids for Martin Carruthers – the seaside Lua-Lua – will bring a declaration of holy war. This bloke also took a dislike to my SUFC baseball cap at our recent office golf day. There is just no accounting for taste.....

Who would have thought as we tumbled down the First Division little more than five years ago that Spud would be managing England? Well, for one match anyway. Let's hope he and Steve McClaren put Italy in their place and do us one other favour – dump the saddo with the ponytail. As for Sven Goran Eriksson, I back his appointment all the way. I prefer culture to the spivvry of the so-called 'people's favourite' any day of the week. Thoughts?

I see there remains a big impetus for a return to the North Bank. This appeared to have been killed off once and for all by John Main, but Ron Martin seems prepared to give trying for the switch another go and United's website poll appeared to show it would be a popular move.

Stanley certainly made a big impact on his Bradford City debut against Leeds, with probably the goal of the season so far. Nice to see the Leeds fans so happy for him, too! It must have taken it out of The Man, though. He was so dire in the Worthington Cup defeat at Newcastle that he was substituted at half-time, along with that other hive of industry Benito Carbone. Strange Stan never came back here.....

How the hell did we draw Torquay away in the FA Cup again? What was wrong with Grays at home? I understand Chris Berry was looking for a noose when the news came through.

IS anyone else reading the Barry Fry autobiography? I have been waiting years for this book, hoping it would be different from the usual bland, run-of-the-mill fare that such productions by players and managers tend to be. Sadly, I don't think it is. There is a quite interesting chapter on his time at Roots Hall and he clearly had a lot of time for Vic. I wonder why. But so many interesting things happened to him both here and throughout his career and you get the overall impression the surface is only being skimmed. It looks a rush job. For example, he seems to remember our League Cup clash with his former club Barnet in 1993 as a one-leg game we lost 2-0 at Underthrill. In fact, it was over two legs – we lost 2-0 at the Hall and drew 1-1 over there with a Brett Angell goal. When he brought Birmingham to Roots on New Year's Day 1994, he says we won 3-0. It was 3-1. Sloppy indeed. Fair Christmas gift, though.

OK, finito, except for this warning footnote as to what might have happened to the official we suffered against Exeter had Hall fans been more warlike. The story was on Reuters.

Malawi – Officials took a referee to hospital for blood and alcohol tests after a controversial performance in a Super League match on Saturday when he awarded both teams two penalties and attacked a photographer. Referee Dinner Nathaya, who serves on the FIFA panel, was found to be sober despite allegations from both Telecom Wanderers and Silver Strikers, who described his performance as 'bizarre'. Police fired tear gas as fans fought in the stands and the game was halted for 20 minutes after the awarding of one of the penalties in the second half. Nathaya also hit a photographer who attempted to take his picture as he left his dressing-room for the start of the second half. "Officiating in this country has left a lot to be desired in the past, but honestly I have never seen anything as bad as this," said Super League chairman Hastings Kapenuka, who took the referee for the tests after the game. The match ended 2-2.

NR (3/11). Any comeback, contact me on nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk

PS. 1. Thanks for your e-mails of thanks.

2. Moira has won another competition.

3. Welcome to Ben Abbey.

4. We don't normally advertise. But if you fancy hiring a luxurious American stretched limo to head off to your next party, wedding or even home game, you could do us a favour by giving R & J 'Limoccasions' a ring on 01268-562024 or 0421-335828. Especially as they will make a donation to the Trust for each order that they get via us. TV/VCR, bar, mirrored ceiling, air con, uniformed chauffeur. Hang on. Hey, Chris.....